Unspectacular Events

Researching Vulnerability Through the Localised and Particular

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Tiffany Page

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Abstract

This thesis investigates vulnerability as a concept and as a methodological practice, using a localised analysis as a feminist methodological approach. Drawing from archival texts in the form of media reports published online between 2014 and 2015, it provides an in-depth case study analysis of two individuals who set fire to their bodies, or what is commonly referred to as self-immolation. These are the stories of Leorsin Seemanpillai, a Sri Lankan man who sought asylum in Australia in 2013, and Mariam al-Khawli, a Syrian woman who along with her husband and four children registered as refugees in Lebanon in 2012 after the civil war began in Syria. The tensions in modes of telling stories and challenges in cross-cultural scholarship led me to outline the core components of a vulnerable methodology. This involves discussing what it might mean to explicate and recognise vulnerability in writing.

The thesis works with the tension of vulnerability being a universal condition, and the way it is differentially experienced and distributed across particular bodies. As a response, it proposes examining elements or qualities of vulnerability that might emerge as people make lives within located contexts and conditions through altering spatial and temporal registers. This approach focuses on the everyday activities of Seemanpillai and Khawli and situates these alongside, rather than in response to, macro level political systems. By doing so the terms of other elements of subjectivity—agency, intention and action—become unstable. As means to examine this, the thesis proposes the concept of "micro events" to distinguish the space, time and pace of activities drawn out through a longer arc of time. This thesis argues that micro events help to illustrate how elements of vulnerability are interwoven into the textures and materiality of the event's context and conditions, and the ways in which individuals live within both spectacular and unspectacular, ongoing temporalities.

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Introduction

This thesis is about the epistemologies, ethics and politics of vulnerability. Drawing from archival texts in the form of media reports published online between 2014 and 2015, it provides an in-depth case study analysis of two individuals who set fire to their own bodies, or what is commonly referred to as self-immolation. The project traces the stories and develops partial narratives on the two individuals, Leorsin Seemanpillai, a Sri Lankan who sought asylum in Australia, and Mariam al-Khawli, a Syrian who, along with her family, fled bombing that occurred in her home city of Homs and sought refuge in Lebanon. Each story is influenced by and grounded within specific political unrest and violence with its own complex history and context, which created the need for Seemanpillai and Khawli to flee one precarious location for another. Their stories occur in the context of one million people who made their way to Europe from other countries in 2015, the most since the Second World War, in response to conflict and poverty.[1] The stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli are therefore also stories of how we encounter, welcome, host and turn away strangers. They raise ethical questions of hospitality and our receptiveness to others, and the conditions we place upon the arrival or proximity of those unfamiliar to us (Dikeç *et al*. 2009; Ahmed 2000; Derrida 2000). This project examines the particular elements or qualities of vulnerability that emerge within the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli. It involves attending to temporal and spatial registers across different layers of the project. Time plays a crucial role in the methodological approach undertaken. In documenting the narratives, this becomes a means of becoming receptive to details within the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli. An intervention occurs when locating both narratives within transnational contexts. This involves examining the temporalities engaged in through the everyday activities and endurance required to maintain lifeworlds when seeking refuge. I also engage in explicating the temporalities of being affected in research and modes of

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[1] UNHCR Press Release, "A million refugees and migrants flee to Europe in 2015," 22 December 2015. Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/567918556.html [Last accessed 25 March 2016].

reflexivity that form components of vulnerable writing. Therefore there is a double movement in the use of time and space within this thesis. One means of articulating this within the project is through proposing self-immolation be conceptualised as a "micro event" to distinguish the space, time and pace of actions that are drawn out through the slowness of time rather than an act occurring within an acute flashpoint. I suggest that the workings of such events can help to illustrate how elements of vulnerability are interwoven into the textures and materiality of the event's context and conditions and the ways in which individuals live within both spectacular and unspectacular, ongoing temporalities.

While this thesis investigates conceptualisations of vulnerability, at the heart of this project are methodological and ethical concerns with how vulnerability is to be researched. In struggling to comprehend the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli and my own need to find reasons for their actions, I examine the unsettled disturbance of not knowing and not being able to make sense of elements of these particular narratives. The tensions in modes of telling stories about the lives of others and the challenges in cross-cultural scholarship led me to outline the core components of a vulnerable methodology. This involves discussing what it might mean to write vulnerably or to explicate and recognise vulnerability in writing. While all research involves aspects of vulnerability and forms of not-knowing, I have chosen to recognise this aspect specifically within the research process. I propose that modalities of not-knowing within the production of knowledge is pertinent especially within cross-cultural research, and within a context that involves examining phenomena such as self-immolation.

The project is situated within the field of cultural studies. Stuart Hall (1996) has addressed how encounters with particular theoretical work in cultural studies led to the "expansion of the notion of text and textuality both as a source of meaning, and as that which escapes and postpones meaning" (p. 270). Hall addresses the notion of "displacement" that is implied by and occurs when working with the concept of culture (p. 270). Within this thesis are concerns with displacement, both through the reasons for Seemanpillai and Khawli each leaving their countries and the methods undertaken

in order to leave and not return. Within new countries each remained displaced even within spaces and places established to provide at least temporary forms of refuge. There are also forms of displacement in the role of the researcher in telling the stories of others. The difficulty of connecting such elements to formal structures, such as national and global political systems and processes, while acknowledging how such structures leave "imprints" and "traces" within the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, is one such methodological tension to be examined through disciplines such as cultural studies (p. 270).

In relation to situating this thesis in the field of cultural studies through its contribution to methods, in developing partial narratives on the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, I made the decision to describe events through writing and textual analysis and not display and incorporate the use of images. There are photos taken of Seemanpillai in Australia that are available online, and photos online of Khawli prior to her self-immolation, as well as video of Khawli speaking in hospital after she burned herself. In chapter one of this thesis I chose to describe rather than present an image taken during the 7 July 2005 bombings in London as a means of beginning the discussion on vulnerability. There are several reasons for the decision I made not to include images. Initially when I began this project I did display images, specifically a photograph taken by the Associated Press of the Vietnamese monk Thích Quang Đuc who died after setting fire to his body in 1963. The image depicts Thích Quang Đuc sitting on a street corner in Saigon, with flames coming from his body. It has become a well-known image associated with self-immolation as a particular form of protest, specifically due to the public location and the bodily positioning of Thích Quang Đuc who sat and did not move while he self-immolated.[2] It has also been used in popular culture, including on the cover of the 1992 debut self-titled album by the group Rage Against the Machine. When I first presented the Associated Press image within written work I was

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[2] The practice of self-immolation and its modern association as a form of protest and resistance is frequently traced back to Thích Quang Đuc, the Vietnamese monk who on 11 June 1963, sat down on a street corner in what was then known as Saigon. Petrol was poured over him and Thích Quang Đuc then set himself alight. His act was in response to the Diem regime in Vietnam and its harsh treatment of Buddhists. The image of Thích Quang Đuc's body burning while he remained completely still was immortalised in the photograph taken by the Associated Press correspondent Malcolm Wilde Browne and sent to newspapers around the world.

questioned as to the reasons for displaying an image that depicted another person dying, and what impact this might also have on those who would view the image. As an alternative, I displayed the image of Thích Quang Đuc using Rage Against the Machine's album cover instead during one presentation, as a means of describing the concept of self-immolation. However, since then I have stopped using images in my written work and presentations. In reflecting on the use of the image of Thích Quang Đuc, irrespective of the format in which it has been reproduced, the lack of permission or consent that I had in displaying it, and the involvement and lack of consent from the audience to witnessing such imagery, I began to consider the epistemic and symbolic modes of violence involved in the telling of narratives about the lives of others. This includes the display of imagery or video of another person dying, in pain, or suffering, and presenting such representations to others through this thesis without the consent or permission of the individual or those close to them, and without consent or warning provided to the reader.

This issue of representation and ethics is also made complex through the transnational context in which I am representing others, and the ways in which self-immolation can become a spectacle. This decision not to include images within this thesis is part of the process of examining my role as a (unchosen) narrator telling the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli without their permission or the consent of their family members. In attempting to reduce forms of epistemic and symbolic violence, I chose to engage in a textual analysis within this project. Therefore I suggest that a component of a vulnerable methodology is also connected to the specificity of materials within the archive and decisions in how to convey these within research. In this thesis I describe how the visual and temporal power of the action of a person burning their own body, and the resulting forms of emotional responses, can erase the subject and the pain of the act, and other forms of activity that occur outside of this acute space and time. The notion of the unspectacular, as a way of conceptualising what occurs outside of this acute, violent moment, became a methodological approach to addressing the visual and emotional force of self-immolation.

I have been drawn towards wanting to develop an understanding of what vulnerability

is, but equally, what vulnerability does. It took some time to formulate exactly how I would approach vulnerability as PhD research. This project, while it focuses on the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, whom I will introduce shortly, has also required my own forms of exposure and discomfort in working through the challenges and failures in writing about the lives of others and doing justice to the complex subjectivity of another person. I have had to be vulnerable, in the ways that have challenged my thinking and the certitude in which I make particular knowledge claims. I have needed to consider the situated position that I occupy as a Pakeha (white) New Zealander living in the United Kingdom and conducting cross-cultural research through textual analysis on self-immolation, a particular action that occurs rarely outside of countries located in Asia and the Middle East. I have needed to acknowledge and remain with my uncertainty as to how to make sense of particular practices and actions that resist familiar intellectual and social forms of intelligibility. These different elements and layers of exposure, and the ways in which I remain accountable for situating the located particularities of vulnerability, have informed the development of this project.

In recent years there has been a rise in feminist scholarship on the topic of vulnerability, and more generally within popular culture.[3] Following attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 there have been attempts within North American scholarship and more broadly to discuss the notion of vulnerability in generative ways, and to examine critically the means in which the United States, through its leadership, responded to being wounded through declaring a "War on Terror." One such prominent figure in these theoretical discussions as they evolved is Judith Butler, whose work is heavily cited in feminist scholarship on the theme of vulnerability, most notably *Precarious Life* (2004) and *Frames of War* (2009). Butler has continued to address vulnerability through her later work in relation to injustice, political responses, and modes of assembly and protest (2013; 2015). Responses to both the experience of

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[3] For example, Dr. Brené Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston, delivered a TED Talk in 2010 entitled "The Power of Vulnerability" that has so far received over 24 million views on the TED website. Available at: https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability?language=en [Last accessed 22 March 2016]. This led to Brown establishing "The Daring Way™," based on her research, which involves "certified professionals engaging in "a highly experiential methodology that we developed to help men, women, and adolescents learn how to show up, be seen, and live braver lives." Source: http://thedaringway.com/ [Last accessed 22 March 2016].

wounding and witnessing injuries inflicted upon others have become a provocation in feminist theoretical scholarship in which to consider the kinds of obligations that the precarity of life might impose (Butler 2009, p. 2). One such approach involves examining the ethics that might emerge from acknowledging another person's vulnerability and its commensurability with our own, through a shared, universal condition of vulnerability. The question as to whether an appeal to an embodied vulnerability can be ethically prescriptive, or provides a means to consider alternative forms of response including non-violence, has been taken up in different ways by a number of scholars including Rosie Braidotti (2006); Adriana Cavarero 2009; Rosalyn Diprose (2002); Erinn Gilson (2014); Susan Hawthorne and Bronwyn Winter (2002); Fiona Jenkins (2007); Isabell Lorey (2015); Mackenzie *et.al* (2014); Achille Membe (2005); Catherine Mills (2007); Ann Murphy (2012) and Kelly Oliver (2015).

This thesis identifies a tension within existing scholarship on vulnerability, one that I suggest is addressed more closely within feminist postcolonial literature but remains less examined in other critical theoretical discussions: that of the tension between vulnerability as a universal, bodily ontology, and the conditions which modify particular forms of exposure. I argue that this has been addressed less within North American and Western European feminist theoretical concerns that have turned attention towards the generative possibilities for vulnerability. While acknowledging the difficulty in conceptualising vulnerability without attending to the ways in which it is a bodily ontology that cannot be escaped, this project examines vulnerability as conditional, and the ways in which it might become transposed unevenly across bodies. I connect this discussion specifically to the problem of time that permeates through this thesis, whereby the generative possibilities of something shared appear to presuppose the temporal primacy of the ontological; that it is shared before it is specific. I argue that this is problematic because it pays insufficient attention to the specificities of how the vulnerability of living beings is demarcated among many axis lines, including through historical, affective, cultural and socio-economic and corporeal differences. In some feminist literatures vulnerability's unevenness is acknowledged, without addressing this as a point of inquiry in order to consider the ways in which factors such as bodies, location, resources, and notions of agential capacities might

modify vulnerability, thereby making it more difficult to speak of something that is shared. By way of example, Erinn Gilson (2014) distinguishes between "ontological vulnerability," which is an "unavoidable feature of life and a basic structure of human experience," and "situational vulnerability," which is a placeholder for "particular constituted patterns of vulnerability" (p. 37). While this distinction between the ontological and situational is helpful, the ontological status of vulnerability is not questioned. As I will describe in chapter one, the primacy of ontological or shared vulnerability can becomes a means in which to establish an ethical connection across those who differentially experience conditions that generate different forms of vulnerability. I suggest that moving too quickly towards an ethic of vulnerability stemming from its ontological status troubles what is to be done about the very real differences in the ways that individuals experience and engage with different elements of vulnerability.

Gilson asserts "it is the ontological that is shared by all that is unavoidable, whereas the situational forms of vulnerability are not necessary" (2014, p. 38). I argue that to consider particular aspects of vulnerability as not being necessary risks a lack of attention to the complexity of what vulnerability is and what it does, and the ways in which vulnerability involves forms of endurance. Such a contention can lead towards the goal of considering how the situational might be minimised or eliminated, without more deeply addressing how particular bodies and conditions might modify and occupy vulnerability, and the functions and effects of vulnerability. It can be seen in the question Gilson raises: "What is it like to experience vulnerability as an ambiguous potentiality rather than already determined as negative and harmful?" (p. 141). I suggest that in part this focus within feminist theoretical accounts of vulnerability has developed through the political need to address the denial or fallacy of vulnerability (Bergoffen 2003b; Butler 2004; Gilson 2014) and how moves to assert invulnerability through retribution became a response to forms of exposure. A common starting point for such theoretical investigations in North American scholarship has been the examination of violent acts occurring on 11 September 2001 in the United States, and in response to the attacks. However, I want to raise the question as to whether such an experience of vulnerability as potentiality is only ever possible for certain types of

individuals. Is there an unexamined universality to the notion of vulnerability as potentiality? This issue is raised directly in the work of Sunera Thobani (2007), which I will discuss in chapter one. Instead, I seek to explore vulnerability, not as negative and harmful, or as potentiality, but as having elements or qualities that emerge through particular conditions and agential activities, which are transposed within and across bodies. Therefore, I suggest a further consequence of this focus on shared vulnerability is that it can erase differences in how an ontological vulnerability is exploited and enacted through forms of power, and what exactly can be thought of as being shared, and for whom it is shared.

If what is shared in vulnerability is the risk of injury, wounding or dying, I argue that this does not sufficiently address the complexity of vulnerability as a condition, and its functions, implications and effects. When death is postponed, or is withheld through political acts that are framed as modes of giving life, such as the act of granting Seemanpillai community detention while awaiting his claim for asylum, risk of death as a marker becomes insufficient in describing the impact of vulnerability. I address this through the notion of micro events and the work of Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) in chapter five. One of the ways that I have chosen to work through this is, in the context of self-immolation, to consider what vulnerability might do to bodies, and to particular bodies. The intensity of slow modes of violence, captured in the work of Lauren Berlant (2007), Rob Nixon (2011) and Povinelli (2011) has helped me to form the framework for such an analysis. In addressing the complexity of vulnerability, I argue that we need to pay attention to the forces or pressings upon bodies and their precarious relations to infrastructure, objects and environments, which is recorded only when something gives way at a level registered as being acute. As I will describe in chapter five, in Povinelli's terms, these quasi-events are not registered through official government channels but I argue are registered on and within the individuals who must endure such conditions. They are grounded in forms of slow erosion, where, for example, they can be framed through "the violence of enervation, the weakening of the will rather than the killing of life" (Povinelli 2011, p. 132).

Therefore, beginning to address how much of the experience of vulnerability is not

directly connected to a temporally imminent death exposes the ways in which vulnerability as a condition is not shared. Specifically I discuss this through the notion of endurance, which, while seeming to be at odds with a notion of vulnerability as that which brings one closer to death, involves considering vulnerability as a form of durability (Butler 2015b). In this thesis I suggest this element is critical to conceptualising vulnerability. The risk of injury, which includes physical, but also involves structural and affective forms of wounding invoked in the ways that particular actions adhere to particular bodies within fixed moments in time, is conditional upon the specificities of vulnerability, and therefore I argue that to speak of something shared we must first address, or at least simultaneously address, what is not shared. I have chosen to do this through conceptualising vulnerability through elements or qualities. I suggest that elements or layers might help to better understand what vulnerability is and what it does, and to allow there to be multiple and contradictory forces and conditions that press upon individuals at any given time. I have chosen to remain with this tension in this project because of how it came to be articulated through methods of examining the two cases of self-immolation that are documented within this thesis.

This thesis involves researching vulnerability through methodological and theoretical approaches that draw upon feminist, postcolonial and queer scholarship (Asad 2000; Berlant 2011; Butler 2015; Freeman 2010; Mahmood 2012; Mohanty 1984; Povinelli 2011). My focus on feminist, postcolonial and queer theoretical scholarship in particular came about through wanting to find ways to analyse and articulate my growing unease with how feminist theoretical conceptions of vulnerability in relation to a consideration of ethics, have been attentive, but in less sustained manner, to the term's located politics. I have situated this project within a feminist canon due to the potential offered by feminist theoretical conceptions of vulnerability that move away from it being a condition that is wholly negative and detrimental to individuals, with this lineage most frequently traced back to Judith Butler's (2004; 2009) work on precarity and the possibility for an ethics of vulnerability that began in the aftermath of the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001. It was here that feminist theoretical conceptions of vulnerability began to consider its complexity as a condition

that might offer new means of engagement beyond being focused on how vulnerability might be reduced or minimised. Specifically it was Sunera Thobani's (2007) writing on the unexamined racial and geopolitical positioning of feminist analyses of vulnerability as a generative condition that led me to want to use feminist postcolonial theoretical analyses to help figure through these tensions in the conceptualisation of vulnerability. Feminist postcolonial scholarship has an important lineage of disrupting hegemonic "western" discourses and calling attention to the erasure of subjects who are implicated within such discourses. The erasure of the ways that vulnerability is not generative for many global majority populations, and was not generative in the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, made me realise that to analyse vulnerability through cases of self-immolation would require me to be critical of North American and Western European frames. Further to this, as a phenomenon that is less understood, and occurs rarely in "western" contexts, I needed to consider whether such theoretical analyses were appropriate for this project.

While queer theory has emerged predominately from the work of North American scholars, it is its engagement as a critical and disruptive mechanism that led me to consider its application for this project. In thinking about the methods in which to engage with a textual analysis, José Esteban Muñoz's claim that often the "work of queer critique is to read outside of official documentation" resonated with my increasing interest in focusing on the gaps, contradictions and erasures within the media texts (2009, p. 148). This is because queer theory has a lineage of working with the conflict and incongruity of the messiness and complexity of "queer bodies" that do not fit normative discourses and modes of knowledge. As I will address in chapter three, Muñoz describes "queerness" as "a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present…that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (p. 1). Indeed it felt like something was missing in conceptualisations of vulnerability that did not address its situated specificities, not as a means in which to work towards the reduction or elimination of such situated forms of vulnerability that in turn suggests vulnerability is the antithesis of resilience, but as a starting point for understanding what vulnerability is and does.

I propose that it can be generative to research vulnerability not as an ontological or constitutive condition that is shared as a feature of all living beings (Bergoffen 2001; Gilson 2014; Kristeva 2010; Oliver 2008), but through a localised analysis of the elements or qualities of vulnerability (Mohanty 1984; Thobani 2007).

I refer to the term "local" within this thesis to describe a method of conducting research within a particular situation and context. The local becomes a tool of specification, which holds theoretical categories and concepts to account for their situated politics. Specifically, I argue that a localised analysis of the micro level details of stories can help to make visible the ways in which vulnerability is unevenly distributed across different bodies, and how vulnerability might be lived with and conditions of precarity endured. This involved attending to the particularities of conditions and context through placing micro level details in parallel rather than within a hierarchal layering below macro level political structures. One means of doing so was by altering the temporal and spatial registers of the narratives. I propose that changing the sequential ordering of events that are represented in linear, chronological time can generate possibilities to help expose and include—as part of the narrative— the gaps, erasures, and discordant elements of stories that resist forms of linear sense-making. In this way, and in the context of the two narratives involving Seemanpillai and Khawli, I discuss the different temporalities of vulnerability and how these might occur within and across different bodies and help to make visible structural, cultural and affective elements of vulnerability.

The main contributions of this thesis to existing literature on vulnerability are two-fold: to conceptualise vulnerability through its contextual specificities, and to address this work through feminist, postcolonial and queer theoretical approaches. This thesis aims to centre the discussion on vulnerability not as something shared that is a foundation that is *also* acknowledged to be situated, but instead to *begin* the analysis from vulnerability as something localised and specific. This project at the outset proposes that vulnerability is a contextually situated concept, which must be understood through the relations, capacities, and networks in which bodies endure and persist. I argue that it is the specificities or localities of those situated conditions and capacities

that may serve to inform the functions and effects of vulnerability.

Research questions

There are several key research questions guiding this project. I ask, how might time be involved in the layers of vulnerability? How might different temporalities attach to particular bodies? Connected to this, how might individuals live with, endure, and maintain particular lifeworlds where vulnerability is not something spectacular, but is invested within the non-spectacular, ordinary time of precarity?

Developing narratives on Seemanpillai and Khawli began to unsettle my understandings of meanings of agency, action and intention and how these inform aspects of subjectivity. This led me to ask these questions, which I focus on addressing more specifically in chapter five of the thesis: What are ways of working with and being worked on by vulnerability that might account for complexities in agency that are not standardised across different bodies, contexts and conditions? How might elements of vulnerability emerge through the course of an event, which are productively discordant, that surface through a myriad of affective, cultural, and historical encounters within microcosmic spaces and dwellings, and that move between bodies as forms of receptivity, responsiveness and responsibility?

Introducing Leorsin Seemanpillai and Mariam al-Khawli

I will provide an introduction to Leorsin Seemanpillai and Mariam al-Khawli, and their stories will be described further in chapter two when I outline my methodological approach. I will engage substantially with each of their stories in chapters three and four, and address their narratives further in chapter five in the context of the elements and layers of vulnerability that emerge when self-immolation becomes framed within the notion of a micro event. I was drawn to the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli and the particular details of their lives because in burning their bodies neither of them appeared to act with others or through the coordination or organisation of a group. While each self-immolation occurred within public spaces, neither incident appeared

to be connected to any particular political movement or campaign. This created questions with regards to the definition of self-immolation as a political act when performed in public by particular subjects (Biggs 2005), and the ways that self-immolation might be connected to broader discussions of vulnerable bodies being mobilised or used within forms of protest, resistance movements and political gatherings (Bargu 2014; Butler 2015). I was drawn to each story through discordant elements within the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, and how these might suggest ambivalence and instability in the conceptualising of vulnerability, political protest and agency, and in the relations between these terms.

In 1990 when Leorsin Seemanpillai was six years old his family fled Sri Lanka to escape violence against Tamils, arriving at a refugee camp in Tamil Nadu, India, where his family have remained for over 25 years. Seemanpillai travelled to Australia by boat in early 2013 and arrived without a valid visa and sought asylum in the country. After being held in a series of immigration detention centres within Australia, Seemanpillai was released and relocated to Geelong, a city just outside Melbourne. He was granted a temporary bridging visa that allowed him to live in the community and work while awaiting an outcome to his claim for asylum. On the morning of 31 May 2014, 18 months after arriving in Australia and while still awaiting an interview and his claim for asylum to be processed, Seemanpillai stood in the yard of his home in the Geelong suburb of Newtown, poured a soft drink bottle containing petrol over his body, and set himself alight. As his body began to burn, he stripped off his clothes and moved from his yard onto the public road beside his house. An off-duty nurse who lived several doors down from Seemanpillai saw smoke in the air and came to his aid as he was standing on the street. She took Seemanpillai to a local business where she poured bottles of water and wrung soaked towels over his body. Seemanpillai fell unconscious and died in hospital the next morning, as a result of suffering full thickness burns to 90 percent of his body. The event of his self-immolation was featured in both local and national Australian media and covered by global media outlets. The family of Seemanpillai, his parents and three siblings who continue to live as refugees in Tamil Nadu, India, were not granted temporary visas for Australia to attend and perform last rites at his funeral.

Mariam al-Khawli, who had fled the city of Homs in Syria after the outbreak of civil war, arrived in Tripoli, Lebanon, with her husband and four children in early 2012. Khawli and her family registered with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) upon arrival and received monthly food assistance in the form of vouchers from the World Food Programme (WFP). Around August 2013 Khawli and her family were deemed to be no longer eligible for aid. The food assistance was not reinstated despite Khawli's frequent visits to the UNHCR registration centre in Tripoli, which included her trip on 25 March 2014. That morning, Khawli walked the one and a half hours to the UNHCR registration centre from her home and again requested that her family be reinstated in the food assistance programme. Khawli then took out a small plastic bottle from her bag and poured its contents of diesel over her head and clothes. Khawli set fire to herself in front of the UNHCR office and others queuing that day. Bystanders and UN guards smothered the flames and Khawli was taken to Al-Salam Hospital with third degree and deep second degree burns. Khawli survived and was interviewed by global media networks while lying in bed in her hospital room. Around a month after setting herself on fire, Khawli died as a result of the burns inflicted. While her self-immolation created global attention, there was no reporting of her death by the media.

This project, with its focus on two individuals who sought refuge in other countries, becomes situated within the socio-political relations involving the movement of people from Sri Lanka to Australia, and from Syria to Lebanon. It is informed by Australian Government policies on border policing, immigration and protection, where changes to legislation in recent years have reduced the likelihood of those seeking refuge and arriving without valid visas being able to settle permanently in Australia. It is also informed by the outbreak of civil war in Syria that has resulted currently in almost five million Syrians leaving the country and registering as refugees with the UNHCR.[4] Both stories are connected more widely to global political systems funded through government, organisations and other donors that determine how and where to

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[4] Source: Syrian Regional Refugee Response Inter-Agency Sharing Portal. Figures last updated 16 March 2016. Available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php# [Last accessed 4 April 2016].

administer aid and resources and to whom. As I will describe within chapter two on the methodological approaches to developing the two narratives, and more specifically within chapters three and four when I address the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli, this thesis does not focus specifically on the macro level processes in a way that might point to causes and reasons for Seemanpillai and Khawli each setting their bodies on fire.

Therefore, while this project examines vulnerability through the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli, which occur within particular sociopolitical and economic conditions, it does not do so with the intention to find solutions or to reduce and mitigate the vulnerability resulting from such conditions. I compare this approach to what might be developed by aid and non-government organisations or within other academic scholarship (for example, in the context of climate change and the environment see Cuomo 2011; and Nixon 2011; in the United States in the context of justice and the law see Fineman 2008; 2010).[5] Instead, as an in-depth case study analysis of two narratives this thesis examines the ways that different elements or qualities of vulnerability might emerge within the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli and the "function and effect" of vulnerability that might lead to further understanding of what vulnerability is, and what it does (Butler 2015, p. 149). One intention of this research has been to consider, as an outcome of using particular methodological approaches in developing narratives on the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, ways of writing vulnerably that enable possibilities for recognising and exploring ethical responses to the stories of others, and through this to begin outlining the core elements of a vulnerable methodology.

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[5] For example, I am referring to reports by inter-governmental organisations such as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) who produced: *Reducing Vulnerability to Natural Disasters: The Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2012*. The report focuses on how when disasters strike countries with less economic wealth within the Asia-Pacific region, the losses incurred are disproportionately borne by poorer households and small business owners such as farmers. These "figures highlight the ways in which socio-economic vulnerabilities are interlinked." In these instances of disaster, "it is the poor, and particularly women, children, the elderly and the disabled, who are the most vulnerable." Reports such as this target the implementation of risk reduction strategies and sustainable development. Available at: http://www.unisdr.org/files/29288_apdr2012finallowres.pdf [Last accessed 25 March 2016].

Introducing the term self-immolation

I will introduce briefly self-immolation and the ways that the concept is involved in this thesis, and this discussion will be continued in chapter two. Self-immolation is the term commonly used to refer to the burning of the one's own body by means of fire. Self-immolation is, at the outset, a disruptive practice: in the visceral emotional response it invokes through the visual imagery of a person burning their own body, the hermeneutic and epistemic uncertainties in accounting for such a practice, and the reverberation of trauma across families and communities from both the act and its contextual specificities. Self-immolation is also an unstable discursive concept and embodied action where, in the absence of the person's own description, its meaning as either a political protest or as a private form of self-harm or suicide is often communicated by interpreting a person's intention and reasons through the located site in which the person burns their body. Self-immolation that occurs in public space or a space that is visible and/or where people gather, is often comprehended as a protest, and self-immolation that occurs within the confines of the home or within private spaces, is considered to be a personal suicide. Its position as a spatial practice is gendered with self-immolation often not afforded political status when women perform it at home. While burning the body can involve serious injury, not all self-immolations result in death.[6] Despite its conceptual connection to self-destruction, whether a person sets their body on fire with the intention to end their life is also uncertain. The phenomenological experience of burning and the materiality of pain inflicted and experienced through burns add further complexity to self-immolation. Truncated representations of those who burn and the lack of agency ascribed to subjects in pain can erase the suffering that occurs during and after self-immolation (Mani 1998).

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[6] In Laloë's (2004) review of 55 global studies of "deliberate self-harm or suicide by fire" involving 3351 cases that were published within a 20 year period prior to 2004, there were 38 studies where the total number of deliberate self burnings and the number of deaths were published. This involved 2822 cases with an average mortality rate of 65 per cent.
In referencing a particular use of self-immolation linked to political events, between February 2009 and 16 March 2016 there have been 144 reported self-immolations by Tibetans living in exile in the People's Republic of China. Of these, 116 people, or 80.5 per cent of those self-immolating, have died. Source: International Campaign for Tibet website. Available at: http://www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans/ [Last accessed 2 April 2016].

Working with the concept of self-immolation in this project, where Seemanpillai and Khawli appeared to act on their own rather than in coordination with others or as part of a political group or cause, has resulted in difficulties in distinguishing activities involving self-making with those involving self-destruction. The ambivalence of the intention and agency involved in an embodied action such as self-immolation has enabled me to examine elements or qualities of vulnerability through the discordant layers of the narratives. However, as the project developed it also began to unsettle my understandings of meanings of agency, action and intention and how these inform aspects of subjectivity. This required me to question how I was using these concepts and to consider the ways this was constraining my analysis and development of the narratives on the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli and resulting in forms of epistemic and symbolic violence. Through the conceptual instabilities of notions of agency, action and intention and my own uncertainty as to how to think about self-immolation, I began to re-figure the time of self-immolation presented as an act or an acute moment, and to consider what might occur in conceptualising it through a longer temporal arc as an event.

Conceptualising and researching vulnerability

Researching vulnerability for me has been framed by tensions in moving between conceptualising vulnerability as a shared, existential condition that is a feature of living beings exposed to harm and the risk of injury and death, and the conditionality of that exposure that might engage particular qualities or elements of vulnerability. That is, while exposed, the vulnerability of living beings is not equal. This tension is something that I have continued to tussle with during this project, without wanting to suggest that vulnerability is tied to particular embodied subjects in ways that are fixed and unchanging. In the context of this project I use the term "subjectivity" to refer to the lived experience of being a subject, which involves its continued formation (Butler 1997, p. 122). Embodied forms of subjectivity include the ways people sense and feel through their bodies and register what impacts or impinges upon their bodies and

psyches. I take a notion of subjectivity to include the specific means by which a subject comes to be constituted, including an individual's desires, struggles and attachments, and the roles of history, culture, and location. In the context of this thesis, I suggest qualities or elements of vulnerability are connected to subjectivity through the specificity of conditions and contexts. I propose that a person's actions do not lay claim to the transparency of intentions and a singular modality of agency that is synonymous with resistance. I address this firstly by discussing the ambivalent terms of vulnerability, which include injury and wounding in both violent and non-violent ways, being receptive to care, and the responsibility for administering care. I then examine the tension between conceptions of vulnerability that can take on ontological, or universal claims, and the ways that such conceptions can erase the conditionality of particular forms of exposure.

This problem has been addressed in particular by feminist postcolonial scholars who critique "western" feminist scholarship which does not acknowledge and address its located politics (for example Mohanty 1984; 2003; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Smith 1999; Thobani 2007). In particular and in relation to vulnerability, Sunera Thobani (2007) questions the commonality of human experience within North American and Western European scholarship that re-centres the "western" subject as vulnerable, and the absence of addressing forms of vulnerability that are incurred by individuals and communities through imperialist actions. In drawing upon Thobani's scholarship I argue through this project that it is not possible to conceptualise vulnerability as a shared, constitutive condition without conversely and simultaneously acknowledging how vulnerability is differentially experienced and distributed across particular bodies. Rather than attempting to resolve this, the difficulties of the ontological and specific continue to undergird the ethical and methodological tensions involved in researching vulnerability, and inform the methods of vulnerable writing used in this project. Consequently, I argue for the need to consider singularities and discordant elements specific to certain qualities of vulnerability through approaches that are responsive to the local and particular, and do not erase or exclude the intricacies, complexities and ambivalences in the ways individuals live and endure that change over time and through the particularity of the places and dwellings they come to occupy within their

own lifeworlds.

In this project I propose that the spectacular time of self-immolation in its temporal and discursive force can mask and work to efface the vulnerable endurance of events that continue to occur within unspectacular, ongoing temporalities. I use the terms "spectacular" and "unspectacular" within the thesis by drawing upon the work of Rob Nixon (2011) who brings attention to the lack of recognition given to the impact of the slow violence of environment crises on particular vulnerable populations. Nixon argues that this occurs often through the "unequal attention given to spectacular and unspectacular time," where the chronic and slow moving is ignored in favour of reacting only to the catastrophic time of disasters (p. 6). I address this through analyses that intervene in the temporal and spatial registers of the enquiry. I consider how nonsequential forms of time can be a means of disrupting the coherence of linear narratives (Freeman 2010; Muñoz 2009; Nyong'o 2010). As a means of complication or disruption, the notion of queerness, positioned as involving the feeling that something is missing and the insistent possibility of alternatives (Muñoz 2009, p. 1), and its articulation in disrupting dominant linear narratives through "queer time" (Freeman 2010, p. xi), has been generative in this project. This has meant working through sensorial, affective, cultural and historical layers involving the ordinary, everyday activities of Seemanpillai and Khawli in ways that move beyond the linear, consequential sequences available online through media reports (p. xi).

This approach included re-conceptualising self-immolation as an event that takes place through different temporalities rather than an explosive act to enable the temporal broadening of activities that both garner attention and disappear through the spectacular time of the acute moment. Widening the spatial and temporal frame of self-immolation to an event enables consideration of how notions of proximity, endurance and agency complicate the problem of intention and the production of knowledge when narrating stories of the lives of others. Therefore at the outset of this project, in the context of narratives involving self-immolation, how might individuals live with, endure, and maintain particular lifeworlds where vulnerability is not something spectacular, but is invested within the non-spectacular, ordinary time of

precarity?

Vulnerable methodological approaches

Feminist postcolonial scholarship and methodological approaches to research have been vital in developing this project. In the opening sentences of her book *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood (2012) argues that a key question that has occupied many feminist theorists has been: "[H]ow should issues of historical and cultural specificity inform both the analytics and politics of any feminist project?" (p. 1). Mahmood's own focus is on the relationship between feminism and religion in discussions of Islam. Mahmood details the conceptual challenges posed by women's involvement in the Islamic movement in her ethnographic account of an urban women's mosque movement in Cairo, Egypt (p. 3). The women's mosque movement becomes a site in which to engage with the forms of knowledge that are produced about women, and in particular about women's participation in Islam. Mahmood attends to the modalities and capacities of agency within the specific context of the practices and disciplines performed by the women. In what follows, I draw upon Mahmood's work on uncoupling agency from singular understandings of political subversion and resistance as a way to attend to the question of the role of situated history and culture in research, which includes contextual specificities such as geopolitical location, race, gender, history, and disciplining practices (p. 153).

A core contribution of this thesis is to outline the components of a vulnerable methodology and to describe what may be involved in learning to write vulnerably. In chapter two I describe forms of vulnerability involved in researching and narrating the life of another person. Undergirding practical descriptions of the methodological practices employed is a concern for the forms of epistemic and ethical violence involved in narration and the risks inherent to the decisions that must be made in how to tell other people's stories. There are forms of violence involved in the burden placed upon others to share or to allow their stories be told, for stories to be used for particular purposes with and without permission, and in the demands for intelligibility

within modes of telling. I attempt to acknowledge and address these through the particular methodological approaches employed within this thesis. These include examining the role of not-knowing within research and how vulnerable writing means being conscious of and extending beyond particular methods of feminist reflexivity. I argue that certain reflexive methods can become a means by which to sanction particular knowledge that is produced, rather than to attend to the situated politics and power involved in research (Skeggs 2002, p. 350). I use the work of Rolande Barthes (1981) and the notion of being punctured through details in a story to describe the vulnerable forms of pricking that occur when engaging with narratives that move us in some affective way, and the risks this poses for reflexive research. It can re-centre the researcher by equating knowledge with affective forms of puncturing that have occurred. As well as exposing how knowledge is assembled and the fragility inherent within the process, I suggest that a vulnerable methodology might be more closely positioned with questioning what is known, and what might come from an opening in not knowing.

As discussed, my intention has been to consider, as an outcome of using these approaches, ways of writing vulnerably that enable possibilities for recognising and exploring ethical responses to the stories of others, and to begin outlining the core elements of a vulnerable methodology. Therefore, a key concern in thinking about feminist methodologies is how we may respond to others in ways that acknowledge vulnerability to that which exceeds knowledge, and remain open to alternatives through enabling space and time to question assumptions and forms of certitude. Within this concern, it is important to recognise also when interpretation and analysis may need to be closed or halted, at least temporarily, in order to bring layers of the narratives and research together and show the tracing and inscription of wider social and political structures and relations within the stories. In both instances, this involves having the time to return to materials, and to change our minds. This form of vulnerable writing, where receptivity to not knowing, and to remaining with uncertainty and hesitancy, can become integral to particular textual strategies and methodological approaches, and became something I continued to think through during the course of the research.

In focusing the thesis on the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, I have taken my lead from Mahmood's approach and engage directly with Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (2003) positioning of cross-cultural research as needing to be responsive to the local and particular through being "attentive to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes" (p. 501). Following the work of Mohanty, in this project I made a decision to employ a particular method of telling the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli that involves researching the micro layers of stories, and situates analyses through the parallel layering and juxapositioning of the complexities of local and global concerns. In developing accounts of the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, I have left the stories open, partial, and incomplete, while keeping Seemanpillai and Khawli at the centre. By doing so, differential vulnerabilities came to be interwoven across the various layers of this project, and within the narratives themselves. By using the term "local" I am not focusing on activities and modes of living that assume a single site or lack of mobility. This includes recognising that while the context in which Seemanpillai burned his body was Australia, his story and history extends beyond the environment of Geelong where he lived, and Australia and its border security and immigration policies. For Khawli the local encompasses multiple sites including to her life within Syria and Lebanon, the specificities of the civil war, and is impressed upon by the wider context of global responses to notions of hospitality, responsibility and protection that have informed Syrians' journeys to and within Europe. These forms of displacement and movement within the notion of the local continue to imprint upon the narratives and this research project. Therefore I use a notion of being localised as a placeholder term for its situated qualities, that acknowledges how all spaces/cultures contain multiple sites that are impressed by wider forces and times.

The methodological approach in this thesis is a response also to considering how research, and in this context specifically cross-cultural scholarship, can be tasked with "explaining causes" (Smith 1999, p. 174). In this project, wider sociopolitical and economic relationalities are discussed as part of macro level political systems and processes that impinge upon the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli. I have been

concerned however, to interrogate modes of producing knowledge that assume that it is always possible, and indeed the intended outcome of research, to map wider structures and relationalities onto what is occurring at local levels in order to "know" the nature, or predict the future dynamics, of micro level practices and relations. In this thesis I utilise the terms "relational" and "nonrelational" and "relationality." I use relationality to refer to the ways in which subjects are attached to and live within series of connections and relations to other subjects as well as systems, resources and infrastructure. In contrast to the relational, I use the term nonrelational to suggest that while the local is multi-sited and situated within wider socioeconomic and political concerns, we need to ask *how* phenomena and experiences are constituted by relations, and what models or conceptualisations of relationality are being drawn upon for explanatory purposes. Rather than suggesting that there is an absence of connected elements or relational capacities to the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli, I am interested in thinking critically about moves that employ relationality to assign causality. Specifically within this, it is the role of cause and effect and the power that this can wield in becoming tangled within forms of relationality. It can suggest reasons and attempt to "know" the intention of those who would engage in activities that are challenging to make sense of, such as the burning of one's body. It is this pull of causality, of being able to know the other that I wish to be conscious of during the course of this project.

Proposing decolonising methodological approaches in resistance to how "western traditions" impose certain epistemological practices in conducting research on Māori, Linda Tuhiwai Smith poses the question as to whose knowledge is being extended by research (1999, p. 170). Because this is a cross-cultural project, I am aware that conducting research on narratives of self-immolation might be positioned as being able to explain, or develop further understanding of this particular phenomenon, and produce knowledge on those who burn their bodies. Rather than refuting relational elements, or connections between events, I am concerned that this thesis does not act as a mode of deterministic explanation through trying to decipher the actions of Seemanpillai and Khawli, which risks forms of epistemic and symbolic violence in explaining their actions. This has informed my decision, where possible, not to propose

particular relational causes. This involves documenting the specificity of what Seemanpillai and Khawli might have endured in the context of local and global management of conflict and precarity and connected issues of border security and responsibility for protection, without saying "this is how it is." This is, as I see it, a different proposition to suggesting that relational elements are not present in the stories or within the conceptualisation of vulnerability. In this project, I wanted to pause and remain hesitant before moving in ways that might fail to account for temporal complexity, ambivalence and particularity in modes of living and creating lifeworlds. It is the intricacies of the layers of the stories that became the focus. Therefore I ask whether there might be occurrences where relationality as a means of explanation might be questioned, and whether there are elements that fall outside of relational bonds. I suggest that attention be paid to singular elements that may not easily be able to be shifted into relational connections.

The time and space of vulnerability

It was through the process of vulnerable writing that I began to consider how researching vulnerability is connected to particular understandings of agency, action, and intention. One of the issues that emerged during the course of the research was how the specificities and integrity of elements of subjectivity can become unstable through a troubling event such as self-immolation. I began to question what agency meant in relation to each narrative. While drawn initially to the idea that even without the involvement of others the location of each event might have indicated that Seemanpillai and Khawli burned their bodies as a political statement or act of political protest, as the project developed and I spent more time with their stories I became less certain. Instead I began to question what forms of intention I was placing upon and demanding from Seemanpillai and Khawli. To address these concerns I began working with the space and time of vulnerability as unstable categories of analysis and methods through which stories might be comprehended or made intelligible. It was Elizabeth Freeman's (2010) notion of "temporal drag" that helped me to start thinking about moving time backwards and forwards beyond arbitrary points of focus that can

come to fix narratives, and the meanings that come to be ascribed to actions, in place. Connected to the notion of temporal drag, I chose to work with certain queer theoretical approaches to time through considering "nonsequential forms of time" as methods of disrupting the linear temporality of narratives (Freeman 2010, p. xi). I consider how different temporalities might attach to particular bodies, through engaging in a form of "temporal syncopation" as a mode of displacement (p. xii). This involved being aware of the force of dominant strains of story telling involved in acute, violent events, and shifting attention to ordinary, everyday activities involved in survival and self-maintenance within the uncertain and contingent conditions of precarity in which Seemanpillai and Khawli lived.

Examining the temporal and spatial registers involved in the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, and the force exerted by time and space as conditions of knowledge production, became methods of disrupting the movement and boundaries of the two narratives. Specifically this led to conceptualising different temporalities of vulnerability and how these might come to be transposed unevenly across bodies and locations through everyday activities of self-maintenance and endurance. In relation to space I consider in chapter three how the meaning of self-immolation can change according to its spatial arrangement and how this informs the problem of intentionality. Connected to my hesitation as to the relationship between self-immolation and its use as a means of political protest, is concern as to how a particular singular modality of agency that is synonymous with resistance may constrain conceptions of vulnerability. In a discussion of Seemanpillai's movements from his yard into a public street and how this movement led me towards certain interpretations of his intention, I consider the distinction between public and private spaces. In thinking through the conception of self-making within the event of self-immolation I examine how different modalities of agency might be utilised by individuals within situated locations and conditions. I suggest that this might occur within the specificity of constructing and maintaining "microcosmic dwelling places" within particular lifeworlds (Motamedi Fraser and Zaker 2014).

Working with different temporalities leads me to refigure the acute flashpoint of a singular act of self-immolation as an event that occurs within the unspectacular and ongoing time of precarity. I work with Elizabeth Povinelli's (2011) notion of "quasi-events" to consider how certain actions, scenes, and subjects appear only if transformed into the acute time of catastrophe. I conceptualise self-immolation as a "micro event" to extend Povinelli's idea to include the particular methodological approach of this thesis involved in working with the micro level details of stories, and as a way of distinguishing the space, time and pace of actions that are drawn out through the slowness of time. I consider the agential forms of endurance within a micro event through the conceptual frames of Lauren Berlant's (2007) "slow death" and Nixon's (2011) "slow violence" to examine what is required to sustain the recursive processes (Nyong'o 2010) and slow wearing out of bodies during events that occur within the local, micro layers of people's lives. I argue that the conditions in which micro events take place are integral to the registering of the event *within* a particular body, and its becoming folded into subjects through modes of time and the forms of endurance required. Therefore in this thesis, rather than examining how the activities of Seemanpillai or Khawli did or did not register at macro level of the state or inter-governmental organisations, or how particular micro events get noticed within such governmental or political structures, my interest is in unstitching the ways that vulnerability *is* registered and attended to by embodied subjects, within the unspectacular, ongoing time of precarity.

Structure of the thesis

In this thesis I address concerns with the asymmetrical qualities or elements of vulnerability and create space to consider the lack of stability to vulnerability as a concept, and as a condition that is lived with as an embodied subject. It is through this process of working with the micro layers of stories that other elements of subjectivity—agency, intention and action—also become unstable when analysed through shifting spatial and temporal registers. I discuss how re-thinking the ways in which people endure and make lives within conditions of precarity requires focusing

on the modalities of agential capacities, struggles and desires that are specific to an individual in relation to their particular lifeworld. Proposing the notion of a "micro event" becomes a method of addressing the conditions that impact upon how vulnerability might be considered within the particularities of subjectivity.

In chapter one I introduce feminist theoretical conceptions of vulnerability and raise the tension between conceptualising vulnerability as a shared, existential condition and the conditionality of that exposure that might engage different qualities or elements of vulnerability. I trace the notion of elements or qualities of vulnerability as an alternative approach that localises a conception of vulnerability that is not only corporeal through its relation to bodies, but becomes situated within bodies through different temporalities that make visible structural, cultural and affective elements of vulnerability. I situate this thesis within current feminist concerns with vulnerability and outline its particular approach, which engages the use of feminist, postcolonial and queer theories. This involves addressing the absence of location and situated politics within certain feminist approaches to researching and conceptualising vulnerability. I raise the question of the time of vulnerability as a means of addressing these issues by exposing the dynamism of the functions and effects of vulnerability that occur within different tempos of living. I describe how vulnerability involves modes of endurance where different forces press upon bodies that do not share the same agential capacities and struggles, and how these agential modalities are not always geared towards autonomy and self-expansion. I argue for the need to consider the singularities specific to certain qualities of vulnerability through approaches that are responsive to the local and particular, and do not erase or exclude the intricacies, complexities and ambivalences in the ways individuals live and endure, and that change over time within the particularity of microcosmic spaces and dwellings.

In chapter two I describe the process involved in developing the narratives on Seemanpillai and Khawli. In addition to the practical descriptions of the methodological practices employed, is a concern for the forms of epistemic and ethical violence involved in modes of telling and the risks inherent to the decisions that must be made in how we choose to tell other people's stories. I outline the rationale for

selecting self-immolation and the two stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli as the focus for this thesis. I address concerns with feminist cross-cultural scholarship and the reasons for choosing a localised approach to situate the micro level details of the two stories in relation to macro level global systems, policies, infrastructure and institutions. In this chapter I examine how the affective responses to encounters in research, which involve forms of puncturing, extend out beyond the borders of stories, and how these in turn shape the conditions, content and production of research. I address the vulnerabilities within the research process that I undertook, what drew me in to each of the stories, and how I was pricked initially by aspects of the narratives that led me to close off certain alternatives. Through these examples I work to distinguish between reflexivity within feminist research as endorsing the attainment of particular knowledge and that risks re-centring the self within the research process, and reflexivity as a methodological approach that involves holding the researcher to account for their role within the fragilities of knowledge production. My intention within this chapter is to discuss, as an outcome of researching and using particular practices in developing the two narratives on Seemanpillai and Khawli, what it might mean to write vulnerably or to explicate and recognise vulnerability in writing, and how this might enable possibilities for ethical responses to the stories of others.

In chapter three I develop a narrative of Seemanpillai's life from what is made available in local, national and global media articles. I situate his arrival in Australia in the context of the country's current policies on immigration and the political environment in 2014. Through this process I consider the complex and contested spatial relations that disrupt understandings of self-immolation, and how this informs the concept of vulnerability through analysing what occurs during and after the embodied movement and motion of setting one's body alight, and the spaces in which such an actions occur. I raise the problem of knowing the intention of another person and how agency is conceptualised within modes of telling. I argue that the complexity of self-immolation sets up a problem with the relation between resistance and agency and how the silencing of the materialities of pain and endurance can mask activities of struggle and self-maintenance and their varied agential forms that Seemanpillai engaged in. Seemanpillai's movements enable an interrogation of the fractured,

porous nature of public and private spaces and the geographic, cultural and structural politics involved in giving meaning to another person's death. This chapter therefore addresses the epistemic and ethical violence involved in attempting to understand why Seemanpillai set his body on fire by asking what was on Seemanpillai's mind. This question leads to an examination of the burden demanded by intentionality in making epistemic claims in narrating another person's life. It raises questions as to a singular modality of agency that is synonymous with resistance and its relation to vulnerability. I suggest that the story of Seemanpillai illustrates how specificities of location, culture and history can embed themselves within elements of vulnerability.

In chapter four I focus on the story of Khawli. I narrate the story of her arrival in Tripoli with her family and situate this in the context of the over one million Syrians who have fled their country and journeyed to Lebanon. I piece together what may have happened in Khawli's family being excluded from the WFP food assistance programme. Through my engagement in developing the narrative on Khawli I examine the notion of agential modalities and how different elements of vulnerability may emerge through modes of endurance. In doing so I argue that vulnerability begins to lose its coherence as a universal bodily ontology as it becomes interwoven within different elements and informs agential capacities. I examine the temporal conditions of knowledge through reflecting on the role of embodied communication within the narratives of Khawli and Seemanpillai and how temporalities contribute to discontinuities along a narrative that contradict and challenge each other. The sited qualities of pain within cultural and neurophysical contexts and that emerge in the narratives, point to the unevenness of how vulnerability comes to be distributed across different bodies and the multiplicity of capacities and desires of embodied subjects. I examine the notion of there being a metric of vulnerability, which connects to an ethics of forced narration and the measurement and comparison of suffering that occurred within Khawli's life. This metric involves the measurement of time and the speed of change. In this context I ask what is the version of time in operation that recognises self-immolation to be spectacular within the unspectacular, ongoing temporalities of precarity. During this chapter I return to the narrative developed on Seemanpillai and the details that emerge and puncture during the affective, slow processes of working with materials.

In chapter five I examine several concepts that have emerged in relation to the conceptualisation of vulnerability through this project. Specifically these concepts include the temporal and spatial frames involved in the production of knowledge and in making particular actions intelligible, a singular notion of agency and its relation to intention and action, and how, as disruptive elements, these can help to open up ways of thinking about vulnerability. In working with the concept of self-immolation and refiguring the acute flashpoint of a singular act as an event that occurs within the unspectacular and ongoing time of precarity, I expand upon this to distinguish the space, time and pace of actions that are drawn out through the slowness of time through the notion of the "micro event." It enables the endurance involved in everyday activities to come into sharper focus. Specifically, I argue that conceptualisations of vulnerability need to be addressed through attending to the specificities of the representation of agential activities that occur across multi-sited spaces and different temporalities.

The approach within this thesis is characterised by how the problems of action, intention and agency become woven through different elements of vulnerability that do not remain bound within fixed notions of the self, but are transmitted beyond Seemanpillai and Khawli. The notion of micro events is a conceptual means through which to discuss how actions, intention and agency are connected to the specificities of bodies and their capacities, struggles and desires. Re-figuring self-immolation as an event opened up space to enable aggregating and disaggregating elements, movements and forces involved in modes of living and enduring to be traced through different spatial and temporal registers. Within the methodological approach employed to develop the two narratives in this thesis I propose that it is possible to make visible different elements that inform vulnerability and the way vulnerability moves within and between bodies as a capacity to endure and survive, as susceptibility to injury and harm, and as receptivity and responsibility.

Chapter One: Encountering Vulnerability

The well-known image of Davinia Turrell, wearing a burns gauze over her face, being helped by Paul Dadge outside the Edgware Road underground station after the 7 July bombings in London in 2005, is offered by Adriana Cavarero (2009) as an example of the ambivalence inherent to vulnerability. For Cavarero, this image reveals "two poles of the essential alternative inscribed in the condition of vulnerability: wounding and caring" and with this, I propose two crucial qualities of vulnerability that inform this project (p. 20). From a fleeting yet decisive mention in Cavarero's writing, I want to remain with this image, and the people who are within it. I do so as a means of illustrating how researching vulnerability through the localised and particular and the varying temporalities of stories is one means of attempting to leave narratives open to the context and situated specificities of the scene, as well as the gaps and absences that occur within stories and accounts.

The image of Turrell and Dadge helps in considering elements or qualities of vulnerability that occur within and across their particular bodies in the specific context of Turrell being injured by one of three bombs that were detonated on the London underground, and the denotation of a further bomb on a double decker bus in the centre of the city on 7 July 2005. Captured in time in a photograph, two individuals, Turrell and Dadge, invoke different modalities of vulnerability, involving injury and wounding in both violent and non-violent ways, being receptive to care, and the responsibility for administering care. Cavarero uses the image (without displaying it) to suggest that the ambivalence of wounding and caring resides in how the "singular body is irremediably open to both responses" (p. 20). Turrell was in the carriage of one of the trains where a bomb was detonated. Her face suffered severe burns not from the bomb itself but from a ball of fire that rushed through the train as a result of the explosion. Turrell made her way out of the train and paramedics placed a protective gauze mask over her face, which she had to hold in place, and which obscured her vision.

In seeing Turrell standing outside Edgware station, former firefighter Dadge, who had come across the scene at the station and began to offer help, guided her across the road to a makeshift accident and emergency station set up at a hotel. It was at this point that a photograph was taken, capturing this moment.[7] Dadge has his arms around Turrell and is holding her close to his body, guiding her, with blue plastic gloves on his hands providing his own form of protection. Turrell walks with her hands to her face, holding the gauze. Dadge and Turrell do not know each other, and yet in the space of such violence, a perceived intimacy forms between them in the moment this image is recorded. The photograph appeared on the front page of *The Times* newspaper the day after the bombings, and became a popular and recognisable image symbolising the bombings. Media coverage continued to document Turrell's medical treatment and subsequent recovery, including articles that published new interviews to mark 10 years since 7 July 2005. While not having been physically injured, Dadge became vulnerable in other ways, through media interest in the story and a whether a relationship had formed between Dadge and Turrell, and his phone being repeatedly hacked by the *News of the World* newspaper.[8]

It is not possible to know the extent of Turrell's wounds from looking at the photo. Other than the gauze covering her face, the everyday clothing that she was wearing on her journey to work is visible, a handbag looped through one arm, and a ring on one finger of her hand held up to her face. While the gauze mask over her face immediately signals that some sort of trauma or injury has been inflicted upon her body, the extent of her injuries remain hidden and sanitised. Although not visible through the cropping of the image that was published by some media outlets, looking at a full-length photograph, while Turrell is dressed for work, what also unsettles the image along with the gauze mask is that Dadge is leading Turrell across the road while she walks in bare feet. As I will describe in chapter two, it was the vulnerability of

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[7] Source: BBC News, "7/7 Victim's Remarkable Healing, *BBC News,* 7 July 2010. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10530999 [Last accessed 28 March 2016].
[8] Mark Townsend, "Media Coverage of Phone-Hacking Trial Ignored Victims, Says Paul Dadge," *The Observer,* 29 June 2014. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jun/29/paul-dadge-phone-hacking-media-coverage [Last accessed 16 February 2016].

Turrell's shoeless feet that pricked a response to this image in me and bestowed the *punctum*. I take this notion of the *punctum* from Rolande Barthes (1981), who, in the context of discussing visual images, describes an element within a frame that punctures or moves the viewer affectively, that raises questions, and that indicates there is a story to be told beyond the arbitrary scaffold and structure of the scene being captured.

I utilise the image of Turrell and Dadge at the outset of this chapter as a way of suggesting how, by remaining with this image and working at the details through a localised analysis that includes the scene and the individuals within it—rather than moving immediately to macro level concerns such as global security and terrorism— the layers and complexity of researching vulnerability begin to emerge. This includes the temporalities of vulnerability that can be less visible when images are captured, or when spectacular violence occurs. Turrell did not sustain her injury during the acute flashpoint of a bomb being detonated on a train in which she was travelling. Her injury occurred afterwards. There is no mention in media reports that I have been able to access as to how much time passed between the bomb blast, and the fireball that resulted in the injury to Turrell's face. While the fireball occurred due to the particular conditions in which the bomb was detonated, injuries sustained by those travelling on public transport on 7 July 2005 were not solely from the actual bomb blast.[9] These injuries were also not exclusively physical and did not occur within proximate, measurable time.[10] It is possible to see how the time of the spectacular act of violence can truncate and reduce the event to what occurred in the flashpoint of detonation. Turrell survives the bomb blast, and was then burned by a fireball that rushed through the carriage. Therefore, I suggest and will consider through this project, how there are structural and temporal forms of vulnerability involved in the ways that particular actions adhere to particular bodies within fixed moments in time.

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[9] Specifically in the context of the 7 July 2005 bombings these injuries have been defined by Patel *et. al* (2012) as including primary blast injuries, which are soft tissue injuries; secondary blast injuries, caused by objects turned into projectiles by the blast wind that follows the blast wave; tertiary blast injuries, as people are displaced by the wave into stationary objects such as walls; and quaternary injuries that include miscellaneous injuries such as burns, inhalational injuries and post-traumatic stress.

[10] For an account of some of the ways in which individuals who were not physically wounded were impacted by the bombings see Emma Giles, "7 July London Bombings: The Invisible Victims," *BBC News,* 6 July 2015. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-33393468 [Last accessed 12 March 2016].

Through this example I propose that vulnerability is in a practical sense, exposure to injury or wounding, where harm may or may not be inflicted. In moves to direct vulnerability away from being conceived as exclusively a negative state or condition, terms such as exposure, receptivity, and openness have been used in feminist scholarship (for example, see Butler and Athanasiou 2013; Butler 2015; and Gilson 2014). Such wounding can be violent in different ways. It can take the form of exposure to physical injury from an external source, where bodies are punctured and damaged through violent acts or injured through being deprived of necessary sustaining support and resources. It can also involve exposure to emotional and psychological injury through, for example, the stress of experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, the use of language to attack and wound, the neglect of needs, or the deprivation of care. However, vulnerability also includes a form of receptivity to being wounded as a response to another's vulnerability or injury. In chapter two I will describe this receptivity in more detail and by reference to Barthes, as a form of being pricked or moved emotionally by a person, phenomena, or scene. As a particular element of vulnerability, Rosalyn Diprose (2002), for example, addresses this openness within the notion of corporeal generosity, and Emmanuel Levinas (1998) writes of the vulnerability of the subject in its ethical obligation to the other. We can be pricked and wounded, as Dadge was to Turrell's injury and her inability to see due to the gauze mask, in ways that can lead to certain forms of responsiveness. For whatever reason, Dadge decided to help Turrell.

How an individual comes to be moved to act, the notion of responsibility to another, and whether there is an ethical obligation connected to vulnerability, have become part of critical discussions of vulnerability as a generative condition within feminist scholarship (for example, Bergoffen 2001, 2003; Butler 2004, 2009, 2015; Gilson 2014; Mackenzie *et.al* 2014; Miller 2002; Murphy 2012; Oliver 2008, 2015; Shildrick 2002; Ziarek 2013). The feminist "turn" to vulnerability has engaged frequently the ethical philosophy of Levinas through the way responsibility in the subject is awakened by the presence of the other and how such a relation is conceived of as ethical (1998). Levinas uses the term "vulnerability" to describe the exposure to the other as a form of

wounding and passivity that is singularly directed at the subject and compels a response (p. 75). In Levinasian terms the self is never conceptualised as existing prior to its relation and obligation to the other (Taylor 2005). In this context, Ann Murphy (2012) in particular has articulated how feminists in recent years have addressed what it means to think of vulnerability as "constitutive of subjectivity and the ethical consequences of this claim" (p. 67). Connected to this are the ways feminists position generative notions of plurality and interdependence in contrast to the individualism and autonomy of neo-liberal politics and state responses involving violence and conflict (p. 67) (for example, Bergoffen 2001; Cavarero 2009; Fineman 2008; Oliver 2008).

It was the work of Murphy in examining the ethical and political provocation of the experience of vulnerability as ontological, and how it might be possible to move from vulnerability, the acknowledgment of one's own and/or the recognition of the vulnerability of others, to a prescriptive normative ethics, that initially helped in framing my concerns as to how to conceptualise vulnerability and the tensions involved in feminist scholarship. She argues that the challenge in connecting vulnerability productively as a constitutive condition to an ethics of non-violence involves being able to "delineate a movement from the experience of vulnerability to an ethical comportment that respects and does not abuse the vulnerability of others" (2012, p. 67). Murphy explains that one difficulty in doing so due to how violence, connected to the condition of vulnerability, is always present. For example, in recognising one's own vulnerability, especially if confronted with the fallacy of one's own invulnerability after being wounded, the impulse can be to inflict harm on others (p. 68). Due to its relation to violence, the experience of vulnerability does not necessarily prescribe certain ethical forms of behaviour towards others (p. 68). In an assertion that connects to this project, Murphy states that in theorising the ethical potential of a shared, corporeal vulnerability, "assuming the profile of the vulnerable body without appreciating the different ways in which different bodies are vulnerable risks generalizing the motif of vulnerability to the point of abstraction and inefficacy" (p. 68). Where working with the category "woman" requires acknowledging its instability as a term and the need for intersectional approaches that examine axes of

differentiation, Murphy argues that vulnerability as a concept requires the same kinds of vigilance from feminist theory (p. 68).

In particular it is Murphy's proposal that there is an "irreducible singularity" in the experience of vulnerability that connects more closely to the contribution that this thesis attempts to make to the field of vulnerability studies within feminist theory (p. 68). Such singularity, which I address through this thesis, exists in tension with any categorical or universal account of the condition of vulnerability, because of the need for specific examination into "how *that* vulnerability and dispossession are lived" (italics added) (p. 68). I argue that this wording of Murphy's is suggestive of there being different elements or qualities of vulnerability that are lived with and endured in multiple ways. Murphy argues that theorists seeking an ethics of vulnerability within "the domain of politics," which I take to mean the demand to address the significant sociopolitical and economic discrepancies in which vulnerability is lived, must hold the "figure of vulnerability" to a "reality check" (p. 68). As I will describe in later sections through the work of Sunera Thobani (2007) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984), it is important to ground this question of accountability more specifically. In the absence of such situated politics and notion of the unevenness of vulnerability, the "figure" of vulnerability comes to be represented as the white, "western" subject. It was through engaging with Murphy's concerns with the constitutive condition of vulnerability, in the context of its prescriptive potential in developing a normative ethics, that presented a means for me to begin to question the constitution of what vulnerability is and what it does, and how it was being utilised within theoretical discussions. As I will discuss in a later section, the critical work of Thobani (2007) in documenting how the singularities and differences in the experience of vulnerability can be erased within theoretical concerns, provided the starting point to begin my analysis. I will describe in chapter two how self-immolation, as a means of thinking about corporeal vulnerability, but also the layers of vulnerability involved in the event of burning oneself and the varied conditions in which it might occur, led me to want to situate this thesis within particular cases.

In relation to this, it is important to note that the story of Turrell's injuries and Dadge's involvement, and the context and conditions in which particular qualities of vulnerability emerge, are different to each of the stories of Leorsin Seemanpillai and Mariam al-Khawli that I discuss within this thesis. I suggest that while all four might be susceptible to being wounded due to a certain corporeal vulnerability, the non-standardisation of bodies in terms of health, capacities and desires, the differences in location and conditions in which each were wounded, the method of wounding, and the resources available for caring, make it difficult to conceive of how Turrell's vulnerability might be viewed in commensurable or shared ways to that of Seemanpillai's, or Khawli's. I make this point because I want to examine what is being investigated and also being assumed when theorising the concept of vulnerability, and how working with the localised and particular as one method of analysis might open up the possibility to engage with the singularities of vulnerability that emerge when working slowly with narratives and stories and altering their time and tempo. While embodied corporeality suggests susceptibility to injury is a shared, constitutive condition, which means as living beings we can never claim invulnerability or fully guard against forms of violence, I argue, through the work of feminist postcolonial theorists such as Thobani (2007), Mohanty (1984) and Saba Mahmood (2012), that it is not possible to conceptualise vulnerability in this way without conversely and simultaneously acknowledging how vulnerability is differentially experienced and distributed across particular bodies. It is the tension between these two conceptions of vulnerability, the shared and the specific, and the question of how to research vulnerability in ways that might enable the qualities and elements that arise within and across bodies due to the particularities of conditions and context to come into sharper focus, that I remain with during the course of this project.

Therefore, this thesis involves working with feminist, postcolonial and queer theoretical concerns as a way of researching and disrupting vulnerability that brings into focus the ordinary, everyday activities involved in living and enduring. For example, in the absence of information provided by the media, my interest in Turrell's appearance, while superficial, comes from what it might tell of the everyday journey she was taking, of aspects of her life that extend beyond the frame of the photograph,

of the thickness of a narrative that spans far beyond her spectacular and singular description in the media even five years later as a "London terror attack victim."[11] In shifting to the context of the two cases within this thesis, while the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli involve the troubling and traumatic act of self-immolation, I have chosen to focus on the varying temporalities associated with such an acute flashpoint and situate vulnerability through slowing time down. This helps to temporally lengthen activities that both garner attention and disappear through the spectacular time of the acute moment. I am interested in how it might be possible to be distracted by what immediately punctures or emotionally pricks, and the layers of complexity that trail out in many different temporal, spatial and affective registers and directions.

I have chosen to situate this project, then, not within a general notion of the body through a discussion of corporeal vulnerability, but within the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli. Methodologically this has been important: I am concerned, in ways that connect to points raised by Murphy (2012), about what may be missed or effaced in theoretical terms when the intricacies of vulnerability are generalised across different bodies in attempts to find moments of commensurability, relationality and connection. I am interested in remaining with the layers and elements of vulnerability that cannot be so easily distinguished between vulnerability that might be shared and vulnerability that is induced through certain political, social and environmental conditions. To do so I have chosen to analyse specific cases of self-immolation to situate this discussion, and to consider the space and time of vulnerability. I examine how shifting spatial and temporal layers through modes of telling narratives about others opens up distinct ways of thinking about vulnerability and its relation to subjectivity, and how related concepts such as agency, intention and the notion of action similarly become displaced and require further examination. Therefore this project is grounded in a localised analysis of the situated ways that Seemanpillai and Khawli were vulnerable to forms of exposure, but also managed and endured within the lifeworlds they created and

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[11] Martin Evans, "London Terror Attack Victim Reveals New Face," *The Telegraph*, 7 July 2010. Available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/7875530/London-terror-attack-victim-reveals-new-face.html [Last accessed 18 February 2016].

occupied in Australia and Lebanon. The complexity of responses that are possible in relation to desires, capacities, practices and attachments to activities, cultures and community, might mean that the notion of making sense of vulnerability through something shared becomes more fraught.

What may stories reveal in their singularity that has broader significance for understanding the layers and elements of vulnerability? What may happen by thinking about vulnerability, not as an experience for which there becomes an ethical imperative to reduce or eliminate the ways it is induced, but in how vulnerability operates within spaces and temporalities characterised by, as Elizabeth Povinelli proposes, "modes of exhaustion and endurance that are ordinary, chronic, and cruddy rather than catastrophic, crisis-laden, and sublime" (2011, p. 132)? When a catastrophe, such as that of self-immolation is identified, its temporal and discursive force can mask the vulnerable endurance of events that continue to occur within unspectacular, ongoing time. These include the ways in which Seemanpillai and Khawli might have held on through activities of continuity and stasis, such as creating routines and daily rhythms and engaging in the protection of others including their family members. Within this, the scope of this project includes how such activities of self-maintenance wear down and wear out bodies and certain agential capacities and struggles in particular ways. In working at this micro layer, what comes into focus also is how "so much decomposition happens below the threshold of awareness and theorization" (p. 132).

Consequently, I am arguing for the need within research on vulnerability to consider the singularities that might be specific to certain qualities of vulnerability or enable such qualities to be made visible. I suggest this is an important starting point from which to consider researching vulnerability through approaches that are responsive to the local and particular, and do not erase or exclude the complexities and ambivalences in the ways individuals live and endure that change over time within microcosmic spaces and dwellings. Therefore, the work of this thesis includes researching the textures and ambivalences of vulnerability. In relation to the narratives involving two people who set fire to their own bodies, I ask, how might individuals live

with, endure, and maintain particular lifeworlds where vulnerability is not something spectacular, but is invested within the non-spectacular, ordinary time of precarity?

In summary, I suggest that while it involves forms of exposure, the vulnerability of living beings is not equal. Researching vulnerability is framed by tensions in moving between conceptualising vulnerability as a shared, existential condition that is a feature of living beings exposed to harm and the risk of injury and death, and the conditionality of that exposure that might engage different qualities or elements of vulnerability. The particular qualities of vulnerability that engage with the very unevenness of its distribution, its non-volitional qualities, its experience and the response it invokes, and the uncertainty of predicting in advance its impact or in being able to attach forms of vulnerability or its specific functions and effects to particular individuals or populations, complicate making sense of what vulnerability is, and what vulnerability does. A core aspect of the work of this thesis is to remain with this unevenness and uncertainty.

Precariousness and precarity

While recognising the continuing presence of violence and the way that it haunts conceptions of vulnerability and its experience, Judith Butler's more recent focus, in working with the notion of the interdependency of bodies and the possibility for mobilising vulnerability through public forms of assembly, is "to struggle for a conception of ethical obligation that is grounded in precarity" (2015, p. 119). In earlier work that considers the intersection between a condition that is shared but is also highly particular, Butler utilises the terms "precariousness" and "precarity" (2009). These terms help in differentiating an existential conception of vulnerability (precariousness) from the differential distribution and allocation of a "politically induced condition" (precarity) that impinges upon certain individuals and populations (p. 25). Other feminist theorists have also taken up this task in different ways. Discussions of state responsibility for reducing and eliminating politically induced conditions are addressed in Martha Fineman's (2008; 2010) legal work on bringing

vulnerability into the public realm as a social concern for the equal and equitable treatment of all. Fineman acknowledges that while vulnerability is a shared, universal human condition, "it is also socially constructed in its particularities" (2008, p. 10, n7). Fineman ties this social construction to the quality and quantity of resources to which individuals can gain access. Here responsibility rests with societal institutions that make decisions as to the distribution of assets. Fineman argues for state involvement in legislating for the vulnerable subject in order to deliver and sustain equality across citizens in a way that might be more equitable than current discrimination-based models. Outside of state involvement, feminist theoretical approaches such as that of Erinn Gilson (2014) expand conceptions of vulnerability from a negative state or condition, to consider the difference between an ontological condition of exposure that makes harm possible, and the actual harm itself (p. 23). Gilson uses the distinction between what she refers to as two levels of vulnerability, the condition and its experience, as a means to "acknowledge a level of vulnerability that pertains to us all rather than jettisoning vulnerability from our self-conception" (p. 37). For Gilson, distinguishing two dimensions through the ontological and the situational helps to establish that there is a condition of vulnerability that is shared and unavoidable, as well as states of vulnerability that are both temporary and unnecessary (p. 38). One of the reasons for creating this distinction is that "without conceptualizing vulnerability as ontological as well as situational, we may be prone to think of it as the reified, fixed property of certain types of individuals" (p. 38). Butler connects the devaluing of certain lives as not being "grievable" to being exposed disproportionately to deficiencies in social and political infrastructure, resources and support, which can lead to, for example, poverty, underemployment, disease and poor health, and legal disenfranchisement (2009, p. 25). The capacity for certain individuals to "become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" means that precariousness, as an ontological feature of what it means to be living, can be heightened and reduced through particular politically induced conditions (p. 25).

In another approach, the vulnerable body becomes the site of politics for Debra Bergoffen (2003). The vulnerable body is conceived as one that resists being marked as vulnerable through its reduction to the female sexed body and instead is situated

within the terms of justice, which involve the heteronomy of mutual shared vulnerability (p. 133). Referring directly to the landmark event on 22 February 2001 of a United Nations Hague war crimes tribunal finding three Bosnian Serb soldiers guilty for crimes against humanity after the rape of Muslim women and girls in events that occurred in 1992 and 1993 during the Bosnian conflict, Bergoffen addresses issues in translating politically conceptions of vulnerability onto a lived body through the universality of international law.[12] Bergoffen's interest in the vulnerable body as a generative site for politics stems from her critique of the fallacy of the autonomous, invulnerable body, and the ways in which patriarchy has sexed the autonomous body referenced within law, as being male (2003b). Specifically, prior to The Hague ruling, the body referenced in the notion of consent and how consent is given, "relies on a masculine concept of the self as an autonomous, independent being" (2003, p. 126). I suggest one of the difficulties in working with conceptions of vulnerability that is echoed in Bergoffen's analysis and feminist theoretical approaches continue to tussle with, is the way in which the concept of vulnerability is understood, both singularly and simultaneously, as an embodied, ethical and political term. This involves its understanding and use as a condition constitutive of being an embodied subject, and one that has been intricately connected to particular marked bodies through its relation to violence. Bergoffen's specific interest is in the political implications of marking the female body (as opposed to the male body) as exclusively vulnerable. The appeal of mutual vulnerability becomes the means in which to address the ways women are constructed and discursively categorised through a notion of vulnerability as weakness, which requires the protection of men who occupy bodies that are autonomous and invulnerable. Where earlier I described feminist theoretical engagements with vulnerability's ethical potential, Bergoffen appeals to the political potential of a vulnerable body through the mutual vulnerability of men and women. Her approach is in response to the "injustice of a politics that speaks of humanity (the universal) from the position of the fantasmatic autonomous male body that refuses its human vulnerability" (p. 131).

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[12] For details of the case referred to by Bergoffen, see Marlise Simons, "3 Serbs Convicted In Wartime Rapes," *The New York Times,* 22 February 2001. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2001/02/23/world/3-serbs-convicted-in-wartime-rapes.html [Last accessed 20 February 2016].

However, tensions exist between embodied, ethical and political elements of vulnerability and how to encompass these within a singular, cohesive term that recognises the ways in which the functions and effects of vulnerability are differentially experienced and are not commensurable across bodies. Bergoffen indicates this awareness in later work where she argues for the need to take into account the specificity of vulnerability within the particularity of bodies, because of "the ways in which the human body is always the embodiment of a meaning making subject" (2009, p. 313). By way of example Bergoffen argues that if we "identify the human rights violation of torture with the infliction of pain (accounting only for the way it abuses the material body)" and forget the embodied ways that torture is experienced through "the importance of the confession and the significance of humiliation" then vulnerability is only constituted through the body and this does not consider the role of vulnerability within an embodied subject. For example, this leads to the justification within "U.S. post 9/11 torture memos…that water boarding was not painful enough to be considered torture" (p. 313). I suggest this echoes the work of Lata Mani (1998), referred to in the introduction and that will be addressed further in this thesis, which draws attention to the lack of agency ascribed to subjects in pain.

Bergoffen argues that replacing the autonomous male body that founds politics with the vulnerable sexed body unmarked by gender, enables movement towards an ethical politics through the law transmitting "our obligations to respect and respond to each other's vulnerability" (2003, p. 127). As I will describe in the next section, Butler addresses such an obligation through the ethics of responding to a "common human vulnerability" (2004, p. 30). In both cases I suggest this assumes a cohesive concept of vulnerability that is generative, where for Bergoffen it becomes universalised as a political body that is shared between men and women. It is the law, founded on the notion of vulnerability, which prevents the particular exploitation of that vulnerability. However, it also risks erasing the uneven ways vulnerability plays out across different bodies, where these differences matter to questions of politics and ethics. It can erase the differentiated and situated ways that both female and male bodies are impinged upon outside of gender. What is the role of location, specificity or privilege, and the notion of agency attached to such a conception of the vulnerable body? For example,

how might The Hague's ruling be read in light of the violence being inflicted upon Muslim women's bodies? What consideration is there for how the prosecution of those committing war crimes is also determined by situated privilege and location, where actions committed by certain troops involving the violation and assault of particular bodies are seldom reported or prosecuted?[13] In what way might this ruling continue to fail particular individuals due to their bodies and the context in which the crime occurs? I have drawn on Bergoffen's analysis because I think it illustrates the difficulties in the use of vulnerability as an embodied element of subjectivity within ethical and political frames. As I will elaborate in the next section, there is a multiplicity of capacities, struggles and desires of embodied subjects that impact upon the ways vulnerability is endured and responded to within and across bodies through different modalities of space and time.

Troubling conceptualisations of vulnerability

The account that drew my attention to specific tensions that trouble theoretical and practical registers in researching vulnerability was Thobani's (2007) article "White Wars: Western Feminism and the 'War on Terror'." In the context of this thesis Thobani's article illustrates parallel levels of analysis. It attends to the macro level contexts involved in power relations that impinge disproportionately on specific populations, while working critically with the particularities of the micro level conditions of vulnerability incurred by those populations. Thobani's engagement with the necessity of grounding theoretical considerations of vulnerability within practical and experiential concerns of how vulnerability adheres to particular bodies, led me to focus this project on the specifics of two cases of self-immolation. I draw upon feminist, postcolonial and queer theories and their approaches to working with the instability of conceptual terms. Thobani's work challenged me to be conscious of forms of commensurability that can be implied through cross-cultural analysis between those located within conditions of precarity and those located within conditions of privilege,

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[13] For example, accusations have been made that United States soldiers committed rape and other atrocities during the Vietnamese War, which were described during the Winter Solider investigation in 1971. See Seldon (2008).

and the un-interrogated cohesiveness of embodied transnational subjects. I will address these concerns in more detail in chapter two.

Thobani argues that there can be an implied subject within feminist theoretical concerns focused on political community and solidarity. She critiques the foundationalism of feminist theory originating in North America and Western Europe by drawing attention to the ways feminist scholarship from these locations can erase its own situated politics. In the wake of the attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, the articulation of whiteness shifted to being vulnerable, but also to be positioned as "innocent and the subject of the irrational hatred of this fanatic non-Western Other" (p. 169). Thobani addresses how the recasting of an imperial power as needing to protect itself poses a problem for "western" feminists in addressing and resisting such colonial and imperialist projects. This involves how feminists examine critically the ways the United States, and other nations, have controlled articulation of the meaning of the attacks and the relation between the "West" and the "Muslim Other" in the wake of 11 September (2007). Thobani examines three feminist texts by Butler (2004), Phyllis Chesler (2003) and Zillah Eisenstein (2004), who, in different ways, theorise the "War on Terror."[14] These texts were chosen by Thobani due to the prominence of the US-based feminist authors, and because these are some of the first book-length analyses of the War on Terror. The works differ in that Chesler offers strong support of the war, and both Butler and Eisenstein are writing from oppositional positions. This range of texts both suggest, in the case of Butler and Eisenstein, the possibility for forms of transnational connection and political solidarity among women, and resist such connections, in the case of Chesler. Thobani's article brings into focus tensions in the way projects of political solidarity or shared experience work across transnational contexts, especially those between imperialist

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[14] Sara Ahmed has written on the response that Thobani's article received when it was published (2012). Within the special issue on whiteness in which Thobani's work appeared, the journal requested responses to Thobani's article and published the (only) response received from Chesler. Ahmed describes how "the response draws on racist vocabularies with quite extraordinary ease" (p. 161). In Chesler's response Ahmed notes that Chesler "describes Thobani's paper as 'ideological, not scholarly' and as trying 'to pass for an academic or even intellectual work'" (p. 162). Chesler labels Thobani's article "an angry and self-righteous declaration of war" (2007, p. 228). I include this detail because it is important to draw attention to the racism involved in Chesler's response and the methods in which scholarship can be dismissed and racism and privileged positioning disavowed when these are named and research is held to account.

nations and colonial or occupied states. What connects the books, even with their conflicting views, Thobani argues, are the ways in which the white imperial subject is represented in relation to the Muslim Other (p. 174). This is because feminist scholarship, where it is produced in North American and Western Europe, but also elsewhere, can omit examination into the privileged locations in which theory is produced and how white subjects can become centred within such theory. In her critique of Eisenstein's analysis, Thobani draws attention to forms of connection and commensurability of experience that are made between women in the "third world" and "white feminists," through their shared position as "gender victims" (p. 180). A focal point for Thobani's essay becomes the absence of analysis into the ways in which "white imperial subjects," men *and* women, remain complicit with violence conducted by imperial nations and do not engage with examinations of "western" discourse and whiteness (p. 180).

The erasure of cultural histories that can occur through the absence of racial identity, and the grounding of theory in a notion of universality rather than in locality means white subjects within examinations involving possibilities for shared vulnerability can be positioned as being "innocent of their imperialist histories and present complicities" (p. 171). Thobani illustrates this by arguing that feminist scholarship on vulnerability as a means of political solidarity and shared connection after 11 September 2001 was centred upon the experience of the "(white) American subject who has suddenly and graphically discovered its own vulnerability" (p. 176). Here it is possible to consider how forms of reflexivity, through recognising one's own vulnerability, while involving a form of openness, can lead not to concerns for the other but to the centring of the self in relations with others. I take up this point in chapter two in relation to some of the risks within feminist reflexive methodological approaches. In particular, I am interested in Thobani's engagement with Butler's *Precarious Life* and the ways it connects to the work of this thesis. Thobani articulates tensions between modes of producing cross-cultural knowledge on vulnerability. She addresses the potential for ethics but also the problems that can emerge from the basis of a "common human vulnerability" (Butler 2004, p. 30). The specificities of vulnerability that condition the way lives are lived within colonised, occupied, and other precarious locations provide a means through

which to interrogate a cohesive concept of vulnerability. Centring experience of vulnerability on what occurred within the United States as Thobani suggests Butler does means that even when the violence inflicted *by* the United States on states and nations is referenced and acknowledged within such discussions, the specificities of that violence, including the military force of the United States, the length of the attacks, and the materiality of the resulting impact on infrastructure, individuals, and communities, is not documented and analysed in these discussions. Instead, in this absence, there is an assumed commensurability between forms of violence inflicted by *and* suffered by the United States. This results in a "shared primal, pre-individuated psycho-existential experience of vulnerability" that erases differences between the power of the occupying and the occupied, the discursive control exercised over such events, and complexities in how vulnerability might be differentially experienced and responded to (Thobani 2007, p. 176). It also avoids examining the ways the United States is involved in structuring and discursively producing such power relations (p. 177).

Here I suggest that it is possible to see how the temporalities invested in universal and local imperatives of vulnerability might play a role in the disruptions generated by working at micro and macro levels of narration and analysis. Being able to speak of something shared, that is distinct from the specific conditions and ways in which bodies are impinged upon, suggests a temporal primacy to an ontological or foundational condition as a means of connection, which occurs prior to any form of injury that might be inflicted upon certain bodies and by certain bodies. While Thobani's analysis is framed within the context of macro level concerns of colonialism and imperialism, she works with the specificities and qualities of vulnerability that individuals, groups and communities live with, and how such conditions trouble the practice of theorising vulnerability through an existential, shared, locationless condition that is not situated within the particular. Such an absence of acknowledging but also analysing the particularities of vulnerabilities of those who live and endure within the microcosmic spaces of lifeworlds outside of the privileged locations in which such theory is produced, means the "implication is that the experiences of occupied peoples can be approached as being essentially the same as those of imperial subjects"

(p. 177). Thobani contends that without discussing the particularities and specificities of loss, which remain less examined in certain populations, especially those who remain living with and enduring conditions of precarity and who may both now and historically have experienced forms of suffering and oppression as a result of violence inflicted by imperialist nations, a universalised human experience that is white is suggested and reproduced (p. 176). Therefore, in engaging critically with the theorising of vulnerability, Thobani centres her analysis on the absence of location and the importance of its role in establishing the singularities of how vulnerability might be experienced by particular subjects. She argues that it is only by working from the located position of engaging with "the West *as defined by its others*" and the critical work conducted by those living under occupation or within conditions of violence and precarity and their experiences and demands, that the binary between "the West and its Other" can be transcended (original italics) (p. 182). It is this painful and uncomfortable work that Thobani addresses as being necessary of scholars engaging with vulnerability and contextualising it within imperialist relations and power structures.

I connect Thobani's analysis of located politics to that of Mohanty's (1984) highly influential work on the development of knowledge about "third world" women in scholarship located in the United States and Western Europe (p. 333). In her article, which has had a pivotal influence on the methodological approach of this project and will be described in more detail in chapter two, Mohanty describes how the term "colonisation" "almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination, and a suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question" (p. 333). Mohanty centres on how that which results from "the West," itself a complex and contradictory notion, becomes the assumed "primary referent in theory and praxis" (p. 334). Specifically, Mohanty draws attention to problems with using "women" as a coherent category of analysis in feminist scholarship, because this assumes "an ahistorical, universal unity" that ignores how women are constituted through a "complex interaction between class, culture, religion and other ideological institutions and frameworks" (p. 344). Therefore, one of the important contributions

of Thobani's and Mohanty's analyses to this project is the way their work raises challenges to working with vulnerability as a coherent, stable, conceptual term.

Instead, I ask how might different elements of vulnerability be induced, constructed, heightened, reduced, or manipulated "*within* particular local contexts" that resists any easy reduction to being made intelligible through coherent, stable discursive categories of agency, gender, race, cultural practices, or socio-economic status (original italics) (Mohanty 1984, p. 344). Mohanty argues that a form of colonialism occurs when the kinds of contextual conditions, such as kinship, legal, economic or other structures, that impact on a unified notion of "women," are "treated as phenomena to be judged by Western standards" (p. 351). In adapting this to considering vulnerability as a constitutive, unified condition, the contexts in which vulnerability might emerge, and the forces exerted and the modes of agency that occur are also at risk of being truncated and universalised through reference to normative, "western" standards. Mohanty argues that this means, "Western feminists alone become the true "subjects" of this counter-history" (p. 351). Consequently, one of the core methodological considerations to my research on vulnerability was the necessity of being aware of how my own "ethnocentric universality" might dominate in the analysis through inattention to the situated and privileged positioning that I occupy as a white woman currently residing in the United Kingdom (p. 351). The questions that arise from Thobani and Mohanty's analyses that I take forward into this project include: Does the conception of vulnerability, and the ways it is researched, assume a form of coherence across cultural, social and historical contexts (Mohanty 1984, p. 350)? How might beginning with an analysis that remains with discordant, ambivalent elements of subjectivity open up space to consider the qualities and layers of vulnerability?

Encountering vulnerability through the localised and particular

A core aspect of this project has involved acknowledging and working with tensions in cross-cultural scholarship without attempting to resolve them, and to remain with the

discomfort of being uncertain how to make sense of narratives involving self-immolation. This has involved my own exposure and acknowledgment of the vulnerabilities in producing knowledge, and what can emerge through slowly returning to narratives, and allowing the space to work on stories and be worked on by stories. In chapter two I describe vulnerable writing and outline the core components of a vulnerable methodology. I have found that layers of vulnerability continue to emerge and impact on this project as it has developed. The fragility of decisions undertaken in methodological approaches to research, and the uncertainty of making epistemic claims, have become interwoven into many aspects of this project and are also an integral part of the temporal politics of my research on this topic. While the thesis was initiated through feminist theoretical approaches to vulnerability, it also attempts forms of disruption by addressing vulnerability through feminist, postcolonial and queer theory. It is these theoretical and methodological engagements that have helped to provide the conditions for interrogative, disruptive and reflexive practices to take shape.

As mentioned in the introduction, I use a notion of being localised as a placeholder term for its situated qualities, that acknowledges how all spaces/cultures contain multiple sites that are impressed by wider forces and times. I take the term 'local' directly from the work of Mohanty (2003) who argued in her influential 1984 article for "grounded, particularized analyses linked with larger, even global, economic and political frameworks" (p. 501).

The time of vulnerability

When considering the tension between the universal and the specific we can address the ways in which the universal is assumed to be timeless, existing in the absence of elements of subjectivity that connect individuals to history, culture and location. I am interested in different temporalities of vulnerability and how these come to be transposed unevenly across different bodies and locations through ordinary, everyday modes of self-maintenance and endurance, and what this might open up in thinking

about vulnerability. In this project I attempt to engage with the question of time through refiguring conceptual frames in which activities take place, bodies move and forms of endurance occur—and consider how this leads to difficulties in distinguishing between activities of self-making and self-destruction.

One aspect of this project involves engaging in what Elizabeth Freeman (2010) terms "queer time," which, as a method of displacement in this project, has involved researching vulnerability "against dominant arrangements of time and history" (p. xi). Freeman articulates how historical narratives, and I would expand this to include particular modes of storytelling, can organise "various temporal schemae into consequential sequence" (p. xi). There are cultural differences in storytelling, where "western" narratives tend to work along linear forms and where the end of the story enables the reader to make sense of what preceded it. There is a moment in the narrative where things begin "to make sense." However, there are other modes of telling stories where such consequential sequences or means of sense-making are not used or relied upon in the same way. I am interested in interrogating the use of consequential sequences as a method of documenting activities, scenes and events through the necessary inclusion and exclusion of certain details, that are laid down, mapped and recorded by adhering to rules and boundaries of chronological, linear time. Such details might be moved, manipulated or erased based on what has come prior and what is predicted as occurring in the future. As I will describe in chapter two, this might occur through categorising the self-immolations performed by women in their homes as private suicides, and those that occur in spaces deemed to be public as political protests. The notions of time and space that adhere to certain actions become indicative of the meanings applied and implied, and of the subjectivity and agency of the individuals involved.

An alternative method of working with, and being worked on by time is to unstitch slowly narratives through considering "nonsequential forms of time" (p. xi). Tied to the notion of the consequential and its role in providing explanations for actions, scenes or occurrences due to the effect of something prior, is how this mode of time might be contextualised through relational elements suggested within narratives. Thinking

about how the relational can be considered alongside what might exceed or fall outside of such connections can involve tracing the limits of social analysis and opening space to consider what eludes "the grasp of comprehension and the fullness of narrative meaning" (Harrison 2007, pp. 591). Paul Harrison proposes addressing the "breaks and gaps, interruptions and intervals, caesuras and tears" that trouble consequential forms of meaning and sense-making (p. 592). Within discussions of the relational, and I suggest this can include a notion of consequential sequences of actions that serve to connect events, Harrison argues that attention should also be paid to the "incessant proximity of the nonrelational" (p. 592). Therefore, I consider that alongside examining relational capacities of vulnerability, nonsequential forms of time can be a means of disrupting the coherence of linear narratives, and engaging with how certain elements may resist forms of relationality. It includes being hesitant in considering the relation between actions and how these might expose knowledge of intentions or help in explaining what was on a person's mind. This might mean, for example, resisting the pull of epistemological connections between activities that occur in close proximity, such as the prominence within Australian Government media releases of the assessment by Seemanpillai's caseworker that Seemanpillai showed no evidence of suicidal thoughts when the two spoke on the telephone the day before his self-immolation. I suggest instead that ruptures, tears and puckers that disorientate linear, chronological forms of time can alter the placement, movement and materiality of bodies and meaning. This can help to "fold subjects into structures of belonging and duration" within less visible microcosmic spaces and dwellings (Freeman 2010, p. xi).

In a similar sense to the notion of a shared, universal condition, I want to consider whether vulnerability, as a constitutive condition, might assume bodies live within certain "shared timings" (p. xi). How might different temporalities attach to particular bodies? In reference to Freeman's work, this research involves engaging in a form of temporal syncopation, where, in the rhythmic modes of living, the more visible parts of the narratives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, are temporally displaced by stressing the lesser beats, the parts of life that do not get heard, or are misheard, ignored, muted or erased in forms of remembering and in modes of telling (p. xii). I suggest the visible, louder beats might include actions proximally involved in self-immolation, and the

ways Seemanpillai and Khawli more directly engaged with political structures and processes, such as Seemanpillai's arrival without a visa in Australia, and Khawli's pressing of her case with United Nations' officers. But even within these louder vibrations that filter certain affective currents through the narratives, the details fall away. The modes of maintaining lives, of sustaining bodies in order to make these efforts are less recorded. In this project, researching vulnerability involves utilising temporal syncopation in order to study vulnerability through the displacement of the dominant linear and chronological temporalities of living where actions are connected to causes and effects, and these relationships can predict the next beat, or the next action. In relation to the stories in this thesis, this narrative structure of cause and effect can involve leading the reader or audience to a final denouement in order to resolve discomfort over what has been unintelligible; in this way the discordant elements and strands of a story come together by way of explanation or resolution.

In returning to the image of Turrell and Dadge after the bomb explosion, the difficulties of displacement can be seen in how Turrell is dressed with the expectation that she would get to her place of work on that day. The outcome of the journey she undertook on the underground, as she might have done each weekday morning along with thousands of commuters, is predictable. Perhaps part of the vulnerability of the time of events is when displacement occurs to what Freeman terms *chrononormativity*, which refers to "the use of time to organize individual human bodies towards maximum productivity" (p. 3). Trains run more frequently during "rush hour," when there are more people and there always seems to be less time available in order to be on time. Freeman points out the ways in which time is controlled by external forces, where corporations and governments have the power to speed up certain elements in modes of living, while encouraging a reduction in pace during leisure pursuits. This results in a syncopated tempo that moves between an enforced "quick time," and a slower pace "that seems to be a matter of choice" (p. xii). These "hidden rhythms" that are normalised through patterns and routine, appear to be difficult to displace (p. 4). Even a bomb blast seems unable to disrupt such daily temporal rhythms controlled by the dominant beats of specific social, cultural and economic forces. After the detonation Turrell walked through the length of the train: "I

didn't realise I was injured, I was still in shock. I remember telling people that I needed to get to work."[15] In the case of Dadge, after helping those injured at Edgware station he continued along his journey that had been interrupted, and went to work. I assumed initially that Dadge too was compelled to travel to his place of employment due to a form of *chrononormativity*, and that his agency was already determined by the pull of such forces. In reviewing my assumption, I realised that I did not know why he continued on to work after the bomb blasts. Perhaps going to work was a form of displacement within Dadge's own life, that it provided a means of obtaining refuge, or that his office provided forms of friendship and support that were not possible from the prospect of returning to an empty house, or the responsibilities or relationships that might have resided at home. I assumed I knew Dadge's intention, and what was on his mind, based on his actions.

Therefore, in thinking about singularities of vulnerability and the ways time can open up individual narratives through working with nonsequential forms, how might time be involved in the layers of vulnerability, where activities become registered upon bodies through different temporalities? For example, in thinking about the two cases within this thesis, how might the daily routines of living in Australia wear upon Seemanpillai in specific ways? How might it become possible to make visible the effort and endurance required within the specificity of living on a temporary bridging visa, of supporting his parents while they themselves live in a refugee camp in India? Or, how might her returning to the UNHCR office with hopefulness for a different outcome impinge upon Khawli in specific ways, and the lives of her children, and make visible different elements of vulnerability? How might these events, which may be barely registered within other times and other locations, be endured and become registered on and within specific bodies? One method for examining this is to alter the tempo of vulnerable events. In engaging with the different temporalities, spaces and bodies of vulnerability and the non-spectacular, ongoing time of precarity, I take my lead from Rob Nixon who considers the "temporal dispersion" of unfolding environmental catastrophes (2011, p. 3). Nixon argues for the need to "engage in a different kind of

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[15] BBC News, "7/7 Victim's Remarkable Healing."

violence, a violence that is neither spectacular or instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (p. 2). I attempt to examine the temporal scales of vulnerability by shifting time, manually rolling it backwards through Freeman's (2010) notion of "temporal drag," by changing the space and pace of time through Lauren Berlant's (2007) notion of the gradual wearing down of a "slow death," and by considering the accretive impact through Nixon's (2011) "slow violence."

I move time forward also after the immediacy of the violent event of self-immolation. I suggest such a visual and affective spectacle has the force to become the sole register of time, and in effect stops or pauses time at the moment of the acute flashpoint, constricting the possibility for different temporal scales to emerge through such an acute moment. As I will describe in my own research, the syncopated tempo of activities occurring after self-immolation and the agency involved may not be registered or may be less attended to, such as the material experience of pain and suffering, the use of bodily movements, the treatment of and recovery from injuries inflicted by burns, and varied embodied forms of communication. While Nixon draws upon climate change as a means of working through and attempting to illuminate the slow moving disasters that are ignored by media and governments, it is the ambivalent presence of both chronic and catastrophic temporal scales flowing through self-immolation as an event that is of interest to this project. This led me to consider what forms of endurance might be involved in vulnerability.

In this project I rethink the pace of vulnerability, and its association with acute, spectacular violence. Following Nixon, I explore how rendering certain layers of vulnerability more visible might entail refining the notion of speed and its relation to time. However, rather than focusing on infusing that which escapes notice with "an urgent visibility" that might lead to public interest and political intervention as Nixon does, I wish to remain with the slowness of time and what might occur in working with localised stories where visible elements of the narrative might mask discordant modes of agency and activity that inform the event (2011, p. 3). Here such events resist causal relations and the tracing of histories within a linear temporality. I use this as a

methodological analysis to consider what might emerge, or become more vivid, when no longer hidden or distracted by the illumination of the spectacular, acute temporality of certain activities, and equally how these discordant elements might also continue to remain interwoven within different layers of narratives.

Enduring vulnerability

In her more recent work focused on political assemblies, and the ways in which individuals and groups mobilise, assemble and protest, Butler distinguishes between volitional and non-volitional forms of vulnerability, where political struggles might demand an end to "unwilled conditions of bodily exposure," or where "sometimes deliberately exposing the body to possible harm is part of the very meaning of political resistance" (2015, p. 126). Linked to this, a quality of vulnerability emerges, which is connected to the ability to be vulnerable and resist political structures and forms of oppression where Butler argues these "can, and do, and even must happen at the same time" (p. 140). I propose this indicates the possible role and involvement of vulnerability within capacities of endurance and struggle, not only during activities of resistance and political subversion, but more broadly. It is the particularity of how these qualities might emerge within different activities that is of interest to this project.

Butler suggests that while conditions of precarity are mediated through the political, geographical and historical sites in which they occur, and movements of social justice seek their abolishment, vulnerability has at its essence, durability. Where precarity involves the impact of forces imposed upon individuals from the outside, vulnerability can be acted upon and used to oppose precarity (2015b). Vulnerability is inescapable, but rather than something shared, Butler considers how it might become "the joint of our nonfoundation," with the ethical obligation that is emitted from such a connection residing in forms of interdependency (2015, p. 119). The passivity of the non-foundational bears connections to the use of passivity within Levinas's (1998) ethical philosophy. I suggest that the non-foundational does not refer to that which is simply

yet to be established as being able to be comprehended within existing forms of knowledge or relationality, or to that which is considered proximally distant. Instead it involves passivity that Levinas equates with a form of exposure to the other that compels action. It is grounded in an obligation that occurs outside of a chronological, linear time where comprehension is required in order to determine what the right course of action might be.

Within the echoes of Levinas's ethical concerns I suggest the tensions of the foundational and the specific continue to characterise Butler's work on vulnerability through the struggle to conceptualise an ethical obligation that might be universal in its response, while also recognising the uneven and unstable ways precarity is lived with and endured. Butler acknowledges this continuing difficulty, in that as "soon as the existential claim is articulated in its specificity, it ceases to be existential" (2015, p. 119). While Butler situates this work in more localised spaces, the focus is on bodies that act in concert, and in the plurality of the mobilisation of bodily exposure. Where I diverge and position my contribution to these discussions is through my focus on individuals who do not act in concert, and thus where there is an absence of coordinated or organised action. I am interested in how vulnerability is worn within bodies and how conditions wear down bodies through the particularities of the cultural and historical trails that might have led to those spaces, through forms of endurance within borrowed or captured time in being hosted in another country, in waiting for outcomes, in the uncertainty of decisions made at both local and macro levels as to whether protection and support will be provided, and in the decisions that must made by Seemanpillai and Khawli. In this way, I focus on how spaces and times alter layers and qualities of vulnerability and the situated specificities of those living within them.

In the modes of endurance that might be connected to the slow temporalities of vulnerability, Povinelli (2011) illustrates the differentiated experiences certain individuals have through being impinged upon and constrained in ways that are disproportional to others and cannot be altered easily through action and intention alone. While those living within conditions of precarity might engage in forms of

agential action and self-improvement that involve the aggregation of both individual and community intentions to undertake and fulfill particular projects of regeneration and survival, what a focus on the willfulness of intention and singular forms of agential autonomy can neglect is that "we are constantly disaggregated by the world around us" (p. 138). Povinelli notes that in the materiality of ideas, actions and intentions, bodies and wills encounter being pressed upon by forces through different arrangements that "shape and direct actions" in ways that constantly threaten to pull apart and derail activities (p. 139). I suggest that it is useful to consider how the aggregation of agential activities geared towards autonomy and self-empowerment might be worn down slowly through a range of disaggregating forces and arrangements that press upon tired, exhausted bodies undergoing recursive processes which eat away at the time available to recover from the tasks of living. This is true especially of structures and infrastructure that require acts of repetition: the re-telling of stories by those seeking refuge in order to gain resources, support and more time; standing in line; the waiting through time or the checking for letters that record the outcome of decisions. The endurance to the forms of time involved is compounded by environmental, social, cultural, and economic conditions in which such recursive activities occur.

However, I suggest through the two narratives in this thesis that while there are forms of relationality occurring through situating the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli within particular sociopolitical and economic structures and conditions that impinge upon their lives, this cannot be resolved easily through tracing a linear cause and effect back to a particular localised or macro level source. Instead I propose that a quality of the time of vulnerability involves its unstable linkages to relational elements. Indeed, it is the difficulty of being able to account for the ordinary, chronic, and cruddy in measurable ways that contributes to these events remaining under-reported and the invisibility of the modes of endurance that occur in everyday ways of living and keeping going. The stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli are interwoven with contextual considerations that deepen the layers of vulnerability across both time and space and that are difficult to measure within a metric of vulnerability that records quantifiable impact. These elements include community tolerance for those seeking refuge and

asylum; the number and needs of individual dependents; discrimination in employment; fears for personal safety; friendships and cultural and religious connections. These disaggregating elements lay open the vulnerability of there being a linear cohesiveness to subjectivity that suggests it is possible to achieve what we set out to do, and that there is a singular modality of agency geared towards autonomy and resistance. The disaggregation therefore makes it difficult and also problematic to identify traceable connective and causal relations as to why such projects might fail, and why efforts of endurance might make it difficult to distinguish between those that involve self-maintenance and those that involve self-destruction.

Elements of vulnerability

This thesis develops several concepts that work to localise vulnerability and attune the inquiry to particular elements or qualities within such a conceptualisation. As discussed in the introduction, the term "local" does not refer to or assume a single site or lack of mobility. I use a notion of being localised as a placeholder term for the local's situated qualities, which acknowledges how all spaces/cultures contain multiple sites that are impressed by wider forces and times. I have chosen to deploy the local through the context in which it has been employed in the work of Mohanty (1984; 2003). A notion of the local is also central to the work of other postcolonial feminist scholars that are referred to in this thesis including Lila Abu-Lughod (1990), Veena Das (1996; 2006), Gayatri Gopinath (2010), Lata Mani (1998), and Sunera Thobani (2007). Mohanty argues for the need of feminist scholarship to be conscious and critical of its location "within a global political and economic framework dominated by the "First World" (2003, p. 501). In the context of writing about the lives of two individuals who set themselves on fire, I was made aware of the problems of conducting this research as a white PhD student within a London-based UK university. While the Eurocentric focus of my research could have been acknowledged as a limitation, it felt an insufficient response to what was clearly a wider problem for cross-cultural research. Instead I wanted to attempt to develop a methodological approach that might consider how this project could approach the work of being "attentive to the

micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes" (p. 501). I decided that I would focus on Seemanpillai and Khawli, and work outwards towards the macropolitical context in which they both lived, which itself was particular to each of their circumstances. This focus on the particular helped me to consider the two cases not solely through a global lens of oppression and precarity, but also through the situated and material details of the struggle and endurance undertaken by Seemanpillai and Khawli (p. 501). Therefore by starting with the local and specific, it allowed me to begin developing a "multilayered, contextual analysis" and from which emerged the need to acknowledge and address the incongruities and uncertainties in the knowledge that was being produced (p. 501).

To unpack this, the location refers to the specificity of the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, but also to the location in which this project takes place, and the situatedness of my own role as the researcher. With this, the local operates in ways that are multilayered, and is designed to keep attention on the tensions but also the means of analysis that multi-sited localities might offer cross-cultural research. In this project I do suggest that the particularities of endurance that occur within the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli might be universally significant in ways that can help to consider how endurance is more broadly a quality of vulnerability. Therefore, the emphasis on the local leads me to consider the instability of vulnerability as a concept and how, in taking Mohanty's lead, to speak in universal, cohesive terms can erase the particular (p. 501). I posit that there are elements or qualities of vulnerability as a direct response to the difficulties in conceptualising vulnerability as a singularity or ontological pull on life that impresses upon individuals in the same way irrespective of location, of bodies, of agential capacities and desires, and the conditions in which we might live. Mohanty's "insistence on the specificity of difference" made me think about how this might be articulated through the way we think about human conditions such as vulnerability (p. 502). If vulnerability is an ontological condition that is simultaneously but also necessarily enacted within the specificities of difference, how might such a concept be described? Through the two cases in this thesis I suggest

these specificities come into contact with, and impress upon, bodies as elements or qualities of vulnerability.

In this thesis I trace how the development of two narratives on self-immolation led me to this conception of vulnerability as something lacking cohesion and universality, despite its ontological foundations. I do not attempt to resolve this tension, but instead I chose to work with the local and specific as a means of, in Mohanty's (2003) terms, illuminating what might be missing from current conceptions of vulnerability that are less focused on the complexity of the relation between the ontological and specific. I use the terms "elements or qualities" to suggest the multi-layered, overlapping, and ambivalent characteristics of vulnerability that are not shared. At the beginning of this section I stated that the thesis develops several concepts that work to localise vulnerability and attune the inquiry to particular elements or qualities of vulnerability. I develop the concepts, specifically the notion of micro events and what a vulnerable methodology might entail, to help figure through how to speak about vulnerability as being localised, both in the situated conditions in which self-immolation might become an activity and response, and how as researchers we might acknowledge and account for the vulnerability of research practices and the production of knowledge.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have outlined some of the debates in feminist scholarship on vulnerability, and the contribution this thesis makes to those discussions. Specifically, this project is grounded in a localised analysis that considers the time and space of vulnerability within two specific stories of individuals who set their bodies on fire. I argue for the need to consider singularities specific to certain qualities of vulnerability through approaches that are responsive to the local and the particular, and do not erase or exclude the intricacies, complexities and ambivalences in the ways individuals live and endure that change over time within the particularity of microcosmic spaces and dwellings. There is recognition here of the tensions in moving between

conceptualising vulnerability as a shared, existential condition, and the conditionality of that exposure that is unevenly distributed across particular bodies, compounded by political, social, cultural, historical and economic conditions. Rather than attempting to resolve this, the difficulties between the ontological and specific continue to underlay tensions involved in researching vulnerability, and inform my methods of vulnerable writing. These tensions continue within the ways in which I have embarked on researching vulnerability, and in being aware of the unevenness of its distribution without suggesting that vulnerability is tied to particular embodied subjects in ways that are fixed and unchanging. Vulnerability is both generative and disabling, and an aspect of life that is managed and endured in highly particular ways. The uncertainty of predicting in advance its impact or in being able to attach forms of vulnerability or its specific functions and effects to particular individuals or populations, continues to complicate, but also to provide generative possibilities for how vulnerability can be examined.

As I described in the introduction to this thesis, I refer to the term "local" within this thesis title and extensively within this project as a methodological site of analysis. I take as my reference its use by Mohanty (1984) to describe a method of conducting research within a particular situation and context. The local becomes a tool of specification, which holds theoretical categories and concepts to account for their situated politics. In doing so, I propose that the local also holds theory, and those who work with theory, to account for its gaps and absences, as a mode of recognition for what cannot be encompassed within means of producing knowledge. It grounds theory as being generated "from *within* the situation and context being analysed" and therefore temporally situates it by not assuming that it occurs prior to an interrogation of locality (p. 345). Mahmood (2012) raises this point also in acknowledging that she approached her own research on the women's mosque movement in Egypt initially with "a sense of foreknowledge of what I was going to encounter" (p. 198). In chapter two I raise these concerns and the temporal politics regarding how and when research is conducted with the task of "explaining causes" (Smith 1999, p. 174). While the causes may be located within specific environments or communities, the research itself can assume a situated politics that is in fact connected to the terms and located

positioning of the researcher and not within the site of analysis. This is the "ethnocentric universality" that comes to occupy a site of nowhere (Mohanty 1984, p. 351). It is one of the tensions in working with the micro layers and macro layers of stories and not losing sight of the position in which knowledge is being produced. By using the term local I am not suggesting that activities and modes of living occur within a single site or lack forms of mobility. Instead I use a notion of being localised as a placeholder term for its situated qualities, that recognises that all spaces/cultures are multisited, impressed by wider forces and times.

I have proposed a nested means of approaching the local through researching vulnerability. As a way of addressing the layers of vulnerability, in this project I am developing a conception of vulnerability that is not only corporeal through its relation to bodies, but becomes localised and situated within bodies through different temporalities that make visible structural, cultural and affective elements of vulnerability. In this thesis, these nested qualities of vulnerability continue to deepen through attending to the stories of two particular individuals, Seemanpillai and Khawli, and modes of working with narratives and being worked on by those narratives that attempt to remain with the singularities and details of each of their stories. This has helped in considering through each narrative how particular actions might require certain subjectivities and bodies to perform them within the long drawn out spaces of time. Consequently I want to remain with the unevenness of vulnerability and its lack of predictability without moving too quickly to ascribing forms of intelligibility to partial narratives. I argue for the need to examine the qualities or elements of vulnerability and its lack of cohesiveness, and how events might resist causal relations and the tracing of histories within a linear temporality. This has enabled me to consider what can be brought into focus, and become more vivid, when not hidden or distracted by the illumination of spectacular, acute temporalities. This includes how individuals live with, endure, and maintain particular lifeworlds where vulnerability is not something spectacular, but is invested within the non-spectacular, ordinary time of precarity.

Chapter five provides means in which to continue the discussion of the core themes

that have been raised here, but does not attempt to resolve them. Instead I use the final chapter to attend to spatial and temporal registers and how the instability of notions of agency, action and intention, and their role in conceptualising vulnerability, might become more visible when self-immolation is refigured as a micro event. This enables distinguishing the space, time and pace of actions that are drawn out through working with the slowness of time. The tension between the ontological and the specific remains in this project, especially in how it might be possible to form ethical responses that are generative but recognise locality and the difficulties in fulfilling such demands. I suggest that one way of beginning to address this is through core elements of a vulnerable methodology, which I will now outline.

Chapter Two: Vulnerable Methods & Vulnerable Writing

This thesis investigates vulnerability as a concept and as a methodological practice, using a localised analysis as a feminist methodological approach. It involves a critical analysis of the ethical and political concerns in researching and conceptualising vulnerability. Drawing from archival texts in the form of media reports published online between 2014 and 2015, the thesis provides an in-depth case study analysis of two individuals who set fire to their own bodies. The first part of the chapter documents how I developed the cases in practical ways, which includes the decisions that I made in initiating the research process, the reasons for choosing to focus on self-immolation and the specific stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli, and a discussion of the concept of self-immolation. In the second part of the chapter I discuss the methodological approaches and strategies used to develop the cases as a means of working towards an outline of the key components of a vulnerable methodology. The methodological strategies I used to approach the narratives became grounded within a concern for ethics: the ethics of vulnerability, the ethics involved in modes of telling, the sensory and affective responses to the material production of research, and the violence committed in narrating the stories of vulnerable others. Within the frame of this thesis, I use the term ethics to refer to the notion of an ethical relation involving response and responsibility towards the singularity of another person. In this I draw upon the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and the primacy of ethics as a relation of infinite responsibility to the other, which haunts that relation between the self and others (1969; 1998). In considering ethics within the realm of singularities (Oliver 2015; p. 489) I see this as differing from politics but also intimately connected within the confines of this thesis, where the political involves the machinery and impact of infrastructure, law and global systems, which impact upon the lives of individuals. In this, I follow Kelly Oliver's (2015) suggestion that there is a "necessary tension between ethics as singular and politics as universal" (p. 488). In this way, "ethics demands consideration of the singularity of each unique being, while politics requires universal rules and principles that apply equally to all" (p. 489). In tracing

ethics I am interested in the ways in which these universal laws impinge upon individuals and communities in differentiated and situated ways that can erase the conditionality of such politics, and the notions of responsibility involved in responding to the demands of others.

These concerns with ethics reflect similar ethical questions posed by Saba Mahmood (2012) in her study of the women's mosque movement in Egypt that I have adapted here and will attempt to address through the work of this chapter: What kinds of relations are formed with the subjects of research? What might it mean not to fully comprehend the lives upon which we make epistemic claims (p. 198)? And what are the kinds of analytic and hermeneutic resources that can help in thinking through such ethical concerns (p. 195)?

Part One: Developing the cases

Selecting self-immolation as a focus for the research

My interest in pursuing stories focused on self-immolation occurred after reading a *New York Times* article in 2013 on the increasing number of Tibetan self-immolations that were described as being a political response to the continued Chinese occupation of Tibet.[16] In the article the Speaker of the Tibetan parliament suggested that after so many years of colonisation without global protest and pressure being placed on the Chinese Government, self-immolation was the only method left to resist the oppression experienced. Due to its political history as a tool of resistance and protest, and the acute affective response it can invoke, self-immolation could attract the world's attention without Tibetans using violence to harm another person.[17] When the world was not coming to the aid of Tibetans, sacrificing one's own life through burning

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[16] Jim Yardly, "As Self-immolations Near 100, Tibetans Question the Effect," *New York Times*, 2 February 2013. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/03/world/asia/as-self-immolations-continue-some-tibetans-ask-is-it-worth-it.html [Last accessed 28 March 2016].

[17] As referred to in the introduction, the practice of self-immolation and its modern association as form of protest and resistance is frequently traced back to Thích Quang Đuc, the Vietnamese monk who on 11 June 1963, set himself alight on a street corner in what was then known as Saigon.

was articulated as a political act: a method of expressing both resistance to political structures of oppression, and the violence and suffering incurred during the Tibetan occupation.[18] The article raised a number of issues that led me to think about self-immolation as a means through which to research vulnerability. I was particularly drawn to the notion that self-destruction of the body could be a method of resisting and subverting dominant forms of power. I conceived of this use of the body as being connected to, while also, due to its destructive capacities, remaining in tension with, Judith Butler's (2015) more recent work addressing forms of bodily mobilisation within protest and public assembly movements and demonstrations, such as the Occupy movement and the Gezi Park protests in Turkey.[19] While connecting to the struggles that Butler describes, which involve bodies acting in concert to demand the end to "unwilled conditions of bodily exposure," and while "sometimes deliberately exposing the body to possible harm is part of the very meaning of political resistance," I was not sure if this could include self-immolation (p. 126). In researching the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli I became uncertain as to whether the setting fire to one's own body, when a person acts on their own rather than in organisation with others or as a discernible means of protest, could be understood unequivocally as a public act of resistance, or instead as a private act of suicide, or whether its ambiguity was something I could not resolve.

In the ambiguity of whether self-destructive acts are political, sacrificial or performed for personal reasons, the article on Tibetan self-immolations initiated my interest through the question of vulnerability's relation to the body, and how it might move within and between bodies. In connection to Butler's work, was self-immolation a means of mobilising vulnerability politically? As I read more about the self-immolations occurring in Tibet and the history of the country and its relationship to China, I wanted to investigate further the relation between vulnerability and conceptions of agency.

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[18] While the *New York Times* article written in 2013 references almost 100 self-immolations, this number has continued to grow. Between February 2009 and 16 March 2016 there have been 144 reported self-immolations by Tibetans living in exile in the People's Republic of China. This figure does not include the number of Tibetans self-immolating within the country. Source: International Campaign for Tibet website. Available at: http://www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans/ [Last accessed 2 April 2016].
[19] For discussion of the anti-government protests that occurred in Gezi Park in Istanbul see also the special issue of *Cultural Anthropology* edited by Umut Yildirim and Yael Navaro-Yashin (2013).

This led me to consider whether vulnerability is a capacity or quality that is acted upon, imposed by the outside, and/or whether it might instead involve durability or endurance (Povinelli 2011). I began researching cases of self-immolation that I thought could help me work through these questions and issues. One particular mode of burning one's body that has been addressed in feminist theory is *sati*, the practice of widow burning in India that was formally abolished during British colonial rule in 1829. For example, *sati* has been written about by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" as well as by Lata Mani (1998) in her book *Contentious Traditions: The Debate On Sati In Colonial India*. Mani argues that colonial discourses on *sati* informed debates about its practice and *sati*, in turn, came to be described only from this vantage point. In doing so the subjectivity and agency of women involved in *sati* was silenced, erasing from historical documentation decisions made by women to partake in *sati* or indeed to refuse, as well as instances where women escaped from the funeral pyre. Consequently the physical suffering that occurred from being burned is largely absent from accounts. *Sati* became a spectacle of ritualised killing and colonial salvation where the voices and suffering of the women involved disappeared (1998). Through focusing on the construction of official narratives and attending to the women at the funeral pyre and the specificities of each case, Mani argues that the colonial rhetoric that portrayed *sati* as a "dutiful act of religious volition" was a "violent fiction" (p. 196). Mani contends that the suffering of women was marginal to colonial debates and the subsequent prohibition of *sati*.[20]

While I have utilised the theoretical frame provided by Mani for this project, I chose not to focus on *sati* specifically. This is in part due to the contested cultural and legislative history of the practice and its contentious status as a legal ritual versus an illegal crime (p. 25). Because I was interested in the mobilisation of vulnerability, acts of burning where a person may have been coerced created a new set of questions and demands. For this project on vulnerability, I was interested in cases that illuminated the relationships between self-making and self-destruction. This is not to suggest that

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[20] Feminist and postcolonial scholars discussing other gendered and so-called "harmful cultural practices" have made a similar point, for example, on female genital mutilation (FGM) in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Critical work on "dowry deaths" in India (often by burning) has also been addressed by authors such as Uma Narayan (1997).

women who performed *sati* were subjects who did not act and were always coerced and, as I will discuss in chapter three, Mani provides evidence of women's agency and voice within *sati*. However, by either willingly placing themselves on, or being tied by others, to the funeral pyre, the purpose of *sati* was for the widow to burn alongside her husband's body. As I discussed in chapter one, I wanted to investigate self-immolation because of how it became a means in which to open up new ways of thinking about vulnerability and its relation to subjectivity, and how related concepts such as agency, intention and the notion of action similarly became displaced and required further examination. The more time I spent examining self-immolation as a conceptual and material frame for actions involving setting fire to one's body, and specifically the two stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli, the less certain I became as to how it was possible to point to a person's burning their body and know their intention to commit an act of resistance or an act intended to cause their death, or instead whether it might involve other forms of meaning.

I also chose not to focus specifically on self-immolation that had taken place in Tibet, or by Tibetans and their supporters elsewhere. While the situation in Tibet initiated my interest, I began this project wanting to examine specific forms of self-immolation that suggested that the acts might have been undertaken as a means of individual protest or resistance, or for other reasons, rather than those as part of a wider movement of people assembling and mobilising against oppressive forces. I wanted to know what might have occurred in a person's circumstances to mean that setting one's body on fire came to be considered an action to undertake. I am interested in self-immolation not only because it specifically involves an act of self-harm, but also because it is an act for which death is the most likely outcome. However, the more time I spent with the two stories in this thesis, the more hesitant I became about the relation between death and self-immolation. The integrity of the distinctions that I have suggested between *sati* and the forms of self-immolation that I engage with remains unstable due to this project's focus on cross-cultural analysis. I am aware that I risk imposing particular claims on how individual self-immolations are to be defined and distinguished through the selection process for the narratives that I developed. What I am attempting to examine are both tensions and ways of researching and

conceptualising vulnerability, and how self-immolation provides a means in which to interrogate these difficulties. What I want to resist is imposing a new framework that similarly segregates particular embodied methods of harming the self according to assumptions about intention through failing to engage with the cultural, political and personal specificities involved in each event.

Conceptualising self-immolation

As a method of self-harm, the term "self-immolation" is used to stabilise and unify acts that remain diverse and ambiguous in intention, meaning and context. On one level, the term self-immolation, when used to refer to a person burning their own body, groups together a range of practices that are both political and deeply personal and are mediated by historical, cultural and geopolitical conditions, practices, attachments and sensibilities. The verb to immolate comes from the Latin *immolatus*, which means to sacrifice, and was originally used in reference to the sprinkling of flour upon a sacrificial meal.[21] While still carrying the connotations of an offering in certain contexts, self-immolation is now most commonly used to name any act of harm that involves the burning of one's body through setting it on fire, irrespective of context or circumstance. Certain forms of self-immolation are qualified as political. These particular acts of self-harm by fire are counted during studies of self-immolation as a method of protest, while others are excluded.

For example, a frequently cited study of over 500 individual acts of self-immolation reported by media outlets recorded in the Nexis (now Lexis Nexis) database between 1963 and 2002 was conducted by sociologist Michael Biggs (2005).[22] Biggs' puts forward an "ideal type" definition of self-immolation, which involves "an individual intentionally killing himself or herself (or at least gambling with death) on behalf of a collective cause" (p. 173). Such an act is not intended to inflict harm on another person

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[21] This definition is taken from the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=immolate.
[22] For the period of 1963 to 1976, which was prior to the availability of content within the Nexis database, searches of the newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Times*, were conducted. It is not clear from Biggs' article whether the media content used to develop the study included non-English language reports.

or cause material damage (p. 173). Within this definition motivation is critical and its assessment often involves using anecdotal evidence to evaluate the reasons why a person decides to burn himself or herself. For Biggs, the definition of self-immolation as a protest pivots on a particular "declared intent to advance a collective cause" (p. 176). As an act of protest it is "intended to be public" (p. 173). However, such an act excludes self-immolations performed in public that "act on individual—albeit political—grievance," which includes refugees who set their bodies on fire after being refused asylum (p. 176).[23] Biggs also excluded self-immolations that occurred within prisons from his study.[24]

The framing of intentionality and the weight placed upon its performance in front of an audience is critical to Biggs' documentation of what is afforded the marking of politics. I argue that this illustrates the limitations of accounts that endeavour to categorise and define self-immolation through public and private spheres. Studies such as Biggs' rely on reported incidents, and such incidents, as Biggs notes, must be seen as worthy of reporting.[25] Private suicide or self-harm performed within or inside the yard of one's home, an act more frequently undertaken by women, and that occurs in particular geographic locations, does not attract media attention in the same way as suicide performed in spaces deemed to be public.[26] Self-immolation that appears in public declares the person as having political agency. For those either without or with limited access to the public sphere, which includes being held in prisons and detention

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[23] Biggs states "Refugees who kill themselves after being refused asylum, for example, usually act on an individual—albeit political—grievance, without any declared intent to advance a collective cause. Therefore these cases are excluded" (p. 176).

[24] In justifying this decision Biggs states that a "minimal amount of specific information is required for inclusion, namely at least two of the following: name, date, and location. For this reason, it proves necessary to exclude self-killing by prison inmates" (p. 176). Bigg argues that even when the self-immolation that occurs in prison is confirmed as being self-inflicted, "whether this counts as an act of protest is usually difficult to ascertain" (p. 176).

[25] As well as the role of the media, an issue arises in the reporting and speculating on the mental health of the individual in explaining causes. Others often provide this information. In a study of 101 cases of self-immolation in Northern Iran, Ahmadi et al. (2014) note that a limitation of their study was lack of information on "psychological factors" and that data was mostly recorded by the person's "caregiver" as to the "cause of mental or physical severity of patients" (p. 230).

[26] In Ahmadi et al. (2014)'s study of 101 "suicide attempted cases" treated within a two year period (2010-2011) at Zare Hospital in Northern Iran, 71 per cent were women and "the majority of suicides occurred at home." The report explains that this is due to the fact that "most of the female victims were housewives." In a four year study of 35 women who engaged in "self-burning" in Tehran, Iran, by Ramim et al. (2013), 47.5 percent of the incidents took place in the courtyard of a house. While this is a single study within one country and with a small sample size, I suggest that the intersections of location and gender need greater attention in how the causes of self-immolation and the intentions of individuals are determined and reported.

centres, self-immolation as a political event remains restricted, and I suggest this in turn calls into question the conceptualisations of agency associated with the act.

Connected to the movements and public protests addressed by Butler, and Biggs' description of the "ideal type" of self-immolation occurring when a person burns themselves on behalf of a collective cause, Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation on the streets of Sidi Bouzid became the symbolic beginning of the revolution in Tunisia. Bouazizi story has become well known; he was a fruit and vegetable seller who plied his trade on the streets like many others. Selling goods is only permitted within the covered market in Sidi Bouzid.[27] One report states that Bouazizi was regularly bullied by local police officers. Police would confiscate his scales and his produce, or fine him for running a stall without a permit. Six months before Bouazizi set himself on fire, police sent a fine of 400 dinars (currently £140) to his house, which is the equivalent of two months of earnings.[28] On 17 December 2010, media reports provide differing accounts of how his wheelbarrow of goods was confiscated when he refused to pay a bribe in order to secure a permit to sell his produce, and that he had been slapped and mistreated by local authorities.[29] Bouazizi went to the regional government headquarters to complain. Reports vary as to whether Bouazizi was refused entry to the building, or refused permission to speak to an official. Bouazizi was then reported to have bought paint thinner and drenched his body in the liquid before setting himself on fire outside the building at around noon that day.[30] Bouazizi did not die from his burns, and was taken to a hospital in Sfax because the local hospital could not treat his burns, which covered 90 percent of his body. He was then taken to a hospital in Tunis as protests and government interest in his case grew.[31] It was two weeks before President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali visited Bouazizi in hospital, and there is a photo

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[27] Thessa Lageman, "Mohamed Bouazizi: Was the Arab Spring Worth Dying For?" *Aljazeera*, 3 January 2016. Available at: http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/mohamed-bouazizi-arab-spring-worth-dying-151228093743375.html [Last accessed 2 April 2016].

[28] Yasmine Ryan, "The Tragic Life of a Street Vendor," *Aljazeera*, 20 January 2011. Available at: http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/201111684242518839.html [Last accessed 2 April 2016].

[29] One such version of events is recorded in: Peter Beaumont, "Mohammed Bouazizi: The Dutiful Son Whose Death Changed Tunisia's Fate," *The Guardian,* 20 January 2011. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/20/tunisian-fruit-seller-mohammed-bouazizi [Last accessed 2 April 2016].

[30] Kareem Fahim, "Slap to a Man's Pride Set Off Tumult in Tunisia," *The New York Times*, 21 January 2011. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/22/world/africa/22sidi.html [Last accessed 2 April 2016].

[31] Peter Beaumont, "Mohammed Bouazizi: The Dutiful Son Whose Death Changed Tunisia's Fate."

available online taken of the president at Bouazizi's bedside, with Bouazizi wrapped in thick bandages. Bouazizi died on 4 January 2011, aged 26.[32]

This was a public act, and yet there were no other self-immolations that immediately preceded Bouazizi's action, or other forms of collective uprising. Did Bouazizi represent the suffering of other street vendors and those oppressed under Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's government? Is it possible in this instance to specify his intention as being "on behalf of a common cause" rather than being an "individual grievance" (Biggs 2005, pp. 173, 176)? In learning about Bouazizi's self-immolation through global media reports prior to beginning to research the self-immolations of Seemanpillai and Khawli, I did not question whether Bouazizi's action was intended as a political protest. As a means of communication, it had secured uptake as a political act (Austin 1962).[33] In chapter five I consider Bouazizi's actions in the context of this project and the ways in which notions of agency, action and intention have become unsettled through researching vulnerability. While not analysing his story in the in-depth ways I engage with developing narratives on Seemanpillai and Khawli, I address it specifically in chapter five in the context of how Bouazizi's self-immolation has been conceptualised as a political act. I do so in order to examine what might get missed when meaning ascribed to certain embodied interventions becomes connected to particular forms of agency.

As an alternative to Biggs' study and definition of self-immolation, Banu Bargu (2014) groups together forms of self-harm, such as hunger strikes, self-infection, self-mutilation, self-immolation and suicide attacks, as political modalities of self-destruction. Bargu positions these techniques of destruction as having certain elements in common including being self-inflicted, painful, and potentially irreversible (p. 6). Such acts are "embroiled within a logic of sacrifice that is opposed to our conventional notions of instrumental action because it renders difficult, if not altogether impossible, the achievement of political ends through means lesser than

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[32] Yasmine Ryan, "The Tragic Life of a Street Vendor."
[33] The self-immolation of Bouazizi led to 10 days of protests first initiated by street vendors and then escalating across the country, which forced the end of the 23-year regime of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia.

death" (p. 6). Bargu's work centres on "the death fast" resistance movement of prisoners within Turkish prisons between 2000 and 2007, of which a central component was a hunger strike. Bargu uses the terms "weaponization of life" and "human weapons" to designate the political struggles undertaken by both non-lethal actions and those that were more likely to lead to fatalities. These are directed either towards the self, through actions such as self-immolation, or towards others through, for example, suicide attacks (p. 14). This discussion connects to the work of Elaine Miller (2002), and her consideration of the "terrifying power" of the vulnerable body. In a similar way Miller illustrates a form of weaponisation through the politics of the anorexic body and the hunger striker, where "the body turned in upon itself can be an effective weapon in some ways" (p. 107). Miller describes such acts as a "political move that utilizes the vulnerability of human embodiment as a tool of power through its own destruction" (p. 108). In her discussion, Bargu suggests that fasting in particular was a means of enacting agency, through prisoners "taking death into their own hands" (2010, p. 249). A common refrain in discourses around forms of self-destruction is the notion of having exhausted alternative options, and the restoration of agency. After being tortured in prison, one participant in Bargu's research stated, "We did not have any other means of resistance than our bodies at hand. Either our bodies would be transformed into weapons against us, through torture, or we would use those bodies as means of resistance against the state" (p. 249).

In Bargu's analysis, while both are modalities of self-destruction, the hunger strike is distinguished from self-immolation by being life affirming, with the struggle conceived as a "willingness to live" (p. 250). Bargu argues this is because death was not a "certain or even intended outcome of the struggle," and yet its presence continued to haunt those refusing food (p. 250). Bargu places this action in contrast to the use of suicide bombing and self-immolation, which "were oriented toward death with a blind, emotive, almost religious devotion" (p. 250). However, as I will describe in the following chapters, to suggest that death is the intended outcome of self-immolation and that it might represent a "willingness to die" is not indicative of the two stories described within this thesis (p. 250). I propose that the suggestion that starving oneself "without letting go of life" requires a form of persistence in living that is absent from

self-immolation fails to take into account the troubled relationship that burning has with suicide and forms of self-making (p. 250). While Bargu is interested in the framing of such actions within political movements, my focus is on responses that resist such signification. I am interested specifically in individual cases of self-immolation where it becomes difficult to distinguish between resistance and despair, self-making and self-destruction.

Initially I considered that hunger strikes could be distinguished temporally from self-immolation through the fact that they occur progressively over time through the refusal of food, rather than within the instant moment that occurs with burning, and that due to this death can be circumvented in different ways through the halting of a fast by choosing to eat or being force-fed. However, as I introduce in this chapter and will take up specifically in chapter five, refiguring self-immolation as an event that involves the agential capacity of struggle and occurs over a longer movement of time has meant that these two modalities of self-harm (self-immolation and hunger strike) come to be less easily demarcated through either time or by the forms of persistence involved. The ambivalence of self-immolation is invested within the particularities of the pace and movement of time, with the acute flashpoint of burning giving way to a long arc of living, suffering, and endurance.

Selecting the stories

The stories of both Seemanpillai and Khawli came to my attention during online research into cases of self-immolation and I was drawn to each for several reasons. Each incident had occurred recently, and did not appear to be connected to any particular political movement or campaign. For me this meant there was political ambivalence to each act; the absence of clear markers that could delineate each self-immolation as either being suicide or protest added to the complexity of what I thought could be examined within each story. Both featured individuals who sought refuge in another country. Australia is the focus of continued attention for its immigration and border protection policies, especially in its response to the arrival of

people by boat without visas after leaving their countries for a variety of reasons, and its establishment of offshore detention centres in Papua New Guinea and Nauru.[34] As a New Zealander, and with family living in Australia, it was a country that I was familiar with and the rarity of self-immolation in this particular geographic region made me want to pursue further research on the story of Seemanpillai. In the case of Khawli, Syria has been involved in a civil war that arose out of pro-democracy demonstrations against President Assad beginning in early 2011. By mid March 2016, more than 4.81 million Syrians were registered as refugees with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), with 935,008 asylum applications made in Europe from April 2011 to January 2016. Lebanon, a country of just 4.4 million people, and where Khawli fled to, hosts 1.067 million Syrians registered as refugees with the UNHCR as of 31 January 2016.[35]

I wanted to know more about the role of vulnerability in the two cases. Elements that might make connections between vulnerability, political ambivalence and agency drew me to each story. Due to Seemanpillai's precarious position in seeking asylum, his act led to questions that I thought could not be answered by simply ascribing his death to suicide as the media had done. Seemanpillai was living in a country a great distance from his family, and had been living as a refugee since the age of six. On setting fire to himself, Seemanpillai moved between the private space of his yard and the public space of the street outside his house. It was this movement between the spaces that he occupied that initially signaled to me that his self-immolation might have been

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[34] In February 2016 the Australian government planned to send 267 individuals who had travelled to Australia without visas to a detention centre on the pacific island of Nauru. These individuals had been in Australia due to their own, or a family member's, need for medical treatment. Of the 267 people deemed by Australian immigration to be "illegal maritime arrivals," 37 are babies born in Australia to people seeking asylum. These actions sparked campaigns and ongoing protests within Australia under the hashtag #LetThemStay. Source: Ben Doherty, "'Let Them Stay': Backlash in Australia Against Plans to Send Asylum Seekers to Detention Camps," *The Guardian*, 10 February 2016. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/feb/10/let-them-stay-australia-backlash-267-asylum-seekers-island-detention-camps [Last accessed 27 February 2016].
As of 1 April 2016 more than half of the 267 individuals have been "granted community detention" within Australia. Source: Helen Davidson, "At Least 196 Asylum Seekers Granted Community Detention After Protests," *The Guardian*, 1 April 2016. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/apr/01/at-least-196-asylum-seekers-granted-community-detention-after-protests [Last accessed 3 April 2016].
The Australian Government recently announced that all children have been released from detention centres within mainland Australia. However children are still being held offshore in detention centres on Nauru and in Papua New Guinea. Source: Agence France-Presse, "Australian Asylum Children Freed From Mainland Detention-But Still Held On Nauru," *The Telegraph*, 3 April 2016. Available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/03/australia-asylum-children-freed-from-mainland-detention---but-st/ [Last accessed 3 April 2016].
[35] Source: Syrian Regional Refugee Response Inter-Agency Sharing Portal. Figures last updated 16 March 2016. Available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php# [Last accessed 4 April 2016].

politically motivated, that he was calling attention to the plight and treatment of asylum seekers in Australia. There were a number of elements in Khawli's story. Khawli was a woman who set fire to her body in public in front of the United Nations, an intergovernmental organisation tasked with maintaining peace and security. Her gender, and the public location in which she chose to self-immolate, may have signaled a protest against the conditions lived in by refugees and the global systems that have the power to measure vulnerability and determine who is eligible for support and resources. I was also drawn to the words Khawli spoke after her self-immolation, and what her act may have suggested or symbolised in connection to the suffering of Syrian refugees. Khawli was carrying a bottle of flammable liquid. This implied the act might have been premeditated. By choosing to burn herself, did Khawli make a conscious choice not to cause physical harm to others? These were all features of her story that I wanted to investigate further.

I began working linearly, first with the story of Seemanpillai, and then, only when I had developed a number of drafts of the case, did I move to Khawli's story. As I developed Khawli's narrative, the ongoing methods of working with her story began to inform the analysis of Seemanpillai's story. As I will describe further, details within Khawli's story drew me back to the details of Seemanpillai's life, making me question what I was writing, and helping me to reexamine the narratives multiple times through my evolving use of the particular methodological practices discussed in this chapter.

Working with media texts

When I came to this archive, it consisted of texts and video content that already existed in the public domain through being published on media websites. Within a vulnerable methodology, the role of the archive and the ways in which I interacted with that archive included my relation to both the physical materiality of conducting a close reading of the texts, but also involved examining my relation to the individuals whose lives had been publicly represented within the media texts. I was not a distant or disinterested analyst, nor was I occupying the role of a journalist in the reporting of

news or information. Importantly, the form the textual analysis took shifted during the process of research as I worked through my relation to the knowledge I was attempting to produce, my relation to Seemanpillai and Khawli, and the ways in which this project might explicate vulnerable forms of writing. Therefore in describing the methodological approach, it includes the need to account for how I worked with the archive, but also simultaneously the impact of that archive on me and how this altered my engagement with the research, and the ethical responsibility that began to emerge in writing about the lives of two people who set their bodies on fire.

While I engaged in a form of textual analysis in beginning to develop the case focused on Seemanpillai, my intention shifted away from wanting to find an answer to the question of "What was on Seemanpillai's mind," that I address in chapter three as being asked both directly and in other more oblique ways within media reports. Instead I began to engage with the question of time as a means of working with the archive. The analysis was informed by the ways in which I considered how different temporalities of vulnerability might come to be transposed unevenly across different bodies and locations. I conducted a textual analysis that was comprised of a close reading that focused on detailing micro level modes of self-maintenance and endurance, while also documenting macro level details that pressed upon the stories of both Seemanpillai and Khawli. However, part of the process involved holding these at a distance in order to resist or at least withhold moves towards proposing causal relations between the two. My intention was not to document macro political and economic systems as a means of explaining Seemanpillai's behaviour or solving the problem of self-immolation, but to allow these details to circulate in tension with one another.

In other words, this meant narrating a partial account of what the media had published in the public domain and working with the details that emerged, without attempting this documentation as a linear method of understanding or sense-making. The media texts represented the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli to communicate the spectacular time of self-immolation. As I will describe in a later section through Rolande Barthes' (1981) notion of the *punctum*, during the process of close reading

and documenting each case, I was drawn initially to certain dramatic 'flashpoints' of narrative content and imagery. During the course of the project my focus shifted from the spectacular act, to unspectacular, or ordinary, everyday modes of self-maintenance and endurance. In describing this, it is important to recognise that these everyday temporalities are present both in the details of the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, and in my own shifting process of engaging in the research and my changing responses to the media texts. There is everydayness portrayed in the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, and in my own movements in beginning a slower practice of working with the texts through the use of time as a methodological tool. These temporalities were part of my experience of working with, but also being worked on by the details emerging through the media articles on the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli.

In this sense I engaged in a temporal textual analysis, utilising time as a means of working with the media texts. In a practical sense, the slowing down and shifting of time meant returning to the texts not only as they were documented online, but also returning to the account that I was developing. Time became a means of thinking through the everyday activities engaged in by Seemanpillai and Khawli, and as a mode of inquiry. Earlier I suggested that vulnerability, as a constitutive condition, might assume bodies live within certain "shared timings" (Freeman 2010, p. xi). I asked how might different temporalities attach to particular bodies. In a practical sense this meant approaching the media texts through multiple layers of analysis. As I have discussed, there are cultural differences in storytelling, where "western" narratives tend to work along linear chronological forms and where the end of the story enables the reader to make sense of what preceded it. Details are included in the media texts representing Seemanpillai and Khawli so that readers can make sense of or find reasons for why each individual might have set their bodies on fire. I could not make sense of why Seemanpillai or Khawli had chosen to undertake particular actions. I began to propose reasons, to suggest causes, which I realised was based on my own self-authorising desire for knowledge: my conviction that I had the right to know. The temporal textual analysis became a means in which to begin to acknowledge and address this issue.

Working with the archive

I conducted the research for this project by accessing documentation that was available online. I used online media articles written in English as the primary source for tracing the details of the stories. I became aware of the self-immolations of Seemanpillai and Khawli through online searches and this led me to reports published on newspaper websites. I also conducted searches on publicly available information that had been published in English in government policy documents and media releases, legislation briefings, refugee newsletters, United Nation and UN Refugee Agency websites, policy documents, status reports and media releases, and in the case of Seemanpillai, local online newspaper sources based in Geelong and his church newsletter. For Seemanpillai, his friends and church pastor were interviewed and recorded on video. In the case of Khawli, news reports also featured video interviews with her in hospital and with her husband. The media sources were based primarily in Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and I also used global media outlets such as CNN, Al Jazeera, IRIN, Al Arabiya and Reuters. Each source accessed is documented in footnotes within the chapters. In the case of Khawli, when I could find no mention of her condition several weeks after she burned herself, I contacted news organisations that had published articles on her self-immolation, and a journalist who had written an article and set up a site to request funding for Khawli's medical costs, in order to find out whether Khawli had survived. This resulted in an email conversation with the journalist, which I have used as a source within the case.

Developing narratives on the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli required decisions to be made regarding the content and structure of each case. The media had already engaged in particular modes of telling each of the stories. What would each case include and what details would be excluded? How should local conditions and their role and impact in the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli be documented and narrated? How should the complex layering of the located specificities of Seemanpillai's and Khawli's lifeworlds be researched and then written in relation to particular geopolitical

factors such as violence and poverty that might have impacted upon their lives? How would I account for the gaps and ambivalences in the media sources that I accessed? How would I be able to account for the veracity of any relation of cause and effect? I refer to the sources that I used in developing the two narratives as an "archive," while recognising that such a term involves a contested materiality. To illustrate how an archive extends beyond documentation that exists in either physical or virtual form, Mariam Motamedi Fraser (2012) refers to the "participants" in an archive in order to conceive of the materiality of an archive as including the work done on archives by both researchers and other forces such as the law, which determines among other things, what archives contain, where they are located and who has access (p. 88). Motamedi Fraser argues that due to this, and how the participants "in the archive are constituted by their relationality, the archive is always, necessarily, in the process of becoming itself differently" (p. 88).

In a very practical sense these relations are apparent in this project using search engines that access and display a partial archive using algorithms that pull documents based on my past search activity. My own history informs my access to the archive. Motamedi Fraser suggests that answers to questions relating to the location and visibility of the archive—"where is it?" and "how is its 'seeability' achieved, and under what conditions?"—have the potential to "transform the kind of object the archive is understood to be" (2013, p. 4). Through Motamedi Fraser's discussion it is possible to consider how an archive is experienced, which includes its temporal location within spaces, but also reliance on material as well as affective qualities such as "rumour, suspicion and paranoia" (p. 14). For example, in the case of Seemanpillai, some of the seeability of the archive is achieved in the anecdotes shared and the distrust of official government narratives within communities seeking asylum. The archive of those seeking refuge is often undocumented, both in the legal status of those crossing borders, and in the processes used to determine claim outcomes. For example, what occurred on and to the archive of Seemanpillai's claim in the spaces of time over the 18 months he remained in Australia without a decision being made? Where and to what level of detail is this activity documented and recorded?

I will illustrate how I began working with the materials involving Seemanpillai's story, which then provided a framework to develop the second case on Khawli. I started by conducting online searches of English language media articles that reported his self-immolation.[36] I worked first at understanding the narrative linearly, attempting to document chronologically Seemanpillai's life from his childhood in Sri Lanka to his living in Geelong in order to understand in practical terms how he travelled to Australia and from where, and the reasons why Seemanpillai might have decided to make such a journey. Seemanpillai's death had been reported on by local and national papers within Australia and had been covered in several articles in the UK's *Guardian* newspaper. Different articles provided contradictory information and discrepancies in dates, as well as gaps where information was not provided. For example, initially I was not sure how many days passed between Seemanpillai burning himself and his death, and I am still uncertain as to exactly when Seemanpillai left India and why. The reasons for him choosing to journey to Australia specifically were also absent. I started by including all the details that I could find and wrote my own version of a narrative. When an online search yielded a new piece of information, I would update the story, moving pieces of the puzzle around to accommodate the new detail. In the case involving Khawli, when dealing with video footage I transcribed the interviews and distinguished between Khawli speaking and where journalists had narrated the event, because while it was a translation into English and not Khawli's "own words," I wanted to know what Khawli had said. If the information I found contradicted an existing feature of the narrative, I went back to searching, attempting to find other articles that may have recorded the same point, or that could provide further information. These searches on particular details often yielded new articles and information.

I had no means of verifying the accuracy of media reports. I did attempt to find multiple sources that recorded specific points, but this did not ensure the facts were correct. The political layers and influences within the reporting of Seemanpillai's story

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[36] The use of English language media will involve particular cultural and political constructions of the events. There are non-English language reports on Khawli's death, and while I have not seen them there are also likely to be non-English language reports on Seemanpillai's death. How the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli are reported will differ according to the cultural and political context, including, for example, notions of shame and honour involved in the decisions made by Seemanpillai and Khawli.

also became apparent. For example, quotes from the Australian Government were used to suggest Seemanpillai's mental instability and the working presence of infrastructure and resources to support him, through noting previous hospital stays and that Seemanpillai's case worker had performed regular checks and had phoned him several days prior to his self-immolation. Interviews with Seemanpillai's pastor at his local church contained information on the community support Seemanpillai received, and the fragility of his mental health. Seemanpillai's friends and work colleagues provided details on his life in Geelong, his concerns about being sent back to Sri Lanka, and his strong work ethic. Seemanpillai's death was also reported on in India, where his family remains living. The focus of several articles in Indian press was on his family's difficulties in receiving the necessary visas to travel to Australia to attend Seemanpillai's funeral.

I had to make decisions as to how I would narrate Seemanpillai's story, and the details I would include. Seemanpillai's story can be told in multiple ways, and from different perspectives. Government narratives differ from those coming from the community where Seemanpillai lived. My initial focus was to find information that would provide answers to my questions as to why Seemanpillai chose to burn himself. Initially I wanted to know, was there something remarkable about his circumstances that provided some level of prediction as to the decisions that he made? Was there something that made his situation different to others seeking asylum in Geelong, or in Australia? And in knowing these details would they help to make self-immolation "understandable"? However, instead of demanding comprehension from Seemanpillai, I realised, after developing early drafts, that I needed to account not only for the details that I was choosing to focus on and document in the narrative, but my role as an (unchosen) narrator. By this I mean that I did not have permission from Seemanpillai or Khawli, or the consent of their family members to document their narratives as part of my PhD research. Initially I did not position myself as a narrator, but rather an examiner or analyst of two stories that I thought had already been told. The shift to view my role as that of a narrator, and the responsibility involved in undertaking such a task within these conditions, came to inform the methodological approach.

I wanted to write a narrative on Seemanpillai in a way that might keep it open, making it possible for readers to bring their own situated knowledges, questions and experiences to this particular account of a person's life and self-immolation. I held my own views as to the implementation of particular policies and legislation regarding people seeking refuge and asylum in Australia, and I was aware that these views would inform and influence the narration and interpretation of Seemanpillai's life and his death. I wanted to work with methods that would enable the context and situated specificities of the case to emerge while trying to lessen or at least account for the impact of my role as a narrator and arbiter of Seemanpillai's story. For example, I chose not to engage in direct critiques of government policies or provide opposing voices from political groups or academic sources that disputed either accounts or the efficacy of Australian immigration policy and its implementation. Instead, I worked to document the material conditions in which Seemanpillai might have lived that included information on the political and social environment within Australia, without suggesting the extent to which these impacted on his life, because I simply did not know. For instance, Seemanpillai spoke both of his concern at being sent back to Sri Lanka due to his knowledge of or access to rumours involving other rejected asylum cases, and of the support he had from the different communities he was part of within Geelong. I wanted these ambiguities in experience to remain with Seemanpillai's story.

This narrative approach came to be included in the decisions I made about the role that I played and the tone and voice of the narratives. There were several issues that I considered when selecting the methodological strategies to use in developing the narratives, which extended to both Seemanpillai and Khawli. I wanted Seemanpillai to be centred within his own story, and for the layers of complexity from the macro level influences of national and global systems and infrastructure to build out from descriptions of his subjectivity, rather than be placed upon his story in ways that might silence his own narrative voice through the burden to comprehend his actions. I did not want the narrative to position itself as suggesting that Seemanpillai's experience could be representative of, and speak for, the experiences of others, whether those in

the community of refugees living in Geelong, or more extensively in Australia, or in other countries. Therefore, I did not want the narrative I was developing to silence alternative narratives and ongoing modes of telling of Seemanpillai's story. I did not want it to have the effect of silencing the stories of others that might provide discordant accounts, or for the recording of Seemanpillai's story to suggest that others who have suffered in similar and different ways do not have stories that are equally worth telling.

The role of narration

My relation to this archive and its public presence was not something I was able to resolve easily through adopting textual analysis as a methodological approach, because these were texts that documented and represented the injury and death of another person. As discussed, the accountability for my role within the research process became part of the methodological approach. This relation included the position I was undertaking in documenting the two cases of self-immolation and how this extended to thinking about the kind of relation/s I had to the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli. In this project I describe the position that I occupy as that of a (unchosen) narrator, to reflect that I did not have the permission or consent of either Seemanpillai of Khawli or those close to them to include their stories in the thesis, or the version of their stories and lives that I chose to document. In initially viewing the process more as a standard textual analysis, with the first case I considered the role I occupied to be a kind of analyst, analysing media reports and attempting to piece together a chronological account of Seemanpillai's life. I was challenged as to the invulnerability and distance that such a position suggested, where this meant I was acting as a disinterested observer and documenter, when in actual fact I came into the project with my own agenda and desires, which, as I will describe in chapter three, involved ascribing a certain form of agency to the actions of Seemanpillai. The role of narration was suggested as one that could make more visible my lack of authority or permission and the presence of a multiplicity of accounts where there is no a single authentic or authoritative account to which I have access to, or the authority to write.

Therefore, in the context of this thesis, it holds up, without being able to resolve such tension, the continued ethical responsibilities and lack of permission I have in utilising the lives of others within this research. In reflecting on this more, one reasons for this is because narration also suggests there is a story or a tale to be told, and this brings forth its own ethical hesitations, in referring to the life and death of another person as a story. A story suggests a reason for an account being told, that involves as much of a relation to the storyteller's intention as it does to what is being conveyed within the story. Its relation to the act of storytelling also indicates that the presence of different versions or accounts. The language that I used to describe and account for my role was signaling to others the work I was doing with the archive, and a relation to Seemanpillai and Khawli. And I am still not sure of this. Was I telling a story? Am I narrating a partial account of the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli? While I remain uncertain, I have continued to use term narration within this thesis as a way of signaling the lack of definitive means in which to document the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, and the need for any account I develop to continue to acknowledge and work to minimise forms of epistemic and symbolic violence enacted upon the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli.

Narrative fissures

The narrative form employed attempts to enable the relational to be considered alongside what might exceed or fall outside of such connections, by exposing the limits of social analysis in making sense of unintelligible or contradictory elements within the lives of others. As a form of story-telling suggested by using the term "narration," an element of this has involved acknowledging the gaps, absences, complications and contradictions in the practice and production of knowledge. I began the documentation process by attempting to eliminate the gaps and discordant details within the stories by finding new information that might serve to erase the absences and contradictions that I was encountering. However, I began to question my role and the purpose of the project as being to produce an account that would explain the

actions of Seemanpillai and Khawli. This involved a shift in how I situated myself, by attempting to work with, rather than eliminate, withhold, or reduce these discrepancies. These narrative fissures that I had initially perceived as problems to be solved, became part of the fabric of both these stories, and the project itself. Underlying this was my concern for the ways in which the spectacular might be explained through recourse to causal relations. While working with a particular narrative form, I also wanted to question the narrative structure of cause and effect, where actions can be explained, and intention can be predicted as a method of producing knowledge. Rather than replicating the media texts through yet another chronological account, the form of narration I engaged in involved attempting to hold relations and non-relations together, by resisting movement towards sequences in time and sequences in events and instead remaining with and exposing the discordant elements without resolving them. When the close reading I engaged in exposed details that were contradictory, or brought other details into question, I attempted to keep both within the narrative. For example, Seemanpillai set himself on fire, he ran, and he took off his clothes. These details were included within the narrative without explanation, and within a narrative that also included the Australian government referring to Seemanpillai's death as a private act of suicide. I do not know why Seemanpillai undertook the actions that he did, and I wanted these to be documented, without me attempting to explain them, or connect them together.

Part Two: Tracing a vulnerable methodology

All research involves aspects of vulnerability and forms of not-knowing. I have posited the notion of a vulnerable methodology and through this, vulnerable writing, as a means in which to engage specifically in recognising and explicating these relationships within the research process. I consider what might be generative of vulnerable forms of writing and how this might occur through working at the intersections of feminist, postcolonial and queer methodological practices and approaches. The core elements of a vulnerable methodology, which connects to this particular project, involve its locatedness, and with this, questions around how to conduct research, especially transnational research, and the demands involved in telling the stories of others. As a background to considering such questions, I have drawn from the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and the provocation presented by the continued demand that stems from the alterity of the other (2001). For Levinas, the ethical relation involves an "absolute responsibility" or an "infinite obligation" for the other that cannot be willed away, but also can never be met fully (p. 117). This continued exposure, to both ongoing ethical responsibilities in narrating the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli and the risk of committing epistemic and symbolic violence through this research process, remains a tension, but also marks out a vulnerable methodology.

As I will argue, it involves approaching research with an awareness of the temporal conditions of knowledge and that the demands of others leave us open to failures but not exempt from the responsibility to do justice to those we write about and work with. It means opening up and remaining with the vulnerability to what is unknown, where research may lead to even greater uncertainty and hesitation, and where comprehension cannot be the foundation in which to form an adequate response. An outcome of working with modes of telling stories about the lives of others is not that this process should lead to documentation or a narrative that must be made intelligible. In disrupting the ways that knowledge is produced by questioning what is known, and how and within the time that it comes to be understood, I suggest that a vulnerable methodology can help to extend a feminist reflexive practice by calling attention to the temporal conditions of affective puncturing and the risks of such

wounding being equated with reflexive comprehension. Therefore, instead of knowing as a "means of knowing what to do," the unsettled disturbance of not knowing that occurs through recognising the necessary construction of spatial and temporal boundaries to narratives becomes integral to the research engagement (Wiegman 2014, p. 7). A vulnerable method does not attempt to resolve discomfort immediately through problem solving, or forms of sense-making that utilise particular relational elements of cause and effect. Instead, what is at the heart of vulnerable methods and vulnerable writing is ongoing questions about what unsettles, about relations to the unfamiliar and strange, and about the erasure of the complexities of subjectivity when individuals and bodies and their actions do not fit or adhere to coherent themes of knowledge. I suggest this unsettled uncertainty of the research process, rather than foreclosing on further understandings, provides space for reconfigured forms of unknowing, and continued attempts at understanding the stories of others.

Central to this continued exposure is the need to position a vulnerable methodology in relation to other feminist methods involving reflexive practice, where reflexivity can be a means of authorising, rather than questioning knowledge (Skeggs 2002, p. 350). Instead of the intention being to develop the outline of a method that might be said to "generate authority," I am interested in remaining with the tension that emerges from the continued exposure to events and lives that resist comprehension (Skeggs 2004, p. 76). This focus stems from my concern with the means of authority and entitlement in knowledge production practices, and in this chapter I address this through feminist postcolonial scholarship (Mohanty 1984; Mahmood 2012; Smith 1999; Visweswaran 1984), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (2003) critical discussion of the paranoid reading that occurs within certain epistemological practices. To engage with the difficulties in modes of telling stories of others is not only to acknowledge the researcher's relation to an unknowable other, but the relation we have with aspects of ourselves that remain unknowable. As Bev Skeggs has addressed, engaging in practices of reflexive research raises questions as to modes and "techniques of writing and telling the self" (2002, p. 352).

Skeggs raises concerns as to the uncritical notion of the self within an aspiration towards reflexivity in research, and the epistemological implications for a self that could be known fully and might become available "as a resource that could be mobilized" (p. 351). Skeggs argues that such practices might simply shine visibility on the "cultural resources and the social positions on which the person/researcher can draw and by which they are located" (p. 352). I suggest that in cross-cultural research there is a grappling with differences between the researcher and those whose lives are being narrated and who might ultimately remain as unknowable others, and elements of the self that remain less known. In a similar way Judith Butler discusses the opaqueness of access to knowledge about oneself that we have to contend with in entering social relations with others (2005). Therefore, an aspect of the continued exposure that occurs within vulnerable forms of research is my own opacity within any reflexive insight, and how that is temporally located and shifts over time. In echoing this concern, Skeggs describes the self within methodological practices as being a present self, "a self that is always reliant on history and memory" (2002, p. 352). Who has access to the particularity of such knowledge, and how it might be understood, adds further complexity to notions of reflexivity.

To help address this tension, Skeggs (2002; 2004) distinguishes between reflexivity as sanctioning the attainment of particular knowledge, and reflexivity as a methodological approach. Skeggs demonstrates how reflexivity can be viewed as a mode of reproduction, whereby as a form of privilege, an individual "requires access to particular knowledge and techniques in order to deploy them in a way that can be recognized as reflexive" (2004, p. 81). Importantly, Skeggs argues, "this is a self which assumes that *access* to particular forms of knowledge *can* be acquired" (original italics) (p. 81). The acknowledgement of the relation with an unknown other therefore also involves what this means for an internal form of otherness, and how we might encounter and address our own "self-otherness" within research (Cooper and Hermans 2006, p. 313). What Skeggs analysis does is to connect a causal link from self-knowledge to self-authorisation: that claims to know come via the exposure and knowledge of one's own positioning (2002, p. 359). For Skeggs, reflexivity is less about a telling and knowing of the self, for which there are social, cultural differences and

barriers to access, than it is an "understanding of the positions and locations of power of others" (p. 359). This form of reflexivity, and one that I am interested in exploring further within a vulnerable methodology, therefore shifts the focus from *knowing* the self to *accountability* for that self in relation to others. It is this continued exposure, to the otherness of participants in research, and our own "self-otherness" that I suggest is closely connected to discussions on the difficulties and demand for ethical responsiveness within research.

Moving from the micro to the macro: Troubling causal connections

In this project I was aware of the methodological fragilities in using a conceptualisation of vulnerability that has emerged in feminist scholarship predominately from North America and Western Europe and with its lineage often frequently traced to post 11 September 2001 and the work of Butler (2004; 2009; 2015). I had placed this theoretical framework in conversation with a particular practice of self-harm that occurs rarely, predominantly under conditions of extreme precarity and within specific geopolitical locations in Asia and the Middle East (Ahmadi *et al*. 2014; Aziz 2011). Within these concerns involving a cross-cultural project, I was also conscious of the distance presented by own subject position as a white New Zealander currently based in the UK. While the burning of one's body is both a form of and often a response to extreme trauma, which may resist being made intelligible to those outside of such an experience, within the research process self-immolation becomes transformed and understood within existing frames of hermeneutic and analytic knowledge. Saba Mahmood directly addresses feminist projects of cross-cultural translation where rendering the other through hegemonic discourses commits epistemic violence "when it tries to assimilate the Other to a language of translatability" (2012, p. 199). Mahmood argues that through this process of translation, unfamiliar, inexplicable lifeworlds are rendered into certain "conceptual or communicable" forms, thereby taming and controlling "that which exceeds hegemonic protocols of intelligibility" (p. 199). This forces the unintelligible into a normative temporal frame where timing becomes synonymous with intention, and knowledge is produced in advance of time.

These difficulties in intelligibility informed the decision that I made within this thesis to focus on two cases of self-immolation. I chose to work with only two events because a project involving a larger number of cases of self-immolation would have meant that less time and space was available to focus on each story. My intention was not to undertake a quantitative analysis of a sample of incidents of self-immolation that could lead to comparisons of cases, or to develop a means of predictive accuracy that might suggest a risk profile could be established, or to engage in cross-cultural forms of commensurability between cases. I wanted to learn about Seemanpillai and Khawli as two singular individuals without comparing the cases, and I wanted to give myself the space and time to begin to investigate in depth the complexities that had begun to emerge through multiple layers of engagement with each story. By limiting the cases I was able to engage in slower research, providing room in which to employ a localised analysis involving working with the micro and macro layers of each narrative.[37]

One of the methodological approaches that informed my decision to focus on only two cases within the thesis was the framework of localised analysis provided by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984). As discussed in chapter one, Mohanty's article and work challenges feminist cross-cultural research originating in North America and Western Europe to address how it may appropriate the epistemology and experiences of its research subjects based in the "global South." In framing these as imperialist projects, Mohanty argues that this work constructs an "essentially truncated life" of cultural others, whereas no such reductionism occurs within the self-presentation of particular groups who are privileged as being the "norm or referent" (p. 337). These authorial subjects engage in temporal modes of analysis that confer the status of being ahead of time, of always knowing more. Research is conducted on "already constituted groups," connected by a singular notion of oppression or powerlessness which is enmeshed within the discursive meanings of assigned categories, such as "women of Africa," or "migrants" (p. 340). I wanted to prevent the erasure of Seemanpillai and Khawli as "material subjects of their own history" through their becoming subsumed within the

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[37] I will come back to the notion of slow research and its relation to research conducted within a university context in the thesis conclusion.

homogenisation of a "discursively constructed group" (p. 337). This meant attempting to find methods of narrating Seemanpillai's and Khawli's stories so neither became just one more "migrant" story or that their self-immolations could be simplified to having resulted from the "migration crisis." In a similar way, Spivak calls attention to the failings of Eurocentric research within the politics of cross-cultural translation that pays insufficient care to the "rhetoricity of the original" by not investing in understanding the complexities and layered meanings of particular sites and contexts (1993, p. 181).

To address these epistemological risks and violations, Mohanty argues for responsiveness to the local and particular within research through being "attentive to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes" (2003, p. 501). To be centred in the local means methodological strategies need to be undergirded by "grounded, particularized analyses linked with larger, even global, economic and political frameworks" (p. 501). This signals the attunement of local and particular concerns with wider relationalities involving sociopolitical and economic structures and systems. What is critical is that research conducted into the intricacies and complexities of individual, localised contexts has the potential to "generate theoretical categories from *within* the situation and context being analyzed" (original italics) (1984, p. 345). I suggest that this space of being within is also a space of vulnerability, where it is not necessarily possible, nor the intended outcome of such methodological practices, to predict in advance how and in what directions the research will progress. In her study of international peacekeepers, Marsha Henry (2015) also attends to the narratives of everyday practices and experiences. Henry uses these as a means of exploring a "peacekeeping economy" that refers to social, cultural and moral worlds that emerge through narratives and make visible discordant, contradictory elements of the peacekeepers' experiences (p. 375). Through the notion of "everyday soldiering" situated in post-conflict contexts, Henry attends to the micro level details, where the ordinary day-to-day grind of activities, including the boredom and monotony of peacekeeping work, unsettles ideas of privilege associated with such roles, but also illuminates the multiplicity of worlds that are navigated (p. 374). There is an element

of vulnerability to the way Henry spatially and temporally shifts the referent of the local from the "peace-kept" to the "peace providers" and how the performance of everyday activities by the peacekeepers affect both the efficacy of peacekeeping, and their own lives (p. 373).

In the context of this project, examining the vulnerability of Seemanpillai and Khawli was one method of situating their stories within the acute violence and impact of civil war, political unrest and poverty, grounding each narrative within complex modes of endurance and what it means to keep holding on. I used Mohanty's framework of localised analysis to alter the levels in which I was accessing each story, moving between the micro level of everyday experiences and the macro level of national and global systems, policies, infrastructure and institutions that informed the lives of those seeking refuge in Australia and Lebanon. However, there are also risks in addressing the macro layers of each narrative and in decisions in how the micro and macro are placed in relation to each other and the divisions and relationships assumed, and I suggest this informs a key component of a vulnerable methodology. Seemanpillai's and Khawli's self-immolations could be reduced to a particular, catastrophic micro level effect or an un-interrogated macro cause. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) criticises the forms of privileged knowing that move from localised, individual experience, to knowledge generated at the macro level, and then back to becoming a resource to determine and solve issues. Smith considers the tension between the differences in how knowledge is gained, held and utilised within Māori society and the aims and methods of non-Māori research practices. Through this Smith describes a form of "crisis research" conducted by non-Māori tasked with "explaining causes" and "solving Māori problems" (p. 174). On the basis of research conducted at particular sites, which may or may not generate understanding, "huge inferential leaps and generalizations about how the rest of Maori society functioned" are frequently made (p. 174). Smith's contention reflects concerns with research that does not address its gaps and absences in knowing what is inside and outside of its field of vision. In a similar way, Patti Lather contends that there needs to be "recognition that we often do not know what we are seeing, how much we are missing, what we are not understanding, or even how to locate those lacks" (1999, p. 217).

The more of each narrative that I developed through attending to its increasing textual and material layers and context, the less certain I was in ascribing forms of intentionality, of being able to tell the story of *how it was*. I began to reflect on what I was demanding from the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, of how forms of knowledge making are not by necessity emancipatory; that my knowing why each had decided to set themselves on fire did not change anything at all. To address my uncertainty and hesitation, I placed the micro and the macro beside each other within the narrative, without suggesting that there was a necessary causal relation that could account for all of Khawli's decisions, or that would have predicted how Seemanpillai chose to act. This was to resist a translation from the micro to the macro that assumes decisions made about self-immolation can be made commensurable, and known in advance. Through placing the layers in parallel rather than upon one another to find or suggest causal connections, the tempo of lives and what impacts on them becomes altered. I argue that it is not necessary that events that have closest temporal proximity or express an acute moment in time are those that may cause people to act in particular ways. I began to recognise that some deaths that we think occur quickly may instead be slow and are eked out not over minutes but rather over months, years, and generations.

From this analysis, what came into focus was how the complexities, materiality and temporality of suffering experienced were being effaced by the singular moment of self-immolation. In operation were particular modes of temporality that recognised self-immolation to be spectacular within the unspectacular and ongoing time of precarity. This meant that the allure of the arresting time of self-immolation, which through its ability to capture attention conveyed the power to signify itself as the narrative endpoint, was erasing the rich textures of agential capacities that move through time and continue after a body is lit. For example, in focusing on the micro layers, what might be opened up by addressing the material detail of the pain of setting your body on fire, the physical and affective experience of burning? Mani addresses the lack of agency in pain in her analysis of the representations of *sati* in India and how the debate was primarily shaped by a colonial discourse (1998, p. 1). As I have discussed, women who burned on the funeral pyre were "neither subjects or

even the primary objects of concern in the debate on its prohibition" (p. 2).

Mani's analysis led me to consult medical articles written on burn patients to try to better understand how much pain is registered and endured when a body suffers full thickness burns. I realised that I had little understanding of the complexity of a burn; of the complicated sensory relationship that burns have to skin that makes their treatment and the management of pain so difficult. Burns do not occur evenly, and regeneration of skin and disordered regrowth both cause their own forms of chronic pain. In the case of Khawli, I accessed articles focusing on the treatment available in minimising pain and aiding recovery of wounds to find out how much Khawli might have suffered *after* self-immolating. In the media articles reporting on both incidents, the pain experienced remained largely absent from the framing of self-immolation; narratives instead articulated the materiality of suffering within defined temporal boundaries. Seemanpillai and Khawli experienced forms of pain and trauma only *prior* to their acts of setting themselves on fire. Therefore, as this example has sought to illustrate, sometimes it is not the case of needing *more* materials because of their incompleteness but instead, to work at the textures within the fabric of what *is* available. The materials available will always be insufficient and partial, and instead we might need to sit with these complications and contradictions in the constitution and modes of sensory and affective expression. We could move them backwards and forwards, and allow these elements and layers to form without attempting to foreclose on the continued emergence of alternatives. The shifting of time as a means to disrupt the agency ascribed to Seemanpillai and Khawli and to consider different temporalities of vulnerability and how these might come to be transposed unevenly across different bodies and locations, became a core methodological strategy in researching and developing the two narratives.

Challenges to the time of knowledge

Questioning my role as an unchosen narrator brought into focus the politics of knowledge production involved in developing each case. A concern of this thesis has

been the role of time as a conditioning agent of knowledge within research practices. In acknowledging the methodological lineage of feminist and queer scholarship stemming from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's critique of paranoid reading, Robyn Wiegman argues that Sedgwick questions the relation between epistemology and politics, where "*knowing* is the means for knowing what *to do*" (original italics) (2014, p. 7). In response to the need to comprehend ahead of time, Sedgwick asks critically, "What does knowledge *do* – the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows?" (original italics) (2003, p. 124). Mahmood addresses her own concerns with the temporal fraying of epistemological certitude. She acknowledges that the cross-cultural approach initially employed in her study of the women's mosque movement in Egypt involved solving ahead of time what was incompatible with her own feminist interests. Mahmood realised reflexively that she did this by having "a sense of foreknowledge of what I was going to encounter, of how I was going to explain these women's 'intransigent behavior' in regard to the ideals of freedom, equality, and autonomy that I myself have held so dear" (p. 198). Mahmood began to interrogate how this form of knowing, which despite the certainty that the feeling of being ahead of time initially gave her, came to be incompatible with the "sentiments, commitments, and sensibilities that ground these women's existence" (p. 198). Through Mahmood's experience, it is possible to consider that what might be at the heart of becoming vulnerable to forms of ambivalence is the difficult task of resisting trying to eliminate the disquiet that comes from "the uncertain, at times opaque, conditions of intimate and uncomfortable encounters in all their eventuality" (p. 198). Mahmood argues that such a mode of unsettled encountering requires that any move towards comprehending different lifeworlds first involves interrogating and dislocating the certitude of one's own epistemological projections from the investigation (p. 199).

Tracing her own work on interrogating queer temporal asynchronies back to Sedgwick, Elizabeth Freeman (2010) argues that the privileging of future-focused temporality within certain queer approaches, which insists on the disruption and disintegration of particular identities and social worlds through confining them to history, suggests that "it's about having the problem solved ahead of time, about feeling more evolved than

one's context" (p. xiii). As mentioned in chapter one, Freeman's notion of "temporal drag" is helpful in this respect in providing a means of disrupting movements of time across methodological and practical concerns. Engagement with non-linear forms of temporality has also featured in the queer scholarship of Jack Halberstam (2011), Heather Love (2009), and José Esteban Muñoz (2009). Freeman's analysis emerges in the context of queer performativity, where temporal drag creates conflict and incongruity within queer bodies through the tautness produced in the pull backwards from identifying with "historical" generations and terminology, and the pushing forwards to construct new social and political movements. Freeman focuses her attention on the backwards motion, reframing it not as a means of regression but instead as an essential component within the complexity of forces and energy needed for modes of living. Therefore the "tug backwards," in contrast to a desire to cast aside the past, can be a "potentially transformative part of the movement" (Freeman 2010, p. 93). The notion of the backwards sweep becomes a further means to probe the productive potential of epistemological uncertainties within modes of telling. It can help to make visible the discontinuities and instabilities of narratives that change meaning when approached at varying tempos – when the story is moved not only forwards but also backwards, and slowed and hastened within and across different spaces.

For example, attending to what tugged backwards within narratives can illustrate how bodies, relations and attachments continue to engage in the struggle to "endure the effort it takes to strive to persevere" within the material conditions of precarity (Povinelli 2011, p. 9). Rethinking agency following Mahmood (2012), as a capacity that involves struggle, effort and exertion, can help to open up new ways to consider how time impacts upon the activities involved in sustaining life. This meant that instead of attending to activities that could have signaled an impending decision by Seemanpillai or Khawli to burn themselves, I focused on how Seemanpillai and Khawli might have engaged in other forms of survival and the ordinary modes of self-maintenance that occurred within each of their lifeworlds. When I began to do this, small details in each narrative started to emerge, which were available within the narratives reported by the media, and enabled me to attend further to the micro politics of each case. For

example, Seemanpillai volunteered, attended church, gave blood, sent money to his family in India, he chose not to tell his parents of his concerns about being sent back to Sri Lanka, and he folded his personal items neatly in his locker on his last day of work. Khawli fled from Syria when her children's lives were at risk, she refused to send her children to work and stop their education or allow her daughters to live in a housing situation that she deemed to be unsafe, she taught her children ancient Arabic before they started school, and she continued to walk the three-hour round journey from her home to the UN office to press her case. These details became part of the fabric of their stories, enabling me to remain with each story for longer and not lose sight of the fact that these were two people attempting to persist in creating new lives in countries that were not their own.

Attending to the varied materialities within forms of endurance connects to what Gayatri Gopinath refers to as the "warmth" of "warm data" (2010, p. 184). This involves "those affective attachments—to places, things—that are experienced sensorially and through the body itself" that in turn become forms of archiving that aim to document stories and reverse the invisibility that occurs when the complexities of subjectivity are reduced to cold data, a process that occurs during the homogenisation of discursively constructed groups (p. 184). Gopinath's reference to a warm database refers to the *Index of the Disappeared* project by artists Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani, a "physical archive of post-9/11 disappearances—detentions, deportations, renditions, redactions and a platform for public dialogue around related issues," which in part aims to collect stories from immigrants.[38] One method is through the web project *How Do You See the Disappeared? A Warm Database*, involving the development of a "warm questionnaire" that asks questions designed to be "diametrically opposed to the questions asked during government processes like special registration, and to elicit data that will be the opposite of the cold, hard facts held in classified files."[39] In Gopinath's argument regarding how the questions used within the *Index* can invoke "the power of the detail, the mundane," it is possible to

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[38] For further details on Ganesh and Ghani's ongoing *Index of the Disappeared* project and the "warm data" questionnaire open to those who have been "affected by detention and/or deportation," see: http://www.kabul-reconstructions.net/disappeared/ [Last accessed 4 April 2016].

[39] Source: http://www.kabul-reconstructions.net/mariam/projects2.html#Index [Last accessed 4 April 2016].

conceive a method for altering the temporal to illuminate new forms of seeability within an archive, where the historicity of affective and sensory trails connecting the everyday to unseen and unspoken histories and relations that continue to exist outside of government processes and classified files, are able to come into focus (p. 184). Connecting such disruptions to my research project, changing the storied temporal modalities of self-immolation can come to ground the event not in the spectacular but instead within particular personal, cultural and political times and histories. The self-immolations of Seemanpillai and Khawli are events with their own historicity, formed of relations, interactions, journeys and memories.

Slowing the tempo

I take the notion of the unspectacular and ongoing temporality of precarity from the disruptions offered by Lauren Berlant's (2007) "slow death" and Rob Nixon's (2011) "slow violence." Berlant argues in the context of the notion of slow death, where populations are worn out not by catastrophes, revolutions or resistances but by the slow creeping of the everyday, that "we need better ways to talk about activity oriented toward the reproduction of ordinary life: the burdens of compelled will that exhaust people…that do not occupy time, decision, or consequentiality in anything like the registers of autonomous self-assertion" (2007, p. 757). In changing the tempo, Berlant seeks to address how stories of agential, aspirational subjects must also represent the inevitable "involvement with pain and error, the bad memory and mental lag" that shapes "indirect routes toward pleasure and survival" (2011, p. 122). Rather than seeking examples of agency that confirm a constant striving to better ourselves, Berlant suggests we also focus on the means by which we endure life, which, while preventing our immediate deaths, is slowly but surely wearing us out. In a similar way, Nixon identifies the elements of slow violence as occurring "gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2011, p. 2). The violence that Nixon articulates struggles to be seen because it is "incremental and accretive," played out across a "range of temporal scales" and over the long arc of

time that flows through generations (p. 2). Where Berlant's slow death describes the cumulative effect of wearing down populations, Nixon's concept of slow violence addresses the gradual rise in intensity that may be barely registered. The "long emergency" of slow violence calls attention to the disparate tempos of responses and responsibilities to vulnerable populations (p. 3). This is witnessed in the insidious workings of certain events, such as those not immediately registered on or within bodies, for example, radiological poisoning. Equally this could be also ascribed to waiting for certain outcomes, or the re-telling of narratives of trauma, activities and events whose pace sustains the ongoing deferral of action by macro level political systems. This results in violence being enacted through the "unequal attention given to spectacular and unspectacular time" (p. 6). The difficulty of visibility for certain subjectivities and bodies living within particular modalities of time is similarly the focus of Mahmood's work on agency, where she addresses the often unseen investments in emotional and physical labour required in the "agential capacity" that "is entailed not only in those acts that result in (progressive) change but also those that aim toward continuity, stasis and stability" (2001, p. 212).

In his notion of slow violence Nixon is aware that while there is a long arc of time between the emergence of particular forms of violence and its effects, what looms within the stealth of slow violence is the threat of catastrophe. The anxiety of slow violence, the catastrophe of the not yet of time, can spark its own explosion. In writing on forms of mourning, Veena Das makes similar connections, contending that the violence we have relegated to distant, historical imaginaries continues to influence the experiences of current generations, and as such "scenes of violence constitute the…threshold within which the scenes of ordinary life are lived" (1996, p. 68). As a methodological addition to relational understandings of cause and effect, I suggest that attending to how people move between the particularities of temporal scales, and how this may involve relational and non-relational elements, has much to contribute to discussions of vulnerable methods (Harrison 2007). It might be possible, for example, to see within this project how two registers of violence, gradual erosion and the acute flashpoint, appear to collide, without rushing to attribute intentionality between the two. It might be possible to develop a richer understanding of the

temporal discontinuities involved in agency, and how this produces contradictory states, where, for example, Seemanpillai and Khawli are forced into temporal spaces of waiting that might bring both stasis and uncertainty. Therefore the notion of the non-relational can help to consider how the emphasis on finding relations as a method of sense-making and comprehension might be less an epistemological demand than a need we cling to when faced with the vulnerability that occurs from our inability to say "why this is" or to know the correct way to respond.

Being pricked and wounded

Within encounters with what is unfamiliar, where details become part of wider struggles to make sense of the lives of others, I want to discuss further how the affective trails weaved through these encounters extend out beyond the borders of stories, and how these in turn lead to responses that shape the conditions, content and production of research. The dynamism of these affective experiences in opening up and closing down receptivity to others suggests the need to address the non-volitional elements of research that come from the singularity of these experiences, leading to both the potential for epistemic forms of violence and for ethical responses. Roland Barthes refers to the affective extension of media as the "blind field," the ability to see that which remains off frame (1981). Barthes was referring to the scaffold or enclosure that is constructed by a photographer, but equally, extending this concept to stories, it can denote the ways we might approach what exceeds the limits of a narrative. Barthes contends that for certain photographs, the contents are held within and "do not *emerge*, do not *leave*: they are anaesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies" (original italics) (p. 56). He calls such an element the *studium,* whereby participation takes the form of viewing "recognizable and culturally comprehensible signs" within the singularity of the image, without the viewing causing a disruption or transformation (Gordon 2008, p. 106). There is little surprise, I may take pleasure in the image, but the photograph is glanced at; its composition is received and then is perceived as being complete (Barthes 1981, p. 41). In contrast, the force of the element referred to as the *punctum* is its relation to the unknown and its power of

extension. It is what happens when we are moved by something within a particular mode of telling. Barthes describes this element in affective terms as an "accident which pricks me," a sensuous means of wounding that nicks the skin and then burrows in deep below the level of consciousness (p. 27). He contends that acknowledging the *punctum* is "in a certain fashion, *to give myself up"* (original italics) (p. 3). Therefore to experience puncturing, one must become vulnerable. Its accidental nature is disruptive, it involves a form of surrendering to what is unwilled and unexpected, and in this way might be thought of as receptiveness. What is of particular interest to me methodologically is the way the notion of puncturing might help to interrogate epistemological assumptions, and how modes of pricking emerge through attending to the details and particularities within a story.

However, there are also risks encountered in engaging with the micro layers of stories. Barthes describes the paradox of the element that pricks, that "while remaining a "detail," it fills the whole picture" (1981, p. 45). What is critical is that it fills the whole picture *for me*, the detail floods into my consciousness and it moves me in some affective way. The subject of the narrative or photograph is not transformed from my experience of being wounded; they do not share this feeling and are not necessarily altered as a result. I suggest that the singular nature of the experience of being pricked therefore points to its potential to be self-serving, and that this expresses a limit of reflexivity through its capacity to reinforce the centring of the self within the relation to the other (Mohanty 1984). While reflexivity as a practice involves being accountable for one's situated positioning and the way this impacts the knowledge produced, the status of that knowledge is also called into question through the puncturing. In the context of anthropological research, Kamala Visweswaran contends that self-reflexive texts "seek to "tell" how the ethnographer comes to know what she knows" (1994, p. 84). As well as "laying bare the process" of knowledge assembly, I suggest that a vulnerable methodology might be more closely positioned with questioning what is known, and what might come from an opening in not knowing (p. 78). I suggest that the *punctum* can perform the illusion of knowing through its affective method, by equating wounding with reflexive comprehension. Knowing that one has been wounded can focus attention on the pricking, suggesting its privileged singularity –

that no one else has been moved in a similar way. A concern when engaging with the micro political within a localised analysis is that it can be a means of authorising knowledge (Skeggs 2002, p. 350). Beverley Skeggs distinguishes between reflexivity as sanctioning the attainment of particular knowledge, and reflexivity as a methodological approach: "there is a significant difference between being reflexive and accruing reflexivity to oneself through a process of attachment and as a cultural resource to authorize the self and doing reflexivity: building sensitivity into research design and paying attention to practice, power and process" (p. 368). Skeggs argues that being reflexive involves acknowledging that conducting research on others is always "a privilege, a position of mobility and power, a mobilization of cultural resources" (p. 361). Because of this, I argue there is no necessary equivalence between wounding and ethical responsiveness. Where the *punctum* may provide some form of enjoyment or pleasure derived from the insights gained, ethical wounds demand in ways that can be painful and relentless.

This is because the efficacy of the response relies not on bounded, time-limited attention to the pricking, but on the continued demand to respond. While Barthes focuses on the affective response that comes from the visual sensibility of the photograph, I suggest that both the risk of self-centring and the possibility for ethics reside in the singular nature of being pricked. Rosalyn Diprose addresses directly the necessity and nature of such an experience and positions it as being a disturbance that shakes us from our autonomy and questions our relations with others. She asks, "What experience transports us beyond what constitutes our ways of being and beyond the familiar worlds we inhabit" (2002, p. 136)? For Diprose, it is the strangeness or alterity of the experience of the other that grounds responsibility and "inspires sensibility as a condition of thinking" (p. 138). It is the connection between being moved affectively, and the response that it *provokes* that provides the foundation for an ethical response. In the ethical philosophy of Levinas, this provocation occurs precisely because the demand is unique and singular (1998). It is an appeal from outside of the self that is only addressed to me, and for this reason I am compelled to respond.

There are temporal conditions to puncturing, where wounds are not always quick, singular and incisive but can also occur by way of slow, deliberate lacerations over time. To illustrate this and its self-referencing potential, what drew my attention initially to each story were aspects of the narrative that intimated the possibility of something beyond the frame, something I thought that *I* could see but others could not. Instead of opening the narrative in ways that made me receptive to further uncertainties and disturbances, I took what I perceived to be the *punctum* in each case and attempted to explain my response in a way that closed down alternative possibilities and other modes of telling within the narratives. In this way, it became possible for me to consider how being pricked had the potential to open up, but also close down responses. In working with the story of Seemanpillai, I was pricked by the moment in which I thought Seemanpillai had enacted an intentional transgression by moving his body across the boundary of the private realm, which I took to be represented by his yard, into the public space of a busy street after he set fire to his body. I interpreted this movement as challenging media accounts that his intention was to commit a private act of suicide, because the public nature of his self-immolation instead suggested a relation between his action and his political intention. I perceived this to be evidence of Seemanpillai's political agency and gave this action prominence and priority over other details, including the "ordinary objects" of daily life that I assumed had little relation to the spectacular moment and movement of self-immolation (Barthes 1981, p. 70). Therefore, I argue that the *punctum's* temporal presence also has the power to condense every incident to a relation of cause and effect and diminish complexity. Every action that Seemanpillai undertook and everything that happened to him suddenly had the potential to become connected to his self-immolation.

For me, the *punctum* that became the means in which to extend beyond the temporal and contextual boundaries of the narrative, while being aware of the colonising potential for appropriating Seemanpillai's story through what had pricked *me*, occurred sometime later. It took time for me to notice that Seemanpillai stripped off his clothes *after* burning his body. This is significant because in cases of self-immolation where it is expressed as a protest, despite the person being in excruciating

pain, I have not come across incidents reporting a person removing their clothes. When I returned again to Seemanpillai's story I was stopped by the detail that Seemanpillai stood in the street in his underwear. This temporal tactic of revisiting the materials, points to productive qualities that can emerge through altering the tempo of writing. Yasmin Gunaratnam links this attention to the slow process of research, returning to materials after spaces of thinking and reflection and intervals of time, with these repeated attempts leading both to new insights and ongoing failures in understanding (2013, p. 159). The spectacle of Seemanpillai standing in a public street in pain, screaming (for whom, for what?) with only the protection of his underwear, which may have been burning and yet perhaps he refused to remove it, was inherently vulnerable. Seemanpillai's remaining clothes were found smoldering in a pile next to his mailbox. These details then led me further into the story that was beyond the narrative: Why did Seemanpillai leave his clothes at his own mailbox? Why were they not stripped off and flung the length of his front yard? Instead did he stand still and take off each item carefully, like the placement of items in his locker at work that were neatly folded two days before he burned himself? This is the expansive power of being pricked, where receptivity to the details, to the complicated suffering and continued surviving of another person, may not come to form any certainty about what has taken place or be commensurable to other forms of experience, but what it can do is to help to keep the dialogue open.

In the case of Mariam al-Khawli, early on I read a news article that documented Khawli saying from her hospital bed, "They burned my heart before they burned my body."[40] This statement disturbed me due to the pain it communicated, the visceral emotional image it invoked, and its illogical premise that unsettled my understanding of the self within self-immolation: how could someone burn Khawli first, and is it even physically possible to burn from the inside out? It was Khawli's act of speaking *after* her self-immolation that I ascribed with a certain reflexive and authentic form of knowing. I realised that I had given credence to the temporal as a conditioning agent of

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[40] Arwa Damon and Raja Razek, "Syria Refugee's Desperate Act: 'They Burned My Heart Before They Burned My Body'", *CNN*, 3 April 2014. Available at: http://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/03/world/meast/syria-refugee-lebanon-damon-razek/ [Last accessed 23 February 2016].

knowledge, in this case its influence in the power and uptake of meaning conveyed through speech being performed at a certain moment in time (Austin 1962). Because of this, I was closing down enquiry into other means and expressions of communication and utterances that might occur during experiences of suffering. I had assumed that certain acts, emotions and events that happen to people remain expressible, and that sensorial and affective understandings and responses to trauma can be conveyed by words. I assumed that words might contain more meaning than other forms of expression, and where these words are temporally located might serve to expose particular meanings that would otherwise be absent.

And so with this vulnerability to my own thinking exposed, I experienced being punctured by the sudden and unexpected dismantling of boundaries to Khawli's story that I realised I had constructed for my own emotional comfort. I assumed that a lack of details about Khawli's progress and her presence in videos and photographs in a hospital bed being attended to by medical staff indicated that Khawli survived her burns. When I searched online for what had happened to Khawli in the days after her self-immolation, I could not find any information detailing her life after 27 April 2014. I contacted the journalist who had written the most recent article and had initiated a public appeal to raise funds for Khawli's medical costs. I received an email a day later that said the journalist was sorry to inform me that Khawli passed away shortly after her article went to print. I realised that Khawli had not been alive throughout the duration of my time spent with her story. She had passed away months prior to me watching her speak on video. I remembered from that final media article that Khawli's husband Ahmad had reassured their children soon after Khawli's self-immolation that their mother had survived. This news came in the form of a strong emotional and physical response that forced me to physically get up and get out of the space that I was in, to walk and somehow try and make sense of what I was feeling. My response also felt disingenuous, a sensation invoked from a relationship that I did not have. It made me quite uncertain as to what I was experiencing, but it did feel like a form of loss, that someone I knew had died. This affective response may occur in part because of the way that aspects of Khawli's life can be experienced through multimedia, with its potential for transformation through multi-sensory displays of motion, sound and

sight that Barthes was not suggesting through his reference to the single image capture of the photograph. I could watch videos and hear Khawli speaking, see into the living area of the home she shared with her family, see the way her husband's face moved as he spoke. And yet, what also moved me were elements of Khawli's story that I could not experience through multimedia and remained outside of the frame: the descriptions of affective attachments that were invoked through ordinary details and the "anti-monumental" rhythms of everyday life for Khawli and her family (Gopinath 2010, p. 190).

The dynamism of these forms of wounding exposes the vulnerability of the story telling process to the deceptive comforts of completeness, and reminds that life both continues and ceases to exist beyond the telling, in this case through forms of media and other archival methods. To engage with the instability, I suggest that there must be a certain acceptance of the puncturing that takes place and of remaining with the disturbances that occur. Therefore these moments of pricking, of being moved, may contain the emergence of an ethical response. What I find to be crucial in its relation to methodological practices of narrating other people's stories is how Barthes contends that while the *punctum* comes to define what we add to a story, it is only an addition that *we* make: "It is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*" (original italics) (1981, p. 55). It disrupts the power of the temporal within sovereign forms of knowledge making. This displaces the notion of cognition as being prior to the encounter; that cognition in the form of understanding is required in order to be responsive. In using the examples above, the particular details that caused a disturbance were already present, they are part of Seemanpillai's and Khawli's lives: the effect of the *punctum* in me did not disclose anything that Seemanpillai and Khawli did not already live with. And that is where the specificity of the puncture mark is important. Within the temporalities of research, I suggest that vulnerable and invulnerable research methods may coexist through the stages of a project, where invulnerability exists as a form of protection that is at times necessary, creating spatial and affective forms of distance to the subjects of research. Distance can be maintained by reversing the process of wounding, puncturing the object of study by attributing forms of agency or intentionality that are willed by the researcher while protecting the

self against being pricked. What may occur is continual movement between forms of vulnerable and invulnerable methods according to context and need, and where invulnerability as protection encompasses the potential for it to make way for reflexive, localised practices that open up space for vulnerable responses.

Vulnerable responses

In this final section I return to Diprose's suggestion that it is the disturbance of the other that "inspires sensibility as a condition of thinking" (2002, p. 138). I want to consider what it might mean to involve the sensorial within conditions of knowledge-making, and its relation to forms of uncertainty and unknowing within research practices. I return to the questions that I asked at the beginning of the chapter: What kinds of relations are formed with the subjects of research? What might it mean not to fully comprehend the lives upon which we make epistemic claims (Mahmood 2012, p. 198)? And what are the kinds of analytic and hermeneutic resources that can help in thinking through such ethical concerns (p. 195)?

In their consideration of responses to the material production of research, Mariam Fraser and Nirmal Puwar draw attention to how "sensory, emotional and affective relations are central to the ways in which researchers engage with, produce, understand and translate what becomes 'research'" (2008, p. 2). Fraser and Puwar contend that there is much to be learned about "how we creatively carry the smells, textures, pains, desires, sounds and the visual store of memories of the research encounter with us, from the points of collection, to analyses and public presentation" (p. 2). In particular, I want to address their suggestion that intimacy is produced in the labour of research, and how the sensory and affective experiences of such labour are often left out of discussions of methodology (p. 2). Connected to the puncturing discussed in the previous section, I found it difficult to communicate the intangible qualities of the emotional feelings that I experienced in working with the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli. When I spoke of each story, a surge of emotion would at times catch me by surprise, suggesting that I was carrying something of my encounter

with each of them within me. It made me uncertain as to my connection, the adequacies and authenticity of my responses, and how this was impacting the research process. So while there are particularities to the research itself that must be struggled with, there are also specificities in the emotional, physical and practical dimensions of the research process that shape the development of the project (p. 6). It raises questions such as, what does it mean to feel "close" to a stranger? What implied suggestion of reciprocity is involved in such a sentiment and expression of a relation? I had reflective conversations with others to try and figure through what affective responses might mean in the context of text-based research. Given that my relation to Seemanpillai and Khawli was mediated through significant geographic, cultural, political and also affective distances, the discussion turned to whether it was possible, or productive, to describe what I was experiencing as a form of empathy.

Understanding empathy as a concept and how it is produced has been the subject of recent critical scholarship in the field of transnational studies (Pedwell 2014). Pedwell interrogates the description of empathy as an "affective mode or technique through which 'we' can come to know the cultural 'other'" by questioning the relation between empathy and the qualities of accuracy and prediction (p.123). Pedwell contends that engaging in what is described as cross-cultural "other-oriented empathy," assumes there is universality to how emotions are experienced in different contexts and by different subjects (p. 127). As a discursive and affective means in which to make sense of and respond to difference, empathy can become "a kind of end-point" that resists examination and assumes the potential for ethics (p. x). Rather than being a method that helps to address epistemological distances in accounting for intention, Sara Ahmed argues that "empathy sustains the very difference that it may seek to overcome: empathy remains a 'wish feeling', in which subjects 'feel' something other than what another feels in the very moment of imagining they could feel what another feels" (2014, p. 30). I realised that early on in the research process, what I was feeling was undergirding the certainty of my interpretation. I trusted that because I was responding emotionally to each case, and caring about the people I wrote about, that I was becoming sensitively attuned to the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli. I thought my response would lead to a certain form of justice. I also realised I wanted this to be

so; I wanted to feel like I understood both Seemanpillai and Khawli, as a researcher, but also as a human being. I wanted to close the distance between each person and me. However, Ahmed argues that in remaining with the distance between the self and another person, that in that space of unfamiliarity and hesitation, recognising the impossibility of emotional equivalence does not shut down the efficacy of a response. Instead distance might suggest that the very ethics of response may involve "being open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel" (p. 30).

If vulnerable writing involves openness to remaining with stories that we are not able to comprehend, and lives that in their complexity remain unknown, I suggest that the relations involved therefore may contain elements of being bound to another person. Am I really bound in any tangible sense? I do not know. But I realised that during this research project what I experienced could not be expressed as closeness to Seemanpillai and Khawli. I contend that what is demanded, unlike what is suggested by the affective closing of distance between others and ourselves, has an inherent lack of reciprocity. In this form of vulnerability it *is* a susceptibility to being hurt, perhaps by what Berlant refers to as the "pain of paying attention" that comes from admitting to our "surprising attachments" to another person, who has neither need, time, or necessary interest to respond in kind (2011, pp. 123, 122). Levinas uses the terminology of a wound to describe the vulnerability invoked through responsibility for the other, where the experience of being unsettled by the other's demand is a form of exposure (1998). He conceives of this singular demand that comes from outside us as a form of solicitation. There is passivity to this exposure to the other's request, which forms an experience that is unwilled and ambivalent, described by Levinas as being a "sense of patience and pain" (p. 50). Passivity refers to the obligation to respond prior to comprehending that which is unfamiliar or understanding what is required of us. The notion of what is prior is not a straightforward linear temporality; rather, passivity is best thought of as a condition for everyday life, where responsibility, in all its troubling and unsettling experience, is always present (Morgan 2007, p. 160). Here ambivalence grounds a notion of the ethical response. The notion of passivity within Levinas's structure of address between the self and others, rather than describing a form of inertia where we wait to be told what to do, or where knowing what is the

right thing to do will emerge over time, involves a form of activity. It means opening up and remaining with this vulnerability to what is unknown, where comprehension cannot be the means to form an adequate response. In connecting this more directly to methodological practices, to be attuned to sensitivities of a narrative and to attempt to reduce forms of violence is not to suggest that this means the story must become intelligible. Instead of receptivity and sensitivity being cognitive acts, they may instead come to form an integral role within ethics (Harrison 2007, p. 601).

Working with this sense of response, which might be read through the distance between others and me, could be one means of trying to remain open to the alterity of stories and the lives of others. I suggest that it shifts the burden of the demand of intentionality away from the subjects of research and exposes the scaffolding and vulnerable structures of knowledge-making, especially in the context of feminist cross-cultural projects. In distinguishing between knowing as a form of action and knowing as a form of passivity, acknowledging forms of unknowing and their placement within the gaps and distances between lifeworlds might alter rather than impede a response. Approaching research with an awareness of the temporal conditions of knowledge means that the demands of others leave us open to failures but not exempt from responsibility to do justice to those we write about and work with. And this difficulty requires acknowledging that, despite every effort and every best intention, we continue to risk misunderstanding, not doing enough, and not being there at the right time (Gunaratnam 2012). Vulnerable writing, therefore, is perhaps an otherwise than knowledge, involving being receptive to what is beyond comprehension, that resists sense-making, that remains outside of the frame, while continuing in our attempts to respond.

Conclusions

Working with a localised analysis of the particular, in conversation with the notion of unspectacular temporalities that emerge from changing the temporal registers of self-immolation, this chapter addressed the hesitations, uncertainties and propensity to

commit forms of epistemic violence that can be part of research practices, especially those involving transnational studies. In this chapter I have proposed a vulnerable approach to writing, and demonstrated how this method has been utilised. I argue that a vulnerable methodology can help to shift the time, pace and layering of research. It requires changing the space and tempo of enquiry to expose and question the framing of concepts and conditions of living within particular temporal and spatial constraints. These boundaries become attached both to concepts, lives, and the production of knowledge. Specifically, I have questioned how a vulnerable methodology might help to interrogate the ways knowing ahead of time can become commensurable with ethical action, and the temporal relation between ethics and epistemology. As Diprose describes, a Socratic model of the production of knowledge places epistemology in relation to, and importantly, prior to, ethics, where "the more you understand, the more virtuous you are" (2002, p. 134). Along with Diprose's support for a Levinasian "ethics as first philosophy," where a response is required irrespective of comprehension, I suggest that this reframing of the temporal relation between ethics and epistemology continues to offer something useful to feminist approaches to research, and forms the basis of the model of ethical relations used to develop this research project. In disrupting the production of knowledge in terms of questioning what is known, and how and within the time that it comes to be understood, a vulnerable methodology might extend a feminist reflexive practice beyond focusing on what is visible and apprehended, to de-centre the researcher through considering what might be beyond comprehension, and the role of unknowing as an ethical concern within methodological practices. Therefore, instead of knowing indicating "the means of knowing what to do," the unsettled disturbance of not knowing that occurs through recognising the necessary construction of spatial and temporal boundaries to narratives becomes integral to the research engagement (Wiegman 2014, p. 7). A vulnerable method does not attempt to resolve the discomfort immediately through problem solving or means of sense-making through particular relational elements of cause and effect. What is at the heart of vulnerable methods are ongoing questions about what unsettles, about relations to the unfamiliar and strange, and the modalities of vulnerability involved in giving in to the "disturbance that inspires sensibility as a condition of thinking" (Diprose 2002, p. 138).

In practical terms, I have engaged with several approaches. Mohanty's localised analysis centres the research process on the micro political dimensions of experience. It helped me to develop narratives that considered both the micro and macro dimensions of experience, and it also enabled me to question the pull of certain relational elements, of finding reasons from the macro level to account for a person's intentions, failings or circumstances. By conceiving of the narratives as a complex matrix of non-hierarchical layering of details involving inconsistency and incongruity, and allowing the epistemological distances between the individual and infrastructure not to close, it is possible to work at making visible how different layers at the micro and macro levels may influence and interfere, and the relations of power that operate within and between. The approach is not to suggest that the local and micro is separated from wider sociopolitical and economic relationalities. Rather it involves not assuming the possibility and making moves too quickly to map wider structures and relationalities onto these local events in fixed or determined ways, which include linear modes of causality. I argue that this localised analysis is helpful within a vulnerable methodological approach because it can alter the ways stories are attended to, and extends the possibilities for different modes of telling.

Specifically within the micro layers, changing the tempo of the conditions of living and the conditions of knowledge production, as well as my mode of writing through slowing the pace, gave space and time to the stories and research, enabling them both room "to breathe" (Frank 2010). Attending to the temporal drag backwards and the slower modalities of time helped in providing a means of disruption across methodological and practical concerns. The notion of the backwards sweep becomes a technique with which to probe the productive potential of epistemological uncertainties within modes of telling. It helped to make visible the discontinuities and instabilities of narratives that change meaning when approached at varying tempos, when the story is moved not only forwards but backwards, and slowed and quickened within each space. In combining the micro political situating of the stories with changing temporal conditions, what came into sharper focus was how the close temporal proximities of events or actions to an acute moment in time may not

determine why, how and when people will act in particular ways.

This chapter has discussed the notion of being wounded within the production of research, using Barthes' element of being pricked and punctured as a means of receptivity to others. There is a non-volitional element to all research within the singularity of what unsettles or disturbs. It is in its singularity that such affective disturbance might become the potential for epistemic and symbolic violence and ethics. The temporal conditions of knowledge suggest a limited form of visibility that remains in tension with what is beyond comprehension, and outside the self. What wounds only enters and gets under the skin of the researcher, and such pricking, because of its affective nature, can give the illusion that it has an impact outside of the body that is wounded. However, it is also the very nature of this singular wound that points to responsibility. If puncturing is conceived as a form of solicitation, where a response is required before understanding or knowing what to do, and where the response is centred on the other, I suggest it has the potential to take the form of an ethical wound. As such a form of exposure, I consider vulnerable writing as an otherwise than knowledge, a passivity outside of comprehension that challenges feminist methods to remain open and receptive to what will always resist sense-making, while continuing to respond to the demand that we do justice to the lives of others.

In this chapter I have argued for the space to consider what might be generative of vulnerable forms of writing and how this might occur through working at the intersections of feminist, postcolonial and queer methodological practices and approaches. In disrupting the ways knowledge is produced by questioning what is known, and how and within the time that it comes to be understood, I suggest that a vulnerable methodology can help to extend a feminist reflexive practice by calling attention to the temporal conditions of affective puncturing and the risks of wounding being equated with reflexive comprehension. Therefore, instead of knowing as a "means of knowing what to do," the unsettled disturbance of not knowing that occurs through recognising the necessary construction of spatial and temporal boundaries to narratives becomes integral to the research engagement (Wiegman 2014, p. 7). I

propose that a vulnerable method does not attempt to resolve discomfort immediately through problem solving, or by forms of sense-making that utilise particular relational elements of cause and effect. Instead, what is at the heart of vulnerable methods are ongoing questions about what unsettles, about relations to the unfamiliar and strange, and about the erasure of the complexities of subjectivity when individuals and bodies and their actions do not fit or adhere to coherent themes of knowledge. This unsettled uncertainty of the research process, rather than foreclosing on further understandings, provides space for new forms of unknowing, and continued attempts at understanding the stories of others. In summary, a vulnerable methodology is one that works at the micro layers of stories, situating analyses through the parallel layering of the complexities of local and global concerns. Space and time become methods of disrupting the movement and boundaries of narratives. Engaging in a vulnerable method provokes a response that is non-volitional, singular, and occurs before and often in the absence of comprehension. This unsettled uncertainty of the research process, rather than foreclosing on further understandings, provides space for new forms of unknowing, and continued attempts at understanding the stories of others.

Chapter Three: Leorsin Seemanpillai

My brother and his wife moved to Melbourne in 2001 from Wellington, New Zealand. They were both drawn by the prospect of doubling their salaries in the faster growing Australian economy, and the ease in which they could migrate and gain immediate residency as holders of New Zealand passports. One Sunday during a trip to visit them in early 2006 the two of them drove me the 75 kilometres from Melbourne to Geelong. We ate at a local café and walked along the pretty waterfront promenade, once part of the Port of Geelong and redeveloped in the 1990s to stimulate the local economy by making it a local and tourist destination.[41] The Victorian government-owned organisation employing my brother moved its headquarters from Melbourne to Geelong in 2009 as part of a government scheme to grow the country's regional economies. Half the organisation's 700 employees left their positions rather than endure the commute from the city or take advantage of the government's A$30,000 incentive to purchase homes in the area. My brother was one of those who chose to commute and did so for three years until he found a job back in Melbourne. Geelong is place of wealth extremes, with multi-million dollar homes visible as you drive on the Princes Highway as it weaves around Corio Bay to the waterfront, as well as located in suburbs tucked away from the city centre. In 2014 Geelong was described as being among the most "economically vulnerable" areas of Australia, with rising unemployment and reductions in average working hours.[42] As a city still holding on to its working class post-war history of heavy industry that attracted workers to factories run by Ford, Alcoa and Shell, its residents have had to confront the decline of manufacturing in Geelong and throughout the country. Closures to the Geelong Ford plant with the loss of up to 510 jobs, the Alcoa aluminum smelter with 800 jobs, and Qantas removing 300 jobs at Melbourne's nearby Avalon Airport have resulted in loss of business to smaller companies within the manufacturing and engineering industries

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[41] Source: City of Greater Geelong website: "The Waterfront Story." Available at: http://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/common/public/documents/The-Waterfront-story-Geelong.pdf [Last accessed 24 March 2016].
[42] Source: Nick Toscano, "Geelong Region One Of The Most 'Economically Vulnerable' In Australia: Report," *The Age*, 30 June 2014. Available at: http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/geelong-region-one-of-the-most-economically-vulnerable-in-australia-report-20140630-zsra4.html [Last accessed 22 March 2016].

and those that serve those industries. Along with the closures, competition from Melbourne and cheaper options overseas have meant the city is adapting to both economic and cultural changes and what this might mean for its identity.[43]

This decline can also be considered in the context of how such economic changes influence the country's immigration policies. After World War II the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship had a target to increase the annual population by one percent per year, with the first migrants from Britain arriving in 1947. Between 1945 and 2010 seven million people had been granted a visa for permanent migration and in 2010 around 45 per cent of all Australians were born overseas, or had at least one parent who was born overseas.[44] In the 2011 Australian census, 31 percent of those living in Victoria were born outside of Australia, and 34 percent had both parents born overseas.[45] A recent poster published in 17 languages by the Australian Government notifies those outside of the country, "No Way: You will not make Australia home."[46] In early 2016, a High Court decision upheld the legality of the Australian Government to operate and pay for offshore detention in a third country. A Bangladeshi woman who was held at the Australian detention centre on the pacific island of Nauru, and taken to Australia for medical treatment where she later

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[43] Danny Lannen, "Geelong's Manufacturing Heartland Hurting Beyond Alcoa," *The Geelong Advertiser*, 6 June 2015. Available at: http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/news/geelong/geelongs-manufacturing-heartland-hurting-beyond-alcoa/news-story/dc4d045ab7112bca693b4dd47cf33de5 [Last accessed 27 February 2016].

[44] Source of the immigration statistics: Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship Annual Report 2009-2010 "Celebrating 65 Years of Nation-Building." Available at: https://www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/annual-reports/diac-annual-report-2009-10-full-version.pdf [Last accessed 24 March 2016].

[45] Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census for the State of Victoria, People – demographics and education, country of birth and birthplace of parents, stated responses. Available at: http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/2?opendocument&navpos=95 [Last accessed 22 March 2016].

[46] The "Counter People Smuggling Communication" poster can be found on the Australian Government Australian Customs and Border Protection website. There is also a similar version directed at people living in Australia. The text on the poster reads:
"No way: you will not make Australia home.
The Australian Government has tough border protection measures to combat people smuggling.
If you get on a boat without a visa, you will not end up in Australia. Any people smuggling boat attempting to enter Australian waters, or travel to New Zealand through Australian waters will be detected and intercepted. The rules apply to everyone: families, children, unaccompanied children, educated and skilled. No matter who you are or where you are from you will not make Australia home. People smugglers are dangerous criminals. Think again before you waste your money. People smugglers are lying."
Available at: http://www.customs.gov.au/site/offshore-communication-campaign-people-smuggling.asp [Last accessed 22 March 2016].

gave birth to her daughter, brought the legal claim.[47] The legality of the offshore detention centres meant that 267 individuals deemed to be "illegal maritime arrivals" and currently in Australia for medical treatment could be sent to the detention centre on Nauru. This number includes 91 children and babies.[48] The outcome led to protests and rallies across the country and online using the slogan #LetThemStay, in response to the ruling that "offshore processing of asylum seekers was constitutional."[49] Both the Premier for the state of Victoria and the Prime Minister of New Zealand made offers to settle the 267 individuals. As of 1 April 2016 more than half of the 267 individuals have been "granted community detention" within Australia.[50] In 2013 local bumper stickers in Geelong inform an unnamed audience, "Fuck off, we're full."[51] This is the country and the city of 220,000 people that Leorsin Seemanpillai would have arrived at in May 2013 after being held in a detention centre in Perth, and the city where he would wait for his claim for asylum to be processed.[52] It is this Geelong with its internal complexities—a regional city in a country that I am free to enter as a New Zealander and remain in without restriction despite my lack of citizenship, and my memories of the warm, pleasant Sunday spent visiting—that I evoked in my mind when reading about a weekend morning in late May 2014, when an off duty nurse noticed smoke coming from a nearby front yard.

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[47] Stephanie Anderson, "Offshore Detention: How the High Court's Ruling Might Affect Australia's Immigration Policy," *ABC News*, 2 February 2016. Available at: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-03/high-court-to-decide-future-of-offshore-immigration-detention/7134446 [Last accessed 28 February 2016].

[48] *The Age*, "Nationwide 'Let Them Stay' Rallies As Andrews Makes An Emotional Plea," 9 February 2016. Available at: http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/let-them-stay-rallies-across-country-andrews-makes-emotional-plea-20160208-gmovra.html [Last accessed 27 February 2016].

[49] "#LetThemStay: Thousands Gather In Australia-wide Protests Against The Return Of Asylum Seekers To Nauru," *ABC News,* 8 February 2016. Available at: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-08/let-them-stay-protests-against-return-of-asylum-seekers-to-nauru/7150462 [Last accessed 28 February 2016].

[50] Community detention refers to those awaiting decisions on their application for asylum being allowed to remain within Australia in the community, and not detained within either mainland or offshore immigration detention facilities. Leorsin Seemanpillai was living in Australia under such conditions. Helen Davidson, "At Least 196 Asylum Seekers Granted Community Detention After Protests," *The Guardian*, 1 April 2016. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/apr/01/at-least-196-asylum-seekers-granted-community-detention-after-protests [Last accessed 3 April 2016].

[51] Konrad Marshall, "One Man's Journey To Despair," *The Age,* 8 June 2014. Available at: http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/one-mans-journey-to-despair-20140607-39pvz.html [Last accessed 24 March 2016].

[52] According to the UNHCR, "An asylum-seeker is an individual who has sought international protection and whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined. As part of internationally recognized obligations to protect refugees on their territories, countries are responsible for determining whether an asylum-seeker is a refugee or not. This responsibility is derived from the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and relevant regional instruments, and is often incorporated into national legislation." Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Asylum Trends 2013 Report, published 21 March 2014.

In 2014 the World Health Organisation ranked Sri Lanka as having the fourth highest suicide rate in the world, with 28.8 persons per 100,000 committing suicide in 2012. In comparison, Australia had 10.6 persons per 100,000 commit suicide in 2012.[53] In 2014 that figure had risen to 12.0 persons per 100,000.[54] Australia's suicide rate has been referred to a "national tragedy," with the rate being close to the highest in a decade.[55] These Australian figures do not of course tell a cohesive story, and neither will those of Sri Lanka. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, statistics from 2014 indicate suicide is the fifth leading cause of death and accounted for 5.2 per cent of all Indigenous deaths compared to 1.8 per cent for non-Indigenous people.[56] Rates of suicide are at least double, with women 3.4 times and men 2.5 times as likely to commit suicide as non-Indigenous Australian women and men.[57] In 2014 the most common method of suicide in Australia for men and women was hanging, followed by poisoning by drugs.[58] In committing suicide in Australia in 2014, Seemanpillai chose neither option. Sri Lanka has one of the highest global rates of self-immolation, along with Egypt, Iran and India (Ahmadi *et al.* 2014; Laloë 2004).[59] This at least tentatively suggests that methods of suicide might be embodied and culturally and historically embedded in ways that are complex. For example, in the UK, less than two per cent of people committing suicide in England and Wales use burning as a method, whereas when examining South Asian UK populations specifically it is used in 8.45 per cent of deaths (Tuck *et al.* 2011). Investigating the cultural histories that are carried with us when we move, or when we are born in places with different cultural heritages than

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[53] Statistics taken from the World Health Organisation, *Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative* report, 2014.

[54] Source: The Australian Bureau of Statistics Causes of Death, Australia, 2014. Released on 8 March 2016. Mindframe National Media Initiative website, Facts And Stats About Suicide In Australia. Available at: http://www.mindframe-media.info/for-media/reporting-suicide/facts-and-stats#sthash.KKQFtMWF.dpuf. [Last accessed 22 March 2016].

[55] Oliver Laughland, "Australia's Suicide Rate Climbs As Experts Declare a 'National Tragedy', *The Guardian,* 26 March 2014. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/mar/26/australias-suicide-rate-climbs-as-experts-declare-a-national-tragedy [Last accessed 22 March 2016].

[56] Source: The Australian Bureau of Statistics Causes of Death, Australia, 2014. Released on 8 March 2016.

[57] Source: Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy,* May 2013. Accessed from the Australian Government Department of Health website. Available at: http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/305B8A5E056763D6CA257BF0001A8DD3/$File/Indigenous%20Strategy.pdf [Last accessed 22 March 2016].

[58] Source: The Australian Bureau of Statistics Causes of Death, Australia, 2014. Released on 8 March 2016.

[59] In Laloë's (2004) review of 55 global studies of "deliberate self-harm or suicide by fire" involving 3351 cases that were published within a 20 year period prior to 2004, India had the highest absolute number of cases in a single study, and Sri Lanka had the highest reported incidence per year (5.8 per 100,000 inhabitants). European and Far-East Asia (Hong Kong and South Korea) countries had a male predominance in cases and in most Middle Eastern and countries in the Indian sub-continent there was a female predominance in cases of self-harm or suicide by fire.

our families, as well as the banality of choosing from the quotidian resources and infrastructure at ones disposal, may help to inform understandings of how and why individuals choose to harm themselves. As this chapter will argue, the complexity of meaning within acts of self-harm points to forms of intentionality that may not always be associated with the ending of life. I suggest that such acts of harm must be read within a wider contextual frame that includes activities involved in ongoing, life-preserving activities.

In critically examining the life and death of Leorsin Seemanpillai, I take to heart José Esteban Muñoz's claim that often the "work of queer critique is to read outside of official documentation" (2009, p. 148). This also points to the necessity of challenging the meaning of documentation within the research process, and how documents are read. The archive I accessed that records elements of Seemanpillai's life and his death is made from the complex interweaving of the cultural practices and histories of Sri Lanka and Australia, which requires reading competing narratives and incomplete stories. It also involves being aware of the influence of both micro and macro level politics and political systems that guide the reporting of an act of self-harm by an asylum seeker living in Australia.

Leorsin Seemanpillai

Leorsin Seemanpillai was a Sri Lankan Tamil who sought refugee status after arriving in Australia in early 2013 on a boat from Indonesia. His story is incomplete, pieced together by the media from second and third-hand accounts and stories told by Seemanpillai to friends and work colleagues. The news reports are inconsistent, each archive disclosing partial accounts of Seemanpillai's life. Seemanpillai was born on Mannar Island, located to the north east of Sri Lanka, and grew up in the village of Pesali on the same island, where his father was a fisherman. Tensions between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority led to a civil war in the country that lasted from 1983 to 2009. Despite a majority Tamil population living in the area, Seemanpillai and his family fled Sri Lanka in 1990 after an uncle was killed, cousins tortured, and the

family home was burned to the ground. They arrived at a refugee camp in Tamil Nadu, India, where they have remained for over 25 years. Seemanpillai completed a diploma in Electrical and Electronics Engineering prior to his journey to Australia.[60] He returned to Sri Lanka in 2005 and stayed less than two years before going back to India. Seemanpillai told a work colleague in Australia that while he was in Sri Lanka "he had been tortured by the army, smashed over the head with the butt of an AK47 and left for dead".[61] I have not been able to find out the reason for his return to Sri Lanka. In 2012 Seemanpillai again left India, this time with a friend, where they paid their way onto a boat from Kerala that ran out of diesel and ended up in North Sumatra, Indonesia. They were held in the Belawan Detention Centre for three and a half months. I do not know where the boat was originally headed. His companion whom he travelled with spoke of both men being sexually assaulted while they were held in the detention centre. In late 2012 both men bribed officials, flew to Jakarta and then Kendari, and boarded a boat that headed for Darwin, where an Australian Navy plane spotted the vessel en route. The boat reached Darwin on 3 January 2013. Seemanpillai was again held in detention centres, this time in the Wickham Point Alternative Place of Detention until both men were transferred to the Yongah Hill Detention Centre in Perth in April. On May 7 2013 the pair were released and relocated to Melbourne, where they then moved into the first of several temporary houses in Geelong. The first two houses were short walks from St Paul's Lutheran Church where Seemanpillai began to volunteer.[62] Seemanpillai was granted a temporary bridging visa that allowed him to remain in the community and work while his application for a substantive visa was being processed.[63] It is unclear from the media reports whether Seemanpillai had

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[60] S. Karthick, "Lankan Refugee Kills Self in Australia, Kin Yearn for Last Look," *The Times of India*, 11 June 2014. Available at: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/Lankan-refugee-kills-self-in-Australia-kin-yearn-for-last-look/articleshow/36365630.cms [Last accessed 3 April 2016].
[61] Oliver Laughland, "The Life And Awful Death Of A Tamil Asylum Seeker in Australia," *The Guardian,* 5 June 2014. Available at:
http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/05/the-life-and-awful-death-of-a-tamil-asylum-seeker-in-australia [Last accessed 24 March 2016].
An earlier report by the same journalist states Seemanpillai returned to Sri Lanka in 2002. Oliver Laughland, "Asylum Seeker Who Set Himself on Fire Spent 18 Months in Limbo in Australia," *The Guardian,* 2 June 2014. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/02/asylum-seeker-who-set-himself-on-fire-spent-18-months-in-limbo [Last accessed 25 March 2016].
[62] This information about Seemanpillai's early life and passage to Australia is taken from Konrad Marshall, "One Man's Journey To Despair."
[63] From the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection website: "A bridging visa is a temporary visa that lets holders remain in the community while their immigration status remains unresolved. The type of bridging visa that is granted to an IMA (illegal maritime arrival) while they are waiting for their protection

already applied for a protection visa and was waiting to be interviewed and his claim to be processed, or whether he was on a temporary bridging visa waiting to apply for a protection visa.

It was reported in the media that Seemanpillai "feared being returned to Sri Lanka from where he had fled to India, after persecution from the Sri Lankan military."[64] To place Seemanpillai's visa status and his fear of being deported in context, under the Migration Act 1958, asylum seekers who arrive in Australia without a valid visa must be held in immigration detention until they are granted a visa or removed from Australia.[65] According to the UNHCR Asylum Trends Report, in 2013, the year that Seemanpillai arrived in Australia, the country received 24,300 claims for asylum, a 54 per cent increase from 2012. That figure represented average of 0.7 asylum seekers per 1,000 inhabitants. One third of claims in 2013 originated from the Islamic Republic of Iran or Sri Lanka.[66] The Australian government has stepped up its enforcement in recent years with the creation of "Operation Sovereign Borders," described on its own website as a "military-led border security initiative to stop the boats, prevent people risking their lives at sea in the hands of criminals, and preserve the integrity of Australia's immigration program."[67] Through Operation Sovereign Borders Australia has removed more than 20 boats from its waters in the past two years, "returning over 650 people to their country of departure."[68] Between October 2012 and September

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claims to be assessed is a Bridging visa E (BVE)." "IMAs living in the community on a BVE while they wait to apply for a protection visa are generally permitted to work." After individuals have applied for one of two temporary protection visas that are available (to be explained in the following section), they are granted a BVE that will be valid until their application has been decided. They have permission to work and have access to Medicare and other services. Source: The Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection website. Available at: http://www.ima.border.gov.au/en/Waiting-in-the-community [Last accessed 25 March 2016].

[64] Oliver Laughland, "Asylum Seeker Who Set Himself on Fire Spent 18 Months in Limbo in Australia."

[65] Source: Australian Human Rights Commission Asylum Seekers and Refugees Guide. Available at: https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/asylum-seekers-and-refugees-guide [Last accessed 28 February 2016].

[66] Statistics taken from the UNHCR Asylum Trends 2013 Report. The report advises that, "these figures, provided by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection in Australia, are based on the number of applications lodged for protection visas. They do not include asylum-seekers who arrived in Australia by boat in 2012 or 2013 and have not been able to lodge protection visa applications or who have been transferred to third countries for refugee status determination."

[67] Source: Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Border Protection website. Available at: http://www.border.gov.au/about/operation-sovereign-borders [Last accessed 28 February 2016].

[68] Source: Transcript of a video featuring MAJ General Bottrell, Commander Operation Sovereign Borders, "No Change to Australia's Boat Turn Back Policy." The video is produced by Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Border Protection and is shown on their website. Published 3 February 2016. Available at: https://www.border.gov.au/about/operation-sovereign-borders/counter-people-smuggling-communication/video-transcript [Last accessed 4 April 2016]. This process of removal includes the interception of boats by military vessels

2014 the Australian government deported approximately 1,300 Sri Lankan asylum

seekers to Sri Lanka and almost 2000 people have died while trying to reach Australia

between January 2000 and 9 November 2015.[69]

A number of media reports state Seemanpillai was receiving "community mental

health support and had been for some period of time."[70] It is also reported in 2014

that he "was admitted to hospital for mental health treatment in January this year for

about 15 days. Multiple sources said he attempted to take his own life during this

period."[71] There is mention in a media report of Seemanpillai writing reminders to take

Olanzapine (an atypical – newer – anti-psychotic medication) and Fluoxetine (an

antidepressant).[72] While "depression" is referred to more generally in some media

reports, no formal diagnosis is stated. However, this combination of drugs appears to

be suggestive of Seemanpillai being diagnosed with bipolar depression.[73] The

conflicting state of Seemanpillai's mental health and his intention to commit such an

act was disputed publically by the then Australian Immigration Minister, Scott

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and the screen of individuals seeking protection while at sea. In the case of an intercepted Sri Lankan vessel this has included handing individuals over to the Sri Lankan Navy. For those travelling from Indonesia it has involved the loading of those deemed ineligible for protection onto single-use lifeboats and the towing the lifeboats to just outside Indonesian waters. Source: Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, University of New South Wales, Fact Sheet: "Turning Back Boats," 26 February 2015. Available at: http://www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/publication/%E2%80%98turning-back-boats%E2%80%99 [Last accessed 4 April 2016].

[69] This statistic on Sri Lankan asylum seekers is taken from David Corlett, "The Nightmare of Returning to Sri Lanka," *Sydney Morning* Herald, 30 September 2014. Available at: http://www.smh.com.au/comment/the-nightmare-of-returning-to-sri-lanka-20140929-10njvg.html [Last accessed 28 February 2016].
The statistic on the number of people dying reaching Australia is taken from the Australian Border Deaths Database, which maintains a record of all known deaths associated with Australia's border since 1 January 2000 and can be viewed here: http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/thebordercrossingobservatory/publications/australian-border-deaths-database/ [Last accessed 28 February 2016]. This has been visually represented by the Australian Special Broadcasting Service (SBS): http://www.sbs.com.au/programs/living-with-the-enemy/border-related-deaths [Last accessed 28 February 2016].

[70] For example, see: "Refugee Hadn't Received Visa Outcome: Morrison," *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 2 June 2014. Available at: http://media.smh.com.au/news/federal-politics/refugee-hadnt-recieved-visa-outcome-morrison-5476592.html [Last accessed 28 February 2016].

[71] Oliver Laughland, "The Life And Awful Death Of A Tamil Asylum Seeker in Australia."

[72] Media source: Konrad Marshall, "One Man's Journey To Despair."

[73] While guidelines are different in Australia and the UK, *The Pharmaceutical Journal* reports an updated clinical guideline published by the UK based National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) on 24 September 2014 that recommends, "Fluoxetine is the only antidepressant that is effective in treating bipolar depression, and only in combination with the atypical antipsychotic olanzapine." 2 October 2014. Available at: http://www.pharmaceutical-journal.com/news-and-analysis/news/fluoxetine-is-the-only-antidepressant-to-be-used-in-bipolar-disorder-nice-says/20066690.article [Last accessed 24 March 2016]. The NICE guidance is available here: https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg185/chapter/Key-priorities-for-implementation. [Last accessed 24 March 2016]. Published Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrics clinical practice guidelines for mood disorders includes the combination as one of the options available for the management of treatment resistant biopolar depression using medications. Source: Malhi *et al.* 2015.

Morrison, who stated that immediately prior to his self-immolation "29-year-old Leo Seemanpillai had not been showing any signs he may try to take his own life on Friday when he was visited by a departmental case worker."[74] This was subsequently amended to clarify that the caseworker had telephoned rather than visited Seemanpillai. The government stated that no decision had been made on his protection visa application, suggesting that Seemanpillai's act of self-harm could not be definitively tied to the threat of deportation.

On the morning of Saturday 31 May 2014, 18 months after arriving in Australia, Seemanpillai poured a soft drink bottle containing petrol over his body and set himself alight at his home in the Geelong suburb of Newtown. Seemanpillai stripped off his burning clothes and moved from his yard towards the road: "People had heard his screams and seen "a ball of fire" running down the street outside his small orange brick flat."[75] An off-duty nurse who lived several doors down from Seemanpillai came to his aid in the street and took him to a local business where she poured bottles of water and wrung soaked towels over his body. Seemanpillai fell unconscious and died in hospital the next morning, as a result of suffering full thickness burns to 90 percent of his body.[76] Leorsin Seemanpillai was 29 years old.

The family of Seemanpillai, his parents and three siblings living in Tamil Nadu, were not granted temporary visas for Australia to perform last rites at his funeral. One of the barriers to visas being issued was the family's lack of travel documents. Again this points to the role and absence of documentation in understanding the life of Seemanpillai. The ability of the family to meet the requirement posed by the Australian government was self-evident: "…we have no travel documents or passports as we have been living in the refugee camp for more than 20 years," said Seemanpillai's father.[77] Without citizenship in India, the only option was to obtain Sri

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[74] Sarah Whyte, "Scott Morrison Denies Tamil Asylum Seeker Had Been Showing Suicidal Tendencies," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June 2014. Available at: http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/scott-morrison-denies-tamil-asylum-seeker-had-been-showing-suicidal-tendencies-20140602-39dsb.html#ixzz3HGSRRK00 [Last accessed 21 March 2016].
[75] Konrad Marshall, "One Man's Journey To Despair."
[76] Konrad Marshall, "One Man's Journey To Despair."
[77] Karthick S, "Family of Lankan Youth Lose Hope of Travelling to Australia To Attend His Funeral."

Lankan passports, which would have meant returning to Sri Lanka. In approaching the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees the family were informed they had no power to issue travel documents.[78] Scott Morrison stated that as Minister for Immigration he could not instruct his department to issue visitor visas and had instead "offered to repatriate Seemanpillai's remains."[79] The Australian Government could send Seemanpillai's body to Sri Lanka or India, but Seemanpillai's brother, Ezekeil, said the family feared for its safety in both countries and his parents wanted their son to be buried in Australia. "My dad and mum are scared as it is and they don't need this kind of scrutiny and trouble. And bringing his body here would only make matters worse for them."[80] While Seemanpillai's brother does have a passport, a letter from the Australian Immigration Department to Ezekeil Seemanpillai clearly outlined its concerns:

> You have stated that your purpose in visiting Australia is to attend your brother's funeral. I do not doubt the sincerity of your desire to pay your last respects to your late brother, however, I consider that the assessment above - that you do not genuinely intend temporary stay in Australia - outweighs this consideration.[81]

Leorsin Seemanpillai was buried, without any member of his family attending, on 18 June 2014 at St Mary of the Angels Basilica in Geelong, followed by a memorial service held at The Grovedale Baptist Church on 21 June.

Seemanpillai was the second Sri Lankan to self-immolate within several months in Australia. Reported as a "self-harm incident" by some media, the first was a man

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[78] Alexandra Kirk, "Leo Seemanpillai Death: Family Of Dead Asylum Seeker Denied Visa to Attend His Funeral," *ABC News*, 16 June 2014. Available at http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-06-16/family-of-dead-asylum-seeker-leo-seemanpillai-denied-visa-for-f/5527768 [Last accessed 1 February 2016].

[79] Deborah Gough, Leo Seemanpillai's Family To Miss Funeral, *The Age,* 8 June 2014. Available at: http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/leo-seemanpillais-family-to-miss-funeral-20140607-39q4x.html [Last accessed 1 February 2016].

[80] Alexandra Kirk, "Leo Seemanpillai Death: Family Of Dead Asylum Seeker Denied Visa to Attend His Funeral."

[81] Alexandra Kirk, "Leo Seemanpillai Death: Family Of Dead Asylum Seeker Denied Visa to Attend His Funeral."

named Janarthanan who had been seeking asylum.[82] Like Seemanpillai, Janarthanan had been living in Australia for 18 months on a bridging visa. He had been told recently that his application for a permanent protection visa had been denied and he would have to return to Sri Lanka. Janarthanan set himself on fire in Sydney in early April 2014. The government stated that Janarthanan "was found not to be owed protection and this decision was affirmed on appeal by the Refugee Review Tribunal."[83] Seemanpillai's death was followed by another act on 20 June 2014 by a Tamil asylum-seeker who poured petrol on his body within a house in Melbourne and then set himself alight (reports vary as to the extent to which he attempted to burn himself, with some reports stating petrol was poured on his legs). The man's housemates extinguished the flames, leaving him with minor burns. A report states that the man (who did not want his name published) had fled Sri Lanka "leaving behind his wife and young daughter, after security police broke his legs."[84]

I will now address some of the difficulties that emerged in the telling of Seemanpillai's story, and explain how they unsettle my understanding of the meaning of agency, action and intention and how these inform aspects of subjectivity. Through researching the story of Seemanpillai and, in the next chapter, the story of Mariam al-Khawli, I propose that different elements of vulnerability exist, not in structured, proximal causal relations that push toward homogenised, universal claims, but within located specificities. These specificities are connected to subjectivity, conditions and context, and do not lay claim to the transparency of intentions and the singular agency of those who self-immolate. I will take up these points in chapter five in relation to the spatial and temporal framing of self-immolation as a micro event and how the uncertainty and ambivalence of Seemanpillai and Khawli's actions is integral to the qualities of the event itself.

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[82] Oliver Laughland, "Tamil Asylum Seeker In Critical Condition After Setting Self On Fire," *The Guardian*, 10 Apri 2014. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/10/tamil-asylum-seeker-critical-after-setting-himself-on-fire [Last accessed 28 February 2016].

[83] Sarah Whyte, "Tamil Asylum Seeker Fighting For His Life," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 April 2014. Available at: http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/tamil-asylum-seeker-fighting-for-his-life-20140410-zqt6q.html. [Last accessed 28 March 2016].

[84] John Elder, Caroline Zielinski, "Housemates Save Tamil Asylum Seeker From Self-Immolation," *The Age,* 21 June 2014. Available at: http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/housemates-save-tamil-asylum-seeker-from-selfimmolation-20140621-zshc0.html [Last accessed 28 February 2016].

Reading for resistance

When I began developing the narrative focusing on Seemanpillai I read in his bodily movement the possibility of resistance. Seemanpillai moved from his yard to a busy street and in this I saw the potential for viewing his act as a particular expression of political agency or protest. It was the shifting movement of his body—and with this what I thought was the displacing of an act of self-harm that occurred within a private dwelling with one that occurred on a public street—that held my attention. After spending time with Seemanpillai's story, and questioning my own intentions for narrating his story, I realised that I wanted to find evidence of resistance because I felt that Seemanpillai had been denied this possibility by the media reporting on his self-immolation. I wanted Seemanpillai to be resisting the immigration policies of the Australian Government and hoped that his intention, his heroic resistance, would be exposed and made visible through the material physicality of his actions and movement. The news reports used language such as "despair" and I wanted to assign an agency to Seemanpillai that read his vulnerability as being mobilised as a political act as he burned his body and proceeded to run.

In originally positing that Seemanpillai's self-immolation should remain open to the possibility of resistance, and directing my investigation to such a possibility, I found myself becoming more hesitant, and less certain of allowing such an alternative to linger. Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) expresses concern with cross-cultural projects that make particular claims of resistance and draws attention to the shaky, unstable relationship between theory and the moment in which theorising takes place. In writing about the relationship of resistance to power, Abu-Lughod addresses how scholarship has shifted its concern from large-scale insurgency and revolution to subversions and smaller or local resistances. Within this work, she questions how and whether a particular analysis might be able to "bring to light the hitherto ignored or suppressed ways in which subordinate groups actively respond to and resist their situations" (p. 41). Connected to my desire to attribute a certain mode of agency to Seemanpillai's story, there remains a risk that research, even when intended to illuminate autonomy and self-empowerment, will document "forms of consciousness

or politics that are not part of…experience" (p. 47). In reflecting on Abu-Lughod's words and the information I had begun to gather to convey a particular narrative of Seemanpillai's life, the case came to be defined by its contradictions and the uncertainties of knowledge claims rather than any certainty that resistance could be ascribed and analysed.

I realised through working with the story of Seemanpillai that there had to remain an inherent level of uncertainty within this project. I continue to be unwilling to locate Seemanpillai's actions within a frame of resistance because I am uncertain as to what resistance may mean in this specific context. The difficulty of my attempts to connect self-immolation to particular forms of resistance and how vulnerability may be enacted returns me to Chandra Talpade Mohanty and what it means to be attentive to the micropolitics of context and subjectivity and the macropolitics of political systems and processes (1984). Such difficulty reflects, as Abu-Lughod points out, the contradictory and intersecting nature of resistance with forms of infrastructural power that are in operation, specifically in this context in the treatment of asylum seeks within Australia, while also acknowledging the cultural and political history of Sri Lanka as a further complexity interwoven through the micro and macro levels of the narrative (1990, p. 42).

A further tension involved in this work is the cost incurred to the dignity of Seemanpillai in attempting to explain his actions. Abu-Lughod asks such a question in the context of the events of 11 September 2001 in the United States and how Muslim women and Afghan women in particular came to play crucial roles within explanations. She argues that "projects of saving other women" have been used to justify invasions into countries and interventions into particular practices, such as *sati* in India and child marriages, and continued colonial rule (2002, pp. 789, 784). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has also written on the role of gender in explaining the reason for colonial interventions in India (1988). In the context of addressing the demand for explanations, Abu-Lughod questions why knowing about the culture of something, in order to recreate "an imaginative geography of West versus East" is more urgent than understanding the history of the politics and practices of government and the

development of repressive regimes (p. 784). She argues this "cultural mode of explanation" as a means of segregation and othering serves to ignore and erase "the complex entanglements in which we are all implicated" (p. 784). Connecting this to modes of telling stories about the lives of others, my own role and situated positioning in discussing an act that is rarely performed in Australia has the potential to set up a form of cultural othering where it serves to make self-immolation a means in which to give some form of meaning to the life of Seemanpillai through the creation of an imaginative spatiality divided into those who burn their bodies and those who do not. This may also serve to silence "political and historical explanations" and the role of Australian political systems and policies in such history in favour of cultural reasons (p. 784). I suggest this sets up a number of intersecting tensions and dualities. These include the documenting of Seemanpillai's life and the psychological state that may have led to his death, the meanings that are invested in self-immolation, and understanding the history and politics of immigration policies that create situations where death and self-harm become accepted by-products of closed borders (Whitley 2014). To negotiate these tensions and the dangers of assigning cultural explanations, and the absence of acknowledging the specificities of cultural and social histories, I want to consider the macropolitical landscape and infrastructural forms of power in operation during Seemanpillai's life in Australia, and how that may influence understandings of resistance and its relation to agency.

What was on Seemanpillai's mind? This is the question of intention that is asked both directly and in other more oblique ways within media reports. In an Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) news report, a representative from the Tamil Refugee Council in Australia states that Seemanpillai was "severely depressed."[85] This depression was credited to the lack of a decision on his application for a protection visa. A spokesperson from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre stated, "it was six months before Mr Seemanpillai had been allowed to make his refugee status claim

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[85] "Death of Sri Lankan Asylum Seeker Leorsin Seemanpillai in Geelong A 'Tragic Accident', Says Scott Morrison," *ABC News,* 2 June 2014. Available at: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-06-02/scott-morrison-warns-asylum-seeker-assumptions-geelong/5493656 [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

and after 18 months he still hadn't had an official interview."[86] Due to this, Seemanpillai had been "living in fear" of the possibility of being sent to Sri Lanka. Trevor Grant from the Tamil Refugee Council in Australia had met with Seemanpillai and stated: "A lot of these asylum seekers are telling us that they would rather die here than go back to Sri Lanka and possible torture. Perhaps that is what was in Leo's mind."[87] The Immigration Minister Scott Morrison says that Seemanpillai's death by self-immolation was a "terrible and tragic accident" and "I frankly don't think anyone is in any position - to draw any conclusions about what is in a person's mind in this situation."[88] The blame directed towards the Australian Government's immigration policies is consequently directed away. Yet to consider that Seemanpillai's death could be read as an accident or as an irregularity within the population of asylum seekers goes against the government's own statistics. During the period in which Seemanpillai was in Australia the rate of self-harm incidents by those held in Australian-run detention centres alone increased 96 per cent in the space of one year, from 229 recorded incidents in 2012-2013 to 449 in 2013-2014, of which 8 resulted in death.[89] While Seemanpillai was not currently being held in a detention centre and was living in the community, he had been detained within such centres in Australia and Indonesia, and his visa status was no more certain. In describing the psychological trauma of being in a period of waiting, a close friend of Seemanpillai's and an advocate at Rural Australians for Refugees, Cathie Bond, stated in a media report, "Such is the terror of being sent back … they know they will be picked up within days. They're totally vulnerable."[90]

The period in which Seemanpillai lived in Australia coincided with a significant period

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[86] Lisa Martin, "Alleged Freeze On Asylum Seeker's Claim," *The Australian,* 2 June 2014. Available at: http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/latest-news/horrific-burns-kill-asylum-seeker/story-fn3dxiwe-1226939452808 [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

[87] "Death of Sri Lankan Asylum Seeker Leorsin Seemanpillai in Geelong A 'Tragic Accident', Says Scott Morrison."

[88] "Death of Sri Lankan Asylum Seeker Leorsin Seemanpillai in Geelong A 'Tragic Accident', Says Scott Morrison."

[89] Source: Freedom of Information request from The Guardian Australia to the Australian Government Comcare. Referenced in Paul Farrell, "Australian-Run Asylum Detention Centres See Sharp Rise In Serious Incidents, *The Guardian,* 20 January 2015. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/21/australian-run-asylum-detention-centres-see-sharp-rise-in-serious-incidents [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

[90] Konrad Marshall, "Leo Seemanpillai took his own life as he gave up hope of refuge," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 June 2014. Available at http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/leo-seemanpillai-took-his-own-life-as-he-gave-up-hope-of-refuge-20140602-39etg.html [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

of change in the country's immigration policies. A federal election was held in September 2013 and saw a change in government from the centre/left Labour party to a centre/right Liberal/National party coalition. There is a claim in some media reports that processing delays and the length of time he waited led to Seemanpillai's death, and so I examined further what was occurring at a national level during this time. In November 2012 the Labour party-led Australian Government introduced a "non-advantage" principle applied to people who arrived by boat to Australia without visa documents after 13 August 2012 and for all future arrivals, which included Seemanpillai. In practice it meant that rather than being transferred "offshore for regional processing" to Nauru or Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, some people would be processed while living in Australia. However, those processed outside of detention centres would not have an advantage over those held in the detention centres in either processing time or outcomes.[91] The government stated "they will not however be issued with a permanent Protection visa if found to be a refugee, until such time that they would have been resettled in Australia after being processed in our region."[92] By the end of November 2014, 30,000 asylum seekers were awaiting claims for protection, with 25,000 living on community bridging visas, of which Seemanpillai had been one.[93] At the time of Seemanpillai's death it had been claimed that the Australian Government had not been processing applications for claims of protection. One reason provided for this delay was the need by the government to pass new

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[91] As well as its offshore detention centres, Australia currently operates four immigration detention centres (IDC) within the country and one on Christmas Island. These are "for people who have overstayed their visa, are in breach of their visa conditions or who have come here without a valid visa. People who are refused entry into Australia at international airports and seaports may also be detained in IDCs. This type of facility provides accommodation for medium and high risk detainees and the majority of the population are single adult males." Source: Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection website, "Immigration detention facilities." Available at: https://www.border.gov.au/Busi/Comp/Immigration-detention/facilities [Last accessed 1 April 2016].
[92] The information is taken from a media release issued on 21 November 2012 by Chris Bowen MP, Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, "No Advantage Onshore For Boat Arrivals." Available at: http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressrel%2F2060961%22 [Last accessed 21 March 2016].
[93] As of 29 February 2016, there were 576 people were living in the community "after being approved for residence determination" and 28,738 were living in the community after the granting of a Bridging Visa E (for "illegal maritime arrivals," and the visa provided to Seemanpillai). There were 1,753 people being detained in "immigration detention facilities" including on the mainland and Christmas Island. There were 1,379 people being detained in the offshore detention centres on Nauru and Papua New Guinea. Of those held in detention within Australia or on Christmas Island, 25.9 per cent had been held for longer than 730 days, with the average being 464 days. There are no figures recorded within this report for Nauru and Papua New Guinea. Source: Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection "Immigration Detention and Community Statistics Summary," 29 February 2016. Available at: https://www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/statistics/immigration-detention-statistics-29-feb-2016.pdf [Last accessed 2 April 2016].

legislation. In November 2014 the Immigration Minister estimated it would take up to three years to work through the backlog once the temporary protection visa legislation it was supporting was passed.[94] On 5 December 2014, which is after Seemanpillai's death, the Australian Parliament passed legislation to introduce a Temporary Protection visa (TPV) valid for up to three years, and a Safe Haven Enterprise visa (SHEV) valid for five years. After that period TPV applicants are only eligible to apply for another TPV or a SHEV.[95] As part of this new legislation the Government stated it is "committed to not granting Permanent Protection visas to people who arrived illegally and engage Australia's protection obligations."[96] The Department of Immigration and Border Protection is currently inviting people who "arrived illegally by boat on or after 13 August 2012 and who are eligible for onshore processing to apply for a protection visa." [97] Due to the numbers, people are invited to apply in the order they arrived. On the department's website as of 25 March 2016, the department is now inviting those who arrived between 13 August 2012 and 30 April 2013. Seemanpillai arrived in Australia on 3 January 2013. In considering the macropolitics of how such immigration policies are connected to the countries of origin of asylum seekers and the relations that these countries share, I note that it was reported in the Australian media that with the change of Government in Sri Lanka in early 2015, the new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe claimed the Australian government was silent on alleged human

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[94] Source of these statistics on the number of asylum seekers and the lack of processing of claims: Stefanie Balogh, "Push To End Asylum Claim Uncertainty," *The Australian,* 26 November 2014. Available at http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/immigration/push-to-end-asylum-claim-uncertainty/story-fn9hm1gu-1227134861799 [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

[95] There are differences between these two temporary protection visas and the eligibility to apply for other substantive visas. The TPV allows people to "live and work in Australia for up to three years. You can access Medicare, social security benefits (Centrelink), job matching and short-term counselling for torture and trauma where required." Source: The Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection website. Available at: https://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Visa-1/785- [Last accessed 25 March 2016]. The SHEV requires the person to reside in a regional location (outside of the main cities) of Australia. "One benefit of this visa is that you might be eligible to apply for other substantive visas later on (but not a permanent Protection visa) if we assess that you meet the SHEV pathway requirements and provided that you meet the application requirements of those visas. You will meet the SHEV pathway requirements if, for at least three and a half years while on this visa, you have been: employed in regional Australia and have not received certain social security benefits; enrolled in full-time study in regional Australia, or; a combination of the above." Source: The Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection website. Available at: https://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Visa-1/790-. [Last accessed 25 March 2016].

[96] Source: Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection Fact Sheet on Safe Haven Enterprise Visas, July 2015. Available from the Refugee Council of Australia website: http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Fact-Sheet-Safe-Haven-Enterprise-visas.pdf [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

[97] The Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection website. "Illegal maritime arrivals." Available at: http://www.ima.border.gov.au/en/Waiting-in-the-community [Last accessed 25 March 2016].

rights abuses in Sri Lanka in order to secure co-operation from the former Mahinda Rajapaksa-run government to stop people smuggling by way of boats sent to Australia. The Australian government has previously stated for the public record that "it is not its place to publicly lecture Sri Lanka on human rights."[98]

In this context, I suggest that it is difficult to know if Seemanpillai meant his act of self-immolation to be anything other than a private moment of anguish and the media reporting never affords Seemanpillai such ambivalence. In attending to such a scene and the public nature of his death, I want to resist reading Seemanpillai's behaviour through a singular mode of agency. In this vein, Lauren Berlant warns that the habit of representing the intentional subject can begin to look "deeply overmeaningful," where both action and lack of action can be read as "heroic placeholders for resistance to something, affirmation of something, or a transformative desire" (2007, p.757). Berlant's words return me to my hesitancy in understanding what resistance may mean in the context of Seemanpillai's life. I suggest that the experience of living on a temporary visa waiting for a response from the government could be read through Berlant's notion of slow death, which I have described in chapter two as populations "wearing out in the space of ordinariness" (p. 761). Berlant argues that in scenes of slow death "a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life, agency can be an activity of maintenance, not making...sentience, without full intentionality" (p. 759).[99] Berlant proposes that it is necessary to attend to the "varieties of constraint and unconsciousness that condition ordinary activity"(p. 757). It becomes possible to consider that Seemanpillai was engaged in an amalgamation of slow death forms of self-maintenance, where despite his attempts at reproducing a life of ordinariness, volunteering at church and in aged care, being employed to clean trucks and mow lawns, the life he led was conditioned by the uncertainty of his legal right to stay in the country. Seemanpillai's life is described in similar terms by a spokesperson for the Geelong Combined Refugee Action Group, "At the end of the day he was a normal

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[98] Amanda Hodge, "Sri Lanka Abuse Silence 'Price of Boats Deal'," *The Australian,* 23 February 2015. Available at http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/foreign-affairs/sri-lanka-abuse-silence-price-of-boats-deal/story-fn59nm2j-1227234601817 [Last accessed 21 March 2016].
[99] Where Lauren Berlant distinguishes being making and maintenance (2007, p. 759), I use the term "self-making" with this thesis more broadly and propose that self-making activities can involve self-maintenance and self-continuity.

lovely young bloke just trying to do the best he could and hold out as long as he could, and he couldn't hold out any longer."[100]

In thinking about Seemanpillai's death I find myself thinking about his agency, about what agency means when seeking government protection, and the relation of agency to intentionality. How might normative notions of agency restrict the understanding of the agency invested in decisions made regarding activities that threaten one's own life? Berlant argues that we cannot take for granted that people are acting for the purpose of engaging in, and responding to "projects of self-extension," because this narrowly defined notion of agency erases the forms of agency also required to complete tasks that are needed for self-preservation (p. 758). She argues that we need to attend to these complexities in living because "self-continuity and self-extension are two different things" (p. 758). Related to this, Berlant asks what sovereignty means in the time and space of ordinary living, and what it means to have agency in the "getting by, and living on" of quotidian living (p. 759). What does this version of everyday living mean for asylum seekers such as Seemanpillai when existing in a position of extreme precarity with regards to immigration status?

Seemanpillai kept a journal, with his entries exposed and published within several media reports. I read the entries, aware again of the shift between the public and private, and whether reading Seemanpillai's journal allows me to "know" his story more fully. I know little of his journal, when it was started, what he chose to disclose and describe, how much was written, and in what language it was written (there is no mention in the media of having it translated or the language Seemanpillai used to write his journal entries). In one media report I learn that "friends found Leo Seemanpillai's journal open on his bed. Within its pages a story of immeasurable endurance and pain had been faithfully charted—day by searching day."[101] In the entries selected for publication, his diary documents the routine activities of living, his hopes, and his emotional responses to his situation. In analysing the diary of Subbalakshimi, a Tamil woman who is also the subject of the biography *Fragments of a*

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[100] Danny Lannen, "Asylum Seeker Leo Seemanpillai's Tragic Death," *Geelong Advertiser,* 3 June 2014. Available at http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/news/geelong/asylum-seeker-leo-seemanpillais-tragic-death/story-fnjuhovy-1226940697955 [Last accessed 21 March 2016].
[101] Danny Lannen, "Asylum Seeker Leo Seemanpillai's Tragic Death."

Life: A Family Archive, written by her granddaughter Mythili Sivaraman, Kamala Visweswaran uses her journal as an archive to try to understand what such entries may reveal as to the parameters of a woman's agency (1994, p. 145). I compare this possibility for the emergence of particular knowledge in what I read of Seemanpillai's journal. ''Attend to the cooking class, attend to the English class, May 7 - come to Melbourne.'' ''I hope to find … work as a social work. I hope to help … in orphans in sri lanka. I hope to enjoy … the peace and quiet.'' In September 2013 he wrote in his journal: ''Thursday - I have no sleeping. Friday - bad dreams, darkness. Saturday - I sleep 3 hours. Sunday - my birthday.'' The media article that discloses his journal states that Seemanpillai's entries move between hope and hopelessness: "If I'm deported back, torture is certain because I'm a Tamil'' and ''In the midst of rejection stand tall. Life is hope."[102] In February 2014 Seemanpillai checked into a mental health facility and tried to hang himself with a towel while staying there. The media reports that "Outwardly Leo was upbeat, visiting friends and calling people." The day before he died they said he sounded ''happy'', ''brighter'' and ''more alert than he had in a long time''."[103] The contradictions evident in the conflicting diary entries appear as both forms of self-continuity and self-extension, where they seem to become interwoven through the effort and endurance required to remain in a place where visa status tells you that you will never belong.

I am uncertain as to what can be understood from Seemanpillai's journal, and I am aware of the violence of reading the published writing of someone who never gave their permission for personal thoughts to be shared. This connects back to the tension presented by the demand for intention; the journal is made public and comes to represent an absent yet fully intentional subject. Visweswaran asks whether it is "possible to produce an interrogative text without interrogating a subject" (p. 62). In this case such a question seems fraught with difficulties because the journal comes to occupy the position of the psyche; to read his journal is to know Seemanpillai. And yet I do not learn more about Seemanpillai's state of mind from reading his journal than I might have guessed. In considering the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) drawn

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[102] Source of Seemanpillai's journal entries: Konrad Marshall, "One Man's Journey To Despair."
[103] Konrad Marshall, "One Man's Journey To Despair."

upon in chapter two, even if the journal entries did definitively point towards Seemanpillai's movement to self-harm, what more did we need to know about the psychological state of awaiting an outcome for a protection visa that would be a surprise?

The narrative I have constructed from media reports that tell the story of how Seemanpillai came to die is neither cohesive nor consistent, and neither is his death. Seemanpillai completed his last shift at the Asphalt Paving Services warehouse on 29 May, two days before he died, and left his work locker with personal items that remained there. Did this suggest that he had intended to return the following week? The night before he took his life he met a friend and showed her pictures of him at work.[104] The next morning, Seemanpillai started to run as his body began to burn. He ran from his yard onto a public street screaming. He began taking off his burning clothes. He stood in the street in his underwear screaming. These are actions associated with someone who, while having committed an act that is connected to self-harm, may also, at the same moment, be resisting pain and possible death. The contested notion of intentionality and its relation to suffering is also addressed in Lata Mani's work analysing the representations of *sati* – widow burning – in India and how the debate was primarily shaped by a colonial discourse (1998, p. 1). As I have described in chapter two, Mani argues that women who burned were "neither subjects or even the primary objects of concern in the debate on its prohibition" (p. 2). Discussion fails to focus on the women themselves, and the materiality of pain and suffering endured by women on the funeral pyre remains strikingly absent from the terms of debate (pp. 75-76). Mani documents colonial eyewitness accounts of incidents of widow burning and narrative accounts of women's actions and intentions prior to and at the pyre. The representations of women within such discourse are framed as either "heroines" or "victims" (p. 162), a binary echoed by Spivak in her work on *sati* (1999, p. 291). Mani argues that these "poles preclude the possibility of a female subjectivity that is shifting, contradictory, inconsistent" and remains contested in accounts where the "widow escapes or is successfully dissuaded from burning" (p. 162). This constricted and compressed notion of agency as an either/or

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[104] Oliver Laughland, "The Life And Awful Death Of A Tamil Asylum Seeker in Australia."

negative/positive alternative links to representations of Seemanpillai and the contradictory nature of his subjectivity.[105] Seemanpillai is happy, bright, and alert, he talks about work, gives blood, and leaves his items neatly placed in his locker. Seemanpillai attempts to hang himself, he calls refugee advocates querying whether he will be sent back to Sri Lanka, calls the friend with whom he journeyed to Australia and asks, "why are we being punished?"[106] Seemanpillai cooks dinner for a friend a week earlier and seems happy. He sees a friend off on a trip two days before he died. The mental health caseworker that telephoned him says there was no indication of suicidal thoughts. When Seemanpillai self-immolated he began to run, crying out and removing his burning clothes. As his subjectivity shifts, Seemanpillai remains neither exclusively a victim nor a hero.

Mani writes that eyewitness accounts, for which I am reliant on in discussing Seemanpillai's life, emphasise the complexity of talking about motivations and conceiving of consciousness as "a dynamic process" (p. 164). Did Seemanpillai experience a "change of heart" when he began to burn and experience pain? Was his running and stripping off the clothes that were burning an attempt to save himself, or an expression of the grief he may have felt? The accounts of Seemanpillai's self-immolation do not focus their attention on the "palpable, visceral, torture" of self-immolation (p. 177). As I have described in chapter two in relation to both cases, Seemanpillai is represented as an "agent in pain," to use Mani's phrasing, through the psychological experience of being an asylum seeker, but not through his physical suffering through burning (p. 177). This becomes a "terrible and tragic accident," without mention of the materiality of that accident, or what Seemanpillai in pain might have been experiencing. In the accounts of self-immolation, Seemanpillai is described in ways that mirror the accounts of *sati* that Mani documents, he becomes a body whose response to burning is described as a "ball of fire" running down the street. Seemanpillai's subjectivity disappears through, in Mani's words, "a type of description

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[105] See Shoshana Felman's (2003) work on radical negativity where Felman contends that the negative suggests a productive scandal in proposing the non-opposition of terms and as such is irreducible to the "symmetrical...contrary of the "positive,"" within a normative system (2003, p. 101). For Felman negativity is without positive reference, and escapes the assumption of a "negative/positive alternative" (p. 104).
[106] Konrad Marshall, "One Man's Journey To Despair."

which effaces the agency involved in the struggle, rewriting it as a purely physical, animal, reflex" (p. 177). In returning to the question of resistance and its relation to vulnerability and the endurance involved in precarity, the eroding of Seemanpillai's agency in suffering, and what may be read as a struggle with death at the moment that he begins to burn, continues to confuse what resistance might mean in this context. Therefore the complexity of self-immolation sets up a problem with the relation between resistance and agency and how the silencing of the materiality of pain, and different materialities of endurance, can mask activities of struggle and self-maintenance and their varied agential forms.

Complicating practices of resistance in public and private spaces

While not explicit so far in the discussion of space, there is a notion of "queerness" within the ways I attempt to work with and displace the spatial and temporal registers within this project. In chapter one I discussed engagement with Elizabeth Freeman's (2010) notion of "queer time" which involves researching vulnerability "against dominant arrangements of time and history" (p. xi). While I described the ways in which temporal schemae within modes of telling get organised into consequential sequence (p. xi), this linearity of arrangement also occurs in depicting and marking movements between public and private spaces. In addition to the term queer as a challenge to readings of gender and sexuality, it can also be used more broadly to refer to a critical means of opening up alternative understandings. Connected to this, Muñoz describes "queerness" as "a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present...that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (2009, p. 1). This provides a thoughtful reference in which to consider the archive as a whole and what might be loosened, uncovered, or glimpsed by remaining with a feeling of uncertainty in working with and being worked on by materials. This also connects to Ann Cvetkovich's (2003) work on an "archive of feelings" and its points of entry. In the context of this project, Cvetkovich proposes that texts can be "repositories of feelings and emotions" that are encoded or worn within the content but also "in the practices that surround their

production and reception" (p. 7). In another point of entry for making visible what might be absent or silenced in texts and narratives, Robyn Wiegman refers to queer feminist criticism as a distinct body of scholarship "which attends to the condition of the present through the converging analytics of affect and time" (2014, p. 5). As a means of complication or disruption, Muñoz's notion of queer signals the exceeding of boundaries, and of operating at different spatial and temporal logics and tempos. It helps me to consider non-standardised forms of agential activities and affective qualities where, as I will describe in chapter four, embodied agential capacities and desires may not be directed towards normative forms of emancipation and self-empowerment (Asad 2000; Mahmood 2012).

In continuing to think about how the meaning of self-immolation changes according to its spatial arrangement and what intentionality may mean in this context, I consider how Farniyaz Zaker re-thinks agency through the ways private and public realms are constructed and made meaningful to individuals. Zaker uses art forms to provoke debate, and in this particular example, Zaker discusses in an interview with Mariam Motamedi Fraser (2014) how her installation *Pause in Movement* interrogates the nature of dwelling and its association with the dress/veil in Iranian society. The installation raises questions as to how concepts and objects relating to the private are separated and constructed through a certain materiality. Zaker argues in particular that through being worn, clothing creates "microcosmic dwelling places" (p. 5). In considering how agency is utilised by individuals in constructing microcosmic dwellings in their own worlds and on their own terms, and how this might represent the fractured, porous nature of spaces deemed to be public or private, I suggest Seemanpillai's movement from the yard to the street enables a similar interrogation of the use of space and how location influences the geographic politics involved in giving meaning to narratives of people's lives. Through the media accounts described earlier, the Australian Government determined Seemanpillai's death as private. In attributing the notion of the private to his death, I argue that the government was able to erase the suggestion that resistance may be connected with or form a relation to Seemanpillai's actions.

The actions of the government in this regard might be understood through an argument put forward by Talal Asad (2006) that is raised in Motamedi Fraser and Zaker's (2014) article. In working through the practices of French secularism and how this comes to be articulated and made visible within debates on the wearing of the veil in France due to the importance of religion within the Republic, Asad contends that the state gives itself "final authority to determine whether the meaning of given symbols is "religious" (p. 95). In considering if such meaning only takes place within a notion of the public sphere, Asad offers that because the state constructs "the legal distinction between public and private spaces" as such, "the scope and content of "public space"" is primarily a function of the state's power (p. 95). I propose that this analysis is useful when thinking about Seemanpillai and how in this instance, the state plays a role determining the meaning of self-immolation, the space in which it takes place, and by extension, the notion of resistance that could be applied to Seemanpillai's act. It meant that, as Asad asserts, the narrative of Seemanpillai's death presented in the media was itself embedded in this form of state power (p. 95).

Asad's interrogation of public spaces and the meaning assigned to particular forms of materiality positioned in each space further connects to conceptions of self-immolation. Asad blurs the distinction between the private and public and the relation of each to ethics and politics through a discussion of intentionality in the assumption of the veil by the wearer. Asad argues that when defined as a duty impelled by conscience, the wearing of the veil remains in the realm of ethics: "…*if* the wearer assumes the veil as an obligation of her faith, *if her conscience impels her to wear it as an act of piety*, the veil becomes for that reason an integral part of herself" (original italics) (p. 96). This shifts the veil away from a sign that communicates a particular meaning, that stands for something, and therefore marks a relation between the materiality of the object and the environment in which the sign carries meaning, to being "part of an orientation, a way of being" (p. 96). I connect this to the ambivalence of self-immolation as a concept discussed in chapter two. If the determination of the meanings of self-immolation is subject to the enactment of forms of state power, and the way that certain spaces are constructed, then I argue the materiality of its location, whether signified as private or public, ceases to signify the political agency and by

extension, the intention of the individual who performs it. The notion of self-immolation as a spatial practice, whereby the space in which it occurs can act as a sign intended to communicate the interior mechanisms of the subject, is ruptured.

Using Asad to think through the spatial practice of self-immolation is not to suggest that self-immolation signifies only some cultural or historical reality, 'as a response to the Sri Lankan civil war', or simply another sign, for example, of 'Sri Lankan culture', where both can be used to give self-immolation a stable meaning (p. 97). Within my research on self-immolation and in working with elements or qualities of vulnerability, the temptation is to treat self-immolation as a sign for politics. In the act of conceiving of self-immolation as a sign for something, the choice of installing within the sign's meaning a relation with resistance enables me then to make particular knowledge claims regarding the intentionality of Seemanpillai. This basis for politics suggests that there remains a form of intentionality in the act that can be understood in isolation from any cultural signification of self-immolation as means of suicide practiced predominately within certain cultures, or what it might mean to witness self-immolation in a location where it comes to be read as a non-normative method of suicide. This furthers the uncertainty in the relation between suicide and resistance seen in the actions of Seemanpillai, and it remains a challenge to be addressed within ethno and Eurocentric readings of self-immolation. My intention in disrupting the fields of public and private and their relation to politics is to remain hesitant in reading Seemanpillai's act of self-immolation through resistance and a singular modality of agency. In chapters four and five I consider alternative ways of thinking about agency through multiple modalities and attempt to refigure the acute flashpoint of self-immolation as an event.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have raised the question of how agency is conceptualised within modes of telling, and in particular in narratives involving giving meaning to a person's death through reading actions as being predictive of intention. In chapter one I raised

concerns with the capacities of relational elements and the allure of consequential sequences of actions. I suggested that alongside examining relational capacities of vulnerability, nonsequential gaps and tears could be a means of disrupting the coherence of linear narratives. The difficulty in the demand for intention to be known, and the connection of intention to agential subjectivity, has come to be a core concern in researching vulnerability. While I have addressed this problem of intention through examining the role of temporal registers within the narrative, it is also possible to see how a localised focus on microcosmic dwellings, whether this be Seemanpillai's front yard, or inside the locker at the asphalt company where he worked, disrupts the linear consequential sequences of time and space and plays an important role in how narratives can resist "the grasp of comprehension" (Harrison 2007, p. 591).

The problem of intention led me away from providing an interpretation of Seemanpillai's act through seeking relational elements or connective forms of intelligibility: I stopped looking for reasons why Seemanpillai performed a particular action, and instead let the details and conditions and context exist in simultaneous layers. What is raised in this chapter and that I will continue to address through this thesis is the connection of vulnerability to other embodied concepts, that of agency, action, and intention. It was through writing a narrative of Seemanpillai that I became aware of the role of agency and the pressure I felt to ascribe a certain mode of agential action through my interpretation of his life and his actions. I thought there must be enough information available to propose reasons, to state this is what was on Seemanpillai's mind, this is why he set himself on fire. I began this project with such a goal. I wanted to write a narrative of heroic resistance. Reading his journal became a pivotal moment in becoming unsure as to what I could say regarding the life of Seemanpillai. The public exposure of his thoughts, without any knowledge of why he had recorded them, and what he had chosen to record, is intensely vulnerable. The discordant elements of his story, the conversations with friends, the ways in which he created a community and engaged in community building activities such as translating for other Tamil asylum seekers, that are bound together with reported attempts to harm himself, continue to sit uneasily. Seemanpillai on many levels was significantly vulnerable, and yet he also constructed temporalities of stability and continuity in his

life through his work, volunteering, and his maintenance and care of social and familial relationships.

At a certain point, when I was struggling to resolve the discordant elements of the story I was piecing together within a narrative, I stopped and realised, I do not know. I do not know why Seemanpillai set himself on fire. It became a turning point to admit the vulnerability involved in not having access to knowledge. It made me feel exposed in relation to the project, that I was writing about a case that I could not figure out. I also became increasingly uncomfortable with the forms of symbolic violence I was enacting upon a narrative that I had no permission to write. What was the cost incurred to the dignity of Seemanpillai, to his family? This led me to examine the ways that my understanding of agency might be impacting the particular narrative that I was developing. In this chapter I began to raise the question of agency through the work of Berlant and Abu-Lughod. Shifting to consider agency as involving forms of self-maintenance, rather than self-extension, opened up space to consider what I was placing upon the narrative by my own conception of agency as involving forms of autonomy and political resistance or subversion. In thinking about Berlant's argument for there to be more to agency than engaging in "projects of self-extension," this led me to look for alternative means in which to articulate agential activities. Seemanpillai became part of Australian society and he integrated into a community. Remaining with the details of Seemanpillai running on to the street, and considering how that might have been illustrative of self-continuity, refocused this project to begin examining the relation between vulnerability and endurance. What might forms of self-continuity mean in this context and how was I interpreting this?

I suggest that the story of Seemanpillai illustrates how specificities of location, culture and history can embed themselves within the elements of vulnerability. While I have not addressed specific qualities of vulnerability within this chapter, in chapter four I describe what happened when I returned to the materials to work slowly at the layers of the ordinary, everyday activities in which Seemanpillai participated. The role of the temporal became increasingly important, uncovering ways in which time plays out across bodies and is lived. The use of verbal and non-verbal language and forms of

communication and its placement in time came into sharper focus in attending to the story of Mariam al-Khawli. While not wanting to make the stories commensurable, the different methods involved in the telling of each narrative came to help interrogate both the stories and my relations to them and the vulnerable processes of writing.

In the following chapter that focuses on Khawli, where the death of someone by burning is attended to in different ways to that of Seemanpillai, I ask: How might self-immolation become what is remarkable and the death that often closely follows it, so unremarkable? How might this begin to unstitch the operations of temporal registers within elements of vulnerability?

Chapter Four: Mariam al-Khawli

Since the beginning of the civil war in Syria that started with pro-democracy protests in March 2011, more than 250,000 Syrians have died, and more than 11 million have been forced to leave their homes, which represents half the pre-war population.[107] For those remaining in Syria, 6.5 million citizens have been displaced within the country.[108] For the remainder, more than 4.81 million had left the country by mid March 2016 and registered with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR).[109] Within that figure, 1.067 million had registered as refugees in Lebanon as of 31 January 2016, a country with a population of just 4.4 million.[110] This led the UNHCR chief Antonio Guterres to state in 2014 that Lebanon now had "the highest per capita concentration of refugees worldwide."[111] By mid March 2016, 34.6 percent of Syrians registered with the UNHCR were aged between five and 17 years old, leading to concerns regarding children's access to education.[112] In the time that Mariam al-Khawli and her family lived in Lebanon no formal refugee camps were built in the country, and so those journeying from Syria lived among the general Lebanese population, often in impoverished conditions. Due to the numbers of Syrians arriving, visa restrictions implemented in January 2015 require Syrians to provide documentation as to their reason for travelling to Lebanon. This is the first time since Lebanon's independence in 1943 that Syrian movement across the border has been restricted.[113] As of mid March 2016 Turkey hosts 2.71 million Syrian refugees, Jordan hosts 636,040, Egypt hosts 119,301, and 245,909 are hosted by Iraq. Between April 2011 and January 2016, 935,008 Syrians

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[107] Source: Syria: The Story of the Conflict, BBC, 11 March 2016. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-26116868 [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

[108] Statistic taken from the UNHCR 2015 country operations profile. Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486a76.html [Last accessed 29 February 2016].

[109] Source: Syrian Regional Refugee Response Inter-Agency Sharing Portal. Figures last updated 16 March 2016. Available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php# [Last accessed 4 April 2016].

[110] Source: Syrian Regional Refugee Response Inter-Agency Sharing Portal.

[111] Kathryn Maureen Ryan, "Self-Immolation Case Highlights The Desperation of Syrian Refugees," *Syracuse College of Law Immunity Watch* website, 9 April 2014, accessed 22 March 2015, http://impunitywatch.com/self-immolation-case-highlights-the-desperation-of-syrian-refugees/.

[112] Source: Syrian Regional Refugee Response Inter-Agency Sharing Portal.

[113] Nour Samaha, "Syrians Worried Over Lebanon's New Visa Rules," *Aljazeera,* 5 January 2015. Available at: http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/01/syrians-worried-over-lebanon-new-visa-rules-20151525310687936.html [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

fleeing the conflict have sought safety in Europe, with 60 percent of those having made asylum applications in Serbia and Germany.[114]

Refugees registered with the UNHCR are entered into the PROGRES refugee registration database. When Mariam al-Khawli and her family registered in August 2012, each person received monthly food coupons (from September 2013 in the form of electronic pre-paid vouchers) from the World Food Programme (WFP) worth around US$30 per month.[115] The e-cards can be exchanged for food at any of the current WFP-contracted shops spread across Lebanon.[116] In September 2013 the UN issued an urgent appeal to make up the shortfall in funding required to meet the humanitarian crisis resulting from Syria's civil war. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon stated at the 68th General Assembly in a briefing on Syria that the UN had raised 40 per cent of the US$4.4 billion needed for Syria and neighbouring countries for that year. The consequences of the lack of funding were that "hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in Lebanon could face reductions in food aid."[117] A September 2013 report states that there was 27 percent funding of the US$1.7 billion UNHCR campaign for Lebanon, and that the UNHCR planned to switch to targeted assistance in October 2013, which would mean a certain percentage of individuals registered as refugees would no longer receive monthly food assistance. This was due to affect 28 percent of Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. At that time, at least 720,000 people had sought refuge in Lebanon.[118]

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[114] Source: Syrian Regional Refugee Response Inter-Agency Sharing Portal.

[115] More recent documents from 2014 by the WFP list the e-vouchers value at US$27 per month per person.

[116] Source: World Food Programme Syrian Response Fact Sheet: Lebanon, December 2014, http://home.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/communications/wfp263838~7.pdf

[117] "UN Appeals For Funds To Avert Cut in Food Aid To Syrian Refugees In Lebanon," *UN News Centre*, 17 September 2013. Available at: http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45875#.VQ1Y5WZ_lek [Last accessed 21 March 2015].

[118] "Funding Shortfalls Force UN To Cut Refugee Aid In Lebanon," *Middle East Online,* 5 September 2013. Available at: http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=61145 [Last accessed 21 March 2015]).
There are a number of reports on the escalating issue of funding shortfalls and what is required by the UN and its agencies to help support the influx of Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon. The figure of a US$1.7 billion then reappears in a media report in April 2014, which describes the UN appeal being 14 percent funded (Source: Yara Abi Nader, "Self-Immolation Highlights Woes of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: U.N.," *Reuters,* 2 April 2014. Available at: http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/02/us-syria-crisis-lebanon-refugees-idUSBREA311AE20140402 [Last accessed 22 March 2015]). The funding required is detailed in the 'Regional Response Plan for Syrian Refugees' covering the period January to December 2013 and included over 60 humanitarian organisations led by the UNHCR. The report is available from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Consolidate Appeals Process. There are numerous articles online citing threats to aid being cut due to lack of funding, and these continued through 2014.

Mariam al-Khawli[119]

Mariam al-Khawli, her husband, Ahmad al-Daher, and their four children, Ala, now aged 21, Amjad, 19, Aya, 17, and Abdul Hadi, 15, lived in Homs before the civil war.[120] Ahmad was the owner of a vegetable trading company and the family owned the building they lived in, where each of the children had their own room. Homs became a stronghold of the anti-government protests and the capital of the uprising when the civil war in Syria began in early 2011. In February 2012 Bashar al-Assad's government forces attacked Homs after the city had been under siege for months, with this fighting killing an estimated 700 people.[121] Khawli's husband Ahmad stated that during the 2012 attack, parts of their house were demolished and the family hid overnight as shells hit the building. Ahmad explains, "The children were terrified and I rushed them all into the bathroom because it had the most shelter. I will never forget their white faces; they were just waiting to die."[122] By morning their neighbours' houses had been destroyed. The family escaped across the Lebanese border into Qobbeh, on the outskirts of Tripoli.[123] Fighting continued in Homs and by May 2014 the city was under the control of Assad's troops. By mid 2014 the UNHCR had more than 352,000 people from Homs registered as refugees, at least a quarter of the pre-war population of the city. In 2012 Khawli and her family moved without any possessions to the neighbourhood of Bab Al Hadid in Tripoli where they paid US$200 a month to live in a single room within an apartment building.[124] After moving to Lebanon all of Khawli's children were enrolled in educational institutions. Khawli's eldest daughter, Ala, was studying business at the University of Jinah in Tripoli on an academic scholarship.

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[119] Mariam al-Khawli's name is spelt in English in different ways within the English language media reports I have been able to access. I have chosen to spell her name as Mariam al-Khawli as this is the most frequently used, but the spelling of Khawli's name will differ when I quote directly from media sources.

[120] The ages of Mariam al-Khawli's children were recorded in April 2014 within media articles and I have amended these to reflect the two years that has since past.

[121] BBC News, "Homs: Syrian Revolution's Fallen 'Capital'," 9 December 2015. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15625642 [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

[122] Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice," *Gulf News,* 27 April 2014. Available at http://fridaymagazine.ae/features/the-big-story/a-mother-s-sacrifice-1.1324656 [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

[123] Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."

[124] There is conflicting information as to the number of rooms that the family occupied. One article states they were living in "two small rooms in an apartment near the poor Bab al-Hadeed neighbour." Transterra Media/Tripoli and Karen Leigh, "Refugees in Grim Global Spotlight After Syrian Woman Self-Immolates in Tripoli," *Syria Deeply*, 27 March 2014. Available at: http://www.syriadeeply.org/articles/2014/03/4956/refugees-grim-global-spotlight-syrian-woman-self-immolates-tripoli/ [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

Amjad attended a vocational school where he was training to be a mechanic, and the two youngest children Aya and Abdul Hadi attended the free Imam school for refugees. While Khawli's children were still in education at the time of Khawli's self-immolation in early 2014, this was becoming a rarity.[125] With the length of the civil war and the number of children excluded from formal schooling, there is growing concern that a generation of Syrians may not be educated.[126]

In May and June 2013, the WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF conducted a Vulnerable Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) living in Lebanon. The VASyR is "a multi-sectoral annual survey aimed at understanding the living conditions and vulnerability profiles of Syrian refugees in order to guide respective responses."[127] The VASyR found that of the more than 1,400 Syrian households surveyed, approximately 72 percent of individuals (equal to 68 percent of households) continued to be sufficiently vulnerable to warrant continued food and non-food assistance.[128] In the survey, 70 percent of Syrian refugee children within the interviewed households did not attend school the week prior to the survey and 50 percent did not attend school during the previous year. Non-dependent household members were defined as those aged 16-59, which is drawn from the legal age for work being 16 years old in Lebanon.

Based on the outcomes of the VASyR conducted in May and June 2013, the WFP and UNHCR jointly reached a decision to "re-focus on food hygiene and baby kit assistance to the most vulnerable Syrian refugees through a targeting approach."[129] The targeting

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[125] In the context of Khawli's story, by the end of 2014, there were approximately 2.8 million Syrian children who no longer attended school. Within that number, 78 percent did not have access to school, and half of all children who are Syrian refugees living in neighbouring countries were out of school (Source: Save the Children *The Cost of War: Calculating the Impact of the Collapse of Syria's Education System on the Country's Future.* Available at: http://static.guim.co.uk/ni/1427711553264/Save-the-Children-Cost-of-W.pdf). A further issue facing children is language difference between the Syrian and Lebanese curriculum. In Lebanon, maths and sciences are taught in either English or French, while in Syria, these are taught in Arabic. For those living Lebanon, as is the case for Syrians who fled to other countries, in being faced with growing debt, a decision often has to be made by parents between education, where it is affordable and available, and their children working to support the family. Source: UNHCR website, "200,000 Syrian Refugee Children To Get Free Schooling In Lebanon," 2 October 2015. Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/560e96b56.html [Last accessed 2 April 2016].

[126] Patricia Mouamar, "Syrian Refugees: 'A Whole Generation Is Growing Up Displaced And Uneducated'," *The Guardian,* 15 March 2015. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/mar/15/syrian-refugees-a-whole-generation-is-growing-up-displaced-and-uneducated [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

[127] Source: ENN website: http://www.ennonline.net/fex/48/wfpevoucher.

[128] Wording taken from: WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2013 Report. Available at: https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=3853 [Last accessed 25 March 2016].

[129] Wording taken from the World Food Programme, "Verification Exercise: Preliminary Result March 2014."

exercise in Lebanon started in November 2013. The World Food Programme
Verification Exercise: Preliminary Result March 2014 report explains that the targeting
exercise meant that instead of all refugees receiving assistance as had been the case, a
new concept defining eligibility would now be used. Continued household eligibility for
assistance was based on the VSyR assessment that "approximately 30 percent of the
Syrian refugee population could meet their basic food and non-food needs without
engaging in irreversible negative coping strategies."[130] This meant funding would
remain available to the 70 percent of Syrian refugees with the highest "burden
scores."[131] These scores appear to be taken from the data gained at the point where a
person is registered with the UNHCR in the PROGRES database. As a result, in October
2013, the WFP stopped distributing food vouchers to around 30 percent of Syrian
refugees in Lebanon, or more than 200,000 people, whom the UN stated were not
dependent on the aid they received.[132] The *Verification Exercise: Preliminary Result
March 2014* report states "The families who were excluded according to the Burden
Index could appeal and request a revision of their case. All the families who appealed
received a verification visit to assess their vulnerability situation, by a team composed
by WFP, UNHCR and CPs."[133]

Khawli's family was excluded from receiving food assistance. I have attempted to trace
what was occurring with the UNHCR and its funding at the time that Khawli stopped

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[130] Wording taken from the World Food Programme, "Verification Exercise: Preliminary Result March 2014."

[131] The Burden Index and the resulting selection of refugees to continue to receive assistance is explained in the World Food Programme *Verification Exercise: Preliminary Result March 2014* report: "Households eligible for assistance were selected based on a criterion known as Burden Index. This index assigned a score to each registration case according to the information recorded during the UNHCR registration process of refugees and hence available in the UNHCR PROGRES database. This score, mainly based on the demographic characteristics, aimed to rank registration cases according to their level of dependency as proxy of household ability to generate income to cover the needs of all household members. The 70 percent of registered Syrian refugees with the highest burden scores, theoretically reflecting the highest degree of dependency, were provided with food, hygiene and baby kit assistance."

[132] "Syrian Refugees Worried As UN Targets Its Food Aid In Lebanon," *IRIN*, 9 October 2013. Available at: http://www.irinnews.org/report/98909/syrian-refugees-worried-as-un-targets-its-food-aid-in-lebanon [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

[133] In full the appeal process is: "Being aware of the limitations of the Burden Index, WFP, UNHCR and various Cooperating Partners (CPs) designed a comprehensive appeal and verification process to guarantee the accuracy of the targeting roll-out, therefore ensure that those most in need were receiving assistance. The families who were excluded according to the Burden Index could appeal and request a revision of their case. All the families who appealed received a verification visit to assess their vulnerability situation, by a team composed by WFP, UNHCR and CPs. In addition, all the households living 500 meters above sea level were visited for their vulnerability status verification due to their special vulnerability risk during winter, apart from the submission of an appeal." Source: World Food Programme *Verification Exercise: Preliminary Result March 2014*.

receiving assistance, however I do not know if Khawli's exclusion was a direct result of the VSyR assessment exercise, or exactly when Khawli was informed of her family's exclusion. Khawli states that she received aid from the UN from August 2012 to August 2013. UNHCR spokesperson Joelle Eid in an article on Khawli says:

> Miriam's family were excluded from aid in 2013…but at the time she did not appeal so she was not visited by a protection team and not inspected at a closer level. She did, however, then approach our offices in Tripoli on a number of occasions to request assistance.[134]

It is possible that Khawli's family, with its burden score based on data entered at the time of registration with the UNHCR in 2012, either did not meet the new eligibility criteria, or, while continuing to remain dependent, did not rank in the top 70 percent of refugees assessed using a metric of vulnerability that quantifies burden and enables that burden to be compared to another person's. The Verification Exercise report describes some of the "irreversible negative coping strategies" engaged by those eligible for assistance. One negative coping strategy commonly adopted was having children leave education in order to find work. Khawli and her family may not have ranked highly on the burden index for education because a particular coping strategy for living within conditions of precarity that appears to be employed by Khawli and her husband was to keep their children in school.[135]

Ninette Kelley, regional representative for Lebanon at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said, "The agency had been in touch with Khawli's family "for many, many months."" The media article states that Kelley gave "no details of why the funds were cut or how many other families might have been affected."[136]

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[134] UNHCR spokesperson Joelle Eid, in Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."

[135] The report states: "Out of the coping strategies considered, the most common was reducing non-food essential expenditures such as education or health (22 percent), followed by withdrawal of children from school (12 percent), child labor (2 percent) and early marriage (1 percent). In terms of discriminant power based on the difference in percentage between the re-included and excluded, child labor as the coping strategy showed the highest difference (4.6 times higher among the re-included), followed by early marriage (2.9 times higher among the re-included). Reducing essential non-food expenses had the lowest difference between the re-included and excluded."

[136] Yara Abi Nader, "Self-Immolation Highlights Woes of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: U.N.," *Reuters,* 2 April 2014. Available at: http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/02/us-syria-crisis-lebanon-refugees-idUSBREA311AE20140402 [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

Another report states that Khawli had a protection file with the UNHCR and in January 2014 an assessment was conducted on her children's medical condition, but that "the UNHCR have no record of her appeal." The UNHCR representative in that article states, "the family was also offered resettlement into communal housing, which they refused, saying they feared for their daughters' safety among strangers."[137]

UNHCR spokesperson Joelle Eid in talking about Khawli's case says:

> We referred her to our partners, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), who visited Miriam to check on her family's overall situation. They were at the time provided with rent and financial assistance over two months. After this they were offered relocation to a collective centre [where many refugee families reside together] but the family refused for legitimate reasons. Due to their conservatism, they didn't want their girls to be housed in a collective environment.[138]

On the morning of Tuesday 25 March 2014, staff at the UNHCR office apparently told Khawli that her name had been removed from a list of families eligible for aid. I cannot find details or information that explains why Khawli was informed on this day in March 2014 after food assistance had been withdrawn in August 2013, or what the removal meant in the context of her previous discussions and appeals. Three days prior to 25 March, after queuing for hours outside the UNHCR office, Khawli had been told to come back the following day. At this time, "She threatened to set herself alight if she was denied aid but no one seemed to care."[139] UN personnel and guards told a reporter that Khawli had not been mistreated.[140]

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[137] Arwa Damon and Raja Razek, "Syria Refugee's Desperate Act: 'They Burned My Heart Before They Burned My Body'," *CNN*, 3 April 2014. Available at: http://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/03/world/meast/syria-refugee-lebanon-damon-razek/ [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

[138] UNHCR spokesperson Joelle Eid, in Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."

[139] Source for details of the days prior to her self-immolation: Abdel Kafi al-Samad, Usama al-Qadiri, and Sandy Hayek, "Repression, Self-Immolation, and Domestic Violence: Is Lebanese Society Crumbling?" *Al-Akhbar English,* 27 March 2014. Available at: http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/repression-self-immolation-and-domestic-violence-lebanese-society-crumbling [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

[140] Arwa Damon and Raja Razek, "Syria Refugee's Desperate Act: 'They Burned My Heart Before They Burned My Body'."

According to a statement from a witness, on the morning of 25 March 2014 while standing outside the UNHCR registration centre in Tripoli, Khawli began to shout: "'For three days I have been coming here to get food assistance for me and my four children. Every time, I get turned away and promised aid if I come back the next day. But these promises are empty'."[141] She then took out a small plastic bottle from her bag and poured its contents of diesel (some reports describe this as gasoline) over her head and clothes. Khawli used a lighter to set herself on fire in front of the office and others queuing that day.[142] An eyewitness states she screamed out as she did so, "Because of you! Because of you!"[143] One of the men running a food stall across the road from the UN office described that after Khawli set herself on fire, "She fell to the ground and just started burning."[144] Bystanders and United Nations guards attempted to smother and put out the flames with their coats and with water. Khawli was taken to Al-Salam hospital, which has a specialist burn centre.[145] Several articles mention there was a contract in place for the UN agency to cover the costs for Khawli's treatment although it is unclear as to the scale or long-term nature of this arrangement.

Khawli survived and is recorded speaking after her self-immolation. She suffered third degree burns to 20 percent of her body and the remaining were deep second degree burns. The director of the hospital, Dr. Gabriel Al Sabah, stated on 27 April 2014: "She responded well in the first 48 hours to treatment but now she will need to be hospitalised for at least two months so we can perform a skin transplant. Basically the

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[141] AFP, "Syrian Refugee In Lebanon Sets Herself On Fire at UN: witnesses," *UNHCR Refugee Global Press Review REFDAILY,* 25 March 2014. Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refdaily?pass=52fc6fbd5&id=533273658 [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

[142] The media report above records that an eyewitness stated Khawli's self-immolation occurred in front of her children, however there is no mention of this in any other article that I've accessed. In another media report it suggests her children were not present. Khawli's husband Ahmad in talking about their children states: "I brought the three eldest here [the hospital] the day after it happened," he says. "But I didn't tell them everything. I told them that their mother was only burnt around her head and her arms. I didn't want to scare them by telling them the truth, I will tell them all of that slowly. As for our youngest, Abdul Hadi, I left him at home. He is too young to see his mother like this." Source: Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."

[143] "Two Hospitalized in Separate Self-Immolation Attempts," *The Daily Star Lebanon*, 25 March 2014. Available at: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Mar-25/251270-two-hospitalized-in-separate-self-immolation-attempts.ashx#axzz3I6IdRHK5 [Last accessed 25 March 2016].

[144] Arwa Damon and Raja Razek, "Syria Refugee's Desperate Act: 'They Burned My Heart Before They Burned My Body'."

[145] Bill Frelick, "Dispatches: After Syria's Horrors, A Desperate Act."

patient does not have enough skin left on her body."[146] In a video that appears online, Khawli is lying in a hospital bed within a room surrounded by glassed windows, her entire head is swathed in thick bandages with only her eyes, which appear shut, and her nose and mouth, exposed. In a voice that is muffled, Khawli is filmed speaking and a translation in English is provided through subtitles:

> The UN gave me help from August 2012 to August 2013. They told us they wouldn't cut support for those who have medical cases. My husband has a lung abscess and does not work. His health is not that good, so it does not allow him to work. He gets tired. I have three children who have hemolysis. I only told the food and beverage [sic], we got really hungry. My four children are studying in schools, I said they can't work. Their health situation doesn't allow them to work. I want them to study so they can get a job and relax. But they burned my heart before they burned my body. They burned my heart from the inside.[147]

In another video interview, where her name is spelt in English as Mariam Khaowleh, the reporter provides the voiceover that translates Khawli's spoken words (the reporter's own words are in brackets):

> I choose death … I choose death rather than see my children die a million times in front of me … I went to them over and over. I said you must have made a mistake … they lied to me. They mocked me. They shouted get out of here.

> [She says she would plead] I'm going to set myself on fire, feel my pain, feel what's in my heart. Feel that I have four children. They would laugh at me and send me away.

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[146] Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."

[147] James Rush, "Desperate Mother Who Fled Syria With Her Family Torches Herself Outside Lebanese UN Office After International Body Stopped Providing Them With Food and Money," *Mail* Online, 4 April 2014. Available at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2596067/Desperate-mother-fled-Syria-family-torches-outside-Lebanese-UN-offices-international-body-stopped-providing-food-money.html [Last accessed: 21 March 2016].

[She says all she has ever done is for her children's survival] I worked very hard for their education. [They don't come to the hospital; she doesn't want them to see her like this.] [148]

When I searched online for what had happened to Khawli in the days after her self-immolation, I could not find any articles written after 27 April 2014. I found an online appeal started by the journalist who had written the final article on 27 April, which had raised US$3119 of a requested US$5000 for Khawli's medical bills.[149] The spelling of Khawli's name in the appeal as Miriam al-Khouli led me to a report by that same journalist published on the *Al Arabyia* website on 17 April 2014, which stated that three weeks after the news outlet's first visit, which was presumably just after Khawli had burned herself, "…Miriam is still in the hospital and her health condition appears to have improved. However, it is a matter of months until she fully recovers."[150] I had previously contacted reporters and websites connected to the stories that had been posted online and did not receive any more information. I contacted the journalist who wrote the Al Arabyia article and began the public appeal to raise funds for Khawli's medical costs. It is the only article I could locate that talks of the lives of Khawli and her husband before they fled to Lebanon, and that names their children, their ages, and what they are doing in school. I asked the journalist for news of Khawli and of what happened to the funds that were raised. I received an email a day later that said the journalist was sorry to inform me that Khawli passed away shortly after the 27 April 2014 article had gone to print. The journalist says she contacted Khawli's husband personally and transferred the money that was raised. It would go towards the children's education, with all those donating agreeing that this would be the best course of action. The journalist writes in the email of Khawli's self-immolation, "It was a tragic last measure and one that should have garnered more international attention."

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[148] Arwa Damon and Raja Razek, "Syria Refugee's Desperate Act: 'They Burned My Heart Before They Burned My Body'."

[149] "Medical Bills For Miriam Al Khouli. https://www.gofundme.com/8obt50 [Last accessed: 25 March 2016].

[150] Al Arabiya News, "Syrian Self-Immolation Refugee To Lebanon Renews Calls For Support," 17 April 2014. Available at: "http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/features/2014/04/17/Syrian-self-immolation-refugee-to-Lebanon-renews-call-for-support-.html [Last accessed: 21 March 2016].

This means Khawli lived for just over a month after she stood outside the UNHCR office and set her body alight. My reaction to the news that Khawli died took me by surprise. I had to physically get up and go outside, get out of the space that I was in, walk and somehow try and make sense of what I was feeling. I had watched Khawli in her hospital room filmed in early April 2014; I had seen a photo of how she looked without the swelling produced by her burns and the bandages protecting her wounds. I realised that I had come to think of Khawli as still living within some liminal space of existing, that being filmed on camera meant she was still alive, that she survived her burns and was being cared for. I thought of her children, of her son in the media report on 27 April saying that his friends were telling him immediately after her self-immolation that his mother was dead, and how much that distressed his father Ahmad, who insists to his son that his mother is still alive, who insists on Khawli speaking to her son on the phone and then realises she does not have the strength to talk.[151] I thought about how Khawli would not allow her children to visit her in hospital, and whether they all came to see her before she died. I wondered materially about the long-term nature of burns and the risk of dying a month after the injuries are inflicted, when several days after burning she was able to speak on camera. I hoped and continue to do so that Khawli's children are still in school and I wondered whether her injury and subsequent death led to a reevaluation of the family's inclusion into the WFP food assistance programme. I have been unable to find any articles reporting that Khawli's self-immolation led to her death. There is no report from the UNHCR that I can locate on public forums or in news items. The public record of Khawli's life does not include the way that her life ended. Khawli remains a spectacle in the media, the desperate refugee who is captured in a single moment, remaining alive in videos and still images. I am left with how unsettling and disturbing this feels. Under what circumstances might the self-immolation become what is remarkable and the death that so often closely follows it, so unremarkable?

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[151] Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."

Temporal conditions of language and the primacy of speech

In writing a narrative that discusses Khawli's self-immolation, and in assuming a position as an un-chosen narrator of Khawli's story without her permission, it took me some time to realise how much the role of verbal language, of Khawli being recorded speaking, dominated the research process I undertook. I began to understand the ways it was informing the development of a canonical narrative that took its authority from privileging certain temporal conditions of speech. I gave authority and privilege to the act of speaking over other forms of communication and action. It was Khawli's act of speaking *after* her self-immolation that I ascribed with a certain reflexive and more authentic form of knowing. I justified its status because the act of self-immolation was described by Khawli and through other eyewitness accounts. Khawli was in charge of the telling. I did not think that a hermeneutical analysis could be applied to the case of Leorsin Seemanpillai. I thought that speaking after the act of burning her body enabled Khawli to exhibit a particular modality of agency and have a form of control over her story that Seemanpillai did not have access to. I realised that by giving credence to a notion of the temporal as a conditioning agent of knowledge, in this case in influencing the power and uptake of information and meaning conveyed through speech being performed at a certain moment in time, I was closing down enquiry into other means and expressions of communication and utterances that occur during experiences of oppression and precarity. It was also causing me to foreclose on possible alternative modalities of agency engaged in by Seemanpillai, which I will address later in this section.

In considering the intimate, risky process of translating between languages, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that even within such an act "…language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries" (1993, p. 180). The words spoken by Khawli do not come to represent the subjectivity of Khawli in a way that removes complexity and contradiction from her subject position. I suggest that there is tension in how her speech acts might account for the choices made and actions performed by Khawli that are not communicated in verbal ways, as well as the thoughts and feelings that remain unexpressed. This serves to unsettle any fixed,

stable or linear notion of intentionality and agency through time. Spivak goes on to argue "The ways in which rhetoric or figuration disrupt logic themselves point at the possibility of random contingency, beside language, around language" (p. 180). Instead of the research task being to show how Khawli's rhetoric or speechmaking fulfills a certain logic, how it has an explanatory value that needs to be unearthed through the research process, and that given enough time and examination the words will themselves give up certain meanings yet to be revealed, I began to focus on generative capacities of the discordant elements within narratives. I suggest that the continuities and contradictions between words, embodied utterances and other forms of communication might enable the tracing of different elements or qualities of vulnerability through Khawli's story, without moving to quickly to find reasons to account for particular actions, or to suggest Khawli's intention could be known. This in part involves refiguring the notion of a single mode of agency to consider different agential capacities. Related to this, in the following sections I examine how the ambivalence of Khawli's burning of her body might disrupt the conceptualisation of self-immolation as a method of self-destruction. I address this through the ways Khawli might have engaged in forms of self-maintenance that involved modes of endurance.

As I recognised that I was prioritising Khawli's speech over other means in which she communicated, I returned to thinking about Seemanpillai and began to see the richness in forms of communication. Seemanpillai did not die immediately after self-immolating. He engaged in a series of bodily movements, he made sounds, he moved locations, he interacted with people, he continued to live after he set his body on fire. Self-immolation became a temporal kind of end-point, where, as a witness through the media reporting of his setting fire to his body, I paid less attention to what occurred after Seemanpillai burned his body. I began to consider specifically how Seemanpillai might have occupied varied subject positions through the particular ways that he communicated after burning his body, and in the ways he also might have chosen not to communicate. Therefore this brought into focus Seemanpillai's physical movements between different spatial registers of the private and public, but also other means of language and non-verbal communication across different temporalities.

I returned to searching for information about Seemanpillai, in order to focus on the non-verbal utterances and embodied ways he might have expressed himself and I found new articles that had not previously appeared in the online searches I conducted. I learned that Seemanpillai chose not to tell his parents of his concerns about being sent back to Sri Lanka, instead he told them, "…don't worry...once I get my visa and everything I would like to bring you guys to this country and be here with me, all of us." His last message to his father included: "There is something here for me, the people here are taking care of me so don't worry. I'm feeling peace in my mind, peace in my heart."[152] Seemanpillai did speak frequently to friends, to his church community, to refugee groups, to work colleagues. Seemanpillai's roommate is quoted as saying, "Leo was always talking about the fear of being deported back. That fear is in everyone."[153] An article states that Seemanpillai's friends "…revealed he had been hospitalised in a psychiatric unit for severe anxiety three months before his death, had twice attempted suicide, and parishioners from his local Lutheran church had him on suicide watch."[154] The Pastor at the church that Seemanpillai attended is quoted as saying, "He would have dark periods, he would have periods of suicidal thoughts where he would say that he would commit suicide … And so many people in our parish have spent a lot of time with him, comforting him."[155]

These conversations that Seemanpillai had, and the ways that he may have expressed himself made me aware that I had given primacy to the particular temporal conditions in which language occurs. I was engaged in a reading of self-immolation that assumed that knowledge claims gain investment in forms of authenticity through the words of the person who committed the act, after the act. I wanted Khawli's words spoken after she burned her body to provide a form of insight that might have been lacking in the

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[152] Danny Lannen, "Asylum Seeker Leo Seemanpillai Dreamt Of Rescuing Family From Exile," *Geelong Advertiser,* 5 June 2014. Available at: http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/news/geelong/asylum-seeker-leo-seemanpillai-dreamt-of-rescuing-family-from-exile/story-fnjuhovy-1226943473423 [Last accessed: 21 March 2016].

[153] Timna Jacks, "Leo Battled With 'Fear of Being Deported Back,'" *The Examiner,* 7 June 2014. Available at: http://www.examiner.com.au/story/2336020/leo-battled-with-fear-of-being-deported-back/?cs=7#slide=1 [Last accessed: 21 March 2016].

[154] Louise Milligan, "Friends of Tamil Asylum Seeker Leo Seemanpillai Say He Had Made Previous Attempts on His Life," *ABC News,* 5 June 2014. Available at: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-06-05/tamil-asylum-seeker-made-previous-suicide-attempts-say-friends/5503712 [Last accessed: 21 March 2016].

[155] Louise Milligan, "Friends of Tamil Asylum Seeker Leo Seemanpillai Say He Had Made Previous Attempts on His Life."

case of Seemanpillai. This meant that while I was right to be hesitant as to the possibility of resistance in the actions of Seemanpillai, I hoped Khawli's words would, while recognising the concerns of Lila Abu-Lughod (1990), enable the attribution of a consciousness that *was* part of Khawli's experience (p. 47). I thought that the particular temporal condition in which language is invoked – Khawli's words, after her act – would bring to light a certain form of resistance (p. 41). I realised that I had assumed that certain acts, emotions and events that happen to people remain expressible, and that sensorial and affective understandings and responses to trauma can be conveyed by words. I thought that words might contain more meaning than other forms of expression, and where these words were temporally located might serve to expose particular meanings that would otherwise be absent.

And so with this vulnerability to my own thinking about language exposed, I returned again to Seemanpillai, this time focusing on what happened after he set his body on fire. I realised how much communication occurred in this period. Because I do not know the content of the words spoken, of the pain he might have articulated, of the precise noises that he made, I had subjugated these forms of embodied communication, in effect silencing them and silencing Seemanpillai. I began to consider what Khawli's words after she burned herself, might convey that Seemanpillai's range of utterances did not. I started to listen for the sounds and also look for the ways that bodies and movement may speak. The off duty nurse who lived two doors away from Seemanpillai heard "a man screaming." Running outside she saw Seemanpillai "quite distressed and screaming." The nurse ran over to him and asked what was going on. I do not know what Seemanpillai said or if he replied by speaking. But words can also be unnecessary, "…it was pretty obvious that he'd been severely burnt. All his skin was peeling off his limbs and he was really distressed."[156] The sensory aspects of embodied forms of communication mean messages are conveyed through both affective and non-conscious processes, through wails, screams, sighs and silence. After he burned his body, Seemanpillai screamed, he ran, he took off his clothes by his mailbox, he stood in his underwear on a street, he responded in some

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[156] Louise Milligan, "Friends of Tamil Asylum Seeker Leo Seemanpillai Say He Made Previous Attempts On His Life."

way to the nurse's questions, he allowed himself to be led by her to have water poured over his body. He would likely have responded to the sensation of water upon his burns. His suffering was communicated, just as suffering was conveyed in the words spoken by Khawli in her hospital bed. Through attending to sensory, emotional and affective forms of embodiment occurring during acts of speech and at times instead of speech, I was able to slow the research down and consider what was missing from media narratives, and what Seemanpillai may or may not have been choosing to tell through a range of communicatory forms.

In thinking about sensory, affective and unconscious processes, Kamala Visweswaran argues that a person speaking can be framed by a "series of unequal relationships of power" (1994, p. 50). Visweswaran cautions that it is important to attend to how things are said but also to the temporal and spatial conditions of such speech acts, and who is talking and who is listening (p. 50). Khawli spoke both before and after her self-immolation, but she also listened and responded to the speech and embodied forms of communication conveyed by others. Khawli's husband Ahmad stated that after learning of their exclusion from the food assistance programme the two of them would journey to the UNHCR office every 10 days: "We would walk for an hour-and-a-half to get there, and then we would wait in a long queue all day just to be turned away."[157] Ahmad says this would mean returning to the apartment and seeing their children's faces. "What can you tell them?"…"What would that do to you?"[158] What might Khawli hear after walking and then queuing for hours? Khawli had heard something that made her promise days earlier, "I'm going to set myself on fire, feel my pain, feel what's in my heart." J.L. Austin (1962) describes the precariousness of statements in securing uptake, where there is always doubt as to whether we were heard and concern for the opposing ways in which our statement might be interpreted or understood. There is risk in how statements "take effect," by committing us to other statements that in turn will be assessed and judged, or do not invite a response (p. 138). The conditions in which uptake is secured are extremely precarious, connected to a particular space and time, but also dependent on economic, political, and social

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[157] Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."
[158] Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."

factors that cannot be wholly accounted for and controlled. Within the contingency of such conditions, and after attending to forms of verbal and embodied responses to her repeated requests for aid, Khawli prepared a small bottle of diesel that could be carried in her bag, she gathered a lighter or some means of igniting the fluid, and she did not tell her husband. She walked the one and a half hour trip to the UNHCR offices and I presume joined a queue, as she had done so on numerous occasions. What might she have been thinking on that journey and when she was standing waiting? This question is never asked of Khawli. Unlike in the case of Seemanpillai, no one asks within media reports what was on Khawli's mind.

If Khawli's state of mind could already be known, because of her identified position as a refugee or due to the words that she spoke, what might be the epistemological and political implications of the media attending to Khawli's speech? Attention to Khawli's words may form a part of a totalising, "strong theory" that serves to explain away localised or alternative readings (Nyong'o 2010, p. 245). The power of Khawli's words, because they are in a language form that can be readily accessed, can then lead to a form of epistemological suppression, where the meaning of her self-immolation, and questions around the complexities of the experience of suffering and its responses are treated as if they were "already exhausted" (p. 245). Miranda Fricker (2007) argues that hermeneutic tools used to make sense of the social world are unevenly distributed, resulting in some groups suffering "an unfair disadvantage in making sense of their own social experience" (p. 146). In Fricker's terms, "hermeneutical injustice" points to a person's experience being obscured from collective understanding due to a lack of resources resulting from structural inequalities (p. 155). This form of epistemic suppression means that those reporting on Khawli's speech and actions give the effect of already "appearing to know" (Nyong'o 2010, p. 245). In a conversation with Michael Moon, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994) discusses, in relation to the marginalisation of the queer community, the implications of a culture of knowingness. Such a culture is defined by the unaccounted for contradictions and assertions that tumble from a "reservoir of presumptive, deniable, and unarticulated knowledge in a public that images itself also as a reservoir of ever-violable innocence" (p. 222). Within this culture of knowingness, the means of rendering individuals and communities as cultural

others through an encounter with forms of behaviour that are unfamiliar, can mean such strangeness becomes synonymous with intention. That which cannot be made intelligible through hegemonic discourse is explained away as representing the inexplicable (see Mahmood 2012, p. 199).

The journalist that informs me of Khawli's death said that when she told others in Lebanon "their response was that 'self immolation amongst these people is fashionable!'" The sensual and emotional shock of self-immolation, where the burning of one's body may be something unimaginable to those not living in extreme precarity, has to be understood within existing bounds of hermeneutical knowledge. This also forces the unintelligible into a normative temporal frame where timing becomes intentional, the fashionable is something "up to date," but notably will also become relegated to the past. I use this example to illustrate how hermeneutic injustice can involve disinterest and dismissal. Moon describes a particular form of knowingness through arguing that those who perceive themselves as having inside knowledge of a particular experience of another, then appear to confer upon themselves an assumptive, privileged understanding of another person's will, history, perception, and prognosis (1994, p. 224). Yet for Khawli's husband Ahmad, having such knowledge of another's experience of suffering is not possible. He states, "Only a human being who lives like this would be able to understand and know why she was pushed to set herself on fire…"[159] What Ahmad's words suggest is that while attempts are made to describe Khawli's act within the limits of hegemonic discourse, because the necessary hermeneutic resources are not available to those lacking experience, it can never be made intelligible to others. However Ahmad prevents the loss of Khawli's own epistemic subjectivity through having a lack of hermeneutic tools by suggesting the modes of reasoning behind such an act are intelligible to those who must attempt to keep living within oppressive conditions and with a scarcity of resources and support.

Attending to the temporal conditions of embodied communication became one means of considering complexities to the experience of suffering and its narration, and how

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[159] Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."

the epistemic subjectivity of Khawli may be effaced through media reports that draw upon her actual words. While Ahmad speaks for Khawli, his words suggest that when attempting to describe the ineffable, we might rely on interpreters, not to deny our own meaning, but as a means to talk about what is unintelligible. Ahmad bears witness to Khawli's pain, one that he identifies as being similar to his own: "I have lived through exactly the same moments as my wife and I, too, have witnessed my children's needs. I am not angry with her because I know what drove her to this and I would have done this myself had she not."[160] In the next section I will discuss different modalities of agency and how this opens up discussions within the narratives of the role of agential capacities of struggle and endurance.

Conditions of agency

I realise that a significant reason for my initial desire to want to recuperate Khawli's agency and connect her actions to a form of political resistance was due to Khawli saying, "Because of you" before she set herself on fire. She appeared to confront the source of her subjection and the resulting physical pain by stating afterwards in hospital, "…they burned my heart before they burned my body. They burned my heart from the inside." It was this use of imagery and Khawli's accusation that she did not burn her body at all, that someone or something else was responsible, that I wanted to explore further. In her own words Khawli appeared to explain why she acted: "I set myself ablaze for the sake of my children…The Syrian people are heartbroken over their children. I urge all people to help my family and Syrian refugees."[161] In this statement Khawli seems to suggest that her act of self-immolation was not for her but instead it was for someone else, that she did this not only due to her children but also because of the suffering of other Syrian children. In considering how Khawli's act might be connected to a complex experience of pain that is both hers and not hers, Talal Asad contends that when someone suffers because of someone else's pain, that suffering comes to be a condition of a relationship. The person suffers "because of the

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[160] Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."
[161] Al Arabiya News, "Syrian Self-Immolation Refugee To Lebanon Renews Calls For Support."

pain of someone she loves" (2003, p. 82). In this relation it becomes difficult to distinguish the source of pain. Asad contends that in thinking about the pain of another person as a relation, it is a relationship that is "inhabited and enacted" (p. 82). Khawli draws attention to this relationship by talking about the suffering of her children, of their hunger, that her "children were telling me they feel dizzy and I couldn't feed them." [162]

In considering Khawli's assertion that her heart was first burned before her body and how that might be read through particular cultural forms of expression and also two different temporalities of injury, Asad raises the question of the relation between physical pain and psychological suffering. Asad contends that assumptions about the locatable conditions of pain, that physical pain can be traced to a particular site within the body whereas psychological pain cannot, are challenged by cultural attunements to distressing emotions that are "experienced as being located in particular organs in the body" (p. 84). If pain is inhabited in distinct ways that are culturally mediated, both in how pain is felt and also in how it is articulated, then Khawli's description of her heart being burned first, and then a subsequent feeling of relief at causing physical pain, suggests, in Asad's words, that pain could be considered agentially as "actions that are sited at once in cultural *and* neurophysical contexts" (original italics) (p. 84). As a social relationship and lived condition, pain "is part of what creates the conditions of action and experience" (p. 85). Asad's notion of pain as action connects to Lata Mani's account of how women involved in *sati* were seldom referred to as agents in pain and that there was an absence in eyewitness reporting of the actions involved the struggle (1998, p. 177). Self-immolation could be conceived as a form of pain but also a form of struggle, a social relation that is both inhabited and enacted.

This returns me to the discussion in chapter one and the ways vulnerability is situated within particular bodies through the intricacies, complexities and ambivalences in the ways individuals live and endure that change over time and within the particularity of microcosmic spaces and dwellings. The sited qualities of pain within cultural and

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[162] Al Arabiya News, "Syrian Self-Immolation Refugee To Lebanon Renews Calls For Support."

neurophysical contexts point to the unevenness of how vulnerability comes to be distributed across different bodies and the multiplicity of capacities and desires of embodied subjects, and the ways vulnerability is endured and responded to within and across bodies through different modalities of space and time. These specificities might emerge when the aggregation of agential activities is geared towards autonomy and self-empowerment, but also when these activities, and those involved in forms of self-continuity and self-maintenance, are worn down slowly through a range of disaggregating forces and arrangements that press upon tired, exhausted bodies (Povinelli 2011).

Self-immolation and self-making

If the conceptualisation of self-immolation through its relation to pain remains open, this in turn means that the notion of suicide that is connected to self-immolation continues to be uncertain.[163] As it has emerged within my research, it appears that while death may be a consequence of self-immolation, it has become difficult for me to attribute suicide to forms of intentionality that might be connected to a person burning their body. Yet despite this uncertainty, only one media article in the archive that I accessed uses the term sacrifice. This term requires further scrutiny, which is outside of the bounds of this particular project. I am not suggesting at this stage of analysis that the self-immolation of Seemanpillai or Khawli could be attributed in this way, but rather I raise the idea of sacrifice as a means to illustrate the complexity involved in how to think about self-immolation and intention. Both Khawli and her husband gesture to the concept of sacrifice. Khawli says, "I set myself ablaze for the sake of my children." Ahmad talks in terms of familial love: "it's not for me and it's not for her but it is for our children because we just don't know how to help them anymore." I propose that there is a difference between the term suicide being attributed to a method of ending life, and what Khawli might have done. Ahmad is convinced that Khawli didn't want to kill herself: "She wasn't trying to commit suicide.

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[163] Emile Durkheim (2006) argues that there are social forms of suicide: the egotistical, altruistic and anomic. As a social phenomenon, Durkheim argues that suicide is connected not only to individual experience, but has a relation to social and communal bonds.

She just felt so oppressed because she felt like she was being told she didn't deserve help."[164] There are also cultural and religious meanings attached to suicide that also contribute to the ambiguities of such an action. Did Ahmad suggest this was not an act of suicide due to the implications that such an act carries? Was it significant that it was Khawli and not her husband Ahmad who responded to their family's desperation? I do not know if Khawli's death brought any shame or honour upon her family (or whether this occurred to Seemanpillai's family as a result of his death), but each can affect and infect families for generations. I suggest that the agency of both Seemanpillai and Khawli is eroded in conceiving of their individual acts of setting themselves on fire as life ending because it silences certain agential modalities, including the efforts involved in life-preserving, self-making acts in which each continued to engage. Khawli fled her country when her children's lives were at risk, she refused to allow her daughters to live in a housing situation that she deemed to be unsafe, she continued to press her case to the UNHCR. I suggest that self-immolation conceived as an acute act, and one centred upon a notion of the self as private and bounded, can erase social and cultural relations and ongoing struggles against death. Seemanpillai volunteered and sent money back to his family in India, Khawli taught her children the classical form of Arabic and how to read and write before they entered school. These continue to be life-saving activities, whether in their own lives or within the social and familial bonds in which Khawli and Seemanpillai were invested.

I want to rethink the conceptual relationship between self-making and self-immolation, where these two actions are not in opposition. Self-immolation as a form of self-making has an ethical component; it can involve a conception of the self that is for the other, an element of vulnerability that emerges as a response to the demand for care. In this way the very architecture of the self and its bounded nature is disrupted. It is a self that acts and is acted upon by others, and relies on forms of interdependency, which are an aspect of living and through which bodies might persist (Butler 2015). The ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas involves an interrogation of the primacy of the self, signifying the subject as existing not in isolation but in relation

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[164] All quotes in this paragraph are taken from Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."

with others. Levinas asks, "Why does the other concern me?" (1998, p. 117). Levinas contends that it is only a question to be asked and only has meaning if we operate from the presupposition that the self is primarily concerned with itself. The explanations provided by Khawli and Ahmad point to a conception of self-immolation that is not a bounded, private act centred within a personal and egoic self. Interpreted through Levinas's conception of ethics, self-immolation as a form of vulnerability, as being-for-the-other, might at times be less an act than it is an obligation. This is not to suggest that Khawli felt compelled to harm herself, or that self-immolation represents a cultural or historical imperative to engage in sacrifice. What I am suggesting is that questioning suicide as being foundational to meanings of self-immolation leads to disrupting a notion of the self within self-immolation.

Agential modalities

If a notion of the self as private and bounded is disrupted, what does this mean for the agency involved in self-immolation? In considering modalities of agency, Saba Mahmood contends that to understand agency through the open terms of struggle, effort and exertion, is "neither to invoke a self-constituting autonomous subject nor subjectivity as a private space of cultivation" (2001, p. 210). This opens up space to consider the influences of located cultural and historical disciplines and practices that are involved in the way subjectivities are formed and evolve. For Mahmood, the emphasis on a singular form of agency, especially one associated with resistance, ignores "other modalities of agency whose meaning and effect are not captured within the logic of subversion and resignification of hegemonic terms of discourse" (2012, p. 153). What draws me to Mahmood's work is her focus on the way that different practices of living are registered through examining the possibility for alternative "human flourishings" outside of the bounds of an insistence on the human subject's refusal to be dominated (p. 155). Mahmood pays attention to specific disciplinary practices of subjectivation, denoting through the use of the term the complexity involved in thinking about agency as individuals engage in a range actions involving "both the becoming of the subject and the process of subjection" (Butler 1997, p. 83).

The work of Mahmood has been critical to this project as a frame in which to examine how different elements of vulnerability may be experienced and emerge through various modalities of agency. I began to consider agency as not being singularly directed towards resistance or self-empowerment, but connected to political, cultural and historical forces that impinge upon bodies and subjectivities and direct activities and energies through multiple demands and desires. This meant paying attention to the specificities of microcosmic spaces and the demands required to endure within particular lifeworlds. In doing so, vulnerability began to lose its coherence as a universal bodily ontology, and became interwoven as elements engaged within and layers of agential capacities. In moving away from a notion of agency being necessarily intertwined with an emancipatory politics of the self, Mahmood contends that the desire for freedom and any relation that agency may have to subversion and the recoding of norms is not an innate desire or relation that has primacy within a person's subjectivity. Instead it is necessarily mediated by other capacities and desires that may not be attempting to fulfill a liberatory form of politics (2001, p. 211). Mahmood argues that in considering the question of politics, the starting point is firstly an interrogation of the relation between "the body, self, and moral agency as constituted in different cultural and political locations" and that this analysis must be done without the assumption of there being a particular self-evident model of resistance and its relation to agency (p. 223).

The focus for Mahmood, like Lauren Berlant, is paying attention to the everyday, where "agential capacity is entailed not only in those acts that result in (progressive) change but also those that aim toward continuity, stasis and stability" (p. 212). In a similar vein, Asad puts forward that it is necessary to attend not only to embodiment, where action and experience are situated within a material body, but also to 'ensoulment,' which describes how capacities for sensing and imagining are culturally mediated (2003, p. 89). In thinking about agency and the ways that it is culturally and politically mediated, attending to the "temporal drag" back of connections to the cultural and historic disciplines in her home country where almost all children went to school and literacy rates were over 90 percent prior to the civil war, Khawli keeping

her children in school maintains a connection that is more than that of education (Freeman 2010). Khawli might have exercised a form of cultural continuity in keeping her children in education even when the poverty of conditions may have suggested that other liberatory or subversive acts in response might have been more viable in sustaining the family.

In the context of thinking about forms of continuity amid crisis and instability, Veena Das asks, in relation to her work in writing about the birth of India, "how one should inhabit such a world that has been made strange through the desolating experience of violence and loss" (1996, p. 67). Das argues that one way to do so, in the language of Stanley Cavell, is through the "gesture of approaching the world through a kind of mourning for it" (p. 67). If Khawli's self-immolation was considered an act of mourning in response to tragic loss, not only the loss of aid, but the loss of the family's business and livelihood, the brutalisation of her home, the scenes of violence and destruction in Homs, of friends and relatives that may not have survived, then Khawli setting her body on fire may have been an attempt to create some semblance of a world defined by continuity and stasis. This might not even have been her world, but instead one built for her family members. Das describes how transactions between the body and language can enable the strangeness of the world to be transformed into one that is again inhabitable. Perhaps it is possible that for Khawli a form of transformation had occurred prior, in finding a way to dwell in Lebanon despite the impoverished conditions, to subsist on UN food vouchers and still send her children to school. That this was a form of life that was liveable, and remained hopeful in some sense. It might also be that there are certain forms of loss that the precarity of such a habitable life cannot protect and sustain.

Moving from an act to an event

Rethinking the conceptual relationship between self-making and self-immolation, and the notion of agency as a capacity, where such capacities for sensing and imagining exist and future lifeworlds are culturally mediated, involve both change in the sense of

forward temporal movement, but also forms of permanence and stillness that are born from temporal drag. The agency of both Seemanpillai and Khawli involves complex and conflicting agential modalities, which must acknowledge the efforts involved in life-preserving, self-making acts in which each continued to engage throughout the duration of self-immolation. In this way self-immolation becomes less an act than it is an event that occurs through different temporal modalities, the drag of the past in its cultural and political mediations, Khawli's efforts at maintaining a present through activities involving stasis and routine, and a future that is liveable. I described in chapter one how in the context of this project, Elizabeth Freeman's notion of "queer time" has involved displacing narratives "against dominant arrangements of time and history" (2010, p. xi). In chapter two I addressed how researching vulnerability led to me to refigure self-immolation from an act to an event that involves agential capacities of struggle. This will be developed more extensively in chapter five. I suggest that the notion of an event helps in working with the ambivalence of self-immolation, which becomes invested within the particularities of the pace and movement of time. In the modes of telling the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli through this thesis, the acute flashpoint of burning has given way to a longer arc of activity and endurance. Changing the temporal modalities of self-immolation came to ground the event not in the spectacular but instead within particular personal, cultural and political times and histories. These are carried on and within bodies, and this helps to consider elements of vulnerability and the ways these unfold within different spatial and temporal registers.

The notion of temporalities is also raised by Levinas, who articulates the problem of experience, of our own and of our encounter with the experience of others, through the duration of time. He focuses on the notion of duration in order to avoid becoming trapped in "the confusion between what flows *within* time and time itself (original italics) (2000, p. 7). I suggest that similar to Freeman's work on queer time, Levinas means not to address the specificities of the meaning of time or its exact measurement; instead he is interested in how temporalities inform activities and elements of subjectivity. For Levinas, death exemplifies an event concerned with duration, one that disturbs the linear relation between experience and time. He argues

that our experience of death does not present a coherent, linear progression which moves the subject to a place where time ends, such as what could be witnessed through the predictability of failing health and aging, as well as traced through sets of normative practices associated with particular historical, religious, economic and cultural markers of time. Instead the notion of duration, conceived through the experience of death, delivers an "irruption within time" or an "eruption outside of time" (p. 10). I consider Levinas's work on time as being connected to the ambivalence of self-immolation as a mode of suicide, and its complex relation with continued self-making that extends beyond the acute moment of the act. As a further means of displacing the temporal, I am interested in the notion of durability within which individuals navigate the temporalities of events. Modes of ordinary, everyday endurance that occur through the persistence of self-making activities have become a core focus for this project. I will address this in more detail in chapter five.

The metric of vulnerability

While I have focused on modes of telling, there are also reasons for not telling certain narratives, which themselves become crucial means of conveying particular trauma within experience. Khawli did not inform her husband of her intentions, and Seemanpillai did not tell his father of his concerns about his visa status, or that he had attempted to harm himself. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2009) character in her short story "The Embassy" stands in line at the American Embassy in Lagos to tell the story that describes how her son died at the hands of government agents. It is a story that if told in a certain way may lead the woman to "a new life" in America. When she gets to the counter and it is her turn to speak, the woman remains silent; she refuses to tell. Adichie raises the issue of the audience for a person's stories, of who deserves to know, of who one decides to tell, and what precisely is told. Other ways of telling that do not require words can also be refused. In Khawli's case, "[Her children] don't come to the hospital; she doesn't want them to see her like this."[165] Stories are demanded

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[165] Arwa Damon and Raja Razek, "Syria Refugee's Desperate Act: 'They Burned My Heart Before They Burned My Body'."

from the character in "The Embassy" and from Khawli and Seemanpillai. These are stories whose repeated telling might be sustained by the logic of hope that each new telling of the same consistent story may lead to changed outcomes. In each instance the stories are measured against a predetermined metric of vulnerability; there is always a burden index in operation. That burden includes the acceptance of what such narratives require from a person. In Adichie's words, it is a "standing in line, accepting so many humiliations. Just to get a chance at America."[166]

Just as Adichie's character refuses the humiliations, chants can be heard from a crowd marching in Syria against Assad's regime in 2011: "Death but not humiliation."[167] Ammar Abdulhamid, a Syrian human rights activist, explains that the basic ethos of this sentiment is the pursuit of dignity.[168] I think of the connection to the words of Ahmad, Khawli's husband, and the refusal to accept the forms of humiliation that became quotidian elements of their daily lives, and the slow violence that eats away at human dignity. Ahmad says he will never return to the UN again: "Even if we are reduced to skin and bones, we will not see worse days than these … everything can be mended except dignity."[169] I read his words as a form of "death but not humiliation," or in Khawli's words, "I choose death rather than see my children die a million times in front of me." The choice for Khawli, and for many other Syrians, might be not to choose to end life, but rather to refuse forms of oppression that take away their dignity.

The metric of vulnerability connects to the ethics of enforced narration, which can be conceived as a recursive process described by Tavia Nyong'o as "any procedure that includes at least one sequence that must be repeated before it can be completed" (2010, p. 247). As a troubling position, Nyong'o describes recursion in this way:

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[166] Source of the quotation: Random House website. Available at: https://www.randomhouse.com/anchor/ohenry/spotlight/adichie.html [Last accessed 21 March 2016].
[167] Ammar Abdulhamid: Death But Not Humiliation. 13 June 2012. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvCdqIfyFdY [Last accessed 21 March 2016].
[168] In an article discussing protests in 2011 demanding the removal of Assad regime, one of the first calls of the Syrian revolution was "death but not humiliation." This is discussed in Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Thousands March Anew Against Syria's Assad, 2 Killed," Reuters, 26 August 2011. Available at: http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-idUSTRE77P12M20110826 [Last accessed 26 March 2016].
[169] Abdel Kafi al-Samad, Usama al-Qadiri, and Sandy Hayek, "Repression, Self-Immolation, and Domestic Violence: Is Lebanese Society Crumbling?"

> [It] splits the subject, not only by denying it the fantasy of a stable vantage
> point and perspective, but further by extending the promise that there is a way
> out of its maze, provided only that one invests in its logic long enough to
> perpetuate its effects (p. 247).

These recursive stories can produce certain vulnerable subjects. In her discussion of forms of precarity produced and governed by neoliberal power structures and regulations, Isabell Lorey refers to the process of "precarization," an instrument of governing by way of insecurity that "embraces the whole of existence, the body, modes of subjectivation" (2015, p. 1). Lorey argues that understanding precarization as it relates to modes of governing makes it possible, in ways that mirror the discordant modalities of agency, to conceive of the "ambivalence between subjugation and self-empowerment" that occurs for subjects (p. 13). The burden index, in determining who has a level of dependency that may restrict potential income generating opportunities, provides access to aid that can alleviate precarity, while enforcing certain social and economic positions of insecurity. To receive aid it is first necessary to enter what refugees refer to as the "queue of humiliation."[170] By turning up each day at the UNHCR office, exposed to the weather, to the lines of people, to be asked questions and narrate a particular story, to receive the comments and judgments on the story being told, involves a certain splitting of the subject. The process might deny a person a sense of stability that can come from having access to knowledge about decisions being made, while extending the promise that decisions may change, that something more can be known, if one invests in the process for just one more day.

Spectacular and unspectacular time

A further metric of vulnerability involves the measurement of time and the speed of change. As mentioned in earlier chapters, Rob Nixon identifies the notion of "slow

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[170] Transterra Media/Tripoli and Karen Leigh, "Refugees in Grim Global Spotlight After Syrian Woman Self-Immolates in Tripoli," *Syria Deeply*, 27 March 2014. Available at: http://www.syriadeeply.org/articles/2014/03/4956/refugees-grim-global-spotlight-syrian-woman-self-immolates-tripoli/ [Last accessed 21 March 2016].

violence" as one that "occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2011, p. 2). In Khawli's self-immolation it may be possible to witness the meeting of slow violence and an acute flashpoint. The violence that Nixon articulates is "incremental and accretive," played out over a "range of temporal scales" (p. 2). Where Berlant's slow death describes the incremental wearing down of populations, Nixon's concept of slow violence addresses the gradual rise in intensity that may be barely registered. For example, in the case of the environment, while Nixon argues for such phenomena's "relative invisibility," it is possible to consider how such blindness can be politically and economically motivated (p. 2). This lack of vision is not the case for those living within the affected landscape and who register the impact in material, economic, and affective ways. The "long emergency" of slow violence is the lack of recognition of the insidious workings of such violence and their impact on vulnerable populations, which is often achieved through the "unequal attention given to spectacular and unspectacular time" (pp. 3, 6).

Within this conceptual frame, what is the version of time in operation that recognises self-immolation to be spectacular within the unspectacular, ongoing temporalities of precarity? Related to this, in returning to Berlant and her reading of slow death as the gradual wearing away of life, where does the question of the acute appear? I conceive of slow death and slow violence as forming a relation through each concept attending to particular temporal scales in activities that remain less visible to certain subject positions. The notion of ordinariness that Berlant speaks of takes on the frame of the unobserved, undiagnosed, and untreated of Nixon's violent landscape (p. 6). In considering the short attendance to Khawli's life by the media after her self-immolation and the absence of discussion or reporting of her her death even when it was connected to an acute flashpoint of spectacular violence, it appears that events occurring within the spectacular and unspectacular of time can both be ways, in Berlant's words, "of talking about what forms of catastrophe a world is comfortable with" (2007 p. 761). In setting her own body on fire, attention is drawn uncomfortably, for only a split second, to an act of extreme violence, but not to the equally devastating violence that can occur to those told that their lives are livable, that their

death will take longer to arrive than another's according to certain metric of vulnerability.

In this context, Freeman's (2010) notion of temporal drag can play a role in conceptualising how the ordinariness of time that is focused on maintenance rather than transformative progression calls attention to the present rather than having a normative future orientation. The pull of the ordinary, the unspectacular, the vulnerability of not moving forward, of requesting continuity over change, resists temporal formulations that attempt to construct a future based on metrics and technology. Freeman refers to this, and bodies who operate in alternative time scales, as articulating a kind of "temporal transitivity," one that collects and connects historical events to the present and does not leave something behind (2000, p. 729). In thinking about the temporal transitivity of waiting, Nyong'o suggests, "Waiting can insert a pause between past and future, a pause in which the subject's relation to both can be, as it were, performed" (2010, p. 83). Both Khawli and Seemanpillai are forced into temporal spaces of waiting. I consider some of the ways that Khawli moves through various tempos of waiting: hidden in her home while shelling hits her building, in queues, for food vouchers each month, for news on her status and that of family and friends, for the civil war to end, for improvements in the health of her husband and children, in hospital while her body attempts to heal. Waiting becomes integral to the experience of seeking refuge.

Waiting through time

In answer to the question, "what's queer about waiting?" Nyong'o suggests that the notion of anticipation is a "fruitfully queer position" because of the way that waiting, for the queer subject, and what can come from the continued hopefulness for something to change, requires a deviation from "straight time" (pp. 82, 83). As described in chapter three, in the context of this project and the two narratives, the notion of queer is presented as modes of existing within temporalities that are out of joint with the linearity of "straight" time. It is the nonsequential departures that

illuminate or come to form a sense, or anticipation, of something being missed or erased within consequential time. As a form of deviation from particular normative temporalities, Nyong'o describes the queer subject's familiarity with waiting for goods essential to an ordinary existence that are expected, or not even noticed by normative subjects, and where only in their absence is the precarity of a life without them more fully understood (p. 82). However, just as Mahmood points to the capacity for struggle that continues to exist even when a person submits themselves to particular disciplinary practices or structural forms of power, Nygong'o cautions that the "degree of willingness to wait" does not act as a sign for the absence of agency (p. 82). In conceptualising the temporal discontinuity of agential modalities in ways similar to Mahmood, Nyong'o contends, "the relation of a queer subject to waiting cannot be a clean division between refusal and acquiescence" (p. 82).

To wait of course is not to suggest that one is willingly *to* wait, but that it might be possible to learn to live within the waitings of time, of making that waiting part of one's own time. To wait produces contradictory affective states: it can result in a period of stasis, where at least for a certain period nothing changes, and uncertainty, where we literally do not know what we are waiting for. José Esteban Muñoz argues that particular individuals "have been cast out of straight time's rhythm…it seems like the other's time is always off…our temporalities are different and outside." (2009, pp. 182, 183). I suggest this connects productively to the notion of temporal syncopation in Freeman's work raised in chapter one, where, rather than attempting to rectify the rhythm, vulnerable research involves remaining unsettled and outside of "straight time's rhythm." Attending to the lesser beats can help to displace the more visible, spectacular parts of the narratives. In doing so, what becomes visible is that for Khawli, continued hopefulness that something will change might require a deviation from "straight time." She waits for goods and resources essential to an ordinary existence. Khawli is always appearing at the UN at the wrong time, informed that she is in fact ahead of time, that aid is promised if she comes back the next day. It is possible to see how time is used as a commodity and a bargaining tool: there are collective hermeneutical resources available to understand Khawli's plight, but these are subject to temporal conditions; they will only be present at another time.

While she waits Khawli continues to move through time. She walks one and a half hours to the UNHCR office. She queues and then takes her turn to narrate her story and to receive responses for which she must evaluate and then calculate hope and promise against the time it takes to go home and then return on another day, and against the effort it takes to decide on the story to tell her children about her journey. Khawli and her family conduct their lives within a single room, and yet within the cramped spaces and ordinariness of patterns and behaviours that may have developed over the course of their time in Tripoli, and despite the slow decline of hope as time continues, through her own form of maintenance, of stabilising time through routine, of keeping their minds off the dwindling hope of time, Khawli ensures all of her children remain in school. When Khawli steps out from the particularities of one temporal scale, a one and a half hour walk, a queue that takes a day to move, the two years of the civil war, the monthly food vouchers, time speeds up and the two registers of violence, gradual erosion and the acute flashpoint, appear to collide. It takes seconds for Khawli to pour diesel over her body and flick the igniter; it occurs at a speed faster than the reaction of any bystander. Her body is covered in second degree and full thickness burns before the neurons in the brain can fire other bodies to move towards her to smother the flames. In his notion of slow violence Nixon (2011) is aware that while there is a long arc of time between the emergence of slow violence and its effects, what looms within the stealth of slow violence is the threat of catastrophe. The anxiety of slow violence, the catastrophe of the not yet of time, can spark its own explosion. Seemanpillai was anxious about the likelihood of being deported back to Sri Lanka, and again the technologies of vulnerability came into play; he knew the statistics and assessed the likelihood. Khawli worried about the probability of her children remaining in school, the prospect of the illnesses suffered by her husband and children being alleviated if they had work or without the promise of regular food assistance, of the chances of her children finding jobs without an education. Casualties are both amassed and deferred when the acute meets the slow movement of certain forms of violence. Khawli has four children who no longer have a mother; Seemanpillai lived as a refugee since he was six years old and his parents remain in a refugee camp in India. These are the "long dyings" that adhere to cultural,

religious and historical traditions that then reverberate across generations (Nixon 2011, p. 2).

Conclusions

This chapter has focused on modes of telling the story of Mariam al-Khawli, who set fire to her body in March 2014. Several elements of vulnerability have been raised through developing a narrative on Khawli's life. Acknowledging the temporal conditions of language and communication enabled me to consider the force of the temporal and my own assumptions regarding the primacy of language and its placement within stories. Conducting the slow work of returning to the materials, re-reading articles, listening to media interviews, and transcribing Khawli's words, was part of the process of allowing myself to be worked on by the stories of both Seemanpillai and Khawli. Rather than always seeking out what was novel to each case, or consigning the novel to facts or certainties or intelligible parts of the narrative, I decided to remain with the material that I had, and to allow the details within the ordinary, everyday spaces to emerge.

Earlier in this chapter I asked, in the context of global media outlets prominently featuring Khawli's self-immolation, under what circumstances might the self-immolation become what is remarkable and the death that so often closely follows it, so unremarkable? One means of examining this was to address the visual spectacle of self-immolation. I also asked, what is the temporality of self-immolation that recognises it to be spectacular within the unspectacular time of precarity? In this chapter I have introduced more substantially the role of time and different temporalities in researching vulnerability and modes of vulnerable writing. I also introduced how shifting the temporal and spatial registers of self-immolation through the temporal lengthening of actions alters its conceptualisation from an act, or a moment in time, to an event that involves cultural, historical and affective ways of living and enduring. I suggest that changing the temporal conceptualisation of self-immolation can help to refigure self-immolation as a complex negotiation between the

spaces of the political and private, and open up an analysis of how such events are mediated by historical, cultural, gendered and geopolitical conditions, practices, and attachments. I will take this up in the next chapter through conceptualising self-immolation as a "micro event."

Since the time of this event, the numbers of Syrians fleeing the country and seeking refuge outside of Syria have risen from 2.55 million registered refugees in March 2014, to 4.81 million registered with the UNHCR in mid March 2016.[171] Applications for asylum in Europe by those escaping poverty and conflict have risen from 103,653 between April 2011 and March 2014 to 935,008 by January 2016.[172] In attempting to record the macro level conditions that might impact those seeking refuge in Australia and Lebanon, the temporal has continued to be an influencing force. I have attempted to document the sociopolitical situation as it might have been in 2014 during the times in which Seemanpillai and Khawli set themselves on fire, and earlier during the period in which they lived in Australia and Lebanon. However, to do so can assume particular causal relations within the narratives. It can suggest that the individual lives of people, irrespective of where they have travelled from and their reasons for leaving, all become "migrants," and that these facts and figures, and the cold data in which macro level political and structural forces become summarised and communicated, might be able to say something about why Seemanpillai and Khawli self-immolated. It also fixes the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli in time. Yet the metric of vulnerability is never "up to date." While Seemanpillai and Khawli died in 2014, and the research I conducted on their stories took place predominately in 2015, the migration of people due to conflict and poverty has continued and escalated since their deaths. That leads to the question, can what is happening now say something about what happened in 2014 to two individuals? I include these figures but I am still resisting using this "cold data" to suggest there is a problem to be solved through the narratives, or as a way of answering the question of why Seemanpillai and Khawli self-immolated.

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[171] Source: Syrian Regional Refugee Response Inter-Agency Sharing Portal.
[172] Source: Syrian Regional Refugee Response Inter-Agency Sharing Portal.

Connected to this, Kamala Visweswaran (1994) writes of her experience in asking a woman to be a subject of her research, and the woman's refusal. Being engaged in the reluctance of subjects and materials to "give up" tales and confessions can involve being punctured and obstructed by these silences, gaps, and refusals to become part of an archive (p. 60). It is through the woman's refusal to become a particular subject that Visweswaran positions her own role as a researcher as involving how she understands and negotiates the "construction of a silence, how I seek to be accountable to it" (p. 60). I suggest this also connects to the notion of there being a burden index always in operation. This includes the burden on individuals to engage in modes of telling and explanation in order to receive resources and support. What I am particularly interested in is that rather than attempting to account for gaps and absences, Visweswaran's reflexive engagement shifts the response and responsibility to researchers in becoming accountable *to* those erasures, pauses, and dents in narratives. It also includes being accountable to what such narratives require from others, and what forms of epistemic violence are enacted in figuring an individual through a fixed form of subjectivity where intention can be known and documented, and actions made intelligible. In chapter five I address how the messy, discordant, and sensorial elements of subjectivity can remain imperceptible through the erasure of these forms of "warm data" (Gopinath 2010). Therefore I suggest that to be accountable *to* silence, which might occur through remaining with an absence of comprehension, and the ways in which it is tempting to fill this silence through different modes of endeavouring to make sense of this absence in knowledge, is part of vulnerable research.

Chapter Five: Vulnerable Events

In this thesis I have considered the complexity of vulnerability through focusing on the self-immolations of two individuals, Leorsin Seemanpillai and Mariam al-Khawli. I have engaged with how vulnerability not only signals a susceptibility to injury, but also how it also has structural, cultural and affective elements that are situated within contextual specificities that include historical, cultural, and geopolitical conditions, practices, and attachments. This means that the ways vulnerability is enacted and acted upon within and across bodies and through embodied forms of activity are not always commensurable. The unevenness of the distribution of vulnerability marks tension in how singular, unfamiliar and potentially non-relational elements of lives and their connections to particular conditions can be erased from conceptions of vulnerability as a shared, universal condition.

In this chapter I examine several ideas that have emerged in relation to my thinking about vulnerability through this project. Specifically this includes the ways in which temporal and spatial registers are involved in the production of knowledge and in making particular actions intelligible. Developing the two narratives in this thesis has unsettled a singular notion of agency and its relation to intention and action. I want to address how, as disruptive elements, notions of space, time, agency, action and intention can help to open up new ways of thinking about these questions that have emerged through the course of this project: What are ways of working with and being worked on by vulnerability that might account for complexities in agency that are not standardised across different bodies, contexts and conditions? How might elements of vulnerability emerge through the course of an event, which are productively discordant, that surface through a myriad of affective, cultural, and historical encounters within microcosmic spaces and dwellings, and that move between bodies as forms of receptivity, responsiveness and responsibility?

Through developing an outline of what it means to write vulnerably and the key components of a vulnerable methodology, this project has oriented its analysis towards working at the micro layers of stories, situating analyses through the parallel layering of the complexities of local and global concerns. There are structural and temporal forms of vulnerability involved in the ways that particular actions performed by particular bodies become adhered together within fixed moments in time. Therefore space and time became methods of disrupting the movement and boundaries of narratives. Through this, one such register to emerge is the temporal force applied to the performance of self-immolation. In working with the concept of self-immolation, I have sought to refigure the acute flashpoint of a singular act as an event that occurs within the unspectacular and ongoing time of precarity. In this chapter I expand on this notion of the event. Specifically I work with Elizabeth Povinelli's (2011) concept of "quasi-events" to consider how certain actions, scenes, and subjects appear only if transformed into the acute time of catastrophe. I consider the agential forms of endurance that are required to sustain the recursive processes and structuring of these events that occur within the local, micro layers of people's lives.

Therefore I conceptualise self-immolation as a "micro event" to distinguish the space, time and pace of actions that are drawn out through the slowness of time. Specifically, I suggest that the workings of such events can help to illustrate how elements of vulnerability are interwoven into the textures and materiality of the event's context and conditions. My intention is to use such a conceptual frame to discuss how the problem of intention and modalities of agency become woven through different elements of vulnerability that do not remain confined within fixed notions of the self, but are transmitted beyond Seemanpillai and Khawli. Continuing to work with the narratives involving Seemanpillai and Khawli, the final section of this chapter examines how it might be possible to make visible elements or qualities of vulnerability and the way these move within and between bodies as capacities to endure and survive, as susceptibility to injury and harm, and as receptivity and responsibility. In particular, I argue that conceptualisations of vulnerability need to be addressed through attending

to the specificities of agential activities that occur through across multi-sited spaces and different temporalities.

There are overlaps in how I conceptualise micro events and how this concept is grounded in the work of Povinelli (2011). However, there are also important differences. Linguistically, the notion of "quasi" suggests an apparentness, but one that under closer examination might be found not to be. I suggest that Povinelli does not infer this meaning even if the language used might indicate otherwise. The term "quasi" lends itself to a quasi-event being mistaken for a non-event, where what is central is that the activities are not registered through particular macro level power relations, such as government and institutional systems and structures, which determine and measure its impact. Povinelli is interested in the processes by which something does not become spectacular enough to report or lead to action, where "nothing happens that rises to the level of an event let alone a crisis" (p. 4). However rather than this being a non-event, Povinelli works with such inequities within and beyond the human condition to illustrate how a certain kind of eventfulness is required in order for ethics and the actions of the state to be initiated. Her project examines the ways in which particular events, which do happen, are, and are not, "apprehended, evaluated, and grasped as ethical and political demands" as opposed to the crisis and catastrophes that "necessitate ethical reflection and political and civic engagement" (p. 13). Quasi-events turn on this dissection of perceptual necessitation—the mode in which something might appear publicly, and the demand for response that stems from such vision.

Where Povinelli is interested in the kinds of techniques that enable quasi-events to be "transformed into perceptual events, even catastrophes," my focus is on the documentation of the event itself (p. 14). I am less interested in whether such activities are perceived by others, and if that occurs at a macro level. In this project, what is critical is not whether macro level forces enable or permit forms of recognising a particular event, but that those *participating* within it register the event, and with this recognition not necessarily being conscious. The event exists through being inscribed within and upon certain bodies. This is how I have chosen to distinguish a

quasi-event from a micro event; a micro event centres its existence and recognition on those for whom it is registered, and at a level, however perceptible or imperceptible, which marks or impresses upon the affected. The micro event specifically draws upon the temporalities that are present in the slow violence of Nixon (2011), the slow death of Berlant (2007), and the violence of enervation described by Povinelli (2011), as a means in which to register and analyse the erosion emitted from such an event.

Working with events

In this thesis I have sought to refigure self-immolation not as an acute act or flashpoint, but rather through the unspectacular and ongoing time of precarity that involves agency as a capacity for struggle and endurance (Mahmood 2001). Earlier in this thesis I suggested that changing the temporal conceptualisation of self-immolation, from an explosive act to an event that occurs through a longer arc of time, can help to refigure self-immolation as a complex negotiation between the spaces of the political and private, and open up an analysis of how such events are mediated by historical, cultural and geopolitical conditions, practices, and attachments. In this chapter I will explore in more detail how this refiguring might help to make visible elements that inform the functions of and responses to vulnerability.

I have chosen to conceptualise self-immolation as an event because it opens the possibility for remaining uncomfortably but necessarily with the temporal lengthening of actions that both garner attention and disappear through the spectacular time of the acute flashpoint. In the case of self-immolation, the spectacle becomes the explosive moment in which an individual, either acting alone or in coordination with others, sets fire to their own body. To shift the spatial and temporal frame from an act of self-immolation to an event enables consideration of how notions of proximity, endurance and agency complicate the problem of intention and the production of knowledge when narrating stories of the lives of others. Alain Badiou writes of the "undecidability of the event's belonging to the situation" (2007, p. 182). As Quentin Meillassoux notes, events as phenomena are epistemologically unstable because the

event is "always undecidable in relation to knowledge and can therefore always be annulled by one who only believes in brute facts: is there political revolution, or merely an accumulation of disorder and crime?" (2011, p. 3). I suggest that Badiou's event, and those activities that come to be represented as precipitating social change, such as political rallies and assemblies, while being initiated at a level that is localised, emerge to operate at the layer of the macro. Here something materialises from bodies acting in concert to bring forth an alternative epistemological understanding of the situation and its particular elements. These are conceived not as individual non-relational components such as puckered occurrences of violence, striking or rioting, but rather as something cohesive, unified and productive.

It is important to note that in her work on political assemblies Judith Butler addresses how events, especially those that take place under oppressive regimes and within public spaces or spaces where groups and crowds gather, and that involve bodies acting in concert to vocalise their protest for the rights of others and against precarious conditions, remain vulnerable to both physical and hermeneutical forms of suppression (2015). What I am specifically interested in is how and when these forms of suppression occur to prevent such elements and individual forms of activity becoming macro events, especially when bodies do not act in concert, but instead, for a variety of reasons, continue to live and endure within their own microcosmic dwellings. The reverse can also occur, where scenes, actions and subjects become subsumed into spatially and temporally framed, macro level events in ways that involve forms of epistemic violence. I will address this in a later section in this chapter. Therefore, although I am interested in the ways that all events and the subjects within them remain vulnerable to particular forms of intelligibility, I diverge from Badiou's notion of the event, and take a slightly different approach to Butler.

In this approach I will focus on what might emerge through a localised analysis of what could be thought of as "micro events," where the event's instability and undecidability involves resisting the closing down or excluding of discordant elements that might come into conflict with or remain outside the boundaries of larger events. Within this, I am interested in the ways space and time work on certain actions performed by bodies to adhere them together while others remain excluded. This notion of the

micro event does not occur on a macro level where the world is irrevocably changed through the novelty of the situation that is marked by the acute, constrained time of catastrophe and forms of social and political intervention, such as Badiou's examples of the student protests in May 1968 in Paris, and more recently the uprising in Tahrir Square in Egypt.[173] Rather, it is the *lack* of change within particular structures and power relations in connection to micro events that questions its integrity as an event, and whether something has taken place at all. Instead of emerging from the actions of individuals moving in concert in ways that is *not* recursive or a "reiteration of something we already know," a micro event might be said to involve a continuing reiteration of the functions and effects of living within certain conditions. Its repetition and endurance is a quality that masks its appearance and makes its occurrence difficult to recognise, or more easy to ignore.[174]

Connected to this concern, Michel Foucault uses the term "eventalization" to describe "making visible a *singularity* at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant, an immediate anthropological trait, or an obviousness that imposes itself uniformly on all" (original italics) (2002, p. 226). Foucault argues that in opposition to the pull of universality, the occurrence is not simply a "fact to be registered" or a rupture within elements in a continuum that either do not change, or change slowly and perhaps imperceptibly over time (p. 227). In order to register a singularity, the procedure involves disrupting the temporal force moving forwards toward cohesion, through engaging in "multiple causation" where the myriad of elements, or processes that constitute an event are analysed (p. 227). This mode of backwards disruption that I suggest involves a form of temporal drag, can help to rediscover the "connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies…that at a given moment establish what subsequently counts as being self-evident, universal, and necessary" (p. 226). Rather than invoking explanatory power, such a form of critical engagement does not readily accept the self-evidence of what

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[173] For Badiou's commentary on Tunisia and Egypt as an event see "Alain Badiou: "Tunisie, Egypte : quand un vent d'est balaie l'arrogance de l'Occident,"" *Verso*. 25 February 2011. Translation into English is provided. Available at: http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/394-alain-badiou-tunisie-egypte-quand-un-vent-d-est-balaie-l-arrogance-de-l-occident [Last accessed 25 March 2016].

[174] "Alain Badiou: "Tunisie, Egypte : quand un vent d'est balaie l'arrogance de l'Occident.""

might become "institutional fact" or "ideological effect" (p. 227). For Foucault, this form of criticism "consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits" (1984, p. 45). Connected to this, therefore Foucault asks instead, "In what is given to us as universal, necessary and obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?" (p. 45). I suggest Foucault's notion of limits and the importance of considering the ambivalence of the singular, non-relational and contingent can be generative in thinking about the workings of the elements of micro events.

How eventfulness is put to work

I have proposed previously that the ambivalence of self-immolation, which frames the micro event, is held within the particularities of the pace and movement of time, with the acute flashpoint of burning giving way to a longer arc of suffering and durability. These two temporal modes continue to be held in tension with each other. In this project I wanted to ensure the catastrophic time and space of self-immolation, that has connected it historically to being the catalyst of macro level events (such as the self-immolation of Thích Quang Đuc in Vietnam in 1963, which has been connected to the fall of the Diem regime, and the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi perceived as triggering the Tunisian Revolution in 2010) did not overpower details emerging from local, micro level analyses. Therefore I did not want to erase the capacity of self-immolation to operate within temporalities that include, as Povinelli proposes, "modes of exhaustion and endurance that are ordinary, chronic, and cruddy rather than catastrophic, crisis-laden, and sublime" (2011, p. 132). In this section I question the role of the catastrophic and the way that its temporal force alters the pace but also the spacing and elements that constitute an event. The discursive naming of an event as "catastrophic" suggests that the catastrophe, as a singular moment captured in time, might signal the moment when a person, object or environment can no longer endure the existing conditions. A catastrophe is an event causing great and usually *sudden* damage or suffering; the naming of an event as catastrophic suggests it occurs often without warning, and is completed quickly. Therefore its condensed temporality has

the power to exclude continued harm, injury or loss that may or may not have a direct causal or proximal relation to the acute damage. When a catastrophe is identified, its temporal and discursive force can mask the vulnerable endurance of micro events that continue to occur within unspectacular, ongoing temporalities. In connecting the catastrophe to emergencies, in the context of the image of Davinia Turrell and Paul Dadge that I described in chapter one to illustrate different modalities of vulnerability, Ben Anderson (2015) has written on the notion of emergency within the context the 7 July 2005 bombings and the logic of response and has conceptualised emergency through a "mode of eventfulness" (Berlant 2011).

In her work on economies of abandonment, Povinelli distinguishes events from "quasi-events" that "rarely appear to be catastrophic" (2011, p. 133). The mode of temporality involved mirrors Rob Nixon's (2011) proposition for how slow violence represents a gradual rise in intensity that may be barely registered. For Povinelli, the notion of intensity is understood not as something that is marked by a metrics of escalation; instead, its impact is felt through a form of endurance. This involves a consistent force or pressing upon bodies and their precarious relations to infrastructure, objects and environments, which is recorded only when something gives way at a level registered as being acute. As Povinelli describes, the quasi-event is grounded in its slow erosion, where it is framed by "the violence of enervation, the weakening of the will rather than the killing of life" (2011, p. 132). It is, as Lauren Berlant (2007) proposes, a gradual wearing out, where the effects of particular elements of vulnerability exist at levels that are purposefully imperceptible within pre-determined metrics set by the monitoring technologies of the state. Therefore, like the environmental destruction encompassed by Nixon's slow violence, "so much decomposition happens below the threshold of awareness and theorization" (Povinelli 2011, p. 132). In conceptualising quasi-events, particular attention is paid to the conditions and context in which these small elements and movements occur, and to whose bodies these events become adhered.

For example, in drawing upon Povinelli's own experience of many years spent with an Indigenous Australian community in the north of the country, the loss of the lid of a

washing machine off the back of a truck that cannot be replaced becomes a quasi-event with reverberating implications. Yet it might remain without mention, without being noticed if such an event was viewed within the frame of a Foucauldian eventalised universality rather than being examined in its singularity. A lid can be replaced, insurance can cover the cost, and even the attribution of blame or responsibility for not securing the washing machine becomes unnecessary. The moment, for it is not an event, it is not something that matters and is barely registered; instead it is, perhaps, a humorous story to be told at another time. However, it *is* a quasi-event when the loss of the lid is framed within what this singular event means to those connected to the scene and its occurrence, and how it becomes mediated through historic, economic, cultural and geopolitical conditions: it cannot be replaced because there is no money available; the car is borrowed on this particular day for this particular purpose; the distance travelled is too great to be repeated on another day. The washing of clothes, that now cannot occur because of the unusable washing machine, is not only to keep them clean, it is to remove the bacteria that cause staphylococcus infections which are endemic to the community in which the family lives (p. 139). The quasi-event therefore connects elements to a "dispersed suffering" that resists being made intelligible solely through self-evident or homogenising forces, and proximal causal relations (p. 4). It is not the careless strapping down of the washing machine that is causing staphylococcus infections that are rare in non-Indigenous, urban-based populations. As I have suggested earlier in chapter two, the close temporal proximity of events or actions to an acute moment in time is not necessarily a means of determining what might cause people to act in particular ways, and the impact of conditions of deprivation upon particular lives.

Therefore, when conceptualised not as an act but within the temporal lengthening of a quasi or micro event, and when linked to those who are intimately connected to the slow, gradual violence of the loss of the lid, this quasi-event illuminates what may have previously disappeared. It signifies the embodied social and structural relations that trail outwards and reverberate both in the present and into the future, but also historically, to expose the continued vulnerability to erosion of the community in which the quasi-event occurred. Just as Foucault focuses attention on how singularities

become subsumed within historical self-evident institutional facts, Povinelli asks critically how eventfulness is put to work: "How do these various modalities of the event rivet scholarly or political attention, or rivet their attention only if transformed through statistical practices into a catastrophic event?" (p. 134). It is possible to see how the loss of a lid, which is no loss at all, and whose impact is never measured, can quickly be erased.

A connection is made here to the previous chapter and the notion of a recursive process raised by Tavia Nyong'o (2010). This involves "any procedure that includes at least one sequence that must be repeated before it can be completed" (p. 247). The novelty of the macro event is replaced by the repeating loops or cycles that infiltrate the quasi or micro level event. As Nyong'o describes, elements of the event become embedded within a particular temporality such that they take on recursive structures (p. 247). Where traditional notions of temporally finite events involve some form of "vanishing point," there is no perceptible end point to the micro event (p. 247). Instead of eventually emerging, "the infinity into which recursion disappears does not stabilize but rather provokes and troubles the visual field. It calls attention to itself and keeps the eye anxiously roving" (p. 247). As suggested earlier through Nyong'o's work, the unsettling, anxious nature of what is occurring means the subjects of the event, in this case those connected to the loss of a washing machine lid, are denied the stability of a vantage point in which to consider a range of epistemological and hermeneutical ways to account for what has happened and to progress forward. They are also denied the promise that one's endurance through continued attempts to invest in resources that many take for granted will ultimately create a form of intervention or social change. (p. 247).

The notion of the quasi-event addresses the instability of the scene and its epistemological vulnerability, for, as Berlant argues, "events are not self-present, but incidental, smaller dents that are always becoming-event" (2012, p. 2). Povinelli's notion of the quasi-event begins with an occurrence that is non-perceptual and asks how situations and actions become transformed into events that are perceptible and which matter in some way. In contrast to the quasi-event where something has taken

place but lacks visibility, the focus of Berlant's interrogation of events through the notion of a "becoming-event" is on what occurs prior to the impact or situation. Berlant considers critically whether events themselves are self-evident (2014, p.7). The temporal positioning of the starting point of Berlant's analytic bears similarities to the way Foucault works backwards from the event by first considering the elements that come to form such self-evident, historic constants. This involves Berlant conceptualising "impact as more like a prompt" where its appearance is then tracked "as circulation, transformation, and mediations" (p.7). Berlant argues that our attachment to stabilising, cohesive, bounded, knowledge as forming undeniable understandings of people, objects and phenomena is connected to a "desire to foreclose that always haunts anchors in meaning" (p. 3). The temptation to take possession of meaning and close down alternative accounts is addressed in this thesis in chapter two. I traced this concern through addressing time as a conditioning agent of knowledge. I also described a culture of knowingness in chapter four, where claims to have access to a person's intention, to know what was on their mind, can give the effect of already appearing to know. This can lead to the production of knowledge being focused on "having the problem solved ahead of time, about feeling more evolved than one's context" (Freeman 2010, p. xiii). The becoming-event instead involves the "tug backwards" of temporal drag, which in contrast to a desire to cast aside the past, or to rush towards the future, remains with what is uncertain and unstable (Freeman 2010).

Therefore Povinelli and Berlant come to critiques of the event in different ways. For Povinelli the interest is in particular forms of "eventfulness" where the establishment of social and political registers means that quasi-events are actions and moments in time whose materiality is such that it never quite achieves the status of having taken place (2011, p. 13). The ways that certain individuals, groups and communities are disproportionately engaged in quasi-events become more visible when slowing the pace and analysing the elements, ambivalences and relations adhered to particular events. In comparison, Berlant approaches events not from the question of the kinds of techniques that might enable quasi-events to become perceptual or visible, but from the question of the epistemological structure of events, where individual

elements might lead to particular localised analyses while withholding moves towards a cohesive structure or meaning. I suggest both approaches provide strategies that help to engage with the duration and endurance of an event, the instability that comes from modes of telling and narration of other people's stories, the shifting movements of meaning, and the ongoing possibility for committing forms of epistemic and symbolic violence towards subjects of the event.

Micro events and warm data

Working within the framing of the micro event, I will now return to the two cases documented in this thesis involving the self-immolations of Seemanpillai and Khawli, which occurred in different contexts, and under different conditions. While there are similarities in their seeking refuge in another country and in the precarious conditions in which each lived, by proposing self-immolation as an event I do not want to suggest that the actions of Seemanpillai and Khawli should be positioned in ways that enable forms of commensurability. I also do not want to suggest there is predictability to different elements of vulnerability through how each element might work upon and within certain bodies and emit particular effects. Instead I propose that within a particular micro event, different elements of vulnerability exist, not in structured, proximal causal relations that push toward homogenised, universal claims, but within located specificities connected to subjectivity, conditions and context that do not lay claim to the transparency of intentions and the singular agency of those who self-immolate. More simply, the notion of the micro event opens out the analysis to consider what may become unsettled if self-immolation was something other than an act or a practice of self-destruction. There is vulnerability to these kinds of events, where the discordant and conflicting can be effaced by the catastrophic, universal and self-evident. I suggest the uncertainty and ambivalence of Seemanpillai and Khawli's actions is integral to the qualities of the event itself.

The night before he burned himself, Seemanpillai sat with a friend. They drank tea together and Seemanpillai showed his friend pictures of him at work, standing in his

protective equipment and clothing. Two days before, Seemanpillai cooked dinner for another friend and they talked about their families. The friend said: "We had a good conversation. He was happy. Before I left, he asked: 'Are you just going to leave me like this?' I thought it was a joke…If I'd have known I wouldn't have gone."[175] Seemanpillai stripped off his clothes from his body while they were burning and he began to run and scream. He removed his clothes, he made noises, he moved from his yard to a public space where there may have been someone who could help him. Seemanpillai poured petrol over his body, and then lit the fluid, and then he might have tried to save his own life. Khawli set herself alight in public in front of the UNHCR registration centre, the agency whose primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. Khawli's husband Ahmad was convinced that Khawli did not want to kill herself: "She wasn't trying to commit suicide. She just felt so oppressed because she felt like she was being told she didn't deserve help."[176] Ahmad connected the necessity of this endurance to particular forms of intelligibility: "Only a human being who lives like this would be able to understand and know why she was pushed to set herself on fire…"[177] Khawli herself explained, "I set myself ablaze for the sake of my children."[178] The proximity of life-preserving, self-making acts with those that had the potential to be life-ending, and the uncertainty of the role of self-making within self-immolation, have persisted through this project. The proximity of these two registers, self-making and self-destruction, means that if "events are things that we can say happened such that they have a certain objective being," then if we cannot say that suicide happened, or that it was political protest, then as a quasi-event, despite its violent illumination, self-immolation might never quite achieve "the status of having occurred or taken place" (Povinelli 2011, p. 13).

While materially documented by the media, the absence of sustained political mobilisation following either Seemanpillai or Povinelli's self-immolations suggests a lack of status afforded to these events. While Seemanpillai's death was registered and did provoke political debate at the time in Australia, ultimately legislation to prevent

[175] Oliver Laughland, "The Life And Awful Death Of A Tamil Asylum Seeker in Australia."
[176] Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."
[177] Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."
[178] Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."

the permanent protection within Australia of those seeking refuge was enacted in late 2014. The self-immolation of Khawli did not become an action upon which forms of political debate or public assembly became galvanised around the plight of Syrians. As discussed, other self-immolations have garnered attention in ways that lead to social and political change. At least tentatively this suggests there is specificity to how self-immolation, even as an acute explosion of suffering, can remain a micro event and not move "from potentiality to eventfulness to availability for various social projects" (p. 14).

One of the ways that micro events might remain imperceptible is through the means in which elements and archives are attended to and documented. The "warm data" of an event can be erased when facts are gathered for the purposes of reporting "cold data," a process that occurs during the collection and reporting of metrics to form a "burden index" and the subsequent homogenisation of individuals through discursively constructed groups (Gopinath 2010, p. 184). As I will address in the next section through the illustration of an event that triggered a political revolution, warm data can also turn cold unless the archiving process involved in making warm data visible remains ongoing. On this basis I suggest that an element of a micro event's heat and energy involves strategies and approaches that resist consigning warm data in its novel form to facts or certainties. When events turn "cold" the data solidifies within certain forms of intelligibility, which can exclude the continual emergence of data or details that destabilises its structure. Therefore I propose that micro events consist of warm data continually emerging from slow temporalities.

I suggest that by attending to warm data it is possible to consider Khawli's self-immolation through critical self-making elements that may come to inform the micro event. As suggested earlier, this is not to propose Khawli's act was intended to sacrifice her life for that of her children's well being. Attendance to and priority of this form of data in shaping the event sharpens the focus on, in Gopinath's words, "those affective attachments—to places, things—that are experienced sensorially and through the body itself"(p. 184). It involves affective responses and "sensorial memory" that "are banished from the official archive" (p. 184). Khawli speaks in terms of sensorial

memory, of her children feeling dizzy, of her inability to feed them, and the relief in setting herself on fire. It becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between the embodied pains of burns, a body requiring food, and the witnessing of suffering for which one takes responsibility. Khawli articulates this blurring in her description after setting herself on fire: "My chest hurts. We don't have any food."[179] In the previous chapter I argued that self-immolation could be conceived as a form of pain but also a form of struggle, a social relation that is both inhabited and enacted. As a micro event, when seen through the warm data that makes visible continued acts of preservation, self-immolation might become one element of a range of warm data that is consistent with Khawli's continued responsibility for her children's welfare (in protecting them from bombing in Homs, from the risks of shared housing, and ensuring they become educated and can provide for themselves). These are life-saving, self-making activities that involve forms of self-maintenance and emerge through forms of communication that include "the non-visual, the tactile, the audible, the kinesthetic, and the anti-monumental," and that might come to include self-immolation (p. 190).

In summary, by changing the temporality of vulnerability to focus on slowing the tempo and what endures over time, the warm data that might escape the burden index can begin to heat the archive. My intention is to shed light on the embodied ways that micro events can reverberate sensorially within and across bodies when attention is paid to discordant sensorial and material elements of lives that emerge within non-sequential modes of time. I propose that these elements of narratives can unsettle, and in this way the data stays warm. The warmth occurs when these tactile, sensorial and kinesthetic impressions of struggle and endurance are not directly connected to facts or certainties within narratives, but instead are documented without the demand for intentions to be uncovered and actions to be made intelligible.

Embodied interventions and forms of agency

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[179] AFP, "Syrian Refugee In Lebanon Sets Herself On Fire at UN: Witnesses."

I now want to consider what might get missed when meaning ascribed to certain embodied interventions becomes connected to political forms of agency. Throughout this project the relation between agency, intention and action in the ascribing of meaning to self-immolation has continued to remain uncertain. I am interested in how assigning particular forms of agency, even when this form attributes autonomy, self-empowerment and resistance to specific activities, has the potential to commit epistemic violence. To find patterns in the ways and reasons bodies perform actions is a source of potential, but also risks homogenising and reducing or subsuming disparate acts and the subjectivities involved in these acts within wider macro level events. Here I want to disrupt the relation between singular notions of agency and the catastrophic time of events, to consider the ways modalities of agency, connected to the capacities of bodies and their range of desires, practices and disciplining constraints, might illuminate the discordant elements that can be subsumed by and erased within forms of intelligibility.

To illustrate this, I want to examine briefly another self-immolation, which has been conceptualised as a political act. As described in chapter two, Banu Bargu coins the term "weaponization of life" to refer to the "tactic of resorting to corporeal and existential practices of struggle, based on the technique of self-destruction, in order to make a political statement or advance political goals" (2014, p. 14). Also in chapter two of this thesis, I described briefly the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian who set himself on fire in 2010 after being slapped by a municipal inspector and having produce from his vegetable cart confiscated. I will address his self-immolation more directly now, in the context of thinking about modalities of agency. Bargu positions Bouazizi as "forging his life into a weapon of struggle" (p. 349). This suggests a series of connected elements: that Bouazizi's intention was known, that the agency involved was directed towards resistance, that his self-immolation was a political protest, and that his bodily act, because it was political, as Bargu suggests, formed a "close kinship" with other individuals engaged in political struggle (p. 349). I suggest that this particular positioning of relational elements and predictability to Bouazizi's actions that provide insight into his intention, might lead to a form of eventalization, where the singular elements of individual acts become self-evident of

historical constants, grounded in an expression of agency that is synonymous with resistance. What was on Bouazizi's mind? Was it a self-destructive act, or a threat, or a protest? Does Bouazizi's intention matter if the outcome was a social revolution?

To attempt to refigure Bouazizi's act involves situating it within the instability of the context and conditions in which it occurred, including geopolitical location, culture, and religious practices. In doing so, the force of spectacular, acute time of self-immolation becomes visible, illustrating how the explosive act masks those acts of endurance that are devastating in different ways. In the days that followed Bouazizi's setting himself on fire, Fedia Hamdi, the municipal inspector whose reported slap triggered Bouazizi's protest, was imprisoned for civil offences upon the orders of the now ousted Tunisian President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. Hamdi began a hunger strike in prison that lasted 15 days before doctors intervened. From online searches, I can only find two original English language articles written on Hamdi, both by the same journalist.[180] Why was there a lack of media interest in Hamdi's story? Hamdi remains largely absent within the discursive framing of political subjects within Tunisia's Revolution, and yet she also engaged in turning her body into a weapon, in protesting the injustice of her imprisonment by the former president. When finally asked by the media about her role, Hamdi explains that, "I would never have hit him [Bouazizi]. It was impossible because I am a woman, first of all, and I live in a traditionally Arab community which bans a woman from hitting a man. And, secondly, I was frightened… I was only doing my job."[181] I am not proposing that Hamdi's narrative should simply replace another or be transformed into a dominant, singular account of the event. Instead, I suggest that the vulnerability of modes of telling and the necessity of examining where actions occur and who performs them, and the temporal and spatial limits enforced upon events, weigh as heavily as the loss of a washing machine lid on a community living in far north Australia. Hamdi's narrative of what occurred between herself and Bouazizi complicates the singular notions of agency as resistance and self-

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[180] Elizabeth Day, "Fedia Hamid's Slap Which Sparked a Revolution 'Didn't Happen'," *The Guardian,* 23 April 2011. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/23/fedia-hamdi-slap-revolution-tunisia [Last accessed 22 March 2016].
Elizabeth Day, "The Slap That Sparked A Revolution," *The Guardian,* 15 May 2011. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/15/arab-spring-tunisia-the-slap [Last accessed 22 March 2016].
[181] Elizabeth Day, "The Slap That Sparked A Revolution."

immolation as an act of political intervention.

Hamdi's agency comes to be rehearsed in its absence; she is simultaneously a municipal inspector and a policewoman despite these roles ascribing her with different authority. In varying media reports Hamdi demanded a bribe from Bouazizi, confiscated several items, an entire cart of produce, the scales used for weighing, and the vegetable cart itself. She assaulted a man, forced him to the ground with the help of other officers, spat on him and insulted his dead father. The force in which Bouazizi's self-immolation is ascribed political agency effaces the specificities of agency being engaged in during micro events. The catastrophic time of Bouazizi's act became an event, and Hamdi's hunger strike never quite achieved the status of having occurred. Bouazizi and Hamdi are differentially both victims of structural forms of state and economic oppression, but Hamdi's imprisonment and hunger strike did not become an element within the event of the Tunisian Revolution. I have not undertaken modes of slow, vulnerable research in working with the details of the self-immolation of Bouazizi that I undertook in focusing on the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli. However, I have included Bouazizi's story to illustrate how, even as a heroic symbol of Tunisia, there is a certain violence done in suppressing or erasing other elements of narratives that emerge in shifting the spatial and temporal registers. As I proposed in chapter one with regards to the use of the term "local," these narratives are multi-sited, impressed by wider forces and times and involve other individuals with their own modalities of agency.

The narrative of Bouazizi returns me to Berlant's (2007) warning with regards to representing intentional subjects that I discussed in chapter three. Berlant warns that the habit of representing the intentional subject can begin to look "deeply overmeaningful," where both action and lack of action can be read as "heroic placeholders for resistance to something, affirmation of something, or a transformative desire" (p. 757). It also echoes Lata Mani's writing on colonial eyewitness accounts of incidents of widow burning and narrative accounts of women's actions and intentions. The representations of women within such discourse are framed as either "heroines" or "victims" (1998, p. 162). These binaries of agential

activity contained within the narrative of heroic resistor or oppressed victim, leave little room for other responses to the affective, cultural and material conditions that press upon those living in particular lifeworlds.

Agential modalities

I will now connect this ambivalence of agency, especially in its relation to singular bodies rather than those working in concert or in coordinated action, to the two narratives in this thesis. As I have described, in working with the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli I continue to remain uncertain as to whether either of their acts of self-immolation could be attributed to forms of political resistance or intervention, or to personal suicide. I suggest that in political resistance being the modality through which certain techniques of self-destruction are materialised, this singular notion of agency, which can inform the meaning ascribed to an event, might become one means to foreclose alternative forms of intelligibility and sense-making. In thinking through the ways that different bodies distinguish themselves and respond to conditions of precarity, Talal Asad contends that a normative meaning of agency assumes a form of standardisation across bodies (2000). To illustrate this, Asad argues that even when there are culturally mediated understandings of sickness, disease, and of how people experience and express pain, "The sick body is often represented no differently from the healthy body in that for both agency is typically regarded as resistance to power" (p. 31). This is telling in terms of how bodies are assumed to function in similar ways, in their access to resources, the restrictions and limitations placed upon them and their responses to conditions in which they live. In the example in the previous section, Hamdi was represented no differently than other municipal inspectors in Tunisia, despite her own awareness of the restrictions that gender might have had on the scope of her actions, and her fear of violence from cart owners that gathered to watch during her confrontation with Bouazizi. State authority was seen to negate the ways that gender, culture and religion may or may not mediate the experience of social relations in Tunisia. Instead, as Butler notes in another context in describing how disability studies addresses agential and bodily capacities, such

capacities are always dependent upon conditions, infrastructure and resources because "human action depends on all sorts of supports—it is always supported action," and yet such support can be absent (2015, p. 72). Therefore I suggest discussion of conceptualisations of vulnerability must also include the ways that certain bodies and certain capacities involve struggle, and are unsupported, limited or constrained.

In considering this, a question arises: Is a certain kind of body needed to perform techniques of self-destruction? In the previous chapter I asked whether it was significant that it was Khawli and not her husband Ahmad who responded to their family's situation. Ahmad has a life threatening health condition. Is self-immolation something that requires a certain kind of body to perform it? Khawli's self-immolation required endurance, a one and a half hour walk, a lack of food, standing in line, shielding herself from the elements of the weather, and pressing the family's case to officers within the UNHCR office. These actions were repeated and repeated. Seemanpillai's body endured fleeing violence in Sri Lanka, travelling on the open sea in vessels, separation from his family, at least one boat sinking, imprisonment within detention centres, sexual assault and other forms of physical and emotional deprivation. If self-immolation is conceived as a micro event through a longer arc of time, what forms of agential durability must first be present to survive the time of the event?

Discussions of agency must therefore include frustration and tired, sick, frail bodies, those with varying abilities, and those for whom agential modalities might be informed by how their bodies operate in unexpected ways, or are restricted in their movement within and through particular spaces. As I have described in chapter two, Berlant addresses how stories of agential, aspirational subjects, of which Bouazizi is an example, must also represent the inevitable "involvement with pain and error, the bad memory and mental lag" that shapes "indirect routes toward pleasure and survival" (2011, p. 122). For Berlant this means talking about activities that reproduce the banal specificities of "ordinary life" through means that are particular to an individual and are less connected to normative understandings of healthy bodies involved in acts of

autonomy and liberation (2007, p. 757). Asad suggests, in ways that resonate with Butler's notion of supported action, that instead of conceptualising agency in terms of autonomous self-empowerment, agency is better thought as "a complex, relational term, whose senses emerge within semantic and institutional networks that define and make possible particular ways of dealing with people and things" (2000, p. 35). Asad clarifies that the modalities of agency employed by embodied subjects will alter depending on the context, conditions, and disciplines in which a person lives, and what the requirements are for living.

I interpret this to mean that Asad is not suggesting that agency is relational in the sense of connecting relational elements of subjects together into intelligible forms, or that agential forms of activity can be traced back to underlying causes and effects that are founded upon human action as being synonymous with resistance, which involves a "questionable vision of history as moral progress" (p. 51). Instead, enquiries address the limits and constraints as well as possibilities of agential activities, by extending a notion of action beyond "how the intentionality of particular humans is externalised in acts that 'generate', or 'resist' social structures" (p. 52). Simply put yet complex in its challenge, Asad's focus is on examining "the possibilities for living sanely in a painful world" (p. 52). In connecting this research concern back to Povinelli's articulation of quasi-events, I suggest such an enquiry might be localised and involves agential forms of endurance that are required to sustain the recursive processes and structuring of events that occur within the micro layers of people's lives. I take this to be a different focus than one that channels such enquiry through notions of a singular modality of agency and its relation to political intention.

In the context of developing narratives on the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli, I have argued for attention also to be paid to the singular, non-relational elements of the stories, and the ways that vulnerability is worn within bodies and how conditions wear down bodies through the particularities of the cultural and historical trails that might have led to those spaces. The move to political subversion and resistance becomes one response of many that might be possible but remain contingent upon the contextual specificities of how conditions of precarity are lived. What I am drawn to within the

notion of there being modalities of agency, which has framed the discussions of each of the two stories in this thesis, is that these modalities are located, and responsive to ways of acting and being that are restricted. This framing helps to question how it might be possible to know in advance how agency might appear, and interrogates how such actions might be connected to structures as well as particular disciplinary practices (see Mahmood 2012). In contrast, agency's connection to political intervention can suggest a temporal notion that is grounded in the transparency of being able know another person's intention, and the corresponding possibility for there to be some form of historicity and predictability to the enactment of agency.

As a capacity that comprises a network of elements involved in forms of activity, the notion of agency is complex in relation to the event of self-immolation. Bargu states that the aim of her focus on techniques of self-destruction is to attempt "to restore agency to these actors by taking them seriously as interlocutors" (2014, p. 349). However, what forms of agency are being restored, and how might that foreclose upon other agential capacities that involve a range of discordant elements? How might agential capacities be forced into concomitant relations? In addressing the conceptualisation of agency, Saba Mahmood proposes that an "inquiry into processes that secure such a desire for resistance" is a necessary part of the question of politics (2001, p. 211). Mahmood argues that a desire for liberation and/or to subvert norms is not a universal motivating force that occurs independently of affective, cultural and historical conditions, but instead is "profoundly mediated by other capacities and desires" (p. 211). In line with Asad, Mahmood proposes that it is necessary to analyse the operations of power that construct this range of desires, capacities and virtues, which might lead to actions that occur in ways that are discordant to normative forms of agency defined through a subject's engagement in resistance and subversion (p. 211). Therefore, rather than there being a historical constant in place that might measure actions against particular criteria removed from the individual and its social relations and conditions in which they live, Mahmood reminds us that "the ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific" (p. 211).

Despite the ambivalence in how agency might exert itself, its relation to intentionality

suggests structural and temporal stability to both these embodied concepts. Asad argues that intentionality "which is variously glossed as 'plan', 'awareness', 'wilfulness', or 'desire'…is made to be central to the attribution of agency in the human sciences" (2000, p. 35). This notion of intention suggests that it involves a form of consciousness, operates in advance of time, is accessible to others through witnessing actions undertaken, and orients an individual "in a singular historical direction: increasing self-empowerment," which occurs irrespective of "the practical requirements of social life" (p. 35). In returning to the modes of telling and the uptake of particular political narratives, to read Bouazizi's actions through Hamdi's assertion that Bouazizi became "hysterical" and "almost unaware of what he was doing" after the confrontation with her, brings into question whether a singular form of agency can be ascribed to account for his self-immolation.[182] Bouazizi continued, as did other vegetable sellers, to sell his produce in areas of the city where such activity was not permitted. His ability to survive forms of violence inflicted structurally, affectively and physically suggests, as it does in the two stories within this thesis, that endurance and holding on, and the small dents that micro events make as a result of these movements, might be involved in particular modalities of agency that require further investigation.

Vulnerable elements

In the previous sections I proposed that refiguring self-immolation as an event with endurance can help to make visible the contradictory, discordant modalities of agency, intention and activity. Self-immolation challenges distinctions between the catastrophic and chronic through the temporal pacing and spacing of actions and the ways bodies and environments slowly decompose. If catastrophe occurs suddenly and often without warning, then self-immolation might be more accurately thought of as a chronic time of living. In chapter one I proposed that researching vulnerability is framed by tensions in moving between conceptualising vulnerability as a shared, existential condition that is a feature of living organisms exposed to harm and the risk of injury and death, and the conditionality of that exposure that might engage

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[182] Elizabeth Day, "The Slap That Sparked A Revolution."

different qualities or elements of vulnerability. That is, while exposed, the vulnerability of living beings is not equal. This project has attempted to localise a conception of vulnerability that becomes situated within bodies through different temporalities that make visible structural, cultural and affective elements of vulnerability.

In these final two sections I focus on the elements of vulnerability that emerge through the narratives and inform the fragile textures of the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli. As outlined earlier, I return now to the questions I set out: What are ways of working with and being worked on by vulnerability that might account for complexities in agency that are not standardised across different bodies, contexts and conditions? How might elements of vulnerability emerge through the course of an event, which are productively discordant, that surface through a myriad of affective, cultural, and historical encounters within microcosmic spaces and dwellings, and that move between bodies as forms of receptivity, responsiveness and responsibility?

In the analysis of each story, I made a decision to place the micro and the macro layers of the narratives in parallel with each other, rather than in hierarchal layers where the force of the causal might lead to translations from the micro to the macro and foreclose upon continued openings and alternatives, as well as receptivity to the slow affective trails that sweep outward from both chronic and acute moments in time. From remaining with rather than attempting to resolve conflicting narratives, it now seems more difficult to reconcile Bouazizi setting himself on fire with the singular attribution of political intention and agency. Did Seemanpillai's depression cause to him to burn his body? Was Khawli's exclusion from a food assistance programme the cause of her self-immolation? In considering the complex elements of each story I previously argued that the close temporal proximity of events or actions to an acute moment in time is not necessarily a means of determining what might cause people to act in particular ways, and the impact of conditions of deprivation upon particular lives. While self-immolation comes to ignite elements within an event, some deaths that we think occur in an explosion may instead be slow and are eked out not over minutes but over months, years, and generations.

The stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli enabled particular elements of vulnerability to come into focus, which became connected not only to the people in which the narratives were centred, but also to places, phenomena and infrastructure, and to the structure and production of knowledge. As the narratives emerged through investigating the micro layers of the stories, it became more difficult to assign particular elements of vulnerability to Seemanpillai and Khawli that might hold in place across the spatial and temporal movements of their lives, and in ways that might be able to be generalised beyond each case. For Mahmood the ways actions and intention are mediated means that "meaning and sense cannot be fixed a priori" but instead be "allowed to emerge through an analysis of the particular networks of concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity" (2001, p. 212). In the context of vulnerability, the network of related concepts include notions of the event, agency, time and space, and knowledge production. I suggest this illustrates how discussions of vulnerability can assume the fixity and integrity to its structure as a concept and a constitutive condition that becomes connected within a static materiality across embodied subjects, conditions and contexts. Instead, working with elements of vulnerability and the ways these unfold within different registers can enable the textures and ambivalences of elements, and the relations and discordant layers between them, to emerge.

While Butler (2015) suggests vulnerability has a relational capacity, one of the themes that has emerged from this project is the place for considering the singular and non-relational. The singularities involved in micro events, the discordant elements of complex subjectivities and the difficulties in making sense of certain narratives make me hesitate in moving too quickly towards the relational capacities of vulnerability, without also allowing space for the ways vulnerable research is informed by attending to the ill-fitting and conflicting elements of stories. As I have described earlier in chapter one, tied to the notion of consequential, linear time, is how this mode of time might be contextualised as a capacity of relational elements. In tracing the limits of social analysis and the space for that which eludes the "the grasp of comprehension and the fullness of narrative meaning," I have described how Paul Harrison suggests also asking about the "breaks and gaps, interruptions and intervals, caesuras and

tears" (2007, pp. 591-592). As a methodological alternative to relational understandings of cause and effect, earlier I suggested attending to how people move between the particularities of temporal scales. There will always be that which resists or is banished from the relation, and therefore any consideration of the relational needs to equally be aware of the "absence of the nonrelational" (p. 592). I have suggested that Foucault's notion of limits and the importance of considering the ambivalence of the singular, non-relational and contingent could be generative in thinking about the workings of the elements of micro events. What space is there for making visible singularities and holding on to discordant elements, and remaining with the tension held between the constitutive and the contingent? In working with vulnerable methods and the unsettled disturbance of not knowing, such an approach does not attempt to resolve this discomfort through problem solving, or making lives intelligible through particular relational elements of cause and effect that involve proximal relations between certain actions or occurrences and what this might infer about intention. It means remaining uncomfortably with not knowing in advance how agential capacities might be enacted within the particularities of embodied subjects. Consequently, I suggest that a component of vulnerability that requires further analysis is its resistance to rendering and assimilating experiences into intelligible forms through modes of translation and prediction. In a very real sense, vulnerability may emerge, be suppressed, and at times be overcome, in ways that challenge how it might be possible to produce knowledge in advance of time. Its mobility questions whether there is a predictive quality attached to vulnerability in some ontological sense, and in its functions and effects upon the psyche and body that would make particular actions understandable.

Individuals are vulnerable *to* something, and for Butler "This means that vulnerability always takes an object, is always formed and lived in relation to a set of conditions that are outside, yet part of, the body itself" (2014, p. 114). While the body might be formed and sustained by relations which means bodies themselves are not discrete, I argue that it might be necessary to interrogate more the "function and effect" of vulnerability in the way it is experienced and lived through particular bodies and their own specific struggles, desires and capacities (Butler 2015, p. 149). Butler argues for

dimensions of vulnerability that are always moving and adjusting through the sensorial and affective, which suggests a precarity to the stability of relations and connections. It means that, "the body never exists in an ontological mode that is distinct from its historical situation" (p. 114). This, in parallel to the analytical framing of Mahmood's work, suggests that vulnerability is a contextually situated concept, which must be understood through the relations, capacities, and networks in which bodies endure and persist, without vulnerability itself being necessarily an exclusively relational concept or dimension of experience. It is the specificities of those situated conditions and capacities that may serve to inform the functions and effects of vulnerability. Proposing that it be analysed in this way has provided me with both methodological and conceptual frames in which to consider the complexity of vulnerability.

As I will explore in the final section, when the temporal and spatial layers are moved in relation to particular vulnerable modalities, the simultaneous occupying of multiple roles, including that of being and becoming vulnerable, of being caregivers and protectors, of responding to and managing precarity, and the way that vulnerability moves within and between bodies, begins to emerge.

Tracing vulnerable micro events within the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli

I will return a final time to the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli. The purpose of this section is to illustrate how the problem of intention and agency becomes woven through different elements of vulnerability that do not remained bound within fixed notions of the self, but are transmitted beyond Seemanpillai and Khawli. Within the narrative, it is possible to see elements of vulnerability and the way, as outlined in chapter one, these move within and between bodies as a capacity to endure and survive, as susceptibility to injury and harm, and as receptivity and responsibility.

According to a media report, Seemanpillai cycled to a petrol station and filled a 1.58

litre plastic bottle with petrol.[183] I do not know if he did this on his own early on the day that he burned himself, or whether he took this journey some time earlier. Seemanpillai shared a house with others, and yet there is no mention of his housemates being at the property on the morning of Saturday 31 May 2014. Seemanpillai poured petrol over his body while he was at his home. Did he wait until morning routines had been completed, and the people he lived with had left? Did he plan ahead and know that this particular Saturday would find him alone in the house? Or did he want others to be close by? What forms of support does such an action require? After pouring the flammable liquid, how would this be experienced physically and affectively? The activity involves sensory forms of embodiment. Even before the burning of a body, what do flammable liquids do to bodies, what is the sensorial and affective experience of petrol upon the skin? Does the sensation cause the body to shiver? How might it begin to seep into the porous cavities of bodies? What does the smell of petrol on skin, in hair, soaked into clothing do, does it get into eyes, nostrils, mouths, do the fumes make a person gag, feel nauseous or dizzy, make hands slippery in working a lighter or striking a match? What forms of agency and struggle are involved when bodies wet with flammable liquid are held close to a naked flame? Does pouring the liquid upon one's own body have a necessary relation with an intention to die? Do some pause or hesitate at this point, or decide not to go ahead? Did Seemanpillai wait, or do anything else in this time before lighting a flame? Was there anything left to do? Did he know what he was doing or the speed at which he might burn, of the flammability of his clothing versus that of his skin? Did he place the lighter near a certain piece of clothing, thinking it would slowly catch hold? Or did Seemanpillai think it would be a quick death, over in an instant? Did he begin to run when he realised his death would not be immediate?

What is known is that in the moments after Seemanpillai set himself on fire, he began to move his body, taking off his burning clothing, leaving it near his letterbox, running from his house on to the street in his underwear, screaming. Had it been a weekday

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[183] Konrad Marshall, "Tamil Leo Seemanpillai's Parents Are Still Not Allowed to Visit His Grave," *The Age*, 3 October 2015. Available at: http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/tamil-leo-seemanpillais-parents-are-still-not-allowed-in-to-visit-his-grave-20150930-gjy84d.html#ixzz3paVQabgK [Last accessed 22 March 2016].

morning, would Seemanpillai have stood on the street on his own? I do not know if he was crying out for help, or making noise due to the pain he experienced, or both. But another person did come to help him. The witnessing and smelling of smoke, a signal that something (or someone) is on fire, the screams of a person, made people come out of their houses to look. Was Seemanpillai still recognisable? The spectacle of Seemanpillai standing in the street, in pain, pricked someone not to come and watch, but to go to Seemanpillai, to talk to him, and to help. Seemanpillai's act invoked the *punctum* of wounding in others, provoking a response without knowing what had happened, without knowing who Seemanpillai was (Barthes 1981). The person, who happened to be a nurse, or because she was a nurse, tried to reduce the pain experienced by Seemanpillai, taking him away from the exposed public street and those watching, to a location where he could have privacy and access to water. She poured water over his body, and stayed with him in his distress until an ambulance arrived. In these moments and movements, Seemanpillai as a person who is wounded, both before setting himself on fire and in this moment, remains a person who is enduring and attempting to survive. In the time of this event, which rolls back prior to the acute flashpoint and motions forward through the ways Seemanpillai continued to live and communicate after he burned his body, and the impact such an act had on relations that extend beyond the self, particular elements of vulnerability came into contact with a person who witnessed the suffering of another human being. Vulnerability as a response, in being wounded by the pain of another, of perhaps not knowing how to ease suffering when a person's skin is melting from their body, and in being with Seemanpillai and ensuring he was not alone, also exists in a connected way "to a set of conditions that are outside, yet part of, the body itself" (Butler 2014, p. 114).

The sets of conditions that remain connected to cultural and historical specificities do not remain fixed and are altered through forms of social relation, attachments and location. In attending to the temporal drag back of this arc of time within the event of self-immolation, Seemanpillai continued to live with the precarity of his situation in Australia, in ways that interacted with and responded to the vulnerability of others. He knocked on the door of St Paul's Lutheran church in Geelong everyday and asked if he

could help. The church resisted his requests at first, concerned about accepting labour from a "vulnerable person."[184] Seemanpillai was assigned to particular discursive categories that determined him to be vulnerable based on a certain criteria and metrics. Vulnerability, in this context, serves as a defining characteristic that erases all others. Yet Seemanpillai, despite the precarity of his status in Australia, became responsible for the vulnerability of others. He began helping with general maintenance work at the church, volunteered at an aged care facility and acted as a translator for other Tamil refugees in Geelong. The individuals that Seemanpillai encountered during his time in Geelong might be found to be "more" precarious than Seemanpillai if their circumstances were applied to a particular metric of vulnerability. Seemanpillai was physically healthy, young and able to work, criteria that might have also been applied to the metric of vulnerability in the case of Khawli.

When the arc of time is moved further into the past, Tamil Refugee Council spokesperson Aran Mylvaganam explains: "Before he came to Australia he was studying to be a priest but unfortunately under difficult circumstances he couldn't continue his studies and had to get out of the refugee camp."[185] These are structural forms of vulnerability that impinged upon Seemanpillai in ways that limited his education. Seemanpillai lived as a refugee for almost the entirety of his life, he survived a boat sinking, was tortured when he returned to Sri Lanka and was sexually assaulted in at least one detention centre where he was held prior to arriving in Australia. He waited 18 months to hear the outcome of his case for asylum without any knowledge of whether it would be approved, while at the same time witnessing other Sri Lankan nationals living in Australia being deported. The pastor at St Paul's church recounts, "He would have dark periods, he would have periods of suicidal thoughts where he would say that he would commit suicide…And so many people in our parish have spent a lot of time with him, comforting him."[186] Elements of vulnerability impacted upon Seemanpillai's life in ways that suggest that rather than undergirding responses and actions as a stable component of subjectivity, vulnerability

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[184] Oliver Laughland, "The Life And Awful Death Of A Tamil Asylum Seeker in Australia."
[185] Danny Lannen, "Asylum Seeker Leo Seemanpillai's Tragic Death."
[186] Louise Milligan, "Friends of Tamil Asylum Seeker Leo Seemanpillai Say He Had Made Previous Attempts on His Life."

involves social and structural elements within as well as between bodies, and is porous and unstable in the ways it functions and the effects it produces.

Seemanpillai's parents have lived in a refugee camp in India since fleeing Sri Lanka in 1990, and spoke to their son during weekly phone calls. "(He said) don't worry ... once I get my visa and everything I would like to bring you guys to this country and be here with me, all of us," his father said. "All of you can get a better life through me."[187] Seemanpillai did not share his vulnerability with his family. Seemanpillai's father says he "had had no idea of his son's anxieties or mental health concerns."[188] When interviewed after Seemanpillai's death, his father talks of their pain, of losing their child, and of not being given permission by the Australian immigration authorities to travel to Australia to attend his funeral because of the power of the metric of vulnerability to predict and expose their unstated intention not to stay temporarily in Australia. In response, Seemanpillai's father said: "We haven't eaten for days…We are in tears. We want to see our son."[189] The vulnerability of Seemanpillai's family to conditions of extreme precarity within the camp in which they live, and without citizenship in India or having Sri Lankan passports, is used by the Australian authorities to suggest its own susceptibility to harm or exploitation if the family were granted temporary permits to enter the country. Seemanpillai's funeral is held in his local church and several hundred people come and pay their respects. A memorial service is held one year later to mark the day that Seemanpillai died.

Khawli filled a small bottle of flammable liquid and carried it with her on her journey to the UNHCR registration centre in Tripoli on 25 March 2014. I do not know if Khawli carried that bottle with her on other journeys, at other times, or if this was the first time. In the days prior Khawli had announced "I'm going to set myself on fire, feel my pain, feel what's in my heart. Feel that I have four children." And in response to her vulnerable admission: "They would laugh at me and send me away."[190] This is not

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[187] Danny Lannen, "Asylum Seeker Leo Seemanpillai Dreamt of Rescuing Family From Exile," *Geelong* Advertiser, 5 June 2014. Available at: http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/news/geelong/asylum-seeker-leo-seemanpillai-dreamt-of-rescuing-family-from-exile/story-fnjuhovy-1226943473423 [Last accessed 22 March 2016].
[188] Danny Lannen, "Asylum Seeker Leo Seemanpillai Dreamt of Rescuing Family From Exile."
[189] Oliver Laughland, "The Life And Awful Death Of A Tamil Asylum Seeker in Australia."
[190] Arwa Damon and Raja Razek, "Syria Refugee's Desperate Act: 'They Burned My Heart Before They Burned My

where Khawli's exposure and precarity began. In attending to the backwards sweep and tugging of disjointed time, Khawli and her family ran a vegetable trading company and owned the building they lived within in Homs, Syria. Khawli witnessed the impact that the civil war had on her children, parts of their house being demolished, and the reactions of her children as her family hid overnight in the bathroom as shells hit the building. Her husband Ahmad said, "I will never forget their white faces; they were just waiting to die."[191] The family moved without any possessions to a different country, thereby losing tangible and intangible means of identification, from the objects of their home to the loss of their identities as company and property owners self-sufficient in their finances and in sustaining their particular lifeworld. Khawli and her family became refugees in a neighbouring country, reliant upon external help to survive. The family's vulnerability was assessed and measured against a "burden score" and they, along with 30 per cent of those currently receiving aid, were excluded from the WFP food assistance programme. Khawli and her family's vulnerability, like that of Seemanpillai's family, can be and is measured. Khawli's family is assessed on the commensurability of its vulnerability to that of others. Seemanpillai's family is assessed on the degree to which their vulnerability threatens the security of Australia. Vulnerability becomes both a measurement tool used to invoke protection, and a threat to the vulnerability of infrastructure and national borders. In each instance circumstances are measured against predetermined metrics; there is always a burden index in operation. Vulnerability is moved back and forth along these measurement scales, where too much and too little results in state sanctioned forms of exclusion.

When Khawli pours liquid over her head and lights a flame, bystanders come forward to smother the flames with clothing and water. Khawli does not cry for help, perhaps because she does not want to be helped, or perhaps because there is no time to ask. Khawli does not run when she sets herself on fire, she begins to burn and falls to the ground. Reports state that Khawli is helped by others, by stall holders who work on the street outside the UNHCR registration centre, by bystanders and UN office guards. This helps to reduce the time in which Khawli's body burned. The spectacle of Khawli's

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Body'."
[191] Anthea Ayache, "A Mother's Sacrifice."

burning body pricks people to respond, to put out the flames, to call an ambulance, to take her to a hospital with a specialist burns unit. Where Seemanpillai survived for hours after he set himself on fire, Khawli survives for almost a month. There are no reports of how Khawli's death is marked in private or public, and only one media outlet or journalist appears to return to Khawli's story in the weeks' following her self-immolation. Khawli lies in a hospital bed, swathed in bandages, her husband standing outside the room. The journalists that file stories on Khawli's self-immolation are filmed standing near the spot on the road where she set herself on fire. Khawli speaks to journalists who record video of Khawli and English media translate her words using subtitles. Her children continue to go to school, Khawli wants their lives to continue, and does not allow her children to visit her. The media that are interested in the catastrophe of Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation rather than the imprisonment and hunger strike of Fedia Hamdi, are interested in the acute violence of Khawli's self-immolation and not the subsequent slow death of a Syrian refugee.

Both Seemanpillai and Khawli's lives illustrate how the modalities of vulnerability do not remain bound within embodied individuals, but instead resonate outwards into the fabric of dependencies and individual attachments to family, traditions, values and culture, but also infrastructure, resources and legislation. Seemanpillai was training to be a priest prior to travelling to Australia and is described by friends and family in similar ways as wanting to help others. He spent time in Australia working with those who were considered vulnerable and in need of assistance. Khawli and her family lived in one room of an apartment building in Tripoli, but she refused to move to communal housing with other families because of the risk to her daughters' safety. With 2.8 million Syrian children no longer attending school, Khawli's children are exposed to living in long-term precarity through the lack of an education. They are vulnerable to ill health and three of the four children have hemolysis. Khawli's husband Ahmad has a lung abscess, a condition that I have learned is life threatening. It can occur due to a form of illness that might have been avoided or treated effectively under different conditions, and it requires access to and long-term use of costly antibiotics.

Elements of vulnerability that weave through the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli appear to alter and shift in prominence in the ways these elements are attended to and lived with. They are also informed by and become responses to the vulnerable modalities of others, both those with whom they shared a lifeworld and those for whom they remained more distant. Khawli remains responsible for minimising the vulnerability of her family to the long-term impact of conflict, poverty, ill health and lack of education: "My children were telling me they feel dizzy and I couldn't feed them. I set myself ablaze for the sake of my children."[192] Khawli tells a journalist while in hospital, "I choose death rather than see my children die a million times in front of me."[193] Vulnerability as receptivity to others is framed by Emmanuel Levinas as the relation we have with "the experience of death that is not mine" (2000, p.12). It is an appeal from outside of the self that is only addressed to me, and vulnerability in part consists of the obligation to respond which cannot be substituted. Returning to Butler, this responsibility also becomes part of set of conditions that "are outside, yet part of, the body itself" (2014, p. 114). Aasif, a close friend of Seemanpillai and an asylum seeker living in Australia said in 2014 that he worried about the future now that Seemanpillai was gone: "He could speak very good English and as a result he took care of many of the kids living in the community here."[194] Seemanpillai tells his parents he will send for them once he has a visa to stay in Australia. I do not know what hope his family had in Seemanpillai being able to secure resident status in Australia for them, nor the emotional burden that Seemanpillai and Khawli each bore in being responsible for, and attempting to alleviate, the conditions of suffering experienced by members of their family. In each case, Seemanpillai and Khawli lived in relations with others, including those occupying different lifeworlds, who each experienced their own forms of vulnerability and came to depend upon Seemanpillai and Khawli for support.

I have continued to search online for articles on Seemanpillai and Khawli throughout this project, hoping that new details might emerge, and that the stories of each of them might have continued, even after their deaths. I was also hoping that they had

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[192] "Syrian Self-Immolation Refugee To Lebanon Renews Calls For Support."

[193] Arwa Damon and Raja Razek, "Syria Refugee's Desperate Act: 'They Burned My Heart Before They Burned My Body'."

[194] Oliver Laughland, "The Life And Awful Death Of A Tamil Asylum Seeker in Australia."

not been forgotten. In November 2015 I found a new article published online by *The Age* newspaper in Australia. Seemanpillai donated his organs to others, and I learned that after his death he has continued to provide for his family. As an employee of a local asphalt company in Geelong, Seemanpillai was covered under an enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA). Tim Gooden, the secretary of Geelong Trades Hall, and Aran Mylvaganam were friends of Seemanpillai. After Seemanpillai's death, Gooden was in conversation with Seemanpillai's employer and discovered that in the event of Seemanpillai's death, his dependents were entitled to death benefit payments from two industry superannuation funds. Gooden and Mylvaganam worked on the necessary paperwork, travelled to India to meet Seemanpillai's parents, and helped them open the necessary banking accounts. In accordance with the payment entitlements, Seemanpillai's parents received a sum of A$380,000 (the current equivalent in early April 2016 is around £203,347).[195] It may be enough money for Seemanpillai's family to live on for the rest of their lives. It may not be able to secure them a way out of their undocumented status as refugees. For despite this new "financial security," which reduces their vulnerability according to particular metrics used by the Australian immigration authorities, Seemanpillai's family remain unable to visit Australia and their son's grave due to their lack of passports.[196]

In retelling the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli, I have examined how layers and elements of vulnerability weave through each of their lives and are altered by the conditions in which they lived, and by the telling. By moving time backwards and forwards, and remaining in the spaces created by shifting the temporal boundaries of these micro events, new elements of vulnerability emerge across embodied, affective, cultural, economic and structural layers and the relation that Seemanpillai and Khawli each have with these different elements, is altered. In this way vulnerability extends beyond singular bodies; it reverberates across and through bodies in unpredictable ways, and is altered through the social relations that each have with others.

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[195] Konrad Marshall, "Tamil Leo Seemanpillai's Parents Are Still Not Allowed to Visit His Grave."
[196] Danny Lannen, "Leo Seemanpillai's Parents Blocked From Visiting His Geelong Grave By Australian Immigration Officials," *Geelong Advertiser,* 6 October 2015. Available at: http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/news/geelong/leo-seemanpillais-parents-blocked-from-visiting-his-geelong-grave-by-australia-immigration-officials/story-fnjuhovy-1227758401933 [Last accessed 22 March 2016].

Conclusions

In this chapter I wanted to address more specifically the conceptual issues that had been raised through developing narratives on the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli. While I wanted to discuss more specifically elements of vulnerability, I did not want to lose sight of Seemanpillai or Khawli by discussing vulnerability as a theoretical engagement where their individual subjectivities and narratives disappeared. In writing about their lives I kept coming back to particular issues that would unsettle the writing process. I realised that I did not know what agency and intention meant, or how I could write about either concept without beginning to make assumptions as to the causes and reasons for Seemanpillai and Khawli setting fire to their bodies. My uncertainty in making epistemic claims, and the forms of violence involved in speaking on behalf of someone without their permission, and without my knowing their story, made me re-think the conceptual terms that I thought were unsettling how vulnerability was been researched and conceptualised. This led me to work with the concepts and unpick my own understandings of what it might mean to enact agency, and what relation intention has to action and to agential capacities. Therefore in this chapter I chose to examine the issues that had been raised during the development of the two narratives by continuing to work with and allow myself to be worked on by their stories. In chapter one I raised my concerns with the tension between conceptualising vulnerability as a shared, existential condition that is a shared feature of living, and the conditionality of that exposure that might engage different qualities or elements of vulnerability. As I described in that chapter, a core aspect of the work of this thesis has been to remain with this unevenness and uncertainty. In coming to the end of this project, I remain unsure of how to conceptualise vulnerability as an ontological condition that is also uneven in its distribution and its functions and effects on and within particular bodies, and I am unwilling to move to resolve that tension. Instead I suggest it provides generative gaps in which to continue researching vulnerability through the multiplicity of capacities and desires of embodied subjects that might emerge through localised and situated projects of enquiry.

A pivotal point came in writing this thesis when I began to explore conceptualising self-immolation as an event rather than an act. It changed the spatial and temporal registers that were adhering to, and I felt were constricting, the modes of telling each of the stories. In moving to thinking about events, it felt like the acute flashpoint of the moment in time in which bodies were set on fire began to relinquish space to the subjectivities of Seemanpillai and Khawli. There is ambivalence to the notion of an event, and while I was aware of other theoretical engagements with the event, I wanted the conceptual term to be grounded in the situated politics of activities that occur within particular times and spaces. There is always something excluded, and the micro event is inherently vulnerable and at risk to the ways that details can be missed or erased. It is also at risk of its referent becoming that of the researcher, who can "see" things that those within the micro event supposedly cannot. This is where the scholarship of Povinelli has been particularly helpful in working at a localised level of engagement, and in learning the ways Povinelli is held accountable by those she works with, both for how events are recorded, and for the discrepancy in privilege afforded by her subject position. I will take this up in the final conclusion.

For this project, refiguring time and space through a micro event opened up the analysis. It became centred on endurance and self-maintenance. This is not to suggest that self-destruction is a binary or incongruent element within such centring, but rather that it might be possible that it is also involved somehow in agential capacities of living and enduring. Researching narratives through different methods can change the ways individuals are described as living through certain events. The details matter, because the details are what can give away the agential capacities and aggregating and disaggregating forces that press upon bodies and impress upon elements of vulnerability. In using Povinelli's example, the loss of a washing machine lid can say so much about a community that struggles and endures, without its being generalised to causes and to solving the problem by making assumptions that it is possible to know more than the individuals involved, or to feel "more evolved than one's context" (Freeman 2010, p. xiii). How do you solve problems that are systemic and have roots deep down into the soil of the land in which the washing machine lid was lost? Those

who are white and live in urban areas of Australia do not wash their clothes to eradicate staphylococcus because it does not register on their particular burden index. Would have more sustained mental health support have made a difference to Seemanpillai in helping in him cope with waiting 18 months without and interview or an outcome to his claim for asylum? Would have food vouchers, or being hosted in a different country have eased the pain of Khawli and her family losing their business, home and fleeing their country? Perhaps these things could have prevented their deaths. Would something else have happened to Seemanpillai and Khawli to wear down their bodies, to exhaust them, would the attrition of delayed death occurred in different ways? I do not know, and I am not sure that it is possible to know.

Through this chapter I have proposed that micro events occur within different layers of stories, the barely perceptible movements, and the exhausting recursive trips to retrace steps to find washing machine lids, in cycle rides to the local petrol station, the effort required to plead ones case, in waiting and in standing in lines. At times within the parameters of our own burden index that we all hold onto we might tell these strands of stories because they are anomalies to the aggregation of agential activities that turn out the way we hoped or intended. But for others, where vulnerability is distributed disproportionately, and is enacted within particular temporalities that may not register on or within other bodies, how do these strands and trails of thwarted action become normative modes of temporal syncopation, where the lesser beat is always being stressed? The frame of a micro event could be one methodological approach for examining narratives of endurance, for unstitching the layers and elements of vulnerability that change and move within and across bodies.

Conclusions

I titled this thesis "Unspectacular Events" because of the way that self-immolation captures attention when it is spoken about and visualised. When people have asked me about the focus of my PhD research and I have said that I am studying vulnerability, inevitably the next question has been to request more information or to enquire as to the context I am addressing. Often these conversations are had during everyday activities, or during meals or social occasions. I will be talking to people whom I have just met or are less familiar with, and I find myself always pausing when these questions are asked, hesitating as to how I will describe the specific focus on my research. I question the respectfulness of telling Leorsin Seemanpillai or Mariam al-Khawli's stories in certain contexts, and of the truncated description that I will inevitably end up providing when time is short or the context does not allow for a longer or more detailed discussion. These discussions, while seemingly prosaic, connect to ethical concerns that I have tussled with throughout this project, and particularly in writing narratives of the lives of people whom I did not know and without their permission or the consent of those close to them. I am uncomfortable in sharing the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli without having the space in which to contextualise and provide details that might help to reduce their lives from becoming a form of spectacle, and without their lives disappearing through the spectacular time of self-immolation. Therefore titling the thesis "Unspectacular Events" was my attempt to signal that while there is an acute moment in which self-immolation takes place in both of their lives, the focus of this project is on the everyday lifeworlds of Seemanpillai and Khawli and the modes or "situations" of endurance and self-making that continue to occur within unspectacular, ongoing temporalities of precarity.

In chapter five I described some of the layers or elements of vulnerability that emerged through developing narratives on the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli. In this chapter there was no narrative denouement, or making sense of details that unraveled during the telling of the two stories, and in conclusion I offer no ending or completion

of their stories. About eight months after completing the draft of the chapter on Seemanpillai's story I learned of the death benefit payment of A$380,000 that was paid to Seemanpillai's parents as a result of his being enrolled in a superannuation scheme. My response to this news was in a sense hopeful; I realised there was at least one journalist who had continued to document and remember Seemanpillai's life, and for whom his death still mattered. This news did not provide a sense of closure, but I did find myself wondering what this might mean—perhaps that such things take so much time: 18 months without an interview or any outcome on his claim for asylum; and then 16 months after his death Seemanpillai's parents receive a payment that was rightfully theirs. Perhaps it is a reminder that while Seemanpillai's legal requirement for needing refuge and protection was never officially registered or recognised, economically his contribution was noted and recorded. Finding out this information also illustrated how narratives have no particular end point, and that Seemanpillai's story has continued well beyond the acute moment of his self-immolation on 31 May 2014. The article that documents Seemanpillai's death benefit payment states that his parents remain living in India in a refugee camp, but with improved living conditions and with access to a new level of health care that previously was not possible due to their financial circumstances. The stories of Seemanpillai's parents and siblings are another element of Seemanpillai's story, which, while not addressed in this thesis, continue with their own narratives beyond his self-immolation. This is also the case for Mariam al-Khawli's husband Ahmad al-Daher, and their four children, Ala, Amjad, Aya, and Abdul Hadi. I do not know what has happened to Khawli's family, and whether they are still living in Lebanon.

I began this thesis with the story of Davinia Turrell, wearing a burns gauze mask over her face, being helped by Paul Dadge after the 7 July bombings in London in 2005. This thesis has not been about their stories, and I was initially hesitant to include them. While their stories provide a means of illustrating the ways that research can involve localised concerns about particular individuals or communities, and can be developed from beginning with the details of a captured image, I was also aware that this short engagement could not do justice to what either Turrell or Dadge had experienced. I knew that I could not develop a narrative that might consider in detail their individual

forms of suffering and trauma and the layers of vulnerability involved in Turrell being injured during a bomb blast while travelling on a train on her way to work. I did not know Dadge, and earlier I outlined the assumptions I made initially about what might have compelled him to continue on to his workplace after he left Edgware station. I was also concerned that including the stories of others might take away from the focus of the thesis being on Leorsin Seemanpillai and Mariam al-Khawli, and that this positioning of narratives might be interpreted as suggesting that these stories could be seen to be commensurable, or that the same level of analysis had occurred.

Part of my concern is due to how centring this project on Seemanpillai and Khawli has been important to me in working through and addressing the ethics involved in telling stories about the lives of others. I know so little about the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli prior to arriving in Australia and Lebanon, and what occurred during the time they each spent being hosted in new countries as they sought refuge from violence and precarious living conditions. I wanted to remain with their stories as long as I could and have the space to develop the narratives but also to allow these to unfold in their own time. It has meant that when I engaged with other narratives, such as that of Mohamed Bouazizi and his self-immolation in Tunisia, the method in which I have done so is different to that of Seemanpillai and Khawli. To attend slowly to the micro level details of Seemanpillai and Khawli, and not to do so with the story of Bouazizi felt like I was not doing justice to his experience of setting his body on fire, and to the particularities of his life. Therefore while the stories of Bouazizi, Durrell and Dadge are present in this thesis, I am aware that this presence suggests its own ethical questions regarding the ways that the lives of people are used for the purposes of research; it also exposes the vulnerable structures involved in epistemic claims and how knowledge is produced.

It is important that I am accountable for my role in the research, and in the narration of the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli. I began this project by first assuming the right to tell their stories, which had been documented by different English language media both locally and globally. Due to this, I did not position myself as a narrator, but rather an examiner or analyst of two stories that I thought had already been told.

When I began to question this assumptive independence and neutrality and to situate my own position in this thesis, it shifted my role to being an unchosen and unreliable narrator. This enabled new terms of engagement in the research process to emerge, and with this, methodological challenges that needed to be recognised and addressed. If I did not have permission to tell the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli, and yet they were present in at least partial ways in media that could be accessed online from almost anywhere in the world, what was my role and how was I choosing to tell these particular narratives? What is involved in different modes of telling and what are the ethical implications for this kind of research? In linking these challenges back to chapter two and the ways research can involve having the problem identified and solved ahead of time (Sedgwick 2003; Freeman 2010), I needed to address whether this project was going to use the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli to provide evidence of a particular epistemological argument that I had already constructed ahead of time on the basis of an engagement with theoretical accounts of vulnerability.

A pivotal moment in this reflexive process occurred when I was asked, in the context of needing to account for the project I was developing: But how do you know? And more specifically, how did *I* know *why* Seemanpillai began to run? Feminist postcolonial research and critiques of cross-cultural and transnational scholarship have been instrumental in my learning of vulnerable methods and the importance of questioning and remaining uncertain during this project (Das 1996; Mahmood 2012; Mani 1998; Mohanty 1984; Thobani 2007; Visweswaran 1994). I started my inquiry with a sense that something was missing from feminist theoretical concerns and writing on vulnerability. It was these feminist scholars working in postcolonial contexts that helped me to begin to unpick what the unsettling sense of ambivalence might be in studies of vulnerability. In this project I attempted to develop a project that was localised and situated on two individuals and the particular elements or layers of vulnerability that were involved in their stories, without moving towards a macro level theoretical engagement through the ways these forms of vulnerability might be constitutive of the human condition. In this conclusion I will discuss the conceptual

difficulties in working with the shared and the specific and how this might be further understood through the ways this project has engaged with micro events.

This thesis has shifted in its focus from originally being intended as a primarily theoretical engagement with conceptions of vulnerability, to being grounded in methodological, theoretical and experiential elements of vulnerability through a localised analysis. Finding ways to conduct research so that I did not position myself as an invulnerable researcher writing about vulnerability has been advice given to me that I have continued to think about during the course of this project. As a result, methodological and ethical concerns undergird this project and the approach undertaken, and proposing the outline of a vulnerability methodology has become a core contribution of the research.

Vulnerable methods and ethics

As discussed, a contribution of this thesis has been to outline what is involved in conducting a localised analysis through vulnerable modes of research. The approach undertaken in this thesis has included situating vulnerability not only as the focus of enquiry, but as an integral part of the research process. Therefore, included in the scope of this project is the need to address the forms of vulnerability that are involved in researching the life of another person, and this includes the power relations involved in my conducting research that involves people living within conditions of precarity in transnational contexts. An element of vulnerable writing in this project involved my exposure to the temporal fraying of my own epistemological certitude. There were times during this project where exposing my own vulnerability—the gaps in my analysis, the assumptions I was making, the changes that occurred in how I read and interpreted but also began to see certain details after returning to materials—was mentally but also emotionally demanding. For a long time it felt like I was exposing my aptitude as a researcher—that these uncertainties and my limitations were part of the scaffolding that should remain hidden and absent from the process. I wanted to have the project figured out and to write it in such a way until I realised that the specific

ethical concerns within this research involved directly the treatment of the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli as problems to be solved. The vulnerability of the research process and doing justice to the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli became an essential part of the methodological approach and development of this thesis.

Consequently this project became grounded by an ethical concern for what I, as a researcher, was demanding from Seemanpillai and Khawli. Working on this project involved figuring through methods that could minimise the forms of epistemic and symbolic violence that might be enacted on the subjectivities of Seemanpillai and Khawli, who could not speak for themselves and were not represented through family members or in other ways. It has been an important part of this project to distinguish, as Yasmin Gunaratnam has done, between knowledge as being a means of *knowing how* and the potential of knowledge as *falling short*, through the receptivity and openness that emerges from the vulnerability of "not knowing in advance" how to respond to the "unpredictable demands" of those unfamiliar to us or narratives that resist forms of intelligibility (2011, p. 106). One of the ways that I attempted to reduce the violence done to the subjectivities of Seemanpillai and Khawli was to place the layers of the narratives in parallel, to document their stories within the wider social, economic and geo-political contexts and shifting sets of relations without attempting to explain them or pursue particular relational elements in ways that might lead to suggesting why Seemanpillai or Khawli set their bodies on fire. In undertaking this project on vulnerability I have attempted to be sensitive to the conditions in which knowledge is generated, and to remain with the discomfort that occurs in admitting that I do not know. The methodological approach has guided me in the forms of analysis that I have undertaken, and in developing a conceptual frame for considering micro events. One of the personal reasons for outlining the core components of a vulnerable methodology is that through the process involved in this project I want to continue developing and using such an approach within new forms of research that I undertake.

Slow research

Working with slow temporalities became a key component involved in vulnerable writing, and became a method in which to alter my engagement with each of the narratives. I propose that the tempo in which research is conducted is not only a matter of time, although time is a crucial element. In working with related notions of the term "slow"—Lauren Berlant's (2007) "slow death" and Rob Nixon's (2011) "slow violence"—the particularities of negotiating alternative temporalities have come to form non-sequential departures from normative temporalities or "straight time" (Nyong'o 2010, p. 83). If being slow is both a criticism of ability, that it might take me more time than someone else to complete the same or commensurable task, it is also ascribed with a form of agential capacity, where "quick time," is enforced by external powers, but to be slow "seems to be a matter of choice" (Freeman 2010, p. xii). This paradox of slowness being willful, and also pleasurable, and slow being punishable and deficient when compared to "quick time," is held within the process of research. This project has taken some time, and critical strategies of working with the materials involved returning to the archive, re-reading articles, continuing online searches, but also sitting with the narratives, being vulnerable and allowing them to work on me. I suggest it is difficult to do these forms of research within the increasingly hurried time of PhD research. This project took me longer than three years, for various reasons, and I was fortunate to be in a position where I could take this time. Research is suggested to be both temporal and universal in its qualities; it has its own ecosystem of "shared timings" (Freeman 2010 p. xi). It *should* take a certain amount of time, irrespective of what is being researched, but no longer. Therefore to undertake slow research is also a deviation from normative practices, to *take* one's time suggests reclamation of what was not ours to begin with. Taking time in order to conduct research slowly is an element of a vulnerable methodology at least in the context of this project. I am aware that I may not have the opportunity again to work with slowness, to spend time with materials and attend to layers that gradually become unstitched, and to have the space to revise my analyses and to question forms of knowledge.

Elements of vulnerability

While this project has focused on conceptions of vulnerability, it has also engaged with the process of researching vulnerability. Throughout this thesis I proposed that it can be generative to research vulnerability not as an ontological or constitutive condition, but rather through its elements or layers, in order to open up space to consider the lack of cohesive stability to vulnerability as a condition that is lived with as an embodied subject. I addressed concerns with the asymmetry of vulnerability as a universal condition and how there are different temporalities of vulnerability that might occur unevenly across different bodies. I drew attention to how the vulnerable body within theoretical engagements, can remain raceless, classless, locationless and healthy, and is assumed to possess equal capacities for managing uniform conditions of precarity. While the identification of particular vulnerable bodies can be generative, this too can also become a form of foundationalism. Certain bodies are categorised as being vulnerable, without analysis into the complexities and contextual elements of the specific functions and effects of these particular qualities of vulnerability and how structural forces and temporalities press upon subjects. Vulnerability can become fixed to an unchanging subject position, that either requires paternalistic powers of protection (Butler 2015), or becomes too commonplace to be registered or to invoke forms of action and support.

The work of Sunera Thobani (2007) and her critique of the implied subject within certain feminist theoretical engagements was the starting point for me to begin to address my unsettled, but also unfocused concerns with how to conceptualise and research vulnerability. Through Thobani's analysis and working with altering the temporal registers of the enquiry, it was possible to consider what I perceive to be a temporal primacy in the ontological condition of vulnerability that appears prior to the ways that vulnerability is unevenly distributed. I proposed the notion of temporal primacy because, in the scholarship I was accessing, situational forms of vulnerability were acknowledged but ultimately did not become the site of analysis, unless the examination involved methods of problem solving and protection for individuals and groups assigned to categories defining a particular "vulnerable group." I wanted to

consider what might occur by starting with a localised analysis that examined the ways in which vulnerability is lived with and conditions of precarity are endured. It is Thobani who raises the question of both the absence and necessity of located politics in vulnerability research. The lack of analysing the particularities of vulnerability and the mediating conditions and contexts of microcosmic spaces means the privileging of a singular burden index can occur. This is because the "implication is that the experiences of occupied peoples can be approached as being essentially the same as those of imperial subjects" (p. 177). Therefore the core questions that I raised in chapter one were: Does the conception of vulnerability, and the ways it is researched, assume a form of coherence across cultural, social and historical contexts (Mohanty 1984, p. 350)? How might beginning with an analysis that remains with discordant, ambivalent elements of subjectivity open up space to consider the qualities and layers of vulnerability?

These questions were meant as starting points, to re-orient the discussion of vulnerability to focus on what is unstable. I wanted to examine how it might be necessary to engage with other ambivalent elements of subjectivity, which through the course of the project I identified as agency, action and intention, in order to examine vulnerability. As my research progressed, I experienced growing uncertainty as to the conceptual stability of these components of subjectivity. I realised that the analysis of vulnerability was framed by thinking about agency within specific terms of resistance and autonomy, and this was narrowing my engagement with two narratives that involved individuals fleeing their homes and seeking refuge in another country. I realised I was working only within an agential binary of resistance or despair. It was Saba Mahmood's (2012) investigation of agential capacities and the exposure of the epistemological certitude in her research aims when she started her project on the women's mosque movement in Egypt that provided the framework for me to begin to examine modalities of agency that might be present within the narratives of Seemanpillai and Khawli. The notion of agential capacities enabled the means to begin to consider the ways that agency, intention and action inform different elements or qualities of vulnerability.

Agential capacities

In this thesis I have proposed that normative understandings of agency can assume that bodies function in similar ways, irrespective of their access to resources, the restrictions and limitations placed upon them, their physical and emotional capacities, and the responses and decisions people make to conditions in which they live. Following the work of Mahmood (2012) and Talal Asad (2000; 2003) I have conceptualised agency through the notion of capacities that are focused on a range of outcomes and which may vary according to the abilities, needs, desires and attachments of individuals. In order to consider the discordant and complex ways that individuals may behave and act, and how actions can be disconnected from intention and modes of prediction, it has been useful to consider both relational and non-relational elements and layers of stories. In the context of Seemanpillai and Khawli, I argued for attention to be paid to the singular, non-relational elements of their stories, in order to examine further the ways that vulnerability is worn within bodies and how conditions wear down bodies. I used the work of Paul Harrison (2007) to describe the place of the non-relational within investigations and how it can create space for the elements of narratives that trouble the production of knowledge and the making sense of the lives of others. This is not to suggest that relational capacities and connections do not exist, but rather it acknowledges the demand for sense making and presenting narratives in intelligible forms. In this process there can be moves to make or create relational connections, to erase discrepancies, to solve problems, and to explain actions and understand intention through recourse to tracing causes and effects. Asad focuses not on agential resistance but on modes of endurance involved in "the possibilities for living sanely in a painful world" (2000, p. 52). By altering the terms of analysis in this way it becomes more difficult to predict what people might do within particular spaces and times to make a life, to alleviate pain, and to meet their own or someone else's need. I suggest this involves different capacities of struggle in response to conditions that are encountered and what is required or desired at a point in time. Within this project the concept of micro events enabled a conceptual frame for thinking through these temporal movements that are localised and particular.

Shared and conditional elements of vulnerability

In this thesis it has not been my intention to dispute that vulnerability exists in some ontological manner, but rather to propose that there is further work to be done on examining the ways that vulnerability is unevenly distributed and is not experienced in shared, universal ways. Judith Butler, in considering the mobilisation of vulnerability through acts of people appearing in places that involve risks to personal safety, such as during protests and within forms of public assembly, proposes that the term "exposure" might help to think about vulnerability "outside of the trap of ontology and foundationalism" (2015, p. 140). In the context of this project, it has been difficult to escape the trap of ontology. Working with a concept and a condition that has some foundation as a feature of all living beings, yet in the very moment of being shared it is simultaneously differentiated across bodies because it is not shared in the same ways, has created a discursive but also conceptual tussle. This involves trying to avoid slipping into essentialist language and ensuring vulnerability remains situated and located, while also not wanting vulnerability to become essentialised by suggesting that it might be distributed only within certain subjects and across certain communities.

The way that I chose to address this problem was to think through the time of vulnerability. Specifically this involved examining different temporalities of vulnerability and how these might come to be transposed unevenly across bodies and locations through ordinary, everyday activities of self-maintenance and endurance. In chapter one I raised the question of whether vulnerability, as a constitutive condition, might be assumptive of bodies living within certain "shared timings" (Freeman 2010, p. xi). While I have addressed how different temporalities might play out across particular bodies, there are ways in which time organises and universalises the pressing upon modes of telling stories. I propose that by moving away from linear, chronological forms of time it becomes more difficult to address the foundational aspects of vulnerability because of how this exposes the dynamism of the functions and effects of vulnerability that occur within different tempos of living. However, other elements that I engaged with, including a particular analytics of location, the materials within

the scene, speech and discourse and varied embodied forms of communication, could equally be used in more substantial ways as methods of conducting vulnerable research.

Micro events

Conceptualising the notion of a micro event became a method of addressing the conditions that impact upon how vulnerability might be considered within the particularities of subjectivity. It helped to expose the temporal force of self-immolation, and provide a means to examine the roles of agency, action and intention. A contribution of this thesis has been to consider the ways in which temporal and spatial registers are involved in the production of knowledge and in making particular actions intelligible. I have addressed how, as disruptive elements, notions of space, time, agency, action and intention can help to open up alternative methodological approaches and means of thinking about vulnerability. In completing this project I suggest that this method of conducting research, while focused on vulnerability within the specific context of modes of telling narratives about self-immolation, could be applied more broadly to examine other fields and forms of knowledge production. I have argued that the temporalities of a spectacular act of violence can truncate and reduce the event to what has occurred in the moment of the flashpoint. In the case of self-immolation, it became recognised as spectacular within the unspectacular and ongoing time of precarity. This meant that the allure of the arresting time of self-immolation, which through its ability to capture attention conveys the power to signify itself as the narrative endpoint, was erasing the rich textures of agential capacities that move through time and continue after a body is lit, but also extend backwards without being connected to a particular starting point.

I wanted to broaden the analysis temporally to include activities that both garner attention and disappear through the spectacular time of the acute moment. I suggested that when a catastrophe, such as that of self-immolation, is identified, its temporal and discursive force can mask the vulnerable endurance and chronicity of

micro events that continue to occur within unspectacular, ongoing time. Within this project, this is connected ethically to how it might be possible to be distracted by what immediately punctures or emotionally pricks, and the importance of attending to the layers of complexity that trail out in many different temporal, spatial and affective registers and directions. I wanted to examine how this might occur in different ways within the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli through working at the narratives within non-sequential temporalities, to make visible discordant elements and gaps or interruptions in intelligibility within the stories. Within the unspectacular time of everyday ordinary activities, I was interested in how Seemanpillai and Khawli made lives for themselves and for their families. Therefore I examined more closely how temporalities became adhered to particular actions and particular embodied subjects. I also used time to engage in slower forms of research that focused on the micro level details of each of their stories.

My proposal that elements or layers of vulnerability were not spectacular is not to suggest vulnerability as unremarkable, or that the events are not registered in some way. By disrupting the ways in which activities might be considered as part of agential capacities and desires, what came into focus were practices and activities of self-continuity that were discordant to thinking about intention as being able to be read through someone's behaviour or action. I do not suggest that elements of the narratives of Seemanpillai or Khawli involve constructing either as "agentless slow deaths" and it has been my intention in examining agential modalities to illustrate the complexity to how we might think about agency and its non-standardisation across bodies through particular capacities, struggles and desires (Povinelli 2011, p. 145). As I have argued, in changing the focus of self-immolation from an act to an event it became more difficult to distinguish activities of self-making from those of self-destruction. Therefore it is critical in this analysis that micro events are not read as a form of "non-event" in the sense that micro events might become understood as "happenings that are already comprehended within some kind of already-existing system" (Anderson 2015, p. 18). Instead, this project has attempted to articulate some of the vulnerable methods of research involved in questioning assumed forms of comprehension that occur prior to any analysis of the particularities of a narrative or

archive. I propose that the textures of events should be considered through mediating conditions and contexts of the particular individuals and bodies that endure both spectacular and unspectacular temporalities.

Rather than examining how the activities of Seemanpillai or Khawli did or did not register at the macro level of the state or inter-governmental organisations, or how particular micro events get noticed within such governmental or political structures, my interest has been in unstitching the ways that vulnerability *is* registered and attended to by embodied subjects, within the unspectacular, ongoing time of precarity. A core methodological concern in developing the narratives, which informed vulnerable ways of writing, was that the lives of Seemanpillai and Khawli be attended to beyond the spectacular temporality that registers their self-immolations and attempts to determine why they each set themselves on fire. I have resisted stating in this thesis that Seemanpillai or Khawli took his or her own life. Instead I have chosen to remain with what did occur, which is that Seemanpillai and Khawli set fire to their own bodies. I am still uncertain whether either person engaged in suicide. This is because I do not know why either Seemanpillai or Khawli decided to burn their bodies. I can speculate, but after more than a year spent with each of their stories, I do not know, and would be unwilling to suggest what was on Seemanpillai's mind the day he travelled to a petrol station and filled up a soft drink bottle with petrol, and when he took that bottle out into the yard of his house. I do not know what Khawli intended or why she chose to carry a small bottle of flammable liquid with her on that particular journey to the UNHCR office.

Universal conditions and their uneven distribution

I propose there are conceptual similarities between vulnerability and an event, due to the aporia involved in vulnerability as a universal, or constitutive condition being unevenly distributed. Elizabeth Povinelli in conversation with Berlant notes, "quasi-events are the general condition of all human social life" (2014, p. 8). While it might be the case that there is something constitutive or even ontological about everyday

activities that both slowly and rapidly slice away energy from bodies leaving them depleted, I am interested in the methods available for conceptualising and encountering a condition or phenomena that is both a general condition of living, a type of burden that can be registered as being borne by living beings, and one that is simultaneously differentiated. Framed in other terms, a problem that has continued to challenge this project is the difficulty in addressing the asymmetrical qualities or elements of foundational conditions that inform social life. Povinelli draws attention to the different forces that quasi-events have, which are mediated by their location within a "socially distributed world" (p. 8). These mediating conditions press upon bodies in different ways, which leads to differentiated modes of endurance. While there is a certain amount of durability required in order to sustain a life, Povinelli makes clear that categorising ahead of time what is trivial, minor or inconsequential, always occurs according to a particular, but often unnamed or invisible burden index in operation, which is seldom situated within the context in which quasi-events impact individuals in disproportionate ways. Such analysis assumes a singular modality of agency, and universal capacities of bodies and does not take into account the different layers of emotional and physical effort or endurance required by certain individuals and communities to "undo, reverse, move on from the trivia of derangements," which makes the trivial a highly situated concept (p. 8). Here, in working at the micro layers of these forms of differentiation, it is possible to draw some parallels between the micro event and vulnerability in the difficulties this presents for research.

While the "entire world might appear to consist of the same type of quasi-events" this generalisation returns the focus of this discussion to the critical engagement with the conceptualisation of vulnerability in chapter one of this thesis (p. 9). As Thobani (2007) has argued, what becomes the referent and the self-referencing formula for calculating the endurance required, the vulnerability experienced, and the resources required, is seldom the located specificities where quasi-events are not trivial but exhausting. Therefore, as Povinelli asserts, what appears as a quasi-event in a particular lifeworld that is afforded forms of privilege, and what appears as a quasi-event in a lifeworld operating within unspectacular temporalities "are not equivalent" (2014, p. 9). Povinelli argues that this is the case because "neither the event nor the

quasi-event are transcendent to their immanent and actual conditions" (p. 9).

Therefore, the conditions in which micro events take place are integral to the

registering of the event *within* a particular body, and its becoming folded into subjects

through modes of time and the forms of endurance required, rather than being

registered outside of that individual. Micro events become adhered within the

specificities of bodies and their capacities, struggles and desires, and their movements

can be traced through spatial and temporal registers. These sensorial and affective

modalities are necessary in order to document micro events without erasing

connected modes of living and enduring. To do so it is crucial to address the ways in

which the fabric of the event in its layers and folds of complexity is stitched within the

"microcosmic dwelling places" in which it occurs (Motamedi Fraser and Faker 2014, p.

5).

I suggest this can be articulated in the demand placed upon Povinelli as a researcher

from her Indigenous colleagues in Australia (2014, p. 9): that an analysis begins from

the localised and particular; and that it makes visible the effort and endurance

required within the situation in which it occurs, where knots tie together sensorial,

material and located burdens and the outcomes that might be possible. The recharging

of a car battery; the loss of a washing machine lid; the weekly phone call by

Seemanpillai to his parents in a refuge camp in India; a one day a week job at an

asphalt company; being left alone after having dinner with a friend; the returning

home to her children by Khawli after a three hour round journey on foot; standing in

line and repeating a story; living in a one room apartment in an unfamiliar city. The

burden index of micro events is always in operation and it is always particular.

These disaggregating elements lay open the vulnerability of a "western" linear

cohesiveness to subjectivity that suggests it is possible to achieve what we set out to

do, and that there is a singular modality of agency geared towards autonomy and

resistance. The disaggregation therefore makes it difficult and also problematic to

identify traceable connective and causal relations as to why certain projects might fail,

why people perform particular actions during specific times and within specific spaces,

and why efforts of endurance may not be able to be distinguished easily between

those that involve self-maintenance and those that involve self-destruction.

Further research

Within this project there are areas that may offer directions for future research. I chose to focus on the narratives of two individuals who did not appear to act in concert with other individuals or groups because I wanted to remain with the ambiguities that were present in documenting the stories of Seemanpillai and Khawli. I propose that methods of writing vulnerably and conducting vulnerable forms of research could be applied to other topics and areas involving feminist, queer, postcolonial and de-colonial interrogations. In the specific context of self-immolation, it could be generative to examine cases where forms of exposure can be more closely tied to political reasons, such as the self-immolations that are occurring in Tibet and by Tibetans living in other areas. In relation to this, the role and emphasis placed on analysing macro level political concerns could be altered in connection to the specificities of the context where the analysis occurs.

I am interested in how further practices and activities could be analysed through the frame of a micro event. While my focus has not been on how such events are governed, this analysis as it appears in the work of Ben Anderson (2015) in relation to emergency responses, and the specific ways the distribution of vulnerability is regulated as described by Butler and Athena Athanasiou (2013) could each form new lines of analysis. While I have suggested micro events as a means of altering temporal and spatial registers of analysis to examine modes of ordinary activities and efforts of endurance, the notion of events could also be examined in more detail including critically questioning what an event is and expanding the notion to include "modes of eventfulness" (Anderson 2015). This could involve how events might change over time and the mediating conditions that more explicitly include structural forms of power and control. While my attention was on examining the two narratives through micro level details, the relation between the micro and macro could be interrogated and play a more substantial part in the analysis and the shaping of a micro event, which would

connect this more closely to the work of Povinelli (2011).

One of the areas that emerged in working with two narratives involving individuals who set their bodies on fire, was my own uncertainty about conceptualising self-immolation as an act or a practice of self-destruction. The proximity of life-preserving, self-making acts with those that had the potential to be life-ending, and the uncertainty of the role of self-making within self-immolation, have persisted through this project. This led me to begin to consider if this ambiguity could be better addressed through the notion of an event. There is more work to be done to examine the ways in which acts of self-destruction are conceptualised, and the modalities of agency that are connected to such activities. I am also interested in the concept of agency and the ways this is contested. While I have addressed this in particular through the work of Mahmood and Asad, a more prominent engagement with agency as an unstable element of subjectivity and the ways it is considered outside of being action oriented would open up new lines of inquiry in relation to vulnerability but also within feminist methods of research.

Vulnerable writing

I conclude this thesis by returning to the question of ethics within research, and the difficulties in producing knowledge on the lives of others and doing justice to stories as an unchosen narrator. In this project I have suggested that vulnerable research shifts the burden of the demand of intentionality away from the subjects of research and exposes the scaffolding and vulnerable structures of knowledge-making, especially in the context of "western/northern" feminist cross-cultural projects. I have attempted to distinguish between knowing as a form of action, and knowing as a form of passivity, as I described in chapter two, as a means of opening up and remaining with the vulnerability to what is unknown, and where comprehension does not form the foundation in determining the means to form an adequate response. It means approaching research with an awareness of the temporal conditions of knowledge and the asymmetrical qualities and uneven distributions of elements of living and

enduring. It means that the demands of others leave us open to failures but not exempt from responsibility to do justice to those we write about. And this difficulty means acknowledging that, despite every effort and every best intention, there is a continued risk of misunderstanding and symbolic violence, of needing to return to and question what is already known, and of not doing enough. In this project I have suggested that vulnerable writing is perhaps an otherwise than knowledge, which involves being receptive to what is beyond comprehension, that resists the closures of certain forms of sense-making, and that remains outside of the frame, while continuing to work with and to be worked on by the stories of others.

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