



# ‘Fabricated Security Space’: The Manus Regional Processing Centre and Gendered Discourse between Australia and Papua New Guinea<sup>1</sup>

Nayahamui Michelle Rooney

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## Abstract

Global processes such as mass human migration because of conflict or natural disasters, geopolitical rivalries, climate-induced insecurity and other forces have heightened policy focus on security. This has included securitisation processes, wherein issues that may have previously been regarded as social or humanitarian challenges are increasingly viewed as security threats. This paper draws on feminist security studies and the analytical frame of a ‘fabricated security space’ to examine the gendered dimensions of the security and securitisation discourses in the bilateral relationship between Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG) between 2012 and 2019. Specifically, I focus on Australia’s offshore detention of asylum seekers in the Manus Regional Processing Centre (RPC) during this period as one aspect of this bilateral relationship. The Australian policy and resultant highly secured detention centre complex were superimposed onto PNG’s own diverse and complex social fabric of security characterised by gendered social relationships. The Manus RPC complex, and the actors who arrived with it, set in motion a chain reaction that increasingly revealed the porous nature of this fabricated security space, leading to the undermining of bilateral efforts to address insecurity in the sense of high levels of crime, ethnic violence and gender-based violence in PNG. A key lesson from this period is the need to better appreciate relationality and mutuality in security discourse. Practices, events and discourses in and about each country are simultaneously and relationally shaped by factors domestic, bilateral and beyond, and each country’s contexts. While each country may deal individually with security as a national issue, this case study highlights how practices, policies, events and discourses can flow beyond national borders to shape the bilateral relationship between two countries and the security discourses within each country. This materialises into a range of outcomes that in turn feed back to shape the discourse.

## Introduction

Global processes such as human migration, geopolitical rivalries, climate-induced insecurity and other forces have heightened policy focus on security. This has included securitisation, wherein political, social or humanitarian issues become viewed as threats to national security that require a militarised response. The scope of the definition of security has also been broadened beyond its traditional narrow focus on military threats to national borders to encompass non-traditional issues (Buzan et al. 1998; Caballero-Anthony and Emmers 2006). As extensively discussed by Wallis et al. (2023), these changing security discourses take a particular form in the Pacific region, which has long held an important place in the strategic security considerations of larger, more powerful Pacific rim geopolitical actors. Processes of securitisation manifest in a variety of ways in security discourses in and about the Pacific. Recent intensifications of geopolitical rivalries, particularly between China and the US, have heightened security debates in the region (see Wallis et al. 2023 for a discussion). For example, influenced by Australia’s security discourse, countries of the Western Pacific have been framed as the ‘arc of instability’, requiring various interventions to curb unrest and instability (George 2011; Wallis 2015). While Pacific countries recognise the need to engage in geopolitical strategic security issues that work to shape outcomes in the region, they also have securitised climate change, as it is regarded as ‘the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific’ (PIFS 2018; Wallis et al. 2023).

This paper focuses on a case study involving the security discourse in the bilateral relationship between Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG). Specifically, it explores the gendered security discourse and securitisation processes in the Australian policy of offshore detention of asylum seekers in PNG’s Manus Province between 2012 and 2019. Although it is often left out of the frame, this policy, also referred to as the Pacific Solution, can be situated within the broader canvas of Australian security discourse in

the Pacific. In fact, as Fraenkel (2016) suggested, this iteration of the Pacific Solution signalled a shift by Australia towards a more explicit emphasis on its national interests in relation to the Pacific. PNG itself is often securitised from an Australian standpoint. It is geographically and discursively located in the Pacific 'arc of instability'. As Australia's closest neighbour and former colonial subject, the pre-existing security discourse on PNG is securitised in particular ways by a history peppered with a variety of approaches ranging from past colonial rule to interventions aimed at supporting the law and justice sector and policing (see Dinnen 2022; Wallis 2015 for discussions). The longstanding importance of security in their bilateral relationship is demonstrated by the joint statements between the two countries in 1992 (DFAT 1987 (1992)) and 2013 (DFAT 2013).

Embedded in Australia's security discourse on PNG are the widely documented challenges of high crime levels, internal conflict, tribal warfare and epidemic levels of violence against women. Achieving political and societal stability in PNG is viewed as a matter of national interest for Australia, including supporting PNG to reduce gender-based violence (GBV).<sup>2</sup> Thus, Australia's view of its relationship with PNG is characterised by a duality between being a paternalistic helper of PNG's women on the one hand and the securitisation of PNG on the other, wherein much of the widespread violence is perpetrated by men. This gendered link between paternalism and securitisation in PNG is evident in the 2020 iteration of the bilateral shared interests shown on Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website (DFAT 2020), which explicitly mentions Australia's support of PNG's strategy to address GBV and states that a stable and secure PNG is in Australia's national interest. Among the key pillars of this shared interest framework are a focus on gender and strengthening protection services to address family and sexual violence (DFAT 2023).

Feminist approaches to security, legal and gender studies have shown the importance of a gender-sensitive approach that links grounded perspectives, including women's, on peace and security to broader peace and security processes (Davies and True 2018; Fluri and Piedalue 2017; Hudson 2005; Rolls and Evans 2020; Stern and Wibben 2022; Teaiwa 2008, 2011; Tickner 2018). Because these global issues rely on laws to reinforce security discourse across different geographic scales and spaces, it is also important to consider how legal and policy frameworks influence power and structures that shape outcomes for women (Cuomo and Brickell 2019). Echoing Teaiwa and Slatter (2013), given the historical and contemporary outside forces that shape security discourse in and about the Pacific, I hope to contribute another Pacific perspective to the field of feminist security studies and security studies more broadly.

Drawing inspiration from these feminist approaches to understanding security, this paper examines the gendered implications of Australia's offshore detention of asylum seekers between 2012 and 2019 under its Operations Sovereign Borders policy and the Regional Resettlement Arrangement (RRA). Specifically, I examine how this policy materialised in PNG in the form of the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre (RPC) and the subsequent implications related to security, securitisation and GBV in PNG. This policy regime materialised in PNG in the form of the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre (RPC). I argue that by extending its border policies and obligations to asylum seekers to include an offshore detention centre hosted in PNG, this policy regime necessitated the fabrication of a security structure dominated by a Westphalian cartographic logic focused on state border security and reliant on laws and bilateral arrangements between the two states. I also argue that this policy regime further complicated and undermined both countries' efforts to address the issue of security in PNG, while also intensifying the securitisation of both asylum seekers and PNG men.

The historic antecedents of Australia's Pacific Solution lie in Australia's domestic political debates about asylum seekers arriving by boat. At one level, these internal tensions related to debates between domestic border security discourse and Australia's international obligations to protect the human security of asylum seekers. At another, related level, as Neumann (2002) and Neumann and Taylor (2010) argued, Australia's Pacific Solution needs to be understood in the context of the country's bilateral relations with Indonesia as a source country of asylum seekers, including West Papuans — who sought refuge in Australia after Indonesia annexed West Papua in the 1960s. To manage both its relationship with Indonesia and its international obligations towards asylum seekers — and to appease domestic support for West Papuans — Australia employed a permissive residence policy towards West Papuan refugees in its then-territory of PNG (Neumann 2002; Neumann and Taylor 2010; see also Glazebrook 2008). This aspect of Australia's relationship with Indonesia is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to note how it shapes Australia's policies on the offshore detention of asylum seekers, which allowed West Papuan refugees to reside in PNG rather than in Australia and included placing a small number on Manus Island in 1968. Thus, as Neumann (2002) and Neumann and Taylor (2010) argue, the Manus RPC sits on a continuum of Australia's policies towards asylum seekers and refugees.

The contemporary Pacific Solution was born in 2001 out of the confluence of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, an Australian federal election and the denial of entry into Australia for the Norwegian boat, MV Tampa, after it rescued over 400 asylum seekers at sea. The legal and policy debates surrounding

these events culminated in the opening of offshore detention centres on Nauru and Manus and the Pacific Solution (Blair 2021; Phillips 2012). The centres were closed in 2008 and reopened in 2012 following another wave of asylum seekers arriving by boat. In the case of PNG, the bilateral arrangements involved an RRA and an amendment to PNG's constitution in 2013 legalising the detention of asylum seekers in the Manus RPC. The operations of the Manus RPC were funded by the Australian Government and outsourced to large international security firms. In Australia, this policy process led to the securitisation of asylum seekers within Australian political discourse and the militarisation of Australia's policy regime (Ghezelbash et al. 2018; Ibekwe 2022; Lippi et al. 2020; Sharples et al. 2022). In PNG, the policy materialised in the form of large sums awarded to security firms to manage the highly securitised complex. This all took place within the large and growing security industry in PNG (Dinnen and Walton 2021), which, as Lusby (2017) discussed, is characterised by gendered dynamics.

I use the phrase 'fabricated security space' as a conceptual frame to problematise the security logic of Australia's offshore detention policy regime in its bilateral relationship with PNG and to capture the paradoxical, discursive, social and material fallout of this policy, which further reinforced the securitisation of both male asylum seekers and male Manus Islanders. The use of the term 'fabricate' allows me to do two things.

First, it allows me to interrogate the securitisation process as a series of intersections between the narrative of security threats that justified the policy and the material fabrication of the security operations in response to these narrated security threats and the chain reactions of impacts that followed. As I hope to demonstrate in this paper, the combination of this masculinised fabricated security space, PNG's male-dominated cultural context and the high prevalence of GBV in PNG caused gendered social impacts locally. It therefore contradicts the broader bilateral aspirations to address gendered insecurity in PNG. Importantly, but beyond the scope of this article, this gendered and racialised discursive dynamic repeats and complicates colonial and contemporary paternalistic and maternalistic narratives in which white men and women try to 'save' brown women from brown men or broader 'oppressive cultural dynamics' (see Rooney 2022b for a discussion). Such gendered and racialised discursive dynamics that reinforce these kinds of asymmetric power relationships between countries like PNG and Australia have been influentially discussed by scholars like Stella (2007) in the PNG context, Jolly (1991) in the Vanuatu context, Spivak (1988) in the Indian context and Abu-Lughod (2013) in the context of Muslim women.

Second, the term 'fabricated security space' enables me to analyse this policy as not only an absolute space but one that resonates with Lefebvre's (1991) and Harvey's (2006) notions of space as relational and shaped by the dynamics created by

those who designed it and those who experience it in relation to each other. My argument rests on situating this produced fabricated security space within PNG's grounded security landscape, which involves myriad carefully interwoven, though fragile and prone to unravelling, social and institutional relationships that connect day-to-day security to the social fabric of communities. The fabricated security space of Australia's detention policy relies on the discursive powers of state-enforceable laws, detention-complex architecture and Westphalian border logic. By contrast, in the context of a weak state and weak-state policing, the social fabric of PNG, which integrates security, relies on a more fluid mix of social relationships and formal institutions. This is important because such relational practices extend to the policing practices in PNG (Dinnen 2022; Forsyth 2022; Rooney 2017:291–92). It is also important because the idea of relational security is established in international security discourses broadly (Buzan et al. 1998).

My argument in this paper is built around connecting security discourses and practices to GBV within and between different scales and spaces in the bilateral relationship between Australia and PNG. The connections between different scales and spaces of security discourse and practice began to crystallise in my mind during my 2013 fieldwork looking at social safety and livelihoods for a migrant group in an urban informal settlement in Port Moresby. I followed the news on the Manus RPC closely because of my interest in GBV and my family connections to Manus. I visited Manus in 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2022 and was able to observe some of the impacts of the Manus RPC (see Rooney 2021, 2022a). As a new migrant to Australia, I was also becoming attuned to Australian politics through watching the news, presenting or engaging in this debate through blogs and various fora, reading Australian media and voting. Between 2017 and 2019, while working under a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade-funded partnership between the Australian National University and the University of PNG, I was part of a collaborative team that examined family strategies for addressing family and sexual violence and children's school attendance in Lae, PNG's second largest city. This paper combines my insights gathered over 10 years in Port Moresby, Lae and Manus with discursive materials such as media and policy documents. My subject positionality here is important because it allows me to connect grounded insights on PNG GBV, social safety and local security practices into a conversation with the Australian border security discourses that gave rise to the Manus RPC.

This paper is structured in five parts. In Part 1, I examine the dynamics of community-level collective security practices in PNG, which are centred on interactions between social or ethnic groups. In Part 2, I discuss the ways in which violence against women becomes subjugated in these local security practices and how women in this context may exercise agency to address violence in their lives. In Part 3, I shift my focus to the level of national interest to examine the

intersection between security and GBV as a shared interest between PNG and Australia. In Part 4, I connect these grounded and bilateral discourses to the fabricated security space that materialised during the period of the Manus RPC. In Part 5, I discuss the gendered impacts of this fabricated security space before concluding with a brief discussion about moving beyond state-centric fabricated security spaces towards approaches that acknowledge the interconnectedness of security and GBV at different scales and spaces between Australia and PNG and the broader regional and international community.

## Part 1. Local social fabric and security practices

In PNG, social relationships and ethnic, tribal and clan identities mould individual experiences of social safety and security and insecurity. It is a country where individuals' identities and agencies are often embedded in and defined by their roles and positions in their family groups. I discuss the implications of this for GBV and women's agencies in Part 2. Here, I discuss how widespread violence in this social and cultural context shapes security practices.

The all-encompassing reach of masculine violence and the high levels of violence against women in communities in PNG were evident during my fieldwork, where violence cut across day-to-day experiences, including in issues like access to land, evictions, housing, water, unemployment and incomes. In the community where I conducted fieldwork in 2013, ethnic violence, crime and contests between insiders and outsiders were common. Social groups were often referred to as ethnic groups based on shared history and provincial, linguistic or other cultural affinities. I worked among a group of people, referred to at the time as the Tufi Ethnic Group, who came from different linguistic groups, shared a common Oro Province origin and comprised one of several ethnic groups of people within this diverse community, dominated at that time by people from the Oro Province. Fieldwork participants expressed their concerns about how young men's violent or criminal behaviour shaped the culture of violence and collective masculine responses to violence in terms of retaliation and mediation. Paradoxically, this cycle of harmony – violence – retaliation – mediation is an important part of a group's security within the settlement and resonate across PNG, as highlighted by the following quote:

If we look after law and order well, if youth in the community and leaders work together, we will make a very good community. Then the place will be safe for our children. Drugs and alcohol cause a lot of problems. Youth who are intoxicated harass and beat people. It is not just us Oro people living here. Now there are others too and the behaviour of our boys can cause ethnic differences and fights between people — like tribal fights. Usually when we have an ethnic fight the entire community stands together and fights. If one man brings his tribe in we all stand together and fight back. That's the way we

are living (Jason,<sup>3</sup> ATS Settlement, 2013, as quoted in Rooney 2017:277).

Being 'our boys' and belonging to a social group when engaging in crime or violence against other groups leads to a rupture in the state of harmony and triggers a chain of reactions that escalate the individual's actions into collective group action either in retaliation, counter retaliation, defence or mediation (Rooney 2017:277). As Wardlow (2006:19–20) highlighted, such relational violent approaches to intergroup rivalries and conflicts coexist alongside societal transformations that include more individualism. Women, like men, are both agents and victims in the fallout. This example from my fieldwork shows that individuals' actions and responses are interwoven into those of the collective social group. An individual who perpetrates violence against another person implicates both their and their victim's social groups, triggering ruptures in social relationships. An important means by which harmony is restored is both groups reaching consensus through diverse, locally grounded reconciliation processes (Craig et al. 2016; Craig and Porter 2018; Rooney 2017). Such relational processes are part of PNG's complex judicial system, which includes formal village courts that form an interface between these autonomous local mechanisms and the state judicial system (see Goddard 2009). A full discussion of PNG's legal and justice systems and practices is beyond the scope of this paper. I highlight them here to emphasise the contrast between the complex social fabric of PNG's security landscape and, as I will discuss later, Australia's logic in overlaying the fabricated security space of the RPC into this context.

The aforementioned characteristic of PNG's social fabric shapes day-to-day individual and group experiences of violence, crime, ethnic conflict and GBV. In security incidents that end up involving the community, such as the one previously described, the gendered dynamics impact men and women differently. This is also seen in the following example, where a woman, as the mother of a male perpetrator of crime, is an easier target for retaliation by opponents:

Viola's<sup>4</sup> son and his friends, also Tufi boys, held up a man with a homemade gun and stole his mobile phone and K800 from him. They beat him up and ran away into hiding. The victim, who was a man from another non-Oro ethnic group, reported the matter to his *wantoks* [members of the same social language group]. The victim's kin angrily came with bush knives to Viola's house. They slapped her and demanded that her son be turned over to them or they would burn down her house. But he had run away into hiding. It became a matter between the Tufi Ethnic Group and the other ethnic group. They demanded K3000 in compensation and the return of the phone. They gave a week for their demands to be met. As usual, the leaders of the Tufi Ethnic Group had to ask everyone in the community to contribute some money to meet this

demand. One option was to take the boy to the police, but he was in hiding. The matter dragged on and on. One Sunday, the two groups met again, and the offended group gave the Tufi Ethnic Group a [three-month] deadline to pay them K3000. Everyone contributed money, and the Tufi Ethnic Group raised K700 and bought a similar phone and gave it to them. This cooled their tempers and they stopped their demands. Whatever happens to a Tufi person, everyone comes together to help to sort it out (informant, ATS settlement, 2013, as quoted in Rooney 2017:295).

Even though these social dynamics can constrain women's choices, as Lepani (2015), Neuendorf (2020), Wardlow (2006) and Merlan (2016) showed, women exercise their individual agency and autonomy in this PNG social context in diverse ways. This is also the case for situations where women respond to violent situations as mothers, sisters, wives, girlfriends, daughters or members of the community. The following example highlights the role women play in counselling young men in their communities and shows that women, like men, work hard to keep peace in their communities and are often frustrated:

We scold young people and advise them that such bad behaviour is not good. We tell them that they are bringing a burden to all of us. Our lives are already hard because none of us is working. If we all behave in an orderly manner, we will have peace to go about surviving. But even though we guide them, after a few weeks we face problems again (female participant, ATS settlement, 2013, as quoted in Rooney 2017:299).

These gendered community practices interconnect people through their various identities — ethnic, provincial, employment, educational, marriage and so on — across different spaces and scales to form a social fabric of security (Rooney 2017:275–308). They

also extend into local and official institutions in PNG, where state security and law and order services like police and justice systems have limited reach and efficiency. In this context, diverse local community mechanisms preside over matters related to security, mediation and the maintenance of peace. These local institutions usually have the authority to mediate conflict, set local rules and play interlocutory roles between their local community and official institutions like the village courts system. These local institutions can range from small committees comprising one or two individuals presiding over a case to the entire community being involved in much larger cases (Craig et al. 2016; Craig and Porter 2018; Schwoerer 2018). Such relational dynamics can be seen in the plural policing practices in PNG (Dinnen 2022; Forsyth 2022).

In another example from my fieldwork (see Rooney 2017:296–98 for a detailed discussion), Figure 1 shows a 2013 community mediation process for a violent incident that occurred between two groups several months before. The marketplace was brought to a standstill, causing loss of income for vendors, as the opposing groups, local leaders and the public engaged in and witnessed the hearing. It is common for compensation payments to be made or other exchange processes to occur between groups. Although the police were present, they had limited authority and relied on local leaders, who had more authority, to resolve conflict. Police attend these mediation ceremonies to signal the presence of the state and, if needed, demonstrate the state's power to deescalate violence and disperse the crowd by firing shots into the air and using teargas. The police often misfire or overstep their boundaries, leading to people being harmed or killed. This and other forms of police brutality, as well as sporadic violent disputes between the police and the defence force, add another layer to insecurity in PNG (Capie 2011; Dinnen 2001; Dinnen and Walton 2021).

**Figure 1. Mediation ceremony at the ATS settlement main market, 2013**



Source: © Author.

In this context, and with the limited capacity of the police, PNG has a large and growing private security industry (Dinnen and Walton 2021), which also entails particular kinds of gendered dynamics that work to reinforce further gendered inequality (Lusby 2017). These multilayered, multiply scaled and multiply spaced tenuous security practices are held together by social relationships, the male-dominated political economy and PNG's fast-changing, unequal and highly mobile socio-cultural context.

I now turn to discuss the implications of these characteristics of the social fabric of PNG's community-level security practices for violence against women and women's agencies.

## **Part 2. Women's subjugation and agencies in hegemonic, masculine and violent security terrains**

PNG has comparatively high levels of violence against women, leading the government of PNG to formulate the 2017 National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence (Government of PNG 2016). An inquiry into GBV in 2020 acknowledged the limited capacity of the PNG police to address GBV (Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence 2021). Whilst this paper focuses on the oppression of and violence against women in a male-dominated society, it is important to note that women are influential and exercise agency as actors in peace processes as well as violent conflict (for discussion, see Capie 2011; Garap 2004; George 2011, 2019; Jolly 2012; Merlan 2016). It is males, however, who hold power, and understanding changing masculinities is now recognised as important for addressing gendered violence (Lusby 2017; Masta 2021; Rooney et al. 2022; Sai 2007). As feminist security studies highlight, it is women who are most likely to be impacted and whose perspectives are left out of security discourses (for discussions, see Fluri and Piedalue 2017; Davies and True 2018; Hudson 2005; Rolls and Evans 2020; Stern and Wibben 2022; Teaiwa 2008, 2011; Tickner 2018).

The masculinised security practices outlined in the previous section shape women's agencies to seek support to address the violence in their lives. Because many community efforts are directed towards ongoing masculine forms of public violence and its mediation, family and sexual violence, or other forms of gendered violence, tend to be subjugated. The following example highlights the reality of the important role of men in the male-dominated dynamics of peace and reconciliation processes and other important matters in PNG communities:

Larry<sup>5</sup> had an argument with his nephew's wife during which he beat her and cut her with a knife. His Tufi friend who lived in the city and helped him substantially with money stopped supporting him because of this. Even when he was put in the jail, none of his kin helped to bail him out. However, he noted that his nephew's wife is a good woman because she dropped court proceedings. [Instead,] she demanded that Larry pay her K2000. He went

to another Tufi brother who lives in the city to ask for help and was given K1000, and he paid his nephew's wife K560. Larry explained that she dropped the charges because he is an uncle and a leader on things like land. The family thought that if he goes to jail there will be no one to lead the family on these issues (informant, ATS settlement, 2013, as quoted in Rooney 2017:301).

In this example, Larry explains his family's concern that if their male head of household was sentenced to jail, it would undermine their ability to mediate issues and therefore their security. Given Larry's status in the family, his female family member was not able to get formal court justice for the injuries he inflicted on her,<sup>6</sup> and her willingness to compromise by way of compensation in order to restore harmony in the family was only partially met. When I visited their small family hamlet in the settlement community, she was present, though she maintained her distance. Her arm was still bandaged from the injuries. I sensed that her distance may have been because my interlocutor had led me initially to Larry out of respect for him as the head of the family. Subsequent discussions were influenced by this initial introduction and led by Larry. Due to my sensitivity about the potential for her to be subjected to further violence should her situation be openly discussed, I avoided interviewing her directly. It is therefore important to note that this insight from Larry came about when I asked him to provide an example of his and the community's experiences of hardship rather than a question about violence against women. He privileged his power and authority in the family and, with this, his entitlement to be violent towards his female family member. He also explained that he faced financial hardship when his employed nephew socially sanctioned him for this violence by withholding money. This case study has important methodological insights for understanding the layers and interconnections between the dynamics of gendered violence at different scales and spaces. Without the appropriate methodological framework to better understand Larry's female family member's own story and responses to her situation, I was left to rely on my own observations and Larry's masculine and more public account of the story.

Thus, efforts to prevent violence against women, or family and sexual violence, tend to be subjugated in this male-dominated, gendered security terrain. This example also shows the importance of research methods. With a team of colleagues, I had the opportunity to build upon these insights in later collaborative research in Lae that specifically targeted gendered violence. My colleagues and I designed a research process that required us to create relatively safer spaces for individual women and groups to share their experiences of family violence. With the support and guidance of several churches in Lae, we were able to interview women and men separately at different times in the safety of church premises. These women as family members and victims of violence also feared the loss of income or

reprisal from the perpetrator's family if a male head of the home were jailed as a result of them taking their complaint to court (Rooney et al. 12/12/2018). Despite significant improvements in laws and services, including innovations in police responses (Forsyth and Hukula 9/9/2019; Rooney et al. 12/12/2018), another factor that may inhibit women from seeking support is the potential of further aggression from men who feel that their authority to address both community and intimate partner violence is being threatened by these laws and services (Rooney et al. 2022). Women's agency when addressing violence in their lives needs to be understood in this social context and involves them navigating the advantages and disadvantages of different spaces and spheres of authority, services and refuge; these choices often exclude legal solutions (Rooney et al. 12/12/2018). For example, in all three areas where I conducted research, churches are some of the safest spaces where both men and women can mediate or seek support on how to address violence in their lives.

A key challenge for PNG women in advocating for the government to address violence against women is related to the kinds of security practices I have outlined. Dickson-Waiko (2001) noted that women's abilities to argue for their human right to live free of violence are also related to the importance placed on the social relationships and clan or group identities women are tied to in PNG. Although reforms have led to improvements in services for victims of violence, as Jolly (2012) discussed, contemporary social and economic factors such as the extractive or logging industries, conversion to Christianity, the introduction and imposition of Western-style laws and policies and HIV continue to fuel violence against women. Gibbs and Yakam (2021) highlighted how despite ongoing high profile cases of violence against women that spark public debates and advocacy for improvements, institutional challenges and societal norms continue to impede efforts to improve security for women and children in PNG.

My discussion now moves from this grounded PNG security practice and its subjugation of women to the bilateral security discourse between PNG and Australia and how it materialised in relation to the Manus RPC.

### **Part 3. Shared interest in a secure, stable and peaceful region: Mutual help and dependence in the context of the Manus Regional Processing Centre**

The Manus RPC was hosted in Manus Province from 2012 to 2019. It provides a unique opportunity to examine some of the gendered dynamics of security in PNG as well as in the bilateral relationship between PNG and Australia, as it involved the insertion of a proportionately large number of outsider men into a small PNG community context. The institutional and security architecture built to accommodate and process the asylum seeker claims and refugee statuses of these men generated a significant flow of money

and had a range of impacts on the local community. In this way, the Manus RPC is comparable to large-scale projects in the extractive industry sector, which, though important for local income opportunities and the national economy, are characterised by various gendered dynamics, including GBV (see, for a discussion, Biersack and Macintyre 2016; Jolly 2012). However, unlike a large-scale extractive industry project, the Manus RPC was enabled through and deeply shaped by various agreements in the official bilateral relationship between the two countries. As such, both the historic colonial and contemporary bilateral relationships between Australia and PNG are important for understanding these dynamics at different scales. Reflecting the securitisation of PNG as part of the 'arc of instability' (Wallis 2015), Australia has invested substantial resources into supporting governmentality, security and policing in PNG since its colonial administration of PNG and as part of its contemporary development aid (see Dinnen 2022 for discussion). Security and stability in PNG are important themes in the bilateral relationship between the two countries and are framed as having intrinsic national interest value for the more powerful and dominant Australia (DFAT 1987 (1992), 2013, 2020). This is clearly captured in Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website which, inter alia, states that a 'stable, prosperous, peaceful and resilient PNG is critical to Australia's interests. [Australia is] PNG's largest development partner and its main partner on economic and security issues' (DFAT 2023). This bilateral discourse is also gendered, and a key theme in the partnership is the stability of PNG, including a focus on gender and justice.

Australia's asylum seeker policy sits at odds with its long-term and deep security engagement in PNG. As I discuss in subsequent sections of this paper, and as summarised in Table 1, from 2012 when the Manus RPC was reopened, the pre-existing gendered bilateral security discourse between Australia and PNG changed. There was an intense focus on the security of asylum seekers in PNG. At the same time, following years of limited policy attention, a combination of increasing violence against women and international advocacy, including by Australia, was bringing national and international attention to GBV in PNG. In 2012, Australia launched a region-wide Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (PWSPD) program, which, over the next decade, was the main vehicle through which Australia extended support to Pacific women, including PNG women (PWSPD 2014).

The Australian aid program included a range of targeted programs for PNG alongside other interventions such as in the law and justice sector (see Dinnen 2022 for discussion). From around late 2012, several widely publicised international calls for PNG to address GBV and several incidents of violence against women in PNG again placed the issue in the Australian media (see, for example, *The Age* 3/3/2016; Chandler 27/3/2012; Fox 26/3/2012; Shah 21/11/2013). Stories focused on international organisations and actors

calling attention to a PNG problem. The Australian media played an important role in advocating for policies to prioritise addressing the problem of GBV (for example, Hayward-Jones 9/5/2013). The Australian media also reported on Australia's contributions towards preventing GBV in PNG (for example, Fox 6/2/2014). In 2014, the Australian parliamentary inquiry into human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific region highlighted PNG as one of the countries of serious concern. The report also recommended that:

the Australian Government introduce a requirement that all Official Development Assistance programs ... must 'do no harm' to women and girls [and that] [p]rograms must be screened to ensure they will not:

- further entrench women's disempowerment;
- result in unintended violence against women and girls or leave women and girls more vulnerable; or
- disadvantage specific sectors of the population of women and girls, including women and girls with disabilities or those from ethnic minorities (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 2015:xxvi).

Although Australian and other media coverage of GBV in PNG is important for garnering public support, and Australian aid supports PNG to address GBV, these Australian discourses can also be read through gendered and racialised lenses. As Stella (2007) argued, foreign portrayals of PNG and PNG people have historically infantilised PNG people or portrayed them as violent or savage; therefore, such foreign portrayals are not always neutral or benevolent. This dual infantilising and violent savage lens can work to reduce PNG women to victims with no agency, while, as Jolly (2012) discussed, PNG men and PNG culture are often presented as the monolithic causes of the violence.

I now turn to applying the idea of a fabricated security space to the reopening of the Manus RPC (Part 4) before examining its intersection with the pre-existing discourse on violence against women in PNG (Part 5).

#### **Part 4. Australia's fabricated security space**

Occurring simultaneously within the canvas of the PNG and Australian gendered bilateral security discourse is the securitisation of asylum seekers within Australia's domestic political discourse (Table 1). In the lead-up to the reopening of the Manus detention centre in 2012, Australian political debates again focused on the stream of people arriving by boat into Australia to seek asylum. The Australian Government announced its reopening and began transferring asylum seekers to Manus Island in November 2012 (Karlsen 2016). On 19 July 2013, the Australian and PNG prime ministers jointly announced that 'any asylum seeker who arrive[d] in Australia by boat [would] have no chance of being settled in Australia as refugees' (Jones 20/7/2013) and would instead be permanently settled in PNG or third-party countries. This announcement drew outcry

from members of the public concerned about the safety of asylum seekers in PNG (for example, see Jones 20/7/2013).

This harsher revamped policy regime was re-rendered as Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders policy, quickly manifested as the Australian Border Force and was characterised by a military-style operation and official secrecy. The operation, which reflected the securitisation of asylum seekers, included an announcement that the government would not comment on 'on-water' operations carried out under the operation (Spinks 2018). Reinforcing this restriction of public access to information about its border policies, the Australian parliament introduced controversial legislation aimed at criminalising whistleblowers who speak out about classified information. This legislation attracted public criticism because it further limited the ability of various oversight and accountability institutions such as the media and representatives of the United Nations to access information about the detention centres (Karlsen 21/10/2015). Ultimately, this combination of policies and discourses reflects the securitisation of asylum seekers arriving by boat in Australian political discourse (Ghezelbash et al. 2018; Ibekwe 2022; Lippi et al. 2020; Sharples et al. 2022).

This combination of Australian security discourses and securitisation processes gave rise to what I refer to as the 'fabricated security space', which then materialised in PNG in the form of the Manus RPC. It served to justify the military approaches, offshore detention centre and significant resources spent on the policy and shaped the dynamics in the bilateral relationship that enabled the opening of the Manus RPC. It is a fabricated security space because it created an insular Westphalian space of security centred on Australian territory and Australian politics. In this fabricated security space, Australian citizens and Australian political, security and policy discourse took primacy in relation to the securitised, mainly male asylum seekers, who were viewed as a threat to Australian borders and in relation to Manus and PNG, where violence and crime are widespread. This fabricated security space extended Australia's discursive and physical border across national territorial borders. As explained in the introduction, I use the phrase fabricated security space as an analytical frame because it enables me to examine Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders policy from a discursive point of view in terms of the security threat narratives that helped justify it. It also enables me to examine the policy's manifestation on Manus as a produced (fabricated) space with gendered social dynamics and impacts. The flaws with the applicability of the logic of this policy in PNG are brought into relief when it is juxtaposed against the dynamics of the diverse social fabrics that characterise local security and social safety in PNG.

It is important to note that I use the phrase fabricated security space to examine here publicly available documents about this particular Australian policy in the context of Australian political discourse at a particular moment in the country's bilateral

relationship with PNG. An analysis of the way the PNG government viewed and framed this policy within the PNG domestic discourse is also important but beyond the scope of this paper.

I represent this fabricated security space graphically in Figure 2 with thick, intersecting, opaque red lines. The line that spans Christmas Island to Manus Island and Nauru symbolises the securitisation of asylum seekers in relation to Australia’s border. The line that spans Canberra, Port Moresby and Manus Island symbolises the existing gendered bilateral discourse and the securitisation of Manus to secure the Manus RPC.

Effectively, the Australian policy attempted to extend or reframe Australia’s borders trans-aerially, spatially and at different scales to redirect the flow of asylum seekers and securitise anything that threatened to disrupt or penetrate this space. Behrouz Boochani (2018) vividly captured this fabricated security space in his description of his and other detainees’ experience of being picked up at sea by an Australian military ship and arriving at the Manus RPC. He described moving from the military ship onto land, into and through a detention centre, onto a tubular plane, then flying through the air and looking out the plane window to see Manus. Upon landing at Manus Momote airport, Boochani’s and other detainees’ names were read out before they boarded a minibus and were driven to the ‘Manus Prison’ detention centre, officially known as the Manus RPC (Boochani 2018:104). Australia transported asylum seekers transnationally while containing them within the fabricated security space intended to simultaneously secure Australia’s borders. It effectively extended Australia’s border to the enclosed, highly secured detention centre complex on Manus Island and redirected all asylum seekers arriving by boat along the pathway of this fabricated security space.

**Part 5. Masculinisation of the fabricated security space as a response to Papua New Guinea’s gender-based violence problems<sup>7</sup>**

This Australian fabricated security space as it materialised on Manus began to crack almost immediately. This can be seen in a gendered timeline constructed from 277 Australian media reports that covered GBV in PNG or included reportage on violence against or relationships with Manus women in relation to the RPC (Figure 3). The emergent shifts in the gendered securitisation of asylum seekers, PNG and Manus men are also evident. Shifts in narratives about who is a security threat and whose security is threatened involve drawing on and reframing legal and policy frames across geographical scales and spaces, highlighting the gendered impacts of laws and policies (Table 1). Much of the domestic outcry in Australia when the policy was announced focused on highlighting widespread GBV, violence and crime as one reason why the policy was bad.

Official reports also raised concerns about the safety of children, young women and families who were detained as asylum seekers in the Manus RPC. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) visited the Manus RPC in February 2013 and highlighted that children detained in the Manus RPC were particularly vulnerable (UNCHR 2013a). The UNHCR recommended that children who were already in Manus should be ‘accommodated completely separately to any single man who [was] in or close to the Centre’ (UNHCR 2013a:3). To secure the safety of children and families, they also recommended ‘that no more children be transferred to Manus Island’ (ibid.).

**Figure 2. Map of the flow of asylum seekers and bilateral security discourse**

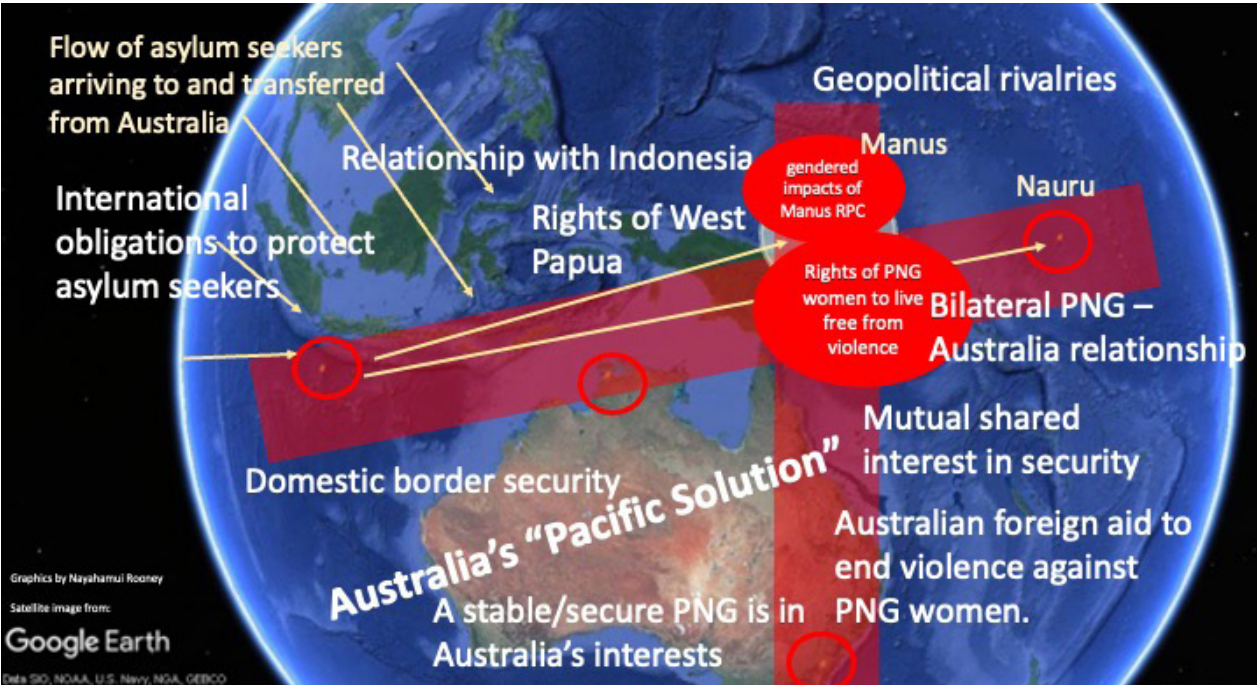
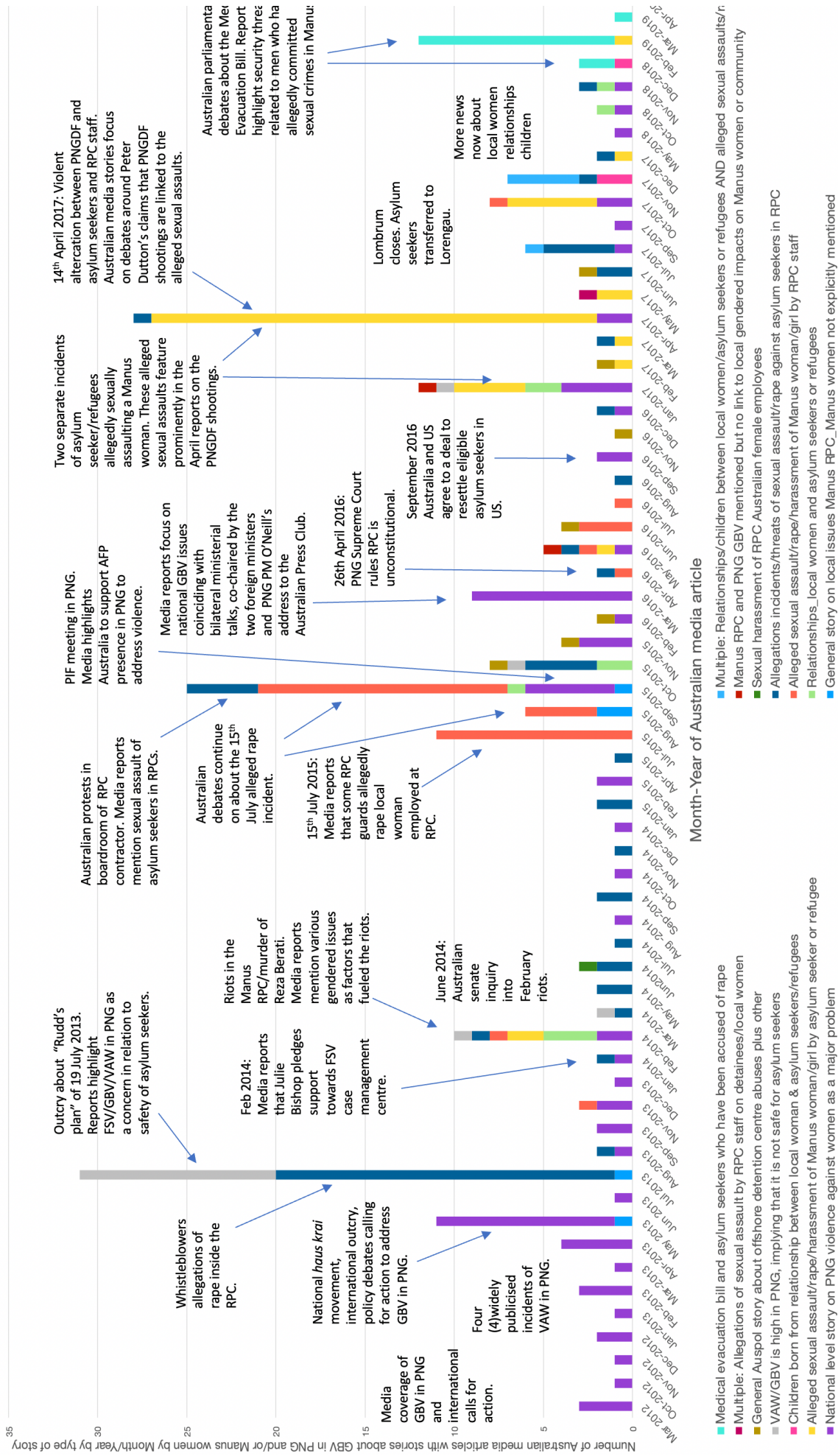


Figure 3: A gendered timeline of the Manus Regional Processing Centre and Papua New Guinea gender-based violence coverage based on Australian media articles (n=277) by type of story mentioned, March 2012 to April 2019



Source: Rooney 2022b:16.

In June 2013, UNHCR conducted another monitoring mission to the Manus RPC, again highlighting concerns for children, families and young women. The mission report stated that ‘families were particularly concerned about: the close proximity of the children and young women to the single adult males, who are separated visually and physically by a narrow “no man’s land” and colorbond fences’ (UNHCR 2013b:11). In addition:

young women felt threatened by the close presence of so many single adult men; and the proximity of the men was of general concern to the family groups who said they did not feel safe living so close to the large number of single adult males (ibid.).

The report reiterated the concerns raised in the January mission that the:

nature of detention and the conditions at the Centre, especially the proximity to the single adult males and the lack of adequate space, had caused significant distress to the families and huge stress on the children. This stress was only likely to increase with time (UNHCR 2013b:14).

It is evident in the details and recommendations from the UNHCR reports that these security concerns were gendered and there was an official recognition of the need to protect children, young women and families from the ‘threat’ posed by ‘the large number of single adult males’.

From July 2013, the Australian Government began to only send male asylum seekers to the Manus RPC, most of whom were of Middle Eastern background (Karlsen 2016). The UNHCR ‘acknowledge[d] a number of positive developments since its January visit, including the transfer of children and their families back to Australia’ (UNHCR 2013b:1). It recommended that ‘children and their families not be transferred to Manus Island’ (UNHCR 2013b:3, 15). Both UNHCR reports raised concerns about the mental health of asylum seekers. The reports also highlighted broader concerns about how the isolation and difficult living conditions would ‘contribute to the all-pervasive sense of frustration and despondency, which, if left unresolved for a protracted period, is likely to lead to increased levels of psycho-social and physical harm of those affected’ (UNHCR 2013b:12).

The policy decision to only send male asylum seekers to Manus reinforced the gendered dynamics already at play locally and within the centre, setting the stage for Manus women to be portrayed in relation to the various male actors present in the Manus RPC, including asylum seekers.

Meanwhile, between 2012 and 2013, when both the Manus RPC and the PWSPD were announced, Australian media reports shifted their focus away from the national-level security problem of violence against women in PNG (Figure 3) — which included reports advocating for Australia to help to prevent GBV in PNG (for example, Hayward-Jones 9/5/2013) — towards more reportage of specific incidents of alleged sexual assault against Manus women and girls involving

either the men detained or working in the centre or alleged sexual liaisons or relationships between Manus women and girls and the men detained on Manus or men who had been granted refugee status. The media also reported on children being born from some of these relationships.

As the Manus RPC took root, it became clearer that Australia’s domestic political outcomes had become reliant on PNG as the ‘wildcard in this game of political poker’ in which PNG’s ‘prime minister [had] delivered [the Australian prime minister] a huge advantage, but it could come at a cost, as scrutiny of the conditions at secretive Manus Island detention intensifie[d]’ (Iggulden 23/7/2013). The PNG solution factored into Australian politics, with headlines like ‘PNG Solution Produces Jump in Poll’ (Iggulden 23/7/2013) and ‘Stop Being Cruel to Get Votes’ (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 30/7/2013).

The gendered timeline (Figure 3) shows how by 2013, the problems within the Manus RPC, including gendered violence, were escalating. For example, an exclusive news report by the SBS *Dateline* program in July 2013 reported a whistleblower revealing allegations of incidents of sexual assault of asylum seekers detained in the Manus RPC. This news report led to the Cornall review, which noted that ‘[s]ome of the allegations are accurate’ (Cornall 2013:9). It also identified various related problems and made recommendations for improving processes within the Manus RPC (Cornall 2013). In mid-February 2014, unrest and riots in the Manus RPC led to the murder of a young asylum seeker, Reza Berati, and dozens of men being injured. Australian media reports about the riots tended to portray asylum seekers as threats to Australia (Ellis et al. 2016) while reinforcing the divisions between the male asylum seekers and local male guards and workers. Asylum seekers were portrayed as provoking the riots because of their alleged relationships with local women and their alleged threats to rape the mothers and sisters of local guards (see, for example, Callinan and Whyte 21/2/2014; Wroe and Callinan 24/2/2014). Portrayed in sexualised terms, local women were implicated in these tensions because of ‘rumours of dalliances between local women and lonely asylum seekers’ (Gordon and Whyte 22/2/2014). In 2015, Australian guards were promptly evacuated after news broke of them allegedly raping a Manus woman in the RPC. Public debates focused on establishing what happened. The Manus RPC was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of PNG in 2016, and detainees were allowed to move freely in the community. Although the Manus RPC was deemed unconstitutional, it continued to house asylum seekers until October 2017, when it was decommissioned, and the remaining detainees were relocated to accommodation centres specifically built for them in Lorengau township.

In January 2017, there were two reports of alleged sexual assault of local Manus women, this time by asylum seekers or refugees who were now living in the community. In April 2017, news emerged about the

PNG Defence Force firing bullets into the RPC, and the media and Australian politicians linked that incident with the alleged sexual assaults in January. The PNG Defence Force incident prompted intense political debates focused on establishing the facts around the shooting. The following excerpt from a statement by the Australian Border Force Commissioner, Roman Quaedvlieg, during a 2017 Australian Senate estimates hearing on the incident suggests that Australia was aware of and concerned about the porousness of its fabricated security architecture and its flow-on implications for Australian security:

... as we anticipated when the centre moved to an open arrangement, wherever there is an interaction between humans it tends to draw out their proclivities, particularly when we are talking about almost 1000 single adult men who had been detained for a period of some time then moving freely about a community. We started seeing a rise in incidents, which were a consequence of interaction between the RPC residents and the Manusians in the Lorengau town centre. ... It is quite a febrile environment on Manus. It is a small enclave. It has a number of different cohorts ... [who] tend to have different relationship dynamics ... nothing happens in Manus in isolation. Everything has a correlation (Commonwealth of Australia 2017).

This senior Australian official's use of the words 'nothing happens in Manus in isolation. Everything has a correlation' (ibid.) suggests that the Australian Government was cognisant of the importance of the relational aspect of the local social fabric of security discussed earlier in this paper and the social gendered impact of the presence of a relatively high number of outsider men on the local community. Another example highlighting that Australian members of parliament were aware of the gendered nature of the fabricated security space can be seen in the political debates around the emerging mental health crisis among asylum seekers and refugees on Manus. By 2018, Australian political debates about Manus had shifted towards a medical evacuation bill (also known as the Medevac/Medivac Bill), which aimed to improve the processes for asylum seekers detained on Manus and Nauru to obtain medical treatment in Australia. Ironically, the Australian debates focused on how the bill would compromise Australia's border security, because it would allow male asylum seekers who had allegedly committed sexual crimes against women and girls on Manus to enter Australia. Thus, paradoxically, the asylum seekers placed on Manus came to be viewed as a threat to Australia, not because they were seeking asylum by boat, but because they now embodied the gendered chain reactions of the fabricated security space, which had thrown them into localised experiences with Manus women and girls, including facing allegations of sexual crimes. Despite some positive stories about new developments and consensual relationships between asylum seekers or refugees, including some that had resulted in

marriages and/or children being born, the situation on Manus had become untenable (Rooney 2021, 2022a, 2022b).

By 2019, amid calls by Manus leaders for the men to be moved from Manus due to a growing mental health crisis and a shifting Australian policy towards emerging geopolitical rivalries between China and the United States, all but a handful of the men were moved out of Manus.

Australian media stories portrayed the asylum seekers and Manus men and women in gendered and sexualised ways, positioning them as:

divergent gendered subjects in relation to other backgrounded subjects such as Australian politicians, Australian asylum seeker rights advocates, PNG leaders, PNG defence force members, PNG police, Australian security guards and other Manus men and women (Rooney 2022b:21).

These gendered and racialised Australian impressions of violence on Manus countered the broader stated bilateral discourse on gender and security and Australia's own political arena. The asylum seekers were either vulnerable or threatening to Australia; Manus men were hostile and violent towards asylum seekers; Manus women were either irresponsible, promiscuous, willing sexualised subjects, victims of alleged sexual assaults or in relationships with asylum seekers; asylum seekers were either threats to local women or the cause of social upheaval and jealousy because they attracted Manus women (see Rooney 2022b for a discussion).

As I discussed in 'As Basket and Papu: Making Manus Social Fabric' (Rooney (2021), based on observations of the local context during this time, these dynamics together brewed a concoction that undermined the social fabric of Manus. These gendered and racialised portrayals also reinforced historical stereotypes of Manus Islanders as hostile to outsider arrivals while neglecting to acknowledge the important indigenous values placed on hospitality and kinship that also shaped relationships between asylum seekers and local people (Dalsgaard and Otto 2020). In Australia, the political sphere was dominated by white men and women discussing among themselves how best to rescue PNG women from PNG men while protecting Australians from dark-skinned men seeking asylum by boat. As scholars like Said (1978), Stella (2007) and Smith (1960) have argued, these portrayals are not neutral and in this context serve to reinforce both PNG and the asylum seekers as the 'other' needing to be carefully managed and controlled — ultimately justifying their securitisation. Both PNG men and the male asylum seekers were depicted as threats to PNG women in such a way that only Australian intervention could help.

Asylum seekers were depicted as a threat to Australian society. Yet, it was precisely the ongoing legacies of Australia's colonial relationship to PNG that materialised in the fabricated security space of the Manus RPC that produced this threat in the first place.

Table 1. Summary of the securitisation of male asylum seekers and men in Manus, Papua New Guinea in the ‘fabricated security space’

| Who/what threatens security?                        | Whose security is threatened?       | Examples of the kinds of institutional, policy and discursive frameworks that shape security discourse and securitisation processes                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PNG men                                             | PNG women                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• International and PNG advocacy</li><li>• Australian and PNG media reports</li><li>• Australia and PNG bilateral aid programs (PWSPD, law and justice sector programs, other)</li></ul>                                                                                                       |
| Asylum seekers arriving by boat                     | Australian public.                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Australian parliamentary inquiry report <i>Empowering Women and Girls: The Human Rights Issues Confronting Women and Girls in the Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific Region</i></li><li>• Australian political discourse and elections</li></ul>                                                      |
| People smugglers                                    | Asylum seekers<br>Australian public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• International laws</li><li>• Migration and Border Force</li><li>• Pacific Solution: offshore detention/Operations Sovereign Borders</li><li>• PNG laws: amendment of constitution to detain, enactment/ amendment of immigration laws</li></ul>                                              |
| PNG men                                             | Asylum seekers                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Australia and PNG bilateral relationship: Regional Resettlement Arrangement (RRA), Manus Regional Processing Centre (RPC)</li><li>• Australia and Indonesia relationship</li><li>• Australian companies contracted to detain asylum seekers ‘safely’</li></ul>                               |
| PNG government<br>Australian government             | Detained asylum seekers             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outcry about security of asylum seekers related to gender-based violence situation in PNG</li><li>• United Nations Refugee Agency monitoring reports</li><li>• Cornall <i>Review into Allegations of Sexual and Other Serious Assaults at the Manus Regional Processing Centre</i></li></ul> |
| Manus men                                           | Asylum seekers                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Constitution of PNG: indefinite detention of asylum seekers is unconstitutional</li><li>• Release of detained asylums seekers</li><li>• Use of Royal PNG Constabulary mobile police force</li><li>• Use of private security companies</li></ul>                                              |
| Asylum seekers                                      | Manus people                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Australian companies responsible for detention centre, Royal PNG Constabulary mobile police force, PNG Defence Force, private international security firms</li></ul>                                                                                                                         |
| Asylum seekers                                      | Manus women                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Detention centre security complex, RRA, Manus RPC</li><li>• Local outcry about the broken social fabric of Manus</li><li>• Manus elected and community leaders raising concerns about the health of asylum seekers</li></ul>                                                                 |
| Asylum seekers<br>Manus women                       | Manus community<br>Manus RPC        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Local customs, norms, laws (marriage, violence, family and sexual violence, children being born)</li><li>• Moral judgements about the behaviour of asylum seekers and Manus women</li><li>• Private sphere and internal to PNG norms and laws on marriage and children</li></ul>             |
| PNG’s failed medical system                         | Asylum seekers                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Australian parliament and health system (doctors)</li><li>• Asylum seekers who have allegedly committed crimes on Manus are a threat to Australia’s border security</li></ul>                                                                                                                |
| Asylum seekers seeking medical support in Australia | Australian public                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Refugee advocates</li><li>• Asylum seekers and refugees raising concerns about their situation</li><li>• United Nations High Commission for Refugees</li><li>• International Organization for Migration</li></ul>                                                                            |

Reading the fabricated security space through a feminist and racial lens brings the gendered and racialised hierarchies of power that shape security discourse and securitisation processes into view. These hierarchies begin and end with the predominantly white political space in Australia.

### **Conclusion: From fabricated to engaging with the social fabric of the relationship between Papua New Guinea and Australia**

International security is recognised as a relational process (Buzan et al. 1998). In the Manus RPC case study covered in this paper, the relationality between Australia and PNG is characterised by an asymmetrical gendered and racialised power dynamic. A lesson from this period is the need to better appreciate the relationality and mutuality in the bilateral security discourse between Australia and PNG. As seen from this case study, practices, events and discourses in and about each country are simultaneously and relationally shaped by each country's discourses and practices in relation to security — domestic, bilateral and beyond. While each country may deal with security as a national issue individually, this case study highlights how practices, policies, events and discourses can flow beyond national borders to shape security discourses within each country and materialise in a range of outcomes that in turn feed back to shape the discourse. Not only is security interdependent for Australia and PNG and part of a patchwork of arrangements across the Pacific (Wallis et al. 2023), it is also relationally, mutually and discursively co-constructed with material and embodied outcomes. That is, it is not just that each country is or both countries are considering external threats to their respective sovereign borders — such as, in Australia's case, the securitisation of asylum seekers — but that security discourse, security practice and securitisation can lead to the co-construction of threats to the social fabric of each country and therefore to their bilateral shared interest in insecurity and stability.

Methods for understanding these issues matter. To understand how Australia's security policies, projected onto its bilateral relationship with PNG, flow on to material gendered outcomes in PNG, one needs to shift the scope and scale of the security frame to link analyses between the international, national and locally grounded frames. This is especially crucial for understanding how security discourses might exacerbate the already dire situation of gendered violence in PNG. The example I provided from my 2013 research demonstrates the importance of methodology. In the context of the urban informal settlement, violence was evident and seen and spoken about in daily life. While people seemed more comfortable speaking openly about masculine ethnic violence and the ways groups responded, they were less inclined to speak about intimate forms of violence involving women or family violence. Women especially were reluctant to speak about their experiences of violence unless they could do so in a safe manner. One

insight from this methodological challenge is that threats to collective security from perceived outsiders are more likely to be discussed and addressed, while intimate forms of violence such as family and intimate partner violence that occur within the confines of the group are subjugated because people fear the repercussions (Rooney 2017:301–2).

Using the example of the violence perpetrated by Larry on his female family member, I highlighted how even though violence in the domestic sphere was evident, my methodological approach did not provide me with the tools to interrogate this violence in this community's domestic spaces either directly or as a multiply spatial and layered phenomenon. Instead, I was compelled to seek out insights from my observations about the violence that was evidently present, that was being mediated, that people were able to speak about more openly or that people remained silent about. This experience in my fieldwork of being able to see and hear about violence everywhere — both in intimate domestic and public spaces — but being methodologically limited in my focus to only the broader level has some parallels with the discursive and material security space fabricated at the bilateral level in the Manus RPC. Everyone wants to talk about and react to the threats posed by the securitised, outsider asylum seeker to the Australian borders, but nobody wants to speak directly about the violence that occurred at the domestic, emplaced Manus community sphere that was fuelled by this broader process. This reluctance to openly acknowledge local gendered violence compared to the relative willingness to speak about external or public forms of violence and security threats offers important insights for security policies in PNG. Like research on GBV, consultations about security policies in the bilateral relationship need to include consultative mechanisms and create safe spaces in the domestic sphere for people to share their views, including about the potential for negative gendered impacts at local levels.

Appreciating the social fabric of PNG's security landscape also matters. Throughout this paper, I have juxtaposed the metaphor of the relational social fabric of PNG's security landscape against Australia's insular, contained Westphalian fabricated security space. Using the case of the Manus RPC, I demonstrated how from its outset, the fabricated security space was anything but insular or contained. Not only was it inconsistent with the kinds of local PNG contexts I have described in this paper, but it also failed the test of the PNG constitution, which embraces these PNG 'ways of life' and rejects the indefinite unlawful detention of people (Independent State of Papua New Guinea 1975). As more local and national leaders began to condemn the Manus RPC, one Manus leader noted that it had 'broken the social fabric' of the Manus community (Radio New Zealand 17/12/2018), highlighting the social and gendered disruption it caused, especially for local women. On Manus, the social fabric can be understood through the indigenous idiom as *basket* or 'the base of a woven

basket'. In political and social discourse, *as basket* is used to talk about the basis of the social fabric. Though Manus is narrated as a male-dominated, patriarchal and patrilineal society, women are — and are recognised to be — powerful and integral to the social fabric in their reproductive and material labour and in their roles mediating and holding social relationships in ways that balance and complement the dominant power of men. Women are the main producers of the Manus basket and as such, the idiom *as basket* signifies the gendered characteristic of Manus social fabric (Rooney 2021). In essence, the Manus leader was referring to the deep gendered rupture to the local social fabric, which, as I have sought to highlight in this paper, carefully incorporates day-to-day experiences of security. The Manus RPC brought with it an intense wave of new outsider men that directly impacted on the Manus social fabric. For locals, the Manus RPC not only had real material and embodied impacts, but it also posed perceived and real threats to the gendered balance of socially and culturally embedded community cohesion, wellbeing and security.

By problematising security discourse as it occurred in and around the Manus RPC through the frame of a fabricated security space, applying a feminist lens to it and drawing on a variety of ethnographic, media and policy materials from both PNG and Australia, I have situated the Manus RPC within Australia and PNG's broader bilateral security discourse. The fabrication of Australia's border security and asylum seeker policies was intentional and powerful, but its materialisation on Manus undermined the pre-existing security discourse focused on stability and security in PNG, which included the security of PNG women. This paper highlights how security and social fabric are interwoven in PNG, while Australia's singular and linear state-centric and Westphalian approach to border security separates security from the social fabric. Instead, Australia relies on the fabrication of a security narrative of threats and responses. As I have sought to demonstrate through the Manus RPC case study, such a narrow focus on state-centric security is at odds with the pre-existing local social fabric, can erode it and can create new forms of insecurity for local people, especially local women.

What kinds of institutions enabled the fabricated security space? At one level, the fabricated security space as conceived by its architects in the Australian policy institutions was something absolute, linear and singular in its logic, and, for them, possible to understand and control. The linearity and singularity behind Australia's approach to security focuses on sovereign territorial borders and laws that distinguish between domestic and international spheres and allow policymakers to separate out policies between different government institutions. For example, whilst the Manus RPC was managed by the Australian Border Force, the bilateral relationship and development aid came under the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Yet, the fabricated security space was a

relational space comprising a diverse array of people who influenced it, who were impacted by it, who used it, whose own lands were occupied by it, who were detained or worked within it or who took advantage of trade or economic opportunities surrounding it. In fact, rather than being singular and linear, the fabricated security space is itself a relational space that catalysed a chain reaction of relationships and events that entangled these different discursive and emplaced spheres. In effect, it transferred an important aspect of Australia's border and immigration policies onto Manus Island, where it quickly became porous. Another strand of the logic that allowed these contradictions to take place is the international logic of the state, wherein states act on behalf of their country's citizens who are confined with the state's domestic sphere and separate from external international relations. For example, the hierarchical structures of international human rights frameworks reinforce the separation between domestic and international human rights violations. Thus, while the rights of asylum seekers gained more attention from international human rights advocates, the local gendered issues that can be attributed to the Manus RPC were relegated to a domestic issue for the PNG government and Manus people to deal with (Rooney 2022a). Another factor is that although the PNG state acknowledges that GBV is an unacceptable societal problem, given its lack of resources and the social and cultural reality described in this paper, the PNG state may arguably also view PNG women as domestic victims of complex, multiply layered gendered violence within diverse, complex, local and social formations that are stitched together in different ways. Sadly, it is also arguable that Australian policymakers responsible for the fabricated security space may have also viewed the gendered fallout of the Manus RPC as mere collateral damage in their singular and linear focus on its border security and domestic political imperatives. Indeed, gauging from Australia's media and policy discourse, the insecurity experienced by PNG women was a key part of the rationale for creating the masculinised Australian fabricated security space imposed on the Manus landscape and social fabric.

The Manus RPC offers lessons for policy in a context where geopolitical tensions are fuelling emergent gendered — likely more masculinised — securitisation and militarisation processes across the region, including in PNG and on Manus Island. The missteps in the security logic of the Manus RPC suggest that there is a need to move away from a purely fabricated security space logic towards increasing understandings of relationality in the shared security between countries that also acknowledge the potential for flow-on effects of interventions. An interwoven and relational understanding of security would focus on repairing and mitigating harm to the social fabric, with careful attention to those who are most vulnerable or whose voices are most likely to be left out of security

discourses and operations. An *as basket* (social fabric) or relational approach to security acknowledges that the bilateral security relationship between Australia and PNG can be regarded as part of the relational and mutual social fabric of the two countries. This means that care must be taken to mitigate any flow-on effects, especially negative gendered impacts, within and between the two countries. This means paying attention to the concerns of local communities and including women in consultation and decision-making processes.

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## Author notes

Nayahamui Michelle Rooney is a research fellow in the Development Policy Centre at The Australian National University.

## Endnotes

1. This Working Paper is part of a series examining different gendered frames of discourses on the Australian asylum seeker policy regime as it relates to Manus, Papua New Guinea. These frames have so far included local gendered impacts (Rooney 2021), human rights discourse (Rooney 2022a) and Australian political discourse (Rooney 2022b). This paper, focused on security discourse in the bilateral discourse between Australia and PNG, draws together various themes of the author's ongoing research and consolidates several public presentations and guest lectures by the author from 2022.
2. A number of terms are commonly used in policy and media discourses to refer to gendered violence, including violence against women (VAW), family and sexual violence (FSV) and intimate partner violence (IPV). For consistency, this paper uses the acronym GBV to cover all forms of gendered violence, unless quoting directly from a specific source.
3. Not his real name.

4. Not his real name.
5. Not his real name.
6. This kind of gendered family dynamic involving dependency on the senior male family member, which works to subjugate women and makes it difficult for them to seek justice, can also been seen in an example provided by Wardlow (2006:27–28) in the Huli context.
7. This section summarises a more detailed discussion in Rooney (2022b).

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## Department of Pacific Affairs

Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs  
ANU College of Asia and the Pacific  
The Australian National University  
Canberra ACT 2600

E [dpa@anu.edu.au](mailto:dpa@anu.edu.au)

W [dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au](http://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au)

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