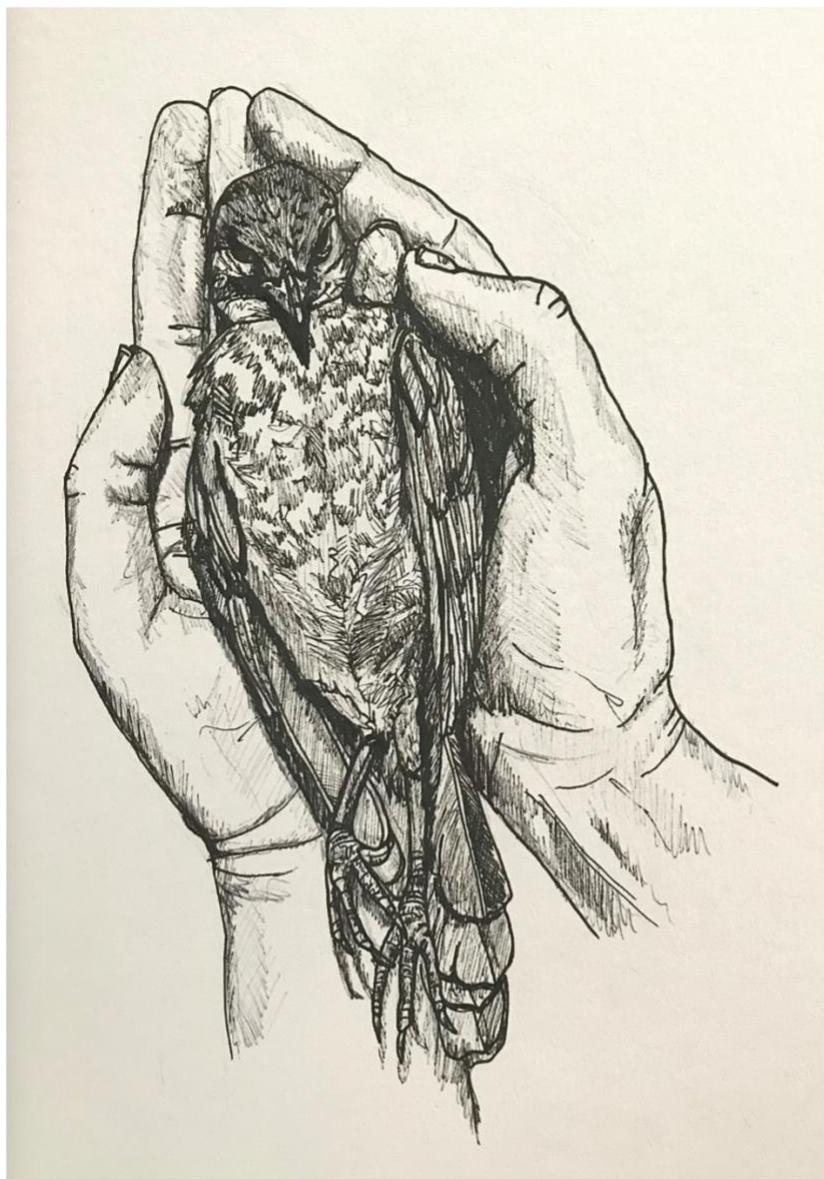


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SETTLEMENT STORIES:
Former Refugee Women's Settling Experiences in
Aotearoa New Zealand

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2026



“Refuge” drawn by Kezia Geange during this study

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of International Development at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Abstract

With increasing numbers of refugees worldwide, the plight of women presents a significant development issue, with refugee women facing higher levels of violence and fewer education and employment opportunities when displaced. Yet, upon arrival in a resettlement country, settlement is not the end of the journey, and women face many challenges as they adapt to new systems and cultures. This research provides nuanced insights into the specific opportunities and challenges encountered by former refugee women as they settle and work in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, Waikato, a resettlement city in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Framing this thesis around concepts of “belonging”, this research focuses on two interconnected questions: How do women with refugee backgrounds create a sense of belonging in their everyday settling, and what are possible factors that could give women in employment a sense of inclusion?

The settlement stories of six former refugee women from Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Colombia were examined over a six-month period through a mixed-methods approach. These methods included observation, semi-structured interviews, and photovoice. This study confirmed that belonging is a situated, and not fixed, state that is both an individual and collective lived experience. Belonging involves transnational communication, emotional connection, security, employment, and community support. Belonging is shaped by the interaction between individual agency and societal structures and negotiated through past and present affective experiences that span people and places.

This research contributes to broader discussions on refugee settlement by illustrating how women create a sense of belonging in their everyday settings, including their homes and jobs in Aotearoa New Zealand. Results demonstrate that belonging cannot be assumed or guaranteed; it must be cultivated through relational, culturally sensitive approaches and ongoing support. The study outlines that true inclusion involves recognising lived experiences, fostering mutual understanding, and creating environments where former refugees can feel secure and thrive.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

I begin this thesis with a quote from one of the women who participated in my study. Her narrative offers a glimpse into her remarkable journey, in which she fled her homeland to a neighbouring country and eventually found a new home in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, a city in Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa/NZ). Aotearoa/NZ is where she has settled for the past ten years, and where this research takes place.

It's just, it's SO hard. Everything happens SO fast... sometimes you just blink and here we are, after ten years. It feels like... wherever we are from, because it's not just my home country, we are looking for the peace and the quiet and the settlement. And it feels sometimes like you just need to have a moment and just stop everything, and just do the same thing, the repetitive things for a bit, because you didn't have the stability...

And moving out of the trauma, it's really hard. It's like going through flames or going through fire. And you feel that you're still burning. You're still trying to move out of it. So, [to] have that peace and just know that you're gonna be fine... I'm still looking over my shoulder every time I go around. And the good thing about being in New Zealand is that the people here are so nice. It's safe enough... this [is] my home. And it's been nice. It has been a really long, hard way, but I'm here, and I'm happy.

This woman's story highlights that a refugee's journey does not end with resettlement—moving from her home place to a place of refuge. Instead, as this quote shows, settling into a new place is an ongoing emotional journey. The process of building a life in Aotearoa/NZ includes vulnerability, concerns about her safety, and a search for stillness. This woman's quote emphasises that feeling “safe enough” in a new place of settlement is an ongoing process of adaptation following often traumatic experiences, in which different realities are navigated in places far from homes once known.

In fleeing war, violence, and persecution, refugees like this woman abandon their homes, leaving their country of nationality, belongings, jobs, and loved ones. A lack of protection in a

refugee's country of origin exposes them to vulnerabilities and inequalities, affecting their safety and future. Pre-settlement vulnerabilities mean that girls with refugee background more likely leave school than boys in the same situation, resulting in significantly restricted employment opportunities (International Rescue Committee, 2025). Fewer than 20 per cent of women in conflict zones participate in paid work. One in five women who have been displaced is affected by sexual violence, and many women face a higher risk of intimate partner violence (International Rescue Committee, 2025, p. 9). During settlement in a new country, where focus is on the experience of belonging, women can encounter difficulties entering the labour market, accessing healthcare and education services, or communicating in a new language (Bahar & Dooley, 2019). Moreover, former refugee women's voices are frequently absent, overlooked, or negated in decision-making about them. Being seen as outsiders or not recognised as full members of society has led to having limited influence on policy (Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm et al., 2025). Such exclusions are concerning, given the scale of global displacement.

This study focuses on women with refugee backgrounds. The disproportionate and distinct effects they experience shape their sense of belonging and the way they feel settled in their new homes, and how they experience their employment situations. The strength of this in-depth research, conducted with a small number of participating women, lies in its rich insights into lived, complex, affective experiences that are often overlooked. These women's voices are especially needed in Aotearoa/NZ, where there are not many studies specifically on women from refugee backgrounds, particularly those residing in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. These experiences are crucial for understanding and informing more inclusive, effective international development processes. Despite their vulnerabilities, women with refugee background are active agents who adapt to new cultural contexts, maintain key aspects of their identities, build social networks, and pursue education and employment. Upon resettlement, women work hard to build a livelihood for themselves and their families while maintaining connections and caregiving responsibilities with loved ones scattered across the globe. This thesis uncovers women's personal stories of employment, inclusion, and wellbeing and explores the systems that support their settlement and belonging amid structural inequalities.

1.2 Background

This section places the women's settlement in a global context. Global trends in displacement have risen continuously over the past 13 years because of new and ongoing conflicts, persecution, violence, and events that seriously violate human rights, causing people to flee from their homes (UNHCR, 2025a). These deep-rooted global imbalances have reinforced each other, triggering and spreading a global crisis and hindering control efforts on an international scale (International Rescue Committee, 2025). As a result of global insecurity, refugee numbers are rising, and are currently at 42.5 million¹ people worldwide, underscoring the urgent need to address challenges faced by displaced populations (UNHCR, 2025b, para. 2).

Among the various collective efforts to address crises² and prioritise the most marginalised and vulnerable communities, such as refugees, is the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This shared global agenda, which Aotearoa/NZ aligns with, is consistent with international law and addresses needs in humanitarian emergencies (United Nations, n.d.). The SDGs embody the vision of “leaving no one behind” to reduce discrimination and inequality (United Nations, n.d.), and place particular emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment. This focus entails promoting inclusion, education, and employment to enable women to reach their full potential (Bahar & Dooley, 2019). Achieving these goals requires recognising that those with refugee backgrounds are active agents in shaping their own life outcomes, rather than characterising them as passive victims (Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm et al., 2025).

Efforts to respond to global displacement are made tangible locally through Aotearoa/NZ's long-standing history of refugee resettlement pathways (Marlowe et al., 2014). The country is party to global welfare agreements, including the 1951 Refugee Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. These agreements underpin the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) work to protect refugees. The New Zealand government, partnering with the UNHCR, prioritises resettling those most in need and

¹ The figure 42.5 million includes 30.5 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate, 3.3 million in refugee-like situations, 5.1 million other people in need of international protection, and 5.9 million Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate (UNHCR, 2025b)

² Global efforts to support refugees and those seeking asylum include The International Organization for Migration; Red Cross; United Nations Children's Fund; International Rescue Committee

ensures that refugees are safe and have fundamental rights, including the right to non-discrimination, housing, and decent work (UNHCR, 2010). An annual Refugee Quota Programme (RQP) is reviewed every three years and adjusted in response to changing global needs and circumstances (Immigration New Zealand, 2024d). From July 2020, Aotearoa/NZ increased its annual refugee intake from 1000 to 1500 (Immigration New Zealand, 2024c, 2024d). Figure 1 shows refugee quota arrivals by year, highlighting the increase in arrivals since 2020. The arrivals align with global resettlement numbers (see Figure 2), which show a decline in resettlement in 2020, due to COVID-19, and gradual increases over the last few years.

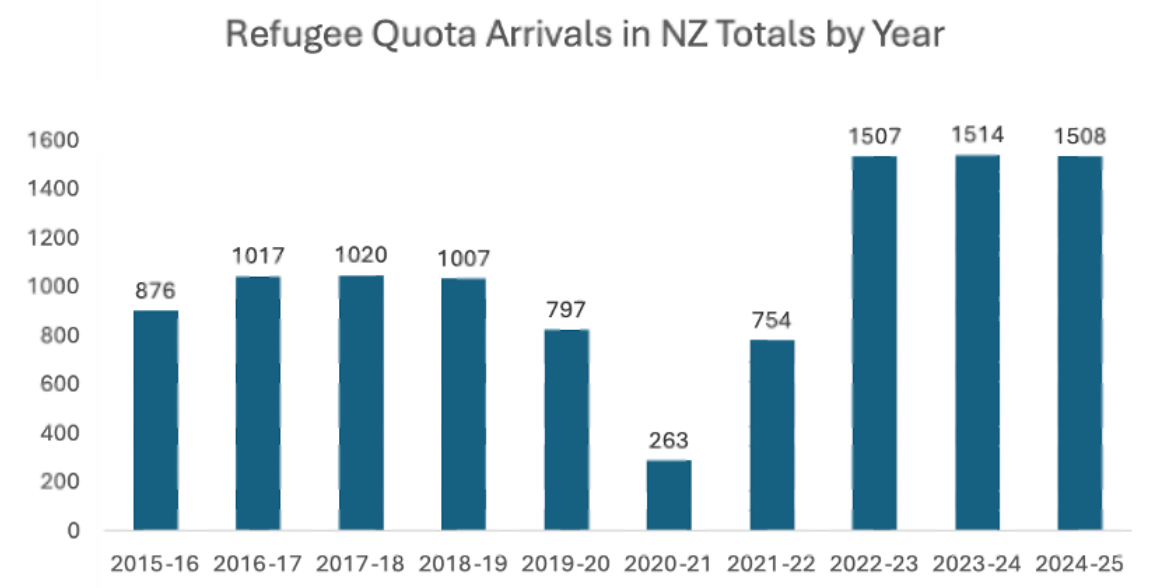


Figure 1 *Refugee Quota Arrivals in Aotearoa/NZ 2015-2025*

Note. Adapted from *Refugee and Protection Statistics Pack – Current to 31 October 2025* (p. 5), by Immigration New Zealand, 2025.

Since 2020, global resettlement figures have shown a positive trend, as shown in Figure 2 below, peaking in 2024 after 40 years (UNHCR, 2025a). Comparing these numbers to Figure 1, however, resettlement in Aotearoa/NZ has remained flat over the past three years, rather than increasing as global trends have to support more refugees.

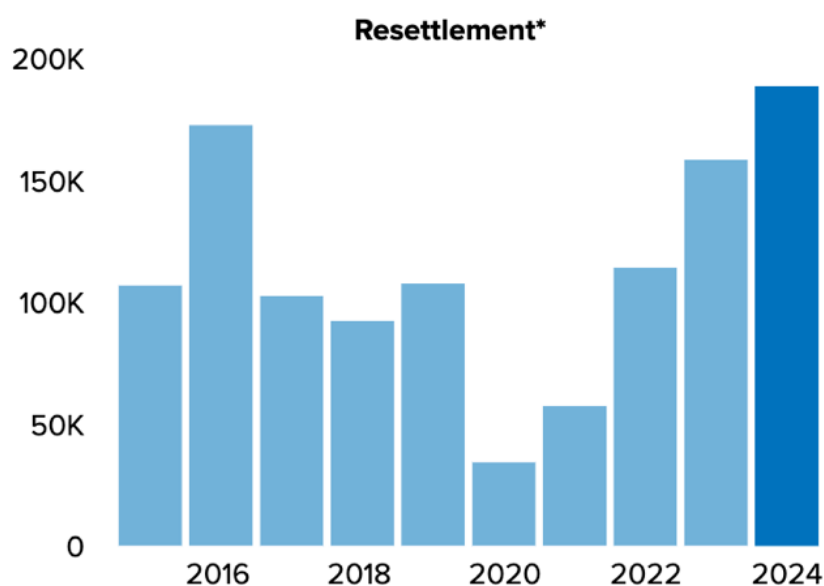


Figure 2 *Global Refugee Resettlement Numbers, 2015-2024*

Note. Data from *Global Trends in Forced Displacement 2024* (p. 11), by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2025a

The New Zealand Government settles former refugees throughout the country, in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, Manawatū, Nelson, Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill, Auckland and Wellington regions (Immigration New Zealand, 2024c). Refugees from a variety of countries have been settled across these regions and provided support for at least twelve months (as stated in Chapter 3). As shown in Table 1, the top five nationalities settling in Aotearoa/NZ under the RQP are from Syria, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Colombia, and Pakistan.

Table 1 *Refugee Quota arrivals in Aotearoa/NZ by Nationality 2015 – 2026*

Nationality	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Afghanistan	143	123	114	105	128	78	107	218	317	249	100
Bhutan	31	61	18								
Burundi							11				
Cambodia							6		5		
China										5	
Colombia	100	139	159	184	135	33	118	135	64	74	20
Congo				18							
D.R. of Congo			12	19	47	5	28	165	84	133	72
Ecuador	6	12	20	12			7				
Egypt											
Eritrea	7			27	64			121	18	56	
Ethiopia			5							10	5
Iran		19	40	5	5			36	93	99	19
Iraq	19	23	8	9	23		11	31	5	19	
Kyrgyzstan								8			
Myanmar	217	187	177	240	207	105	126	206	206	199	96
Nepal		5									
Pakistan		39	44	76	33	14	131	140	132	81	15
Palestine	26	59	73	77	36					11	
Papua New Guinea								9	13		
Somalia	13	12	9	35	13	14	60	123	93	47	6
South Sudan			9							6	12
Sri Lanka	24	27	7	29	11			6	26	11	
Sudan								8	11	6	7
Syria	252	302	307	155	81	8	111	257	375	439	71
Turkey							20	11			
Venezuela									44	20	6
Vietnam	16								7	15	
Yemen								18			
Other	22	9	18	16	14	6	18	15	21	27	18
Total	876	1017	1020	1007	797	263	754	1507	1514	1507	447

Note. Data from *Refugee and Protection Statistics Pack – Current to 31 October 2025* (p. 5), by Immigration New Zealand, 2025.

The people in these top five countries have faced ongoing conflicts and persecution. There has also been regular resettlement of people from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Pakistan over the past eight years, before 2024-25 (Immigration New Zealand, 2024e). A government approach has been in place since 2012 to support integration of refugees through the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy (NZRRS). There is particular emphasis on settling people from the same ethnicities or similar cultures together for their wellbeing and for resource sharing. The NZRRS aims for those with refugee backgrounds to settle successfully, achieve goals, and thrive in Aotearoa/NZ by feeling safe, having a sense of belonging, and participating in all aspects of life (Immigration New Zealand, 2024d). The NZRRS's approach aims to ensure former refugees have the support and opportunities they need to successfully flourish in their new community, and particularly recognises the role of

decent employment, though it does not specifically mention women (Immigration New Zealand, 2024d).

1.3 Positionality and Personal Motivation

My interest in understanding settlement experiences is motivated by a curiosity about how people negotiate belonging, especially when they have limited choices in their new homes. My positionality is that I am a white British woman who grew up in East England. I became interested in issues of belonging and inequality after volunteer work and having a couple of migrant experiences.

Around a decade ago, I volunteered at a charity working with women experiencing sexual violence, exploitation and coercion in the United Kingdom, and then spent a year in India, working for a company that employed women wishing to leave Kolkata's sex trade. During this period in India, I experienced my own process of creating a 'home' while feeling welcomed by people who, for the most part, had been trafficked and not chosen Kolkata as home. Yet they still adapted under challenging circumstances. This personal quest for home and belonging resurfaced after I married a New Zealander and moved from England to rural Waikato, Aotearoa/NZ in 2020 to be near my husband's family. I am an English speaker with a bachelor's degree, work experience, and an initial network of family in Aotearoa/NZ, yet I was surprised by how difficult it was to settle in, even with cultural similarities. This experience deepened my interest in understanding the settlement practices of people from diverse backgrounds.

I have never been a refugee or displaced person, but my desire to explore stories from former refugees grew through exposure to settlement services when volunteering at a local settlement support organisation. Later, during the early research stage, I volunteered as a settlement support worker at another organisation, assisting former refugee families newly arrived in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. Volunteering gave me insight into settlement processes and the importance of local knowledge, while deepening my interest in personal experiences.

1.4 Key Concepts and Methodology

The thesis aims to understand how participants negotiate their sense of belonging across personal, cultural, social, and institutional contexts, including the workplace. I will introduce key concepts that inform this study here, along with outlining the methodology employed, but these ideas will be fully articulated in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Belonging is understood in relation to home and place attachment, encompassing the symbolic, spatial, cultural, relational, emotional, and affective connections through which it is formed. Place attachment is a critical concern for development amid global humanitarian crises and growing transnationalism, as women's ties to meaningful places and relationships are disrupted and reshaped.

Belonging provides a framework for understanding women's agency in negotiating identities, commitments, relationships and participation in settlement contexts. As a concept, belonging enables analysis of structural processes and power relations that produce inclusion and exclusion. These structural processes include global, political, social, economic and environmental forces which shape belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Kale et al., 2019; Marlowe, 2018). Belonging is conceptualised as a multisensory, layered, and evolving process shaped by both personal experiences and structures.

A qualitative methodology, which leans on ethnography, was employed to explore participants' perspectives and experiences through my prolonged engagement with women in their homes, and by observing them in their social, cultural, and workplace environments. Using methods that lean on ethnography enabled deep engagement with the women and their communities and provided data on contextual subtleties. Qualitative methods included observation, interviews, and photovoice to produce varied and comprehensive accounts from the women. These research methods allowed for relational and sensory engagement with participants' lives, thereby supporting the generation and interpretation of findings.

1.5 Research Aim and Questions

This research has aimed to explore former refugee women's settlement narratives in Aotearoa/NZ and to understand their belonging and what has explicitly made them feel more included in society. To achieve this aim, the research is structured around two research questions and key objectives outlined below.

Research Question 1: How do women with refugee backgrounds create a sense of belonging in their everyday settling?

- 1.1. To understand the statutory and voluntary support systems available to women to build a sense of connection to their new homes
- 1.2. To understand the women's social networks and how these are built and maintained in their everyday practices
- 1.3. To uncover affective experiences throughout the everyday that create a sense of belonging

Research Question 2: What are possible factors that could give women in employment a sense of inclusion?

- 2.1 To understand the women's paid employment experiences
- 2.2 To analyse the services available towards finding employment
- 2.3 To explore the importance of employment in the women's lives

1.6 Thesis Layout

This thesis comprises seven chapters:

Chapter 1 has introduced the research topic, its aim, rationale and background, and briefly highlighted the conceptual framing and methodology.

Chapter 2 focuses on a literature review of belonging, with particular attention to the context of forming home and the affective experiences of settling, which create emotional bonds to people and places. The literature on everyday sensory experiences is explained in relation to memory. Subsequently, interconnected factors of belonging are analysed, along with the processes of inclusion and exclusion, and belonging as a socio-political issue.

Chapter 3 offers a background-related literature review, presenting an overview of the refugee journey and settlement in Aotearoa/NZ. This chapter then offers background on Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, where participants currently reside. This chapter reviews the literature on employment opportunities and challenges faced by former refugees and women in entering and succeeding within the labour market.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology and presents the methods used to conduct fieldwork and recruitment of participants, including the role of settlement service providers in this process. The chapter also discusses ethical issues when working with women from refugee backgrounds.

Chapter 5 is the first chapter analysing the research findings on the settlement narratives of participants. This chapter analyses the women's sense of belonging to their homes through their stories about safety and security in daily life, and their connections to transnational culture, loved ones, activities, and places that shape those feelings.

Chapter 6 is the second research analysis chapter, exploring interconnecting responsibilities, interests, and connections, including in workplaces, and the role of agencies that support women's settlement and pathways to work, helping participants meet both immediate and long-term needs.

Chapter 7 addresses the research questions through a discussion of the fieldwork findings from participants' narratives and observations. This final chapter offers a conclusion and makes recommendations for how to provide better support to people with refugee backgrounds.

Chapter 2: Conceptualising Belonging in the Context of Refugee Settlement

2.1 Introduction

This study uses belonging as a lens to understand refugee settlement in Aotearoa/NZ. Refugee settlement is about belonging, the experience after a person has arrived in a country of resettlement, within which they integrate and participate in a receiving society (Marlowe, 2018). Belonging is a vital concept in an era of transnational migration, as it helps to understand how geographical ties, social, familial, and employment networks, practices, and commitments across places connect to existing homes and create new ones. However, belonging is complex and has often been taken for granted, making it a relatively under-theorised and vague concept (Antonsich, 2010; Marlowe, 2018).

This chapter seeks to understand belonging through factors which shape the idea of ‘home’, while observing conceptualisations of belonging as synonymous with integration, citizenship, and identity. Firstly, the notion of belonging at ‘home’ is presented through place belonging, where home is symbolic, spatial, and emotional. Belonging is also presented as a feeling of acceptance and inclusion, serving as a sign of being part of a group and a place. Belonging is then explored as multisensory experiences that shape and influence settlement and inclusion. Later, factors that affect the settlement of former refugees are discussed, thereby influencing their experiences of belonging. These belonging factors comprise five interconnected aspects described by Antonsich (2010) as legal, cultural, autobiographical, economic, and relational. Additionally, identity and security will be explored. Alongside place belonging, the concept of the ‘politics of belonging’ (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006) is explained, highlighting social inclusions and exclusions that both constrain and construct individual and group belonging.

2.2 Making and Remembering Home

Since the end of World War II, there has been ongoing interest in refugee integration (Cheong et al., 2007). While integration helps understand access and participation, belonging has gained prominence in refugee literature. This prominence is because belonging provides a useful theoretical lens for exploring people’s commitments to places and society’s receptiveness to refugees during what Marlowe (2018) labels as “everyday” and

“extraordinary” events (see also Antonsich, 2010). The following subsections present belonging as encompassing gendered, spatial, cultural, and technological aspects (Marlowe, 2018). Belonging is shown to relate to attachment to place and is constructed through sensory experiences across locations that foster emotional and cultural bonds. Multisensory experiences influence how individuals navigate homes by merging past experiences and memories with new surroundings and engaging with unfamiliar spaces through evoking connections (Kale et al., 2019; Munt, 2016). Recognising how senses shape memories, identity, and emotional reactions contributes to an essential understanding of what it means to feel at home in different cultures and life situations.

2.2.1 Constructions of Home

As highlighted in Chapter 1, place attachment in the context of belonging and settlement is becoming increasingly important as global crises that cause displacement threaten people’s ties to places. Scannell and Gifford (2010) shared that place attachment occurs between individuals and meaningful environments. As ‘home’ spans micro- to macro-level considerations and is not confined to a single place, meaningful environments take many forms. In today’s increasingly interconnected world, this is especially true for people who live in and between multiple homes, making it challenging to secure roots in one place (Ahmed, 1999). However, to belong is to find a place where ‘home’ can be felt, which is often a physical and symbolic space of connection. Hage, (1997) presented home as an affective construct grounded in homely feelings. Hage suggested the feelings that contribute to building this structure are security, community, familiarity and a sense of possibility or hope. Kale et al. suggested home as “a dynamic interplay between physical environments, the socio-political constructions which divide and govern these environments, and a relational embodied feeling that one belongs somewhere” (2019, p. 2). Home is therefore suggested to have physical, social and economic elements. These concepts of home are valuable in refugee studies for understanding how home can remain connected to or created when the physical home or familiar spaces are lost.

Place attachment includes the spatial home, which comprises streets and public or private buildings near the house, neighbouring villages where friends and extended family reside, and surrounding land that provides income or nutrition (Taylor, 2013). Taylor proposed that these spaces encompass everyday activities and routines in mosques, churches, shops,

mountains, and cafes, where events such as baptisms, birthdays, and political commemorations take place. These experiences mark the human lifecycle. The spatial home is therefore not entirely limited to the places where activities and routines happen but extends through communication and connections elsewhere. The community of place must be considered, as it describes social ties rooted in location, where spaces support social interaction (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Home is a multifaceted space, and this complexity leads to many negotiations and nuanced feelings toward routines, countries, cities, objects, and people, fostering a sense of belonging. Belonging is not just a personal matter but also a social one (Antonsich, 2010).

Home is especially significant for refugees who navigate unfamiliar territories (Kale et al., 2019). Aguirre (2025) writes that, for displaced people, home is always part of their experience and narrative, with home representing something lost, sought, and sometimes found anew. Taylor (2013) stated a sense of loss and injustice may be derived from losing a place a person believes they had a 'natural' connection to or a historic 'right' to. Home can also become a fantasy, nostalgia for what once was, and a dream of what could be. Marlowe (2018) shared that countries of settlement are often presented in refugee camps as utopian constructs. Unrealistic or inaccurate expectations about life abroad may lead to failure to acknowledge the challenges and obstacles inherent in settlement experiences. Conversely, home is not always an embracing experience of security and comfort but can be a space of turbulence and alienation. Hage (1997) argued that because homes are never fully secure, familiar, or communal enough, these feelings of hope for something better are natural characteristics of home. A sense of hope is needed for home building as it creates ongoing future possibilities. These ideas show the need to consider home as a fluid and diverse experience and to reconsider ideological constructions of home and resettlement countries as safe and inviting places (Ratnam, 2018).

Home and place attachment include physical spaces and emotional attachments. For individuals from refugee backgrounds, these attachments are crucial to their sense of identity and belonging in the loss of physical homes. Recognising the adaptable and varied nature of home highlights the importance of viewing resettlement not just as a change of location but as a multifaceted process involving emotional, social, and cultural ties. Ultimately, developing a detailed understanding of home can lead to more compassionate and practical ways of supporting those experiencing displacement and resettlement.

2.2.2 Multisensory Experiences of Home

The ability to feel at home is multisensory, as sensory experiences are a means through which emotional bonds with a place can form (Kale et al., 2019). Spaces turn into places when they are physically and materially infused with emotional and sensory connections, making them meaningful sites (Tyler, 2024). Duffy and Waitt (2013) drew on visceral sensations of home with ‘visceral’ referring to mood, internally felt sensations, and states of being produced from sensory engagement with the material world (drawing on Hayes-Conroy, 2008). Highly visceral experiences prompted by multisensory sensations can evoke memories and feelings, allowing people to enter a place and making them feel at home or pushing them away (Kale et al., 2019).

The ebb and flow of feelings of homeliness shows the dynamism of individuals’ emotional reactions to multisensory stimuli. Alongside developing an understanding of different cultural, social, economic, and political systems, migration also involves sensual and visceral understandings of the body, including different languages, sounds, smells, tastes, textures, gestures and culinary practices (Longhurst et al., 2009). Ratnam (2018) referred to these bodily experiences as “affect”, which is invisible yet sensed by the body and helps to understand connections between the self and the world. Simpson and Simpson (2024) concluded that sensory practices also shape the spaces traversed and inhabited. As a result, affective dispositions from these encounters form individual and collective values and perspectives on the world (Simpson & Simpson, 2024). Ratnam (2018) shared that cyclical daily sensory experiences build community through recollection and remembrance, thereby contributing to both individual and collective identity.

Daily sensory experiences influence various feelings about the home, including security, comfort, and a warm sense of belonging. In Western societies, the five senses of sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch are recognised. However, broader affective concepts suggest the inclusion of more senses. Steiner identified twelve: sight, speech, taste, smell, touch, hearing, movement, temperature, balance, thought, ego, and life (1981, as cited in Kale, 2019). These senses, along with comforting sensory activities like gardening, painting, socialising, or cooking, are linked to processes of security and familiarity within the home (Ratnam, 2018; Simpson & Simpson, 2024). For many former refugees, having come from instability, uncomfortable affective responses such as to crime and fear are intensified. Uncomfortable

responses include physical reactions to immediate threats; worry, persistent thoughts about potential harm; and anxiety, a low-level emotion concerning uncertain future events (Lee, 2024). Hage (1997) identified that a sense of security is a fundamental need and the most vital feeling for creating a homely space. Therefore, in understanding the affective experiences of home, memories and fears about safety must be acknowledged, and threats must be eliminated to create safety.

Supporting the connection between senses and memories, Kale et al. found that “stimulation of particular senses elicits memories of past times and places, enabling individuals to connect multiple places simultaneously and form transnational or plurilocal place attachments” (2019, p. 7). Similarly, Hage (1997) drew on nostalgia as an affective building block, a mode of feeling at home in the present. For example, if someone wishes for communal life, they draw on specific situations in which they felt communal feelings. In a study on displaced Kashmiris, Pathak and Karmakar (2022) referred to tangible objects and the material memories they evoked, which became repositories of hidden histories that preserved fragments of a past previously unspoken about because of marginalisation. Physical items can store sentiment and cultural knowledge, replacing interpersonal relationships lost during rapid flight (Parkin, 1999).

Physical items, which Parkin (1999) described as private mementoes, act as a bridge between places and are drawn upon as an affective building block for communication. Drawing on and using material objects enables personalisation, comfort and control in otherwise alienating environments (McCarthy, 2020). Moreover, senses from the material home elicit intuitive emotional and physical responses. As found in Munt's (2016) study of individuals from refugee backgrounds arriving in the UK, participants' observations were highly sensory, drawing on memories of places and noting differences and similarities. Munt's participants reported that, upon arrival in the UK, they felt the cold, saw green grass, noticed the shape of the buildings, and smelt unfamiliar smells. In Kamri-McGurk's (2012) findings on Burmese women settling in Wellington, the quietness of Aotearoa/NZ and the lack of people were remarked upon, in contrast to the social and spatial liveliness of participants' former homes. Senses evoke familiarity and comparisons between places, which can serve as a reference point to help construct a sense of belonging. Considering these ideas, a sense of homeliness can be recreated in a new place if a similar sensory environment and resources are available.

Multisensory experiences can highlight differences between past and present, leading to negative memories and thoughts. These nostalgic reference points may cause disappointment, longing, and homesickness as individuals recall lost time, people, objects, land, and livelihoods. However, according to Antonsich (2010), feeling sentimental is a permanent condition for migrants. Homesickness influences feelings of belonging but tends to decrease as migrants stay longer in a new country and develop a greater sense of belonging (Hage, 1997). Kale et al. (2019) highlighted that former refugees need to mediate between past, present, and future desires, needs, and experiences to manage grief, restore a sense of security, and maintain valued aspects of their identity. Multisensory experiences can serve as both an aid and a hindrance in this process of belonging.

Sensory experiences profoundly influence feelings of home, belonging, and identity, especially for migrants. Rooted in visceral sensations and memories, the senses evoke nostalgia, comfort, and adaptability. Recognising multisensory engagement helps create inclusive, meaningful environments that honour individual and collective histories.

2.3 Factors of Place-Belongingness and the Politics of Belonging: Constructing Inclusions and Exclusions

This next section explores the factors that influence the feeling of belonging. Leaning on a theory explored by Antonsich (2010), two corresponding dimensions are now outlined: place-belongingness and the politics of belonging. Antonsich suggested that place-belongingness is a personal, intimate, emotional, and symbolic connection to a place, characterised by a sense of being at home. As mentioned above, Antonsich's view of place-belonging comprises five factors that link people to specific locations: legal, autobiographical, cultural, economic, and relational. Alongside these factors, I also highlight security and identity as key to understanding belonging. The politics of belonging, the second dimension of this theory, is presented in relation to factors of place belonging. The politics of belonging is more public and formal than place belonging. In the politics of belonging, belonging is seen as a discursive resource that shapes and legitimises the socio-spatial inclusion or exclusion of individuals, groups, and social categories within power structures (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Central to considerations of belonging are boundary discourses that can create an 'us' and 'them'. Migrants may perceive this difference between themselves and the host society as a "vector of othering" and, consequently, find it impossible to settle and legitimise

their presence as members of the receiving society (Borrelli et al., 2022, p. 1146). Here, I explain that inclusive factors, such as membership in society and ownership of a place, are essential for belonging.

2.3.1 Security and Legal Factors

As explained in Chapter 1, refugees can face significant insecurity in their countries of origin, during their flight, at borders, and even after resettling. For people to feel they belong somewhere, home must be a space of security, comfort, familiarity, and a sense of possibility (Aguirre, 2025; Antonsich, 2010; Hage, 1997). As mentioned earlier, security is essential for creating homely spaces (Hage, 1997), and comforting practices, such as enacting cultural traditions, can help foster a sense of security (Simpson & Simpson, 2024).

The 1994 Human Development Report focused on human security and stated that feelings of insecurity often stem from everyday worries rather than catastrophic world events (United Nations, 1994). In ‘safe countries’, former refugees still face daily insecurity, as human security remains a concern across all nations, from hunger and disease to drugs and crime (United Nations, 1994). Factors related to security include daily needs, including financial, environmental, community, personal, political, and health security, as well as protection from crime (Innes, 2016; United Nations, 1994). Innes (2016) raised that, conceptually, human security addresses a material or objective deficiency in one of these areas, implying that security is achieved by identifying and supplying what people lack. However, Innes reflected on feminist security studies, which challenge this assumption by noting that women's security experiences differ from broader world experiences, and rejects the notion of insecurity as a mere lack that can be remedied by providing objects and materials of security. Schiestl et al. (2021) also noted, refugees’ settlement experiences are different from those of other migrants due to legal restrictions and traumatic experiences impairing mental health.

Further, women face additional challenges compared to men, including being more likely to be victims of abuse during flight (Schiestl et al., 2021). Innes (2016) instead argued that security is a continuous, evolving concept that varies over time and context. Security is, in this sense, subjective and influenced by a wide range of experiences related to identity, social and cultural interactions, power dynamics, and violence (Innes, 2016). Home stability is

crucial for former refugees, as relationships formed there have been found to directly impact moral, human, and social capital, which are essential for human flourishing (Aguirre, 2025).

Legal factors related to residency are viewed as vital components of security and belonging (Antonsich, 2010), as citizenship grants the right to participate in society. Rights and citizenship underpinned Ager and Strang's (2008) framework for integration and can be understood as national or participatory belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Citizenship, which embodies the idea of nationhood and a nation's sense of identity, thus constructs a sense of formal inclusion in a specific community. Citizenship and other forms of residency determine a person's rights, such as access to work, healthcare, and benefits, and influence society's responsibilities towards refugees. Regional, racial, ethnic, and religious differences are common markers of citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 2011). However, at the core of citizenship or residency are notions of equality of outcomes and opportunities for all, regardless of these markers. Hassan suggested that "equality of citizenship is one of the most significant yardsticks with which to measure social inclusion in modern societies" (2016, p. 45). According to Antonsich (2010), immigrants can participate in the local economy (economic belonging), engage in social relations (social belonging), and enjoy human rights (universal belonging) within citizenship or residency (political belonging). All of these form a type of security. Consequently, overarching political belonging through citizenship or residency is connected to other types of belonging within a place.

While legal status is a factor in belonging, as Antonsich (2010) highlighted, the politics of belonging involves two sides: those who claim belonging and those who have the power to grant it. As many refugees gain formal belonging in settlement countries after fleeing insecure states, the state is a powerful agent in the (re)settlement process. States shape migration regimes and associated policies that determine the physical mobility of certain people (Marlowe, 2018). Governments play a role in defining refugee identities, but, as Poteet and Nourpanah, (2016) outlined, this is more complex than simply granting residency or citizenship. Antonsich (2010) shared that citizenship may not always foster place-belongingness, as people may not enjoy equal rights if they cannot express their own identity or authenticity. Public and political concerns have grown around how borders are managed and protected, reflecting worries over migrants' rights to belong or be excluded (Aguirre, 2025). Alongside granting residency or citizenship, governments can set restrictive asylum policies, decide on relocation outcomes, and determine the amount of financial or emotional

support recipients receive (Marlowe, 2018). These influential decisions can determine whether former refugees are included or excluded and define elements of their agency and autonomy.

Home stability and legal elements, such as residency and citizenship, are essential to refugees' security and sense of belonging. Legal status can support inclusion within a community, but it may also create barriers if rights are not equally accessible. While political institutions establish the framework for these rights and responsibilities, communities, workplaces, and local environments significantly shape whether individuals feel valued, heard, and accepted as equals. Ultimately, feeling secure and connected to a place depends on the interaction of legal, social, cultural, and personal factors that shape experiences of belonging and influence journeys towards integration and human flourishing. The next subsections further explore these cultural and relational factors.

2.3.2 Autobiographical and Cultural Factors and Links with Identity

In understanding settlement experiences, the concept of identity has been studied across psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and linguistics (Kale et al., 2018). Greenbank (2020) shared that identity is both individual and collective, social and personal, and something that is negotiated and emerges from interactions. According to Poteet and Nourpanah (2016), forming a sense of self requires maintaining oneself on social, cultural, and personal levels while interacting with and being influenced by a new culture. The authors stated that identity necessitates constant transformation in migratory contexts because of disruptions that occur during migration (Poteet & Nourpanah, 2016).

Marginalised groups like refugees often face negative emotional and social challenges, including in seeking employment, which Ibañez and Lopez (2019) found can damage one's identity. Tomlinson (2010) reiterated that when refugee women experience rejection or exclusion in areas of their lives, such as employment, they often respond by strengthening their attachment to identities and communities where they do feel included. Therefore, identity is reworked or refined in unfamiliar environments as new strategies for living are found. Baker et al. (2016) shared that although identity formation is a fluid process, autobiographical factors remain important, alongside cultural expressions. Autobiographical factors pertain to personal experiences, relationships and memories that connect a person to a

specific place (Antonsich, 2010). Autobiographical factors include past histories, such as the areas where a person was born, childhood memories associated with a place, and the locations where family members may still reside (Antonsich, 2010), all of which link to the formation of identity. For those with disrupted biographies, integrating past and present experiences into a toolkit for settling helps create a sense of belonging to home (Baker et al., 2016).

A key element of a person's identity and worldview, which underscores how they interact with people and places, is culture. Baker et al. (2016) stated that culture is leaned upon to sustain identity. Maintaining culture is another of Antonsich's (2010) five factors that contribute to place-belongingness. Culture can be expressed through objects used to enact everyday practices, both individually and collectively, including household furnishings, special clothing, and food. Objects with cultural significance or memory foster connection, comfort and continuity in the absence of loved ones, aiding a sense of home (McCarthy, 2020; Parkin, 1999). Material culture serves as a tangible marker of distant lands, with both objects and memories being used to strengthen and preserve cultural practices, stories, and histories (Pathak & Karmakar, 2022). Reflecting this, Kamri-McGurk (2012) shared how Burmese women settling in Wellington developed a sense of security through practising traditional textile crafts and gardening, which they were unable to do in refugee camps. Places in the new home can be crucial to supporting settlement outcomes and enabling ongoing cultural practice. These may include places of faith, landscapes, restaurants, or international food supermarkets that remind individuals of former homes and arouse sensory experiences.

Adapting and negotiating multiple cultures is complex. Former refugees often have to navigate different cultures and identities to integrate into their new home while having connections to other areas. Berry et al. (2006) understood integration as an individual seeking daily interaction and involvement with a host country's population while maintaining their cultural heritage from their origin country. Therefore, movement between places can be a catalyst for the conscious preservation and reinforcement of cultural practices that can also be shared within a new culture (Marotta, 2016). Transnational and multisensory practices can be embraced and celebrated, or they can prompt an unsettling feeling among residents, who perceive their ways as under threat from the perceived mobility and practices of newcomers (Kale et al., 2018, 2019). Historically, there has been a preoccupation with refugees'

integration into new societies through their enculturation into different ways of life (Taylor, 2013), rather than acknowledging the dynamism of blending different cultural practices. Bhugra and Becker (2005) referred to assimilation into a new culture as a psychosocial change, a process by which cultural differences disappear as the dominant host culture is adopted. Cultural changes can affect identity and cause stress, leading to issues with self-esteem and mental health (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). As such, organisations like the UNHCR (2011) have emphasised integration as the need to adapt to the host society's lifestyle without losing one's cultural identity. Individuals and groups must be able to sustain, grow, and express themselves to feel a sense of belonging and inclusion, which also helps in building diverse communities. Herewith, places of faith, landscapes, restaurants, or supermarkets that offer international food products can support settlement outcomes by maintaining connections and replicating practices that foster familiarity and comfort.

Food serves as a marker of culture, indicating group identity, reflecting a country's or region's history and way of life, carrying symbolic meaning, and being passed down through generations. Longhurst et al. (2009) found that migrant women living in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton used food and eating practices to sustain their connection to a new home. Longhurst's participants expressed an embodied sense of self and cultural identity, as cooking evoked familiarity and security through memories, creating visceral links between their homeland and adopted land.

Another cultural and autobiographical factor that helps positive settlement outcomes is language. Language is vital for interpreting and defining situations (Antonsich, 2010). There is a consensus that lack of proficiency in the receiving country's language is the most common barrier to refugee settlement and belonging (Ager & Strang, 2008; Rezaei et al., 2021; UNHCR, 2002). Shishehgar et al. (2017) found refugee women who are not proficient in a host country's language have an increased risk of depression, loneliness, low self-esteem, and reduced opportunities to share experiences. Further, Rezaei et al.'s (2021) study on the integration experiences of former refugees from Afghanistan living in Australia found that participants facing language barriers felt weaker connections outside of their co-ethnic community. Rezaei et al. (2021) concluded employment aided language development and connections, and that outside of work, social connections were reportedly created through cultural events and gatherings. Feeling at home requires a shared language, values, and morality, as the home is imagined as a place with maximum communicative power (Hage,

1997). Therefore, in Aotearoa/NZ, the use of one's heart language in and outside of the home and workplace should be considered, not just proficiency in English or the Māori language.

In summary, in unfamiliar environments, cultural and autobiographical factors shape a person's identity and sense of belonging during adaptation. Adaptation in a different environment takes place through reliance on memories, histories, and cultural practices through familiar places and objects. Cultural preservation is vital for successful settlement. Identity, a dynamic, multidimensional construct influenced by various factors, is key to fostering belonging.

2.3.3 Economic Factors

Economic factors are essential for place belonging, as they support the creation of safe, stable, material conditions for refugees and their families (Antonsich, 2010). Employment is imperative for individuals to feel invested in a place's future, and economic embeddedness through work is a top priority for many former refugees settling in host countries (Antonsich, 2010; Zepinic et al., 2012). Employment supports integration into a new society because it is associated with social interaction and participation, language development, stability and future planning (UNHCR, 2002). Furthermore, employment directly links to identity formation (Senthana et al., 2020) and to empowering women by enhancing their independence, self-esteem, and agency, which support positive belonging experiences (Marlowe, 2018; Schiestl et al., 2021). Well-paid employment with safe working conditions should increase women's autonomy and liberation and enhance their decision-making power in the household (Beneria et al., 2015).

Exclusionary practices in employment exist, such as the overrepresentation of refugees in global unemployment statistics, which undermines inclusion and a sense of belonging (Greenbank & Marra, 2020; Marlowe, 2018; O'Donovan & Sheikh, 2014). Much literature refers to extensive barriers to employment, such as the lack of recognition of previous skills and qualifications, cultural and societal expectations, proficiency in English, and because of racist and discriminatory factors (Ager & Strang, 2008; de Vries et al., 2023; Greenbank, 2020; Greenbank & Marra, 2020; Schiestl et al., 2021; Senthana et al., 2020; Tomlinson, 2010). Governments have often emphasised the economic integration of migrants to minimise significant assistance costs, especially amid rising global migration. But there is a disconnect

between the promotion of employment and its implementation, as evidenced by numerous barriers to employment. A focus on economic integration underpinned the achievement of the NZRRS until 2023, when it was refreshed (Office of the Minister of Education, 2023). The NZRRS's previous overarching settlement outcome was for former refugees to be "participating fully and integrated socially and economically as soon as possible" to live independently (Office of the Minister of Education, 2023, p.29). The refresh now better addresses the needs of former refugees, given the challenges they face, and reflects their goals of thriving in Aotearoa/NZ rather than a focus on swift economic independence (Immigration New Zealand, 2024f; Office of the Minister of Education, 2023).

Economic factors, especially employment, are essential for fostering a sense of belonging and successful refugee integration. Despite many barriers, well-paid work and good conditions can empower refugees, particularly women, and support their independence. Addressing exclusionary practices and recognising relevant skills are key steps toward aligning economic participation with integration goals. The promotion of meeting economic criteria for belonging has been critiqued, with arguments that there are more pressing concerns when settling in a new country, such as relational factors (Greenbank & Marra, 2020), as explored next.

2.3.4 Relational Factors

Relational factors are the personal and social ties in a given place that enrich an individual's life and are a core component of Antonsich's (2010) theory of place-belongingness. These ties range from weak ties or social bridging with acquaintances and strangers to strong ties or social bonding with family and co-ethnic communities (Cheung & Phillimore, 2013; Elliott & Yusuf, 2014; Gericke et al., 2018; Lubbers, 2021; Ryan, 2011).

Social networks are found to be highly relied upon for accessing resources during the initial years of refugee settlement and integration (Poteet, 2016). These social bonds and bridges influence cultural knowledge, language, and safety, which are necessary for settling into a new society (Rezaei et al., 2021). Mansouri and Lobo (2016) remarked that migrants' diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds foster community development and social inclusion. Hage (1997) explained that community involves living in a space where people see others as themselves, feel acknowledged in return, and share similar values and

morals. Forming community connections is key to feeling a sense of belonging (Hage, 1997). Relational factors help explain how social networks support successful settling by shaping how belonging is negotiated and how resources that support settlement are mobilised.

Belonging in relational home terms is experienced through daily interactions, intimacies, and negotiations with people across multiple places (Taylor, 2013). Relatives and ethnic community networks (social bonds) help create positive experiences of refugee integration (UNHCR, 2011). Transnational exchanges of ideas, resources, and practices create and support communities across substantial geographical distance (Marlowe, 2018). Daily interactions with networks can be disrupted during fleeing, leading to a loss of companionship and support, as Taylor (2013) highlighted, particularly affecting women due to the loss of social ties. However, advances in technology have increased global connections through travel, communication, trade and remittances, aiding transnational feelings of belonging. These practices represent exchanges of capital and maintain physical, social, economic, cultural and political links (Taylor, 2013). Transnational belonging can foster deep emotional attachments to the lost home while simultaneously making a new home (Taylor, 2013), thereby reiterating the complexity and multiplicity of place belonging.

Many interrelations overlap between community cohesion, social inclusion, and social exclusion. Integration is a two-way process of commitment between two cultures. Therefore, the receiving society shapes refugee peoples' resettlement experiences (Poteet, 2016). Mansouri and Lobo considered that social inclusion "is underpinned by a utopian vision of the fundamental and unconditional exercise of the right to belong for all people regardless of ethnic identity and religious affiliation or formal status as citizens or non-citizens" (2016, p. 1). While social inclusion can be seen as an outcome of a supportive society, democracies today face increasing difficulties accommodating cultural diversity (Ercan, 2016). Challenges arise as ambivalent feelings towards diversity and migration emerge, creating obstacles to social- and political-level policy-making (Mansouri & Lobo, 2016). Further, social inclusion and community cohesion have become 'buzzwords' in development, making the concept of inclusion vague and potentially reducing its importance for refugee groups during settlement (Cornwall, 2007). This study emphasises the need to recognise shifting power dynamics and perceptions of inclusion/exclusion among former refugees and co-ethnic communities, employers and employees, and families in Aotearoa/NZ and countries of origin, as roles are renegotiated.

According to Nelson et al. (2016), key factors for social inclusion included motivation to be accepted in a group and actions to operationalise this, with some acceptance from the group. Therefore, those already in the group need to welcome those who remain external to it. Membership in a group and ownership of a place are fundamental to the politics of belonging (Antonsich, 2010). McCarthy (2022) noted, however, opposition exists with migrants sometimes seen as economic burdens on social welfare. Discourses, often in media, have historically shown xenophobia, Islamophobia, and ‘othering’ of refugees through incorrect narratives of intruders or vulnerable victims (Greenbank & Marra, 2020; Rahman, 2021). Instead of welcoming, supportive communities, many people receive discrimination, racism, isolation, limited access to basic services, and poor living conditions (Cheong et al., 2007; Marlowe et al., 2014). Female refugees have been found to face greater marginalisation, yet receive less public attention than men (Schiestl et al., 2021). Throughout history, some refugee groups have been made to feel less welcome than others (McCarthy, 2022). Research in Aotearoa/NZ has found that Somali and Colombian refugees have faced significant discrimination through racial profiling and in employment practices (Severiche, 2022; Ward & Liu, 2012). Nelson et al., (2016) found that the reception that minority groups encounter influences their sense of belonging and integration. Therefore, community relations programmes and community cohesion policies must consider the impact of an unwelcoming reception.

Social networks and community ties help foster a sense of belonging for refugees during settlement, impacting the integration process. These connections facilitate access to resources and support cultural, social, and emotional continuity through transnational exchanges. However, social exclusion, discrimination, and unwelcoming receptions can hinder this sense of belonging. Recognising the complexity and fluidity of belonging underscores the need for inclusive policies and community efforts that respect diverse refugee experiences and promote genuine integration.

2.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter analysed concepts of belonging within the context of refugee migration experiences, focusing on home, place belonging, and exclusion/inclusion. Belonging is regarded as the ultimate sign of an integrated community and is promoted by the

Aotearoa/NZ government to achieve positive settlement outcomes. Belonging relates to home through emotional, relational, social, and wellbeing ties linked to place. This chapter shared home is more than a physical space; it also symbolises public/private spaces, people, communities, and activities beyond borders. Former refugees leaving their homes may feel loss, joy, familiarity, insecurity, and longing, which can shape expectations of home.

This chapter has covered links among affective experiences, memories, and activities that can foster feelings of familiarity, comfort, and security, helping recreate a sense of home. Using Antonsich's (2010) framework of belonging as well as security and identity, five factors of place-belongingness—legal, autobiographical, cultural, economic, and relational—were examined. Across these interconnected factors lies the politics of belonging, which constructs and challenges forms of inclusion in places and among people. Exclusion in areas, such as economic exclusion or discrimination against a person's cultural identity, can deepen disparities and influence former refugees' sense of belonging, making them feel unwelcome and unaccepted. Conversely, inclusion, such as residency or a welcoming community that embraces diversity, can offer physical and emotional security and foster a sense of connection that supports settlement outcomes and enriches social fabrics.

The next chapter builds on this chapter's literature on belonging by providing an overview of settlement processes in Aotearoa/NZ and delving further into women's and former refugees' employment experiences.

Chapter 3: Refugee Journeys towards Settlement

3.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the previous chapter's analysis of belonging by providing a contextual overview of the resettlement and settlement processes in Aotearoa/NZ, where participants in this study create a sense of home in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. First, the chapter explores the pathways by which refugees resettle in Aotearoa/NZ. Then it outlines the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy, which aims to help former refugees feel safe and supported, fostering a sense of belonging through settlement outcomes that achieve self-sufficiency and personal goals. Then, a brief history of migration and refugee movements to Aotearoa/NZ and to Kirikiriroa/Hamilton is presented. Finally, the focus shifts to employment as a key goal for successful settlement, highlighting its benefits and addressing the exclusionary processes that women with refugee backgrounds face, including experiences in Aotearoa/NZ.

3.2 Pathways for Refugees to Settle in Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa/NZ's refugee resettlement efforts will be explained in this section, as background to understanding how the women in this study were granted settlement in the country. Outlined are the Refugee Quota Programme (RQP), the Refugee Family Support Category (RFSC) and the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship scheme. The New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy (NZRRS), including recent updates, is also explained, with a focus on enhancing settlement outcomes for refugees upon arrival.

3.2.1 The Refugee Quota Programme and Sponsorship Categories

Aotearoa/NZ is committed to upholding its international humanitarian obligations through its refugee policy, which adopts a strong resettlement process. Aotearoa/NZ is among 37 countries in the UNHCR's regular resettlement programme (Immigration New Zealand, 2024d). The UNHCR recognises individuals as refugees in accordance with internationally accepted guidelines and partners with countries to support their resettlement. The UNHCR continuously reassesses needs, prioritising those requiring physical and legal protection or family reunification (Immigration New Zealand, 2018).

As explained in Chapter 1, the New Zealand Government, in partnership with UNHCR, operates an annual RQP (Immigration New Zealand, 2024d). The RQP targets those with the greatest need for protection, and Immigration New Zealand (INZ) then processes cases in line with policy requirements and security, health, and immigration risks (UNHCR, 2023). Within the RQP, there has been an increase in places allocated to Middle Eastern and African countries, and for Afghan refugees following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021 (Immigration New Zealand, 2024c). Of note for this study on women, the RQP includes a subcategory for Women-at-Risk, recognising the disproportionate dangers women face as refugees, which exacerbate their vulnerabilities and access to aid (UNHCR, 2023). The subcategory is designated for women who face gender-related persecution and are without the support of family or community protectors (UNHCR, 2023). As mentioned earlier, compared to boys and men, women face higher threats of gender-based violence and exploitation during displacement and greater food insecurity (International Rescue Committee, 2025). Women also have greater long-term impacts on their economic prospects during crises (International Rescue Committee, 2025; UNHCR, 2023). Therefore, targeted assistance is needed to ensure women's safety.

In addition to the RQP, other complementary pathways to residency exist. These pathways include Convention Refugees, the RFSC, and the CORS scheme. Convention Refugees are people who arrive in Aotearoa/NZ, seeking asylum and then are granted refugee status by Aotearoa/NZ under the United Nations' 1951 Refugee Convention (New Zealand Red Cross, n.d.-a). The RFSC supports family reunification, with 600 places allocated each year for family members of refugees to be granted residence (Immigration New Zealand, 2024f). Under the RFSC, the New Zealand Government provides medical checks, waives application fees, covers travel costs, and provides other funding for immediate or extended family members (UNHCR, 2023). The CORS scheme has been piloted since 2018 and is a partnership between communities, Immigration New Zealand, and HOST Aotearoa New Zealand, an umbrella organisation (Immigration New Zealand, 2024a). The CORS category has enabled groups and individuals, including local civil society organisations, authorities, and governments, to operate as a public-private partnership in supporting newcomers (Global Compact on Refugees, 2024). Community sponsors provide former refugees with practical assistance with housing, education, health, employment, and community connections (Immigration New Zealand, 2024a). Sponsors also help former refugees connect with Te Ao Māori and Whenua history (Immigration New Zealand, 2024a). In June 2025, the pilot

concluded, with new CORS applications closed and the category under review (Bonnett, 2025). These support pathways exemplify a comprehensive approach to refugee resettlement and community integration.

A benefit of community sponsorship programmes is that they allow residents of a country to respond to crises worldwide should they feel moved to do so (Haugen et al., 2020). The UNHCR (2021) global report states people are asking, “What can I do to help?” following the Ukraine conflict, which awakened millions to their own ability to make a difference. The UNHCR (2021) acknowledges this strong sense of generosity in contemporary society. Sponsorship programmes are needed to prepare for future increases in the number of displaced people and to address existing gaps between settlement needs and resettlement (Hirsch et al., 2019; UNHCR, n.d.). As stated in Chapter 2, refugees are highly dependent upon networks for resources, especially in the first couple of years of settlement (Poteet, 2016). Therefore, community sponsorship can be understood as social capital, as conceptualised by Cheung and Phillimore, as “the concrete help and resources garnered from networks” (2013, p. 10). Community sponsorship programmes and community support in general act as social bridges, linking former refugees with resources to foster a sense of belonging.

Although the number of those resettled in Aotearoa/NZ remains low, these approaches to refugee resettlement initiatives highlight the country's commitment and adaptability to supporting vulnerable populations, particularly women-at-risk. The strategies also reflect a broader global trend of community involvement and solidarity in addressing displacement challenges. Now that resettlement programmes have been outlined, the next section will look at the NZRRS, which supports settlement processes.

3.2.2 The New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy

Refugees receive support upon arrival in Aotearoa/NZ through the NZRRS, which was established over a decade ago to aid settlement processes through a holistic ‘whole of government’ framework (Immigration New Zealand, 2024d). The NZRRS aligns with the government’s vision for resettlement and the aspirations of people from refugee backgrounds (Immigration New Zealand, 2024b). The strategy updated its vision language in 2022-2023 to better reflect the goals of successful settlement for former refugee communities. Previously,

the NZRRS included only those arriving under the RQP, a policy that was criticised because those arriving through other pathways did not receive extensive support, such as assistance with housing and employment (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2022). The refreshed vision now encompasses individuals arriving through the RQP, the CORS scheme, the RFSC, as Convention Refugees, and Afghan interpreters and evacuees (Immigration New Zealand, 2024b). Including these additional visa and resettlement categories better addresses feedback from refugee communities and enables them to be part of the decision-making to improve support for newcomers (Office of the Minister of Education, 2023). The NZRRS refresh provides a greater evidence-based understanding of settlement journeys and the challenges encountered as it moves away from its previous economic focus (Office of the Minister of Education, 2023).

The NZRRS is underpinned by five settlement outcomes: Participation and Inclusion; Health and Wellbeing; Housing; Education, Training and English Language; and Employment and Self-Sufficiency (Immigration New Zealand, 2024e). The outcome areas remain unchanged from before, as shown in Table 2, but the interpretation and definition of the outcomes have evolved from the previous version, with less emphasis on economic terms, as part of what is labelled “the refresh”. As the table highlights, there is now a greater focus on the community role, such as welcoming newcomers. The term ‘refugees’ has been replaced with ‘former refugees’, and there is increased emphasis on supporting the achievement of personal goals rather than those set by the New Zealand Government (Immigration New Zealand, 2024e). The NZRRS refresh sought input from former refugees, Māori iwi, migrants, Pacific peoples, and organisational voices (Immigration New Zealand, 2026). Including other voices should better support former refugees’ desired outcomes, while acknowledging government goals. The inclusion of other voices is important as historically policymakers and practitioners have often defined refugee values and practices based on their experiences, using these as benchmarks for successful integration (Malischewski, 2016).

Table 2 *New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy before and after the refresh*

NZRRS Vision and Outcomes	
Up to 2022/23	Refresh 2022/2023
<i>Refugees are participating fully and integrated socially and economically as soon as possible so that they are living independently, undertaking the same responsibilities and exercising the same rights as other New Zealanders and have a strong sense of belonging in their own community and to New Zealand.</i> <i>Within this vision statement, the strategy proposes five primary goals that are noted as 'integration outcomes':</i>	<i>The vision of this strategy is that former refugees and their families settle successfully, achieve their goals, and thrive in Aotearoa New Zealand. This includes feeling safe and well, having a sense of belonging and being able to participate in and contribute to all aspects of life (social, economic, cultural, and civic).</i> <i>The vision is underpinned by 5 settlement outcomes:</i>
Self-sufficiency: all working age refugees are in paid work or are supported by a family member in paid work.	Employment and Self-Sufficiency: Former refugees and their families achieve their employment and self-sufficiency goals, building on their skills and experiences.
Participation: refugees actively participate in New Zealand life and have a strong sense of belonging to New Zealand.	Participation and Inclusion: Former refugees and their families are welcomed and have a strong sense of belonging and acceptance in their communities and in Aotearoa New Zealand. They feel confident and safe to participate in different aspects of their lives.
Health and wellbeing: refugees and their families enjoy healthy, safe and independent lives.	Health and Wellbeing: Former refugees and their families achieve their health and wellbeing goals and thrive in their lives.
Education: refugees' English language skills enable them to participate in education and achieve qualifications and support them to participate in daily life.	Education, Training and English Language: Former refugees and their families achieve their education, training and English language goals.
Housing: refugees live independently of government housing assistance in homes that are safe, secure, healthy and affordable.	Housing: Former refugees and their families live in homes and in communities that meet their long-term needs and goals.

Note. Adapted from *Refreshing the Refugee Settlement and Migrant Settlement Strategies*, (pp. 19, 29), by Office of the Minister of Education, 2023

3.3 History of Settlement and Cultural Diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand

This section discusses the historical and ongoing influences of the country's diverse ethnic composition. Aotearoa/NZ has become a significant destination for refugees and migrants since World War II, shaping its diverse population and social landscape (Immigration New Zealand, 2024c). Since 1987, the New Zealand Government has adhered to a formal annual quota for resettling refugees, but has resettled more than 50,000 people since the Second World War (Marlowe et al., 2024, p. 22). Before the 1960s, the country was regarded as bicultural; however, from the 1970s to the 1980s, it increasingly came to be recognised as multicultural with greater influxes of people (Phillips, 2015). Today, a diverse migrant population is evident in daily life, with at least 213 ethnicities speaking more than 160 languages (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2022). While Aotearoa/NZ has become increasingly multicultural, it remains grounded in a bicultural framework shaped by Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi. Signed in 1840 between Māori and the British Crown, Te Tiriti o Waitangi recognises Indigenous rights as foundational through its articles (Wilson, 2020). Ward and Liu (2012, p.65) shared that Aotearoa/NZ faces a “unique challenge of balancing the respect for Indigenous rights with multicultural responsibilities in a culturally diverse society.” Aotearoa/NZ’s bicultural identity is widely viewed as a positive distinctiveness that has fostered a unique national identity, and shaped social relationships, even as the nation has become increasingly multicultural.

The bilateral Te Tiriti o Waitangi, continues to influence constitutional arrangements (Wilson, 2020) and shapes government practices, such as engaging Māori iwi as critical voices in policy initiatives. Historically, there has been a lack of Māori input into immigration policy, which disregards partnership principles of the Treaty of Waitangi (McCarthy, 2022). Quince, (2021) identified that a Māori or Tiriti lens can positively influence immigration, with principles of aroha³, utu⁴ and manaaki⁵ that guide social interaction, behaviour, and maintain balance in relationships, serving as resources and efforts to guide and protect newcomers. Beaglehole (2009) connected Aotearoa/NZ’s growing care and generosity towards refugees with the increased recognition of the unfair and harsh treatment imposed on many Māori in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

³ To love, feel pity, feel concern for, feel compassion, empathise (Moorfield, n.d.)

⁴ To repay, pay, respond, avenge, reply, answer (Moorfield, n.d.)

⁵ To support, take care of, give hospitality to, protect, look out for - show respect, generosity and care (Moorfield, n.d.).

There is an emphasis on resettling refugees in neighbourhoods with similar cultures and ethnicities to improve settlement outcomes. For people with refugee backgrounds, settling in a new country involves adapting to new systems, legal frameworks, language and social norms (Marlowe et al., 2024). Positive settlement outcomes are impacted by acceptance and appreciation of diverse cultural histories and different types of support (Marlowe et al., 2024). Nonetheless, even as a multicultural country, full integration with other nationalities does not always occur. Networks and initial bonds with people from similar cultural backgrounds have been found to help attain integration goals and influence how new circumstances are negotiated and how resources are mobilised (Kale et al., 2018; Lancee, 2012). Elliott and Yusuf (2014) found that living among co-ethnic communities can help minimise culture shock and increase health and wellbeing. But, ethnic subcultures can develop, leading to isolated enclaves (Ager & Strang, 2010 as cited in Kale, 2018). McCarthy (2022) found that people can self-segregate and are often unwilling to integrate into society. Clustering individuals in particular areas may overlook refugee preferences and how hostility and discrimination can shape residential patterns (McCarthy, 2022).

3.4 Settlement Processes in Aotearoa New Zealand and settling in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton

This section focuses on pre- and post-settlement support in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, as well as the support systems in place to prepare former refugees for their new homes.

While the immediate concern of any resettlement strategy should be to provide protection and address safety and wellbeing, the long-term focus is on settling and rebuilding a new life in the host community (Ranabahu et al., 2021). Ansell and van Blerk claimed that migration is not simply uprooting contexts or moving from place to place, but “involves becoming part of a place. It involves not just settling, but settling in, where place and identity interact in daily activities and social relations” (2007, p. 27). Settling in comes with challenges, including the fact that most often, refugees do not choose which countries will offer them resettlement. Moving to a new country involves exploring neighbourhoods, setting up homes, registering with support and education services, learning a new language, and accessing medical and mental health support (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2022). To support these pre-, initial and post-settlement processes, specific services assist former refugees.

Before arriving in Aotearoa/NZ, refugees receive information about living and working there (Immigration New Zealand, 2024c). Individuals complete assessments to identify their needs and required services, and offshore pre-departure medical screenings are offered (UNHCR, 2023). A pre-departure interview with a Resettlement Case Officer is held to discuss support, employment opportunities, and housing. Under the RQP, refugees are given Permanent Residence status on arrival. This legal status provides security as it entitles the holder to vote, live, work, and study indefinitely. Citizenship can then be applied for after five years (UNHCR, 2023). On arrival, a five-week reception programme is run by Te Āhuru Mōwai o Aotearoa, Māngere Refugee Resettlement Centre, managed by INZ and partnered with other government and non-government organisations. Key areas of the reception programme include a traditional pōwhiri (Māori welcoming ceremony); English language lessons; orientation to living and working; health checks and treatment; and employment assessments (Immigration New Zealand, 2023, 2024c). Everyday practical support, such as banking and social welfare assistance, is also provided (UNHCR, 2023). This assistance equips individuals with knowledge of processes for a smoother transition into an often very different culture.

After the reception programme, the government distributes refugees to established regions throughout Aotearoa/NZ (see Chapter 1), where refugees of similar cultural backgrounds have already been resettled. Suitable housing is provided, with most former refugees placed in private rental accommodation (UNHCR, 2023). INZ manages this process with the Ministry of Social Development, which assesses housing needs, and with Kāinga Ora and Community Housing Providers, which match suitable public housing to needs and availability (UNHCR, 2023). The New Zealand Government settles many former refugees throughout the country, including in the Waikato region, where dedicated support is available (Immigration New Zealand, 2024c). Once resettled, formal support can be accessed for up to twelve months in each locality and includes financial assistance and a community orientation programme (Immigration New Zealand, 2024c).

Research on former refugee women's settlement experiences has been conducted in Aotearoa/NZ in Christchurch (Habte, 2017), Wellington (Fitzgerald, 2017; Kamri-McGurk, 2012), and Dunedin (Fitzgerald, 2017). Findings from photovoice have highlighted that people from refugee backgrounds rely on community networks, such as neighbours, people in

their ethnic group, and cultural gatherings, to adapt to life in Aotearoa/NZ (Kamri-McGurk, 2012). Services and networks provide information, education, comfort, opportunities to access culture, language, and shared activities, which benefit recipients and their families (Kamri-McGurk, 2012). Preserving culture and passing on values to future generations are considered important (Fitzgerald, 2017; Kamri-McGurk, 2012). With many Syrians resettling in Wellington, Fitzgerald (2017) found that Syrian women used the ability to maintain culture as a tool for resettlement. In Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, Severiche (2018) noted that Colombian refugees over time, adopted a hybrid identity blending two or more cultures to construct a new identity. While Kamri-McGurk's (2012) participants selected the best aspects of Burmese and Aotearoa/NZ cultures and combined them. The role of volunteers was found to foster a sense of connectedness to the host community, facilitate links to support programmes and services, and offer practical assistance, such as making appointments or using public transport (Fitzgerald, 2017; Kamri-McGurk, 2012). Despite the Women-at-Risk category of resettlement under the RQP, settlement support was not found to be tailored to gender, thereby disregarding the specific needs of single, divorced and widowed women (Fitzgerald, 2017).

While these studies have shown correlations among women and other former refugees across different areas of Aotearoa/NZ, settlement environments can vary across regions, making an understanding of the landscape and population of Kirikiriroa/Hamilton and the broader Waikato district essential for this study. Around 22 per cent of Waikato's 489,771 residents are thought to have been born overseas (Stats NZ, 2025b). Although many of these are born overseas, the majority (95.9 per cent) speak English, with other languages at much lower percentages than in other districts (Stats NZ, 2025b). Table 3 provides details of the main nationalities settled in each region in Aotearoa/NZ.

Table 3 Main nationalities settled in regions in Aotearoa/NZ in the last 5 financial years

Region	First	Second	Third
Auckland	Myanmar	Afghanistan	Syria
Waikato	D.R. of Congo	Syria	Somalia
Manawatu	Myanmar	Afghanistan	
Masterton	Pakistan		
Levin	Colombia	Venezuela	
Wellington	Syria	Pakistan	Myanmar
Nelson	Myanmar	Pakistan	Colombia
Blenheim	Myanmar	Colombia	
Christchurch	Eritrea	Afghanistan	Somalia
Ashburton	Afghanistan		
Timaru	Syria		
Dunedin	Afghanistan	Syria	Iraq
Invercargill	D.R. of Congo	Colombia	

Note. Data from *Refugee Protection Statistics Pack* (p. 6), by Immigration New Zealand, 2024e

As shown in Table 3, in Waikato, the main refugee nationalities resettled are those from the DRC, Syria, and Somalia, though these nationalities have also been resettled to other regions across Aotearoa/NZ (Immigration New Zealand, 2024d). Refugees have also arrived from Colombia, Burma, Iraq, Afghanistan, Djibouti and the Republic of Congo (Immigration New Zealand, 2024d). Recognising the diversity of refugee populations and their access to shared language, culture and support services in a new country helps explain women's experiences of integration.

Support from service providers begins after completion of the Māngere Refugee Resettlement Centre settlement programme (HMS Trust, 2024b). The Waikato region has a range of service providers and organisations that support thriving, lifelong settlement for refugees and migrants. These include the New Zealand Red Cross, the Hamilton Multicultural Services (HMS) Trust (the operational location is also referred to as the Settlement Centre Waikato), and the Refugee Orientation Centre (ROC). While these three organisations directly support former refugees and migrants, Waikato has other services, such as Shama Ethnic Women's Trust and the Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec), that run programmes to aid settlement.

HMS Trust is the approved provider that supports the settlement journey of 'New Kiwis' under the refugee quota. The Red Cross, a longstanding settlement service provider, lost its tender in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton to HMS Trust in June 2022 (New Zealand Red Cross, n.d.-d;

O’Callaghan, 2022). The HMS Trust was established to address gaps in services for people from diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds in Waikato, with a focus on supporting refugees and migrants to settle well and increasing awareness among receiving communities (HMS Trust, 2024b). The Settlement Centre Waikato, overseen by HMS Trust, provides a range of services, including the New Kiwis Settlement Service, which collaborates with community partners and local service providers (HMS Trust, 2024a). Programmes are offered for self-sufficiency, friendship, health, secure housing, leadership, and language development. ROC was set up by refugees for refugees, with over 80 volunteers supporting programmes for all ages (ROC, n.d.). ROC runs a range of education and social programmes for youth and children, assists adults with driving, and offers services related to finance, immigration, and study. The New Zealand Red Cross also supports refugees who arrive through the annual government quota system, providing community settlement support nationwide. The Red Cross runs Pathways to Employment, a programme at 13 nationwide locations that supports former refugees receiving Work and Income benefits in finding meaningful employment (New Zealand Red Cross, n.d.-e). The Red Cross also seeks to understand former refugees’ career aspirations and collaborates with organisations to find suitable work (New Zealand Red Cross, n.d.-c). The programme supports study advice, job applications and interview preparation (New Zealand Red Cross, n.d.-b).

Effective settlement of refugees in Aotearoa/NZ involves comprehensive support before and after arrival, including legal status, orientation, and housing, all of which are vital for successful integration into diverse local communities. Local settlement services provide practical assistance to encourage participation in society, foster relationships with other co-ethnic groups, and build confidence and workplace skills. The next section will delve deeper into successful settlement by examining employment, which affects economic and social integration.

3.5 Employment as a Vehicle for Settlement

Employment is widely recognised as vital to refugee integration into a new society (Marlowe, 2018; Schiestl et al., 2021; Senthana et al., 2020; UNHCR, 2011). Economic self-sufficiency is integrated into the NZRRS, with the aim of individuals securing suitable employment that matches their skills and experience (Immigration New Zealand, 2024d). Despite this, Marlowe (2018) shared that refugees worldwide are overrepresented in unemployment

statistics and struggle to find meaningful work even when qualified for the job. This section explores the benefits of work, employment opportunities in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, and the inequities and exclusions that women and people of refugee backgrounds face when seeking employment.

3.5.1 The Benefits of Employment

There are many advantages to being employed. Employment generates intergenerational and lifetime benefits by contributing to individuals' and families' physical, mental, financial and cultural wellbeing. Employment can create a sense of purpose, provide a means to develop and pass on skills and knowledge, and build social connections and support networks (MBIE, n.d.-a). Support networks have been found to contribute to independence, self-esteem and belonging (Greenbank, 2020; MBIE, 2018). Kindon et al. confirmed that "workplace relationships more than neighbourhood relationships influence a [former] refugee's sense of belonging as they bridge the gap between individual and wider society more effectively" (2018, p. 12). There are also benefits for the host country. Former refugees are vital contributors to Aotearoa/NZ's local economy, not just as labourers but also as entrepreneurs and business owners, thereby creating more job opportunities (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2022). A wealth of experience, skills, cultural and social richness, and diversity is brought to workplaces, which benefits businesses (New Zealand Red Cross, n.d.-b). By increasing workplace diversity, negative stereotypes can be challenged, and former refugees can access well-paid work, reducing aid dependency and poverty levels (International Rescue Committee, 2019). Employment also provides many benefits specifically for women. Employment, alongside financial provision, was found to lead to fulfilling lives for former refugee women in Aotearoa/NZ (Kamri-McGurk, 2012). There is recognition that employment can empower women from refugee backgrounds (Rydzik & Anitha, 2020) and improve their health status (Shishehgar et al., 2017).

Employment solutions rely on refugee-settling governments permitting access to decent work and equal labour-market opportunities, as guaranteed by the right to work once former refugees are residents. Figures show that the longer the residency time, the higher the paid employment rate (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2022). On average, 26 per cent of former refugees are in paid employment after two years, 35 per cent after three years, and 43 per cent after five years (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2022, p. 24). In an MBIE study in

Aotearoa/NZ, many former refugees chose not to remain in their first jobs because they were dissatisfied with their work, hours, or treatment from employers and colleagues (MBIE, 2021). Other reasons for leaving included health issues, casual contracts, and not learning English. Therefore, long-term job security requires employment that offers fair hours, opportunities for skill and language development, and community building.

In maintaining overseas communities as many former refugees do, transnational remittances are often sent, representing social and economic exchanges of capital and supporting relational, cultural, and political ties (Marlowe, 2018). For many, successful integration relies on family wellbeing, and separation can pose challenges (MBIE, 2021). Thus, it is essential to increase employment rates for strong settlement outcomes for individuals and their families, and to recognise the skills and opportunities that people from refugee backgrounds bring to society.

3.5.2 Inclusionary and Exclusionary Processes and Work

There is a split between the promotion of employment and its translation into practice because of deep-rooted inequalities. The literature reports a “refugee entry effect” or employment gap (Adserà et al., 2022, p. 548), with former refugees’ employment rates below 20 per cent in the first two years of integration into high-income countries (Schiestl et al., 2021, p. 2). Disaggregating further, among refugees, women’s employment rates are typically half those of men’s (Greenbank, 2020). Given the difficulties in accessing paid employment, Tomlinson (2010) highlighted that refugees are encouraged to become volunteers or undertake unpaid work placements instead. As de Vries et al.’s (2023) study on former refugees in Aotearoa/NZ highlighted, former refugees can end up volunteering for settlement support services. They found that this volunteering frustrated some other former refugees, who preferred that professionals with local experience, language skills, and non-refugee backgrounds support the process of finding work placements, rather than those with/in a similar experience.

The availability of work opportunities in the settlement location must be considered to understand the market that former refugees enter. In 2023, it was estimated that 50.5 per cent of the Waikato population were employed full-time, and 13.5 per cent were employed part-time (Stats NZ, 2025a, *Waikato work and labour force status table*). Disaggregated by sex,

59.2 per cent of males were employed full-time and 8.7 per cent part-time, while women had lower full-time employment rates of 42.1 per cent and higher part-time employment rates at 18.1 per cent (Stats NZ, 2025a, *Waikato gender by work and labour force status table*).

Occupations in Waikato also exhibited gender segregation, with a high proportion of employment options being in farming, healthcare, and tertiary education. The results of a nationwide census survey are shown in Table 4, displaying the occupational split between males and females in the Waikato region. As stated, former refugees face obstacles in securing employment, and occupational segregation adds another layer of difficulty and exclusion by limiting the roles participants can access. The availability of work may not align with their previous qualifications or employment goals.

Table 4 Percentage of population by gender, by occupation, Waikato Region, 2023 Census

Category	Male / Tāne (Waikato Region)	Female / Wahine (Waikato Region)	Another gender / He ira kē anō (Waikato Region)
Managers	23.8	15.5	11.4
Professionals	18.4	28.7	22.5
Technicians and Trades Workers	20.2	6.4	17.9
Community and Personal Service Workers	5.4	12.8	10.7
Clerical and Administrative Workers	4.4	17.3	10.4
Sales Workers	5.7	9.5	11.1
Machinery Operators and Drivers	10.4	2.2	3.2
Labourers	11.8	7.7	12.9

Note. Data from *Waikato Region*, by Stats NZ, 2025a

As shown in Table 4, the female workforce in Waikato has a higher proportion of women than men among professionals, community and personal service workers, clerical and administrative staff, and sales workers (Stats NZ, 2025a). Simultaneously, more men work in managerial and manual occupations (Stats NZ, 2025a). In June 2025, 60 per cent of working

women in Aotearoa/NZ were concentrated within four industries: health and social assistance; retail, trade and accommodation; professional, scientific, technical and support services; and education and training (Ministry for Women, 2025). Occupational segregation can cause inequalities by undervaluing women and paying them less in female-dominated jobs compared to male-dominated ones. Gender pay gaps hinder the advancement and recruitment of women into higher-paid roles (Ministry for Women, 2025). Occupational segregation increases the likelihood of securing female-heavy, office-based and care jobs that may be less well-suited than those in male-dominated industries (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2022).

There is a need to distinguish between paid work and unpaid reproductive work to make gender inequalities visible. Work is considered to include productive, reproductive, and community management roles (Moser, 1989). Women have long carried uneven workloads, expected to perform all three types of work (Moser, 1989) and rarely have a decline in unpaid responsibilities when commencing paid work (Beneria et al., 2015). Therefore, they balance roles, which creates a burden seen as ‘natural’ and thus rarely valued (Cornwall, 2000). Despite progress in gender equality, in the Global North, on average, women spend twice as much time as men on unpaid care and housework (United Nations, 2020). These figures are lower across Aotearoa/NZ, but findings show a higher percentage of women than men take on household, care, and voluntary responsibilities (Stats NZ, 2025a).

Women play a significant role in voluntarily and unofficially welcoming and hosting newcomers into the community (Gardner et al., 2022). This creates a predicament because, as opportunities to build intra- and inter-community relationships increase, they come at the expense of time and commitments elsewhere. A lack of recognition of unpaid work can make women’s work invisible, whereas historically, men’s work has been more likely to be respected through remuneration, status, and political power (Cornwall, 2000). Gender segregation and the burden of unpaid work can lead to the exclusion of women from parts of society and cause them to be stretched between family and societal expectations.

Intersectional factors of identity can lead to inclusion and exclusion, and many refugees can be multi-marginalised as a result. These factors include locality, race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, and religion. Discrimination across multiple factors can reduce power and influence (Ryder & Boone, 2019). Reports have shown that in Aotearoa/NZ, people who have

refugee backgrounds have been the target of discrimination, including racism, segregation and prejudice (Cheong et al., 2007; Marlowe et al., 2014; McCarthy, 2022). Age has also been found to be a factor in inclusion and exclusion. Findings in Aotearoa/NZ show that younger people from refugee backgrounds are much more likely to be employed than those aged 51 or older (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2022). This may be due to ageism and lower English skills compared to younger refugees, a significant finding for this over-51 population (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2022). Although barriers to employment include recognition of previous skills and qualifications, people's conscious and unconscious biases, and cultural and societal expectations, there is a consensus the most common barrier to employment is a lack of proficiency in the receiving country's language (Ager & Strang, 2008; Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2022; MBIE, 2021; Rezaei et al., 2021; UNHCR, 2002). One study in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton found that low English skills impacted refugees' employment, making language-dependent jobs unfeasible in a new country (de Vries et al., 2023). Another study in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton found that former refugees from Colombia struggled to secure employment and reported that employers discriminated against them because of their limited English (Severiche, 2018). Under a framework of agency and belonging, Tomlinson (2010) found employers can favour less experienced individuals with superior language abilities over people from refugee backgrounds, which devalues refugee experiences. There is, as such, a disconnection between the promotion of employment and its translation into practice.

Compared with the general population, 'ethnic communities' are more likely to have formal qualifications but continue to experience poor labour market outcomes, including lower incomes (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2022). Many refugees leave their countries without formal identification documents such as passports and education records, leaving them undocumented even after registering with authorities to obtain refugee status (Bahar & Dooley, 2019). A lack of documentation hinders access to employment in their field of interest, as well as to healthcare and education. Aotearoa/NZ often requires certificates and diplomas as prerequisites for jobs, but does not always accept qualifications and skills obtained outside the country (MBIE, 2021). In Kamri-McGurk's (2012) study on women from Burma resettled in Wellington, participants signalled that a major concern for them was finding work aligned to their experience and qualifications. Although there are increases in female employers and employees, women from ethnic communities, disabled women and

sole mothers continue to experience worse outcomes and barriers in the labour market (Ministry for Women, 2022).

In summary, an ongoing undervaluation of unpaid reproductive and community work, often performed by women, exists. Occupational segregation limits women's job opportunities and career growth. Factors such as ethnicity, age, and refugee status influence access to employment and inclusion, creating added complexity. Despite their qualifications, many refugee women face barriers, including language and credential recognition, that hinder labour market integration. Valuing unpaid work and tackling structural inequalities are essential for true gender equity and social inclusion.

3.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has outlined resettlement processes in Aotearoa/NZ, highlighting the country's long history of welcoming newcomers, which has today shaped a multicultural society while still maintaining a strong bicultural identity of Māori and Pākehā. The various pathways for refugees to obtain residency have been outlined, and a more inclusive vision to better support former refugees in these pathways has been developed through the NZRRS. The NZRRS exemplifies a comprehensive, whole-of-government framework that addresses settlement needs and fosters participation, inclusion, and belonging.

The role of society remains crucial with multicultural communities, local services, and employers providing support and fostering community through interaction. The chapter highlights the benefits, challenges, and exclusions in employment for women and people with refugee backgrounds. Employment can serve as a cornerstone of successful settlement by fostering self-sufficiency, language skills, self-esteem, social interaction, and planning. However, barriers such as racism, gender pay gaps, and non-recognition of skills can exclude refugees from workplaces.

Chapter 4: Research Approaches and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This research aims to explore the settlement stories of former refugee women and identify what has made them feel more included in society. To capture rich, meaningful data, selecting the right research methodology was essential. The following chapter outlines methodological considerations and the methods employed to answer the research questions. First, the qualitative research methodology is outlined, along with ethnography, a concept this study relies on heavily. Ethnography was chosen to gather detailed insights into the women's sociocultural backgrounds and lived experiences. The chapter then discusses key research methods of participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and photovoice, explaining how they contribute to understanding these stories. Ethical considerations are also addressed, including adherence to Massey University's ethical protocols, informed consent, and reflections on power dynamics, building trust, and reflexivity. Finally, the chapter outlines how participants were selected and recruited, and how data were processed, providing a comprehensive view of the research process.

4.2 Methodology

This section explains ways qualitative research has framed the fieldwork. It first clarifies the concept of qualitative research, then discusses ethnographic methodology as a means of gathering deeper sociocultural insights into individuals with refugee backgrounds. This study incorporates ethnographic principles, such as immersion and participant observation, along with contextual attention, to understand participants' lived experiences.

4.2.1 Qualitative Research

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore the participants' personal and social experiences, meanings, and practices, as well as their contextual backgrounds (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015). The methodology aimed to approach 'the world out there' and to understand and describe phenomena 'from the inside' by analysing experiences, interactions, and documents in their natural context (M. Angrosino, 2007). Qualitative research was accessible because it is conducted in everyday settings using simple tools such as paper,

pencils, word processing software, recording devices, and cameras (Silverman & Patterson, 2022).

Qualitative research has long been a tradition of the social sciences (Silverman & Patterson, 2022). In Development Studies, qualitative research supports project development and implementation, as well as understanding the impact and scope of development programmes (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015). Qualitative research is often used in Development Studies because it generates data in natural settings and can help understand complex social phenomena, including human experiences, culture, places, and situations (O’Leary, 2017; Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). Silverman and Patterson (2022) observed that, in modern communities facing poverty and economic difficulties, environmental stress, rapidly changing demographics, and residential segregation, qualitative methods provide professionals with valuable tools for developing and evaluating policies to tackle these issues. As Skovdal and Cornish (2015) emphasised, qualitative research is useful for exploring sensitive topics, including the care and living arrangements of hard-to-reach groups, such as those who have experienced persecution and displacement, like the women in this study. Qualitative research can consequently give voice to individuals, such as refugee women, whose perceptions are often overlooked or unheard and help explain how, under specific circumstances, a particular phenomenon occurs (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015). Another advantage of this methodology is that it makes data analysis and results accessible to a wide range of individuals and groups in society, as this study intended (Silverman & Patterson, 2022).

4.3 Research Methods

This research leaned on ethnographic concepts and methods. Data collection methods have included interviews, observation and photovoice characteristic of ethnography. This section first outlines the application of ethnographic concepts and methods and then explains how these were combined with other research methods.

4.3.1 Ethnographic Concepts

This research used ethnographic concepts to collect data on the lived experiences of settlement in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton and to uncover underlying patterns in institutional and

social relationships. A limitation of fully employing ethnography in this research was the time constraint of completing a Master's degree. However, through this part-time study, deeper immersion was achieved through volunteering with former refugees (though not with these women), which facilitated community access, then allowed prolonged interactions with participants at their homes, workplaces, and local areas over several months.

Ethnographic research is fundamental to qualitative methods, offering researchers a comprehensive set of tools for systematic and holistic analysis (Silverman & Patterson, 2022). As Silverman and Patterson (2022) explained, qualitative methods are guided by theory that explains the challenges communities face and develops a comprehensive understanding of them. Critical ethnography goes deeper by identifying challenges and proposing policy changes that disrupt and deconstruct the societal power relations underlying issues, thereby promoting social change (Silverman & Patterson, 2022). Therefore, leaning on ethnography facilitated a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and the societies they enter and leave.

Anthropologists pioneered ethnography, but it has since become part of the qualitative research toolkit across many disciplines (M. V. Angrosino, 2007). Angrosino stated “ethnography is the art and science of describing a human group – its institutions, interpersonal behaviours, material productions, and beliefs” (2007, p. 14). Today, ethnography encompasses both the collection and analysis of information and a way of knowing (McGranahan, 2018). O’Leary ratifies definitions in defining ethnography “as the exploration of cultural groups in a bid to understand, describe and interpret a way of life from the point of view of its participants” (2017, p.194). Ethnography captures the rhythms and logic through which sociocultural groups navigate their worlds, as well as the underlying rules that govern their beliefs and practices (McGranahan, 2018). Ethnography is an open-ended process of discovery and learning over months or years (Whitehead, 2005). The agreed elements of ethnography include it being immersive, time-intensive, and not rigid or investigator-controlled. It emphasises detailed attention and observation in naturally occurring settings, focusing on nuances (McGranahan, 2018; Randall et al., 2007). Advice on conducting ethnographic methods includes presenting oneself as reasonable, unthreatening, and courteous to those being researched, paying attention to one’s surroundings, and choosing to listen (Randall et al., 2007), all of which I adopted in this study.

Applying ethnography with qualitative research considers the ever-changing structures and multiple and multifaceted realities of humans (Whitehead, 2005). Therefore, leaning on an ethnographic approach meant my research could be more open-ended and discovery-oriented than quantitative approaches and could use multiple data analyses to explore research assumptions (Whitehead, 2005). Through these approaches, I was able to immerse myself in the fieldwork site by studying a small number of women in their homes and workplaces.

4.3.2 Observation

Observation was a key method for understanding the women's settlement stories and is an ethnographic tool for examining lived experiences in natural settings. O'Leary defined observation as "a systematic method of data that relies on a researcher's ability to gather data through his or her senses" (2017, p. 251). Since the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection in qualitative analysis, they must become acquainted with the field site, actively focus, engage and amplify all their senses (Silverman & Patterson, 2022). The goal was to experience phenomena and events from the participants' perspectives (O'Leary, 2017). In ethnography, participant observation is the researcher's involvement in activities (Whitehead, 2005), so leaning on this, I participated alongside participants in their everyday activities of choice. Activities were conducted in public and private spaces, such as workplaces, shopping centres, and parks and in the participants' homes and their friends' and family's homes.

The initial intention was to observe women at their workplaces, but some workplaces, such as schools, did not permit it for ethical reasons, including concerns about observing minors. Despite this, I was able to see all but one woman's workplace during my visits. I also conducted non-participatory observations when I was unable to join activities due to regulations, such as when a participant worked as a translator for her ethnic community during a theoretical driving test, which I observed from a distance. Since I had previously explored 'home' as an affective experience (see Chapter 2), documenting the sensory landscape of a place was important. Alongside sight, I recorded sounds, smells, light, the spatial surroundings (actors and objects in the space), and temperatures. Influenced by Whitehead (2005), I also observed interactions among people and group dynamics to identify shared characteristics, such as occupation, sex, age, kinship, or type of affiliation. I recorded data through notes, journaling and audio recording.

4.3.3 Semi-structured Interviews

While the number of observations varied across participants, mainly because of their time commitments, all the women had one-to-one semi-structured interviews using a similar question format. An interview guide was created to keep the conversation flowing with open-ended questions, characteristic of qualitative research (Silverman & Patterson, 2022). Participants could elaborate on topics and concerns as they wished, which provided greater power and autonomy over what was shared while still generating standardised data (Liamputtong, 2020). Alongside these semi-structured interviews were other informal interviews and small talk, often occurring during observation, which were used to establish rapport, build trust, and open lines of communication (O’Leary, 2017; Silverman & Patterson, 2022).

As Silverman and Patterson (2022) stated, there is a transition from naturalistic inquiry to semi-structured interviews, in which roles are more active, and boundaries are clearly defined between interviewers and interviewees. To make participants comfortable, all interviews occurred in their chosen setting. All participants chose to answer questions at home or on a walk. Walks felt more informal, as participants could focus on other stimuli. O’Leary (2017) remarked that conducting interviews while managing several tasks at once—asking questions, prompting responses, actively listening, making sense of answers, and recording non-verbal data—can be complex. As all participants permitted me to audio-record conversations, I adopted a posture of listening and made minimal notes during the interviews. After interviews, I voice-recorded my reflections and observations and kept a journal.

4.3.4 Photovoice

Photovoice was adopted as a complementary method to observation and interviews to aid the collation of rich qualitative data. Photovoice is a research method in which participants take photographs to illustrate their situation and tell their stories, with visual data being common in social sciences (Silverman & Patterson, 2022). Pink (2007) shared that, in producing ethnographic knowledge, cameras are essential tools through the visual images, metaphors and discussions they produce. According to Wang and Burris (1997), photovoice enables people to record and reflect on their community’s strengths and concerns, promotes critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues, and reaches policymakers. The

method provided structure to interviews and helped reduce awkwardness, with photos serving as a reference point for discussion. In taking photos, participants can exercise their autonomy, reflect, and use creativity to represent their experiences, which can help equalise power relationships between participants and researchers (Wang, 1999, as cited in Chai, 2022). Feminist theory and practice have helped develop the concept of photovoice as a tool particularly powerful for those who have historically been invisible. Photovoice, therefore, has been used to gather insight into refugees' and migrants' wellbeing, health and integration (Tippens et al., 2021). For example, Chai (2022) used photovoice with 'place' as an analytical lens to examine immigrant women's settlement experiences, with participants taking photos of 'comfortable and uncomfortable' places. They found that the photos and stories showcased processes of place-making, reflecting the local, daily re-creation of places that evoked feelings similar to those of the participants' home countries (Chai, 2022).

I asked participants to take photos to illustrate their belonging and settlement and used Chai's (2022) example of comfortable and uncomfortable places as a starting point. The five participants who used the photovoice method preferred their mobile phones or previously printed photos to disposable cameras. Photovoice was used in various ways, but it always visually corroborated stories and encouraged conversation and the expression of emotions. Some women took photos before their interviews, which sparked dialogue. At other points during the interviews, the women recalled specific events and situations, then shared existing photos. The photos served as critical symbolic markers for women of memory and emotion, expressing strength, loss, grief, and celebration. According to Wang and Burris (1997), photovoice is used to share not just individual stories but also the stories, explanations, and ideas of other community members. Aligning with Wang and Burris, the women in this study shared photos that represented the experiences of others in refugee or resettlement experiences, including their family and friends.

A mix of methods enabled the development of relationships and flexibility in the research process. Moreover, other forms of self-reflection, such as audio recordings of my reflections and journal entries, were included as research methods. The purpose of this data triangulation was to strengthen the validity of the information, yielding comprehensive, multifaceted findings and allowing me to gain deeper insight into the women's personal perspectives and their interactions with their environments.

4.4 Ethical Procedures and Considerations

One of the central considerations when conducting research is ethics. Ethical principles inform all stages of the project from inception to writing up results (Scheyvens, 2014), and are therefore fundamental in guiding procedures. Before fieldwork, I checked that my research met Massey University's ethical standards for human participants and adhered to these protocols throughout (Massey University, 2017). The research proposal was evaluated through peer review by the University's in-house Ethics approval and was deemed low risk (Appendix 1). Consequently, it did not need to go through the University's Human Ethics Committee. The following sections explain the obligations undertaken to uphold ethical standards and protect participants from harm. I outline how I sought formal consent, built and maintained trust and respect, and understood power dynamics during this research.

4.4.1 Formal Consent

Obtaining participant agreement to take part in the research was a key stage of the ethics process. Consistent with ethical principles, participants' dignity and safety were ensured throughout the study through their informed consent, the ability to withdraw or decline participation at any stage of the interviews and observations, and the concealment of their identities. I met participants individually (away from 'gatekeepers') to explain the research verbally, answer any questions, and give participants time to reflect before signing the consent forms. Participants were informed of their rights to withdraw, to decline to answer any questions or participate in any part of the research, and, during interviews, to request that the audio recording be stopped at any time. Their rights to privacy and confidentiality were respected, and each participant chose a pseudonym to protect their identity and wellbeing. Pseudonyms were similarly assigned to other individuals mentioned by the women.

4.4.2 Power, Trust and Reflexivity

Capturing reliable interpretations depends on participants speaking openly and honestly with the researcher; therefore, building rapport and trust was crucial to this research (O'Leary, 2017). I respected the communities' knowledge and traditions, acted sensitively, and minimised any perceived power differences to build trust, ensuring respondents did not feel alienated or intimidated by the research (O'Leary, 2017). I considered the women to be full

agents in their lives and was mindful of their backgrounds when I approached conversations. Participants were offered the option to bring a female friend for extra support during the interview or observation stages, to help keep the gathering female. All the women chose to conduct interviews alone in separate spaces away from family. While the interviews were one-to-one, during some of the observation time, I met family members and friends.

The ethnic and cultural background, experiences and values of a researcher can influence the research process (O’Leary, 2017; Skovdal & Cornish, 2015). I recognised my outsider position, understanding it was a privileged stance with entirely different reasons for moving. I reflected on my positionality throughout the study to avoid projecting my subjectivities. O’Leary (2017) shared that research has long lacked reflexive self-awareness, leading to assumptions and biases shaped by Western, patriarchal perspectives. Being reflexive ensures accountability and helps minimise conflicts of interest, misinterpretation and misrepresentation when engaging with women of different ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and educational backgrounds (O’Leary, 2017; Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). As Whitehead (2005) stated, it is difficult to become a truly neutral researcher, so analysing subjectivity throughout the research process is beneficial. Voice recording after interviews and journaling supported reflexivity throughout the process.

I positioned myself to listen attentively and found that my interest and respect for the participants’ culture and stories helped build relationships. Being female facilitated trust and was culturally appropriate to spend time with another woman. As discussions focused on life in Aotearoa/NZ, I believe being from another country fostered reciprocity, as the women felt they could express themselves more freely, knowing I was also settling in Aotearoa/NZ, away from family. However, I have no personal experience of displacement or refugee status, nor have I lived in the countries the women previously resided in. My research was motivated by transnational awareness, which shaped my engagement with the women and interpretation of their stories.

Overall, the research considered challenges and limitations, including power imbalances and the need to promote autonomy, as the women shared their lives and stories with me. As such, decisions were guided by ethical principles to safeguard participants and protect the data generated. The women understood the benefits of sharing their stories, hoping it would lead to better support for future refugees’ (re)settlement. They each received a token of

appreciation for their time, and I also offered practical help to some women during the observations.

4.5 Fieldwork

Fieldwork with the participants took place from September 2023 through to April 2024 in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, in the Waikato district of Aotearoa/NZ. The women regularly referred to the Red Cross, the HMS Trust, and ROC (see Chapter 3), which supported their settlement. This section explains the participant selection process, detailing how six female participants were recruited through these organisations and how data from photovoice, observations, and interviews were analysed to produce key findings (as explored in Chapters 5 and 6).

4.5.1 Participant Selection and Procedures

Kirikiriroa/Hamilton was a familiar field site for my research as I lived and worked nearby. I volunteered with a settlement service provider in an office role, and shortly before the research started, with another organisation as a settlement support volunteer. In this role, I helped newcomers from refugee backgrounds to familiarise themselves with the city, access local services, and enrol in education or find employment. Participants were accessed through the settlement centres mentioned above through snowball sampling and through a contact of mine who had also volunteered with former refugees. The centres already had reciprocal relationships with former refugee communities, having developed a deep sense of trust and familiarity over time through programmes. Initially, I met with staff from settlement organisations to explain the research. I provided them with an information sheet and invitation (Appendices 2 and 3) to share with individuals who met most or all of the research criteria. Many of these staff members were migrants or former refugees themselves and had links to refugee communities outside the workplace. These individuals and centres acted as gatekeepers by referring potential participants. As a result, recruitment was conducted through non-random sampling, a common approach in qualitative research and Development Studies for gathering rich data from often underrepresented or marginalised groups (O’Leary, 2017).

Once a participant was referred, I ensured they had a copy of the information sheet (Appendix 2) and arranged a one-to-one informal meeting to discuss the next steps involved

in participating. The meeting was a time for me to answer any questions, and those interested consented to participate (Appendix 4). The women were allowed to consent to being observed in their daily activities, interviewed and/or invited to take photos of their settlement experiences for discussion. A total of six women in employment who had lived in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton for around one to eleven years were recruited. Information on the participants in Table 5 is provided, including their countries of origin, ages, jobs, and who moved with them to Aotearoa/NZ.

Table 5 Information on the Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Years in Aotearoa/NZ (all spent in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton)	Countries lived in	Job	Living and family situation
Rose	30	10 years	Afghanistan	Fixed term part-time translator in a school	Arrived with her husband and now has children. Her in-laws, parents and a sibling live nearby. Other family remain overseas including in Afghanistan.
Alice	26	Under 1 year	Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda	Full-time factory quality checker	Arrived with her husband and young child. Her sibling and in-laws are also in the city. Much of her family remain in Rwanda, a secondary country they fled to when she was young.
Meena	20	1.25 years	Afghanistan and Pakistan	Part-time kitchen porter and student	Arrived with her siblings and mother. A couple of other relatives already lived in the city. Her sister is Athena. She has family that remain in Afghanistan, Pakistan (where her family fled to), and other countries.
Athena	24	1.25 years	Afghanistan and Pakistan	Fixed-term, part-time youth worker and student	Arrived with her siblings and mother. A couple of other relatives already lived in the city. Her sister is Meena. She has family that remain in Afghanistan, Pakistan (where her family fled to), and other countries.
Annie	23	1 year	Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda	Part-time community worker	Arrived with some of her family, including mother and some siblings. She has family who have been resettled overseas. Her family had fled to Rwanda before resettlement.
Kaia	30s	11 years	Colombia and Ecuador	Full-time receptionist	Arrived with her husband. She now has a child as well. Her family remains in Colombia.

4.5.2 Limitations and Challenges

Recruitment limitations were apparent. The fieldwork was a lengthy process because it required building relationships with the settlement centres, and I underestimated how long it would take to recruit participants. While I had hoped to include female participants of various ages, the criterion of being employed limited the pool of potential applicants, and the centres had no further recommendations. Some women who initially showed interest in my study proved difficult to arrange an initial meeting with and to recruit within the timeframe. I broadened the research to include women seeking employment, but did not secure any additional participants. Although speaking English was not a criterion for participants, the ‘gatekeepers’ (the settlement support agencies) likely put me in contact with more women who spoke English, many of whom were younger. Availability of time and language also hindered recruitment. A lack of free time reoccurred as a theme in the settlement experiences of the refugee communities, as explored later in the data analysis chapters. It was therefore difficult to avoid unintentional age bias, as all participants in this study were in their early twenties and thirties.

When planning this research, I intended to interview key informants from refugee settlement service providers as an additional source of knowledge. I met with two Red Cross employees to discuss the research, who provided information on processes for refugees in Aotearoa/NZ, but a formal interview was not secured. Nonetheless, volunteering and engaging in conversations with other settlement services led me to encounter programmes that supported settlement, as I was practically supporting and befriending newly arrived former refugees myself. This aided in achieving greater research accuracy by extending beyond the literature reviewed and the women’s private experiences. Another limitation was that I did not explore refugee experiences with tangata whenua and how Māori concepts might support integration and settlement.

4.5.3 Data Processing

As stated earlier, the data for this study was collected using a qualitative methodology with ethnographic techniques influencing the methods. The next step was to analyse these findings. Because of the prolonged fieldwork and the use of various research methods, substantial data was generated for review and transcription. Data from interviews were

transcribed verbatim and thoroughly reviewed alongside observation notes, journals, and other self-reflections, which captured contextual nuances. The women received interview transcripts and could give feedback, make edits, and request omissions. Only one woman asked me to make a few minor omissions. The interviews were then analysed thematically using the electronic software NVivo, which helped manage the data.

NVivo was new to me, and while it helped me identify initial themes, learning the programme was time-consuming. Therefore, I began a manual coding process to identify further themes and patterns. Stewart-Withers et al. (2014) shared that, unless dealing with a large amount of data or working with a team, becoming intimate with raw data is more beneficial. To do this, transcripts were reviewed line by line, re-read, resorted and recoded. I created a table that captured broad categories and then identified sub-themes. My observation notes and self-reflections helped in identifying themes. For example, security was a category, with sub-themes of financial and social security, peace and comfort, culture, faith, and time. I had not predefined themes; therefore, I was surprised by how themes and patterns emerged organically within the topics discussed and observed, even though I focused on individual stories. In addition to the themes, I also highlighted significant statements that either linked to my research aim and questions or that I felt needed to be shared because they were meaningful to the participant(s). It was essential to ensure findings were grounded in the women's perspectives. While there were many interconnections, I collated ideas, splitting them into two overarching notions, one correlating to 'home' and the other to 'interconnections' to form Chapters 5 and 6.

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

This study employed a qualitative research design to gather comprehensive data from women's narratives. The methodological orientation included ethnographic approaches, which underscored the fieldwork methods of observation, interviews, and photovoice to produce rich qualitative data on the sociocultural background and experiences of former refugees. As outlined, ethical considerations throughout the research have been integral to upholding participants' rights and fostering the close working relationships necessary to implement the research methods. The combination of firsthand accounts and direct observation of the women's lives and their close networks enriched the understanding of refugee homemaking, social connections, and employment. The data analysis identified key

patterns with significant repetitions in the women's stories, as well as differences in experiences, which are further explored in the next chapters.

Chapter 5: Searching for Home

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents the findings from observations and interviews conducted in settings chosen by the participants, along with their use of photovoice. The chapter mainly addresses Research Question 1, showing how the women created a sense of belonging in their daily lives and exploring their affective experiences and support networks as they built and maintained feelings of home.

When people from refugee backgrounds are resettled in Aotearoa/NZ, they are granted legal status to belong in the country and call it ‘home’. Settlement services have even adopted the language of “new Kiwis” in an effort to welcome people transitioning and to eliminate the term “refugees” (HMS Trust, 2024; New Zealand Red Cross, n.d.). For the women in this research, experiencing feelings of belonging in Aotearoa/NZ was not as straightforward as simply becoming a resident or ‘new Kiwi’. Instead, the women’s sense of settlement is linked to culture, friends, families, activities, and places overseas. This chapter begins by presenting the women’s need for transnational safety and security in developing a sense of belonging and inclusion. Then, the research findings showcase the participants’ stories of their local experiences, exploring their narratives of home, immediate surroundings, and local community members, while reflecting on the events that led them to the city. Narratives about home, close surroundings, and local communities reveal feelings of both inclusion and exclusion. Then, connections to personal effects and culture are explained as crucial in shaping a sense of belonging. Finally, homes across multiple places and affective markers are shown as ways in which the women build attachments to belong.

5.2 Feeling Safe

This section views the ideal home as a place of sanctuary and highlights the need to build stable, secure homes, especially after experiences of instability. Notions of safety and security are used interchangeably in this thesis. However, safety broadly refers to physical and environmental conditions and is expressed as the assurance of protection from potential risks and dangers, so nothing causes harm. Security relates to structures, such as the state of society or economic conditions. Security is implied as stability and reliability; it is the state of being free from threats and dangers. Both of these concepts are fundamental to survival,

rebuilding lives, and integrating into new communities. Firstly, presented in this section are some of the women's stories of feeling unsafe in their new home because of their prior traumatic experiences. Alongside unsettling experiences of the past are stories of excitement, peace, and opportunity in their new homes.

Most women felt much safer in Aotearoa/NZ after gaining residency and rights to belong. However, being in a new place did not eliminate fears about the safety and wellbeing of family members, both locally and overseas. Some women experienced strong emotional reactions to the new spaces they encountered, primarily shaped by their previous overseas experiences. Some of the women's past experiences included trauma, which raised concerns about family wellbeing and resulted in initial responses to new homes being focused on safety concerns and apprehensions about the future. Emotional reactions extended beyond the home to the community, schools, and workplaces.

Many participants discussed how precarious situations they had experienced in the past had affected their current settlement and belonging. For example, Kaia and Alice looked back at their journeys. Despite both feeling safe living in their neighbourhoods and wider Aotearoa/NZ, they also shared experiences of living in dangerous situations. In recalling these incidents, the women expressed concerns about their family's safety at home, keen not to find themselves in unsafe conditions in their new neighbourhoods. Alice is a 26-year-old woman from the DRC who lived in Rwanda with her family for most of her life until she moved to Aotearoa/NZ in mid-Autumn 2023 with her husband and young child. Like many refugees relocating under the refugee quota, Alice was allocated her home on arrival in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. She expressed apprehensions about the home, primarily regarding her family's safety. These fears were evident when discussing a small area of plants and flowers outside the home (Figure 3). Alice perceived the area as dangerous because of concerns that someone could hide in the shrubbery and jump out. She explained her reasoning behind these fears:

Because of the background that we had, so like people would come into your house and start killing people, you know.... We had a very bad experience back in our country. You're living in a place where there's something that, like people can hide in there. When you see something, maybe something is like [how it was back then] there. (Alice)



Figure 3 *Shrubbery outside Alice's house. Source: Alice*

Instead of this area of vegetation being an enjoyable environment offering shade and privacy, for Alice, it evoked negative memories, causing feelings of fear and caution. Alice expressed the distressing reality that she had experienced with risks of intrusion, attack, and killings. Because of these perilous experiences, Alice felt a lack of control and trust over what others might do. Alice shared that she did not like being alone in her house, and during our discussions, her husband was usually nearby. She continued that she wanted to take active steps to change her environment to guarantee her family's safety. Alice expressed that, once her one-year rental was up for renewal, she wished to relocate to a new, safer home in a more urban area with less vegetation. In addition to reducing the risk of intrusion, she wanted to move because there were rat issues both inside and outside their home, and her family needed more affordable housing to improve financial security. Despite these concerns, Alice compared her new home with her Rwandan home and described it as feeling safer. She explained that in Rwanda, she used to listen for any possible intrusions at night and said she was now sleeping better, knowing that her current house had not been and would not be robbed. Despite feeling safer in Aotearoa/NZ, Alice's decision to move house was an example of her taking control to mitigate potential risks to her family's health and financial and physical security.

Similarly, Kaia emphasised the instability that many former refugees have experienced. Kaia, originally from Colombia, also experienced feelings of insecurity in her home, struggling to feel safe and comfortable. Kaia had been homeless for some of her time in Ecuador, living on

the streets and in hostels after fleeing from Colombia with her husband. She had moved to Kirikiriroa/Hamilton over a decade ago and was now in her thirties with a son. Kaia reflected on the first few years after she arrived in the country and the impact that this insecurity had on forming a new home:

The first couple of years was really hard for me too, or I was really struggling to not feel unsafe. We were used to just um lock the doors in different ways and put sticks on it, because we still coming from the trauma. (Kaia)

To address their sense of insecurity, Kaia and her husband took practical steps to increase security, as highlighted. Kaia specifically referred to her reactions as ‘from the trauma’ while Alice described traumatic events. Like Alice, Kaia had experienced precarious incidents that affected her behaviour, heightening her caution and distrust. The concerns about something bad happening were reactions from the trauma experienced, despite both women referring to Aotearoa/NZ as safe. For Alice, hoping to move house, and for Kaia, barricading her doors, were tangible ways to feel more in control, protect their families, and gain peace of mind. For Kaia, time had helped her feel safe at home and increased trust. She later shared that one day she fell asleep with the doors to her living room open, and no one came in. She referred to this as being able to “let it go a little bit”, which was a significant step toward feeling safe enough, and as a result, she felt more comfortable outside the home. Further, she explained that she felt reassured that she could send her son to school and know that he would be okay. Both Kaia’s and Alice’s stories highlight the uncomfortable and insecure situations many former refugees experience. Kaia’s later experiences of living in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton illustrate that these strong reactions resulting from traumatic events can subside as part of a natural healing and recovery process where time assists in building trust and a sense of safety.

The surroundings adjacent to the home were also inspected by Afghan sisters Athena and Meena, as were those by Alice and Kaia. Compared to Alice and Kaia, the sisters reacted differently when they secured their family’s house. For Athena, aged 24, and Meena, aged 20, securing their home in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton brought immediate happiness and a sense of being able to relax. The physical home was a marker of security and stability, allowing them to belong to a place after they were sponsored for resettlement by a relative already residing in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. Athena, the eldest of four daughters, was born in Afghanistan, while her sister Meena, the second eldest, was born in Pakistan, where their family had fled when

Athena was young. In Pakistan, the family resided in a community primarily of Hazara people. For a short period, the sisters also moved to Afghanistan to study away from their immediate family in Pakistan, and they mentioned that while living in Kabul, security problems arose. The sisters were residing in the city when the Taliban recaptured Kabul in August 2021. Meena revealed:

...but on the last day when we come back [returned from Afghanistan to Pakistan], I mean, Taliban, when the Taliban came. So, we take everything, and we took our suitcases and everything. (Meena)

Athena also referred to the Taliban's invasion, saying:

But like passing that border [between Afghanistan and Pakistan], it was very difficult. The way was difficult... It was difficult. So, it was the reason we wanted to come to [Aotearoa/NZ] to have a better life. We couldn't go back to Afghanistan too because there wasn't like security. And now even they don't have... the girls, they don't have the right to study. (Athena)

Here, Meena and Athena shared the complications of living between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Taliban's order to curtail women's secondary and university education disrupted their lives significantly, which meant they had to abandon their studies. They had already experienced other disruptions to their further education because of COVID-19 lockdowns, which made it difficult to travel across borders. However, the Taliban's recapturing caused them to make a more permanent move back to Pakistan while they awaited their application approval to move to Aotearoa/NZ. Athena and Meena's passion for education was evident, having faced exclusion and injustice rooted in the inequalities and restrictions imposed by the Taliban. During the interviews, they were both studying and working. A deep appreciation for having the same rights as New Zealanders, including access to free education and the right to work, fostered a sense of inclusion in society. The sisters felt a sense of hope for the future that I noticed was not shared as optimistically by some other participants. Their insecure situations had caused unease, so the security of residency and stable governments helped them feel they were in a place that offered opportunities. Therefore, belonging to Athena and Meena was linked to access to security, legal status, and equal rights.

The stories about safe houses for stability and wellbeing highlight the similarities in the women's experiences, despite their different backgrounds. In their accounts, a connection existed between the inside of their houses, which serve as sanctuaries and places of refuge, and the unrest, hostility, and uncertainty. Although outdoor spaces usually boost wellbeing, Kaia and Alice's traumatic experiences led to reclusion and agoraphobia. Kaia and Alice's stories also revealed traumatic events abroad that eroded trust in new environments. Despite threats to their safety, the women demonstrated resilience and took practical steps to protect themselves and their families. For Athena and Meena, unsettled homes and changes in their other countries fostered excitement and a sense of belonging in Aotearoa/NZ, which provided stability and opportunities.

5.3 Inclusive and Welcoming Communities

This section looks at inclusion and exclusion and their impact on establishing a permanent connection to a place. The home is presented as complex and multi-layered, shaped by encounters with people locally around the women's homes, as well as with people across borders.

Interviews with the women revealed that it was essential for them to foster social cohesion and connect with people from similar backgrounds and their host communities, as these relationships helped shape their new experiences. All participants expressed fondness for New Zealanders, with some sharing detailed accounts of their connections to their local 'Kiwi' community (See Chapter 6). Alongside positive experiences with Kiwis were some general beliefs that New Zealanders were nice people, but one must still remain cautious, as safety cannot be guaranteed everywhere. A few women were wary of specific areas within their local community and workplaces because of negative interactions with others, which led them to perceive those areas as unsafe. These negative encounters sometimes led to exclusion through self-preservation, with the women distancing themselves from certain places or groups to protect themselves. Athena provided an example of feeling unsafe in an area around her home when recalling a situation that she and Meena had experienced:

It was [at] the beginning that we came here... We just missed a bus, and it was like late at night, it was like six o'clock, it was in... autumn time and the day was a bit

shorter. So, we just came from Hamilton Central. And here we just walk... So, when we reached here (laughs), someone just shouted and tried to follow us. And we also shouted (laughs)... Yeah, it was a bit dark. So, when we're here, we don't go [to] this side of [the park] when it is darker because we are afraid. (Athena)

In the above narrative, Athena and Meena were walking home at night when strangers shouted at them and followed them. Athena retold the incident, giggling sporadically. Her laughter suggested that, in retelling the story, she saw a comical side to the incident, perhaps because they shouted back or because those following her were children. She could equally have been laughing to make light of a bad memory. People tend to feel more conscious of their safety at night because of limited visibility and often associate nighttime with increased crime rates, especially towards women. Therefore, Athena and Meena felt vulnerable and afraid and began avoiding the area at night because they felt threatened, even though they had the right to access it.

In contrast, Athena also shared positive experiences of her security in Pakistan. However, these positive stories were localised to her Hazara community. She shared that her former Hazara community felt "very secure," but said that when she left her town, she needed to be accompanied by a male relative or friend because it was unsafe. She also referred to dressing in longer dresses when in Pakistan versus in Aotearoa/NZ, where she typically wore more Western-style clothing, and shared that she only wore a head covering when joining her Muslim community. Athena took action to feel more secure in her home areas, as shown by how she presented herself by blending with the culture, avoiding certain places, and being accompanied by a male (something she did not have access to in her immediate family, now in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton).

Anti-social behaviour from people in Aotearoa/NZ was also an issue for Rose, albeit in a different context. Like Athena, Rose put procedures in place to protect her family. Rose, a 30-year-old woman from Afghanistan, has lived in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton for slightly over ten years with her husband and two young daughters, who were born in the city. In the last few years, her parents, younger sibling, and parents-in-law moved to Aotearoa/NZ and live nearby, which has dramatically increased Rose's wellbeing. Before their move, Rose had no relatives in the country. However, the remainder of her family, including other siblings, resided in Afghanistan. The separation had previously made Rose feel lonely as she did not

know anyone in Aotearoa/NZ. Despite Rose's family seeking to build a better, safer life, they had been threatened by their neighbour over a trivial matter related to visitors and car parking at their properties. This ongoing relationship struggle resulted in her family feeling vulnerable and sad because they felt the conflict was not aligned with their Islamic values. Rose explained that:

...the first right for us is our neighbour. We need to look after them. If, for example, they need help, we need to help them. This is from our religion, what prophets say.
(Rose)

For Rose's family, conflict with neighbours was rare and under Islam, one must care for one's neighbour. Rose shared that in Afghanistan, neighbours helped one another, shared food, and showed respect because of their proximity. The conflict with her parents' neighbour left her family feeling powerless, as they could neither express their feelings nor resolve the issue, as the neighbour avoided speaking to them. Rose shared that her mother stayed with her and her husband rather than being alone at home when her father was not around. Because the situation scared Rose's mother, Rose told her, "Don't sit alone with that man because I don't feel comfortable [when you do]." Rose was concerned about her family's safety due to the disagreement. When outside the home, Rose would call her mother throughout the day to check that all was well. Her family's limited English skills contributed to concerns about not feeling at ease at home, as they could not communicate for assistance when unsafe or in trouble.

Reflecting on people in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, Kaia shared her interactions with people who stereotyped her Colombian national identity. She referenced one man calling Colombians "Cocaine importers, drug dealers and whores." Individuals would express this light-heartedly, but Kaia found it inappropriate and unjust. She was saddened by these jokes, especially knowing that people died every day because of the drug industry. She believed TV programmes and movies contributed to stereotyping, and said, "That's not how we are!" adding, "Colombia is a hard-working country." These daily encounters and reactions were challenging for Kaia as she tried to represent her identity around people who knew little about her Colombian heritage or were not interested in learning more. In addition to feeling misrepresented, Kaia shared that her culture was sometimes overlooked despite Aotearoa/NZ being recognised as multicultural. She believed only two cultures were fully recognised,

while others were ignored. Kaia was referring to the country's bicultural identity, comprising Māori and Pākehā, but in saying this, she questioned whether it was fair to feel this way or whether she was being jealous. In these self-reflections, she shared photos of Colombian animals at the zoo and illustrated her feelings.

The first time that I went to Hamilton Zoo, they have these parrots, and they have a little cage.... And they were like, at the very beginning, in a very small part over there and [an information sign] just said they are from Colombia, and [there was] some little monkeys. And [the monkeys] looked re-e-ally sad and like, people will not pay attention. Nobody will pay attention to it. But they're beautiful... Sometimes you feel [like that] left out or hiding or... So, I felt like that corner was like, oh, I feel so sad. And that's how it feels sometimes. Yeah, not always but sometimes”

The zoo visit left Kaia feeling sad, as she felt the Colombian parrots and monkeys were hidden away at the zoo with no information about them. She connected with the animals, expressing that, like them, she and her culture were often overlooked or invisible, which made her feel left out. Kaia had a large picture of Colombian parrots in her living room, so these birds held sentimental value for her. Kaia added that some of the other animals at the zoo from other countries had larger, better enclosures than those from Colombia. She believed the attention given to different regions and animals was unequal. This unbalanced attention resonated with her feelings that in Aotearoa/NZ, not all cultures were equally recognised.

In summary, there was agreement that Aotearoa/NZ is a safe country and that New Zealanders are kind, friendly people. However, there were stories of negative interactions that had caused the women to create barriers to protect themselves. The women often compared their local experiences with those in their former homes and cultures abroad. For many women, the wider home was a social space for meeting and greeting; therefore, not having a bond with neighbours or the community was harmful to their sense of feeling settled. These interactions with neighbours demonstrate how quickly the women felt threatened and excluded within their own homes, again highlighting the importance of security and social cohesion in settlement.

5.4 Reflections of Home

In addition to safe, secure homes and surroundings, the interior of the house was important for participants to build connections and feel comfortable in their spaces. The following section explores the women's personal effects and their importance in fostering a sense of home. First, spaces and everyday items with cultural significance in the house are explored, then rituals and customs such as hospitality and cooking, and lastly, cultural acceptance and representations outside the home.

Personal effects held profound significance, aiding adherence to cultural norms and serving as vital extensions of identity, connected to memory. The women arrived with few belongings because of limited baggage allowances, so the few items they could bring were significant. Belongings elevated interior spaces, creating personal sanctuaries that expressed culture and individual interests and offered comfort to the women. However, performing actions linked to culture was, for some, hindered by opportunities to access and express culture in a new place.

While some of the women had resided in their homes for a long time (Kaia and Rose), others had recently moved in and were disappointed with their new spaces. Kaia shared a photo of her bare home before making it 'homely', and it was unrecognisable from the space she had ten years later, with more furnishings. For Annie, a 23-year-old Congolese woman who lived with her mother and siblings, their house was unsuitable because it was on a steep hill and felt too large for her family to fill with belongings or to heat in the winter. On the contrary, Alice felt her house was too small for her growing family. Alice had resided in a Congolese refugee camp in Rwanda, then in a nearby city outside the camp with her family before resettlement. Her in-laws later also resettled nearby in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. Like others, Alice and her husband had no say in the location of their property, as it was assigned to them. While she appreciated the property and those who supported her in providing it, her concerns were not solely about safety, as mentioned earlier, but also about cultural norms in the household and furnishings. For Alice, the space and furniture provided were unsuitable for hosting guests, making her feel disappointed. She shared:

And reaching here to Hamilton, we, oh we were surprised with the house because we thought it would be like a very, very nice house. Having all the equipment in the house. And we found it totally different. Only have one sofa, that has two seats. Like

what if you have visitors? And in our culture like having a visitor is something that is common. (Alice)

Hospitality and communal living were important in Alice's culture, and she felt her house and furniture were unsuitable for hosting guests. She had a small open-plan kitchen and living area with one gifted sofa and a dining table with chairs. Alice disliked the sofa and wished there were more seating. She took a photo of the sofa as a symbol of what hindered her sense of belonging and settling in, as shown in Figure 4. Although these household items could easily have been discarded or replaced with items of her choice, and Alice had added some soft furnishings, she lacked the financial means or time to do so immediately. Therefore, she saw them as beyond her creative control, and the space reminded her of belongings she had once owned and missed. Alice had emotional attachments to specific items she could not bring with her, so she missed many things—not only physical possessions but also cultural elements like music. This left her feeling disconnected and longing for the life she had spent so long trying to rebuild in Rwanda.



Figure 4 *Alice's sofa, which she felt inhibited her belonging. Source: Alice*

Excitement and buoyancy were shared when Athena chose her bedroom, because although smaller than her bedroom in Pakistan, she liked its sliding door to a small, partially fenced-off garden outside. Athena revealed, "I like, um, when I'm sleeping, I like that I should see the sky." For Athena, opening her room to the outside was a pleasant experience, and she shared that it evoked positive associations with her former home, conjuring memories of

sleeping on the roof under the stars in hot weather. Athena's answers expressed a fluidity between external and internal spaces and their uses.

Athena was less concerned with household possessions and described feeling at ease and content when securing a property, even when they had very little furniture. When selecting their home, the sisters and their mother needed to purchase their own furniture and household items, giving them some degree of choice. They reflected with humour, sharing about the arduous trips of carrying furniture on buses. I noticed they had a large dining table in their home, which did not look like it was used for dining. I observed the same when at a friend of Rose's house. Rose's friend said she was excited to buy a table when she first moved to the city from Saudi Arabia, even though her family ate on the floor. Similarly, Athena shared that when her family first acquired the table, they placed it in the middle of the room and sat at it, but after a while they grew tired of it and now used it only occasionally. Instead, they ate and socialised, sitting on the floor on cushions and a large, detailed rug, just as they would have done before. They had bought their rug locally from a small business that imported and sold the rugs for this purpose. Rose also had the same layout in her living room and had colour-coordinated her space with red and gold. The living spaces Rose, Athena, and Meena created were social areas, something typical of their lives in Afghanistan and Pakistan, recreated in their new surroundings.

When at Athena and Meena's, Rose's and her friends' and parents' houses, I was invited to join and socialise in these living spaces. A warm sense of hospitality from the women and their wider friends and family was felt. The women served black or green tea, and we ate snacks of fruit, nuts and sweets, sometimes served in ornate glasses and bowls (See Figure 5). Rose enjoyed cooking and was familiar with where to buy produce to make Afghan meals. During observation, we visited a butcher specialising in halal meat and one specific store to buy a box of Afghan green tea. Rose bought produce in bulk from these stores, likely making the most of visits to stores outside her local area and buying for others. At Athena and Meena's house, I was invited to watch a Turkish TV drama dubbed into Farsi on YouTube, which they shared on a large television placed on the floor. The sisters were joined by their two younger sisters and their mum. Being in a room with five other women, I was amused as they would fast-forward the drama to scenes featuring the female characters, deliberately skipping over the male characters' scenes, saying they were less interested in them. Television was a means to regularly connect with their language and culture.



Figure 5 *Hospitality: Food and drink served to me by Rose and her friend. Source: Researcher*

During the time of observation at Athena and Meena's house, the sisters showed me their art. The whole family was creative, and their artistic pastimes were something they continued to enjoy and replicate in their new home, just like Rose did with cooking. The sisters decorated their rooms with photos and art, making them more homely and personal. While they could use their creativity to make their house feel like home, the sisters alluded to missing belongings in Pakistan. Meena spoke about missing her old bedroom, explaining that it was a large room, like their other rooms, that were well-suited to hosting. Meena had painted on the walls, something she could not do now in their rental. She recalled that her relatives were invited to housesit and, with disappointment, shared:

And my room, uh right now (laughs), my cousin is living in my room. Yeah, and when she came into my room, she just removed all the paintings. She painted on them... And I was SO mad when she did that. Now they're all gone under the paint, the other paint that she has done. (Meena)

Meena had painted a few pieces on her bedroom walls in Pakistan, but when her cousin moved into the property, the cousin painted over the artwork without first discussing it with Meena. For Meena, the loss of the paintings and her cousin's removal of these memories caused her anger and sadness. For her cousin, painting the walls would likely have symbolised a new chapter, with a perceived right to make decisions about the property now that her extended family no longer lived there. Whereas Meena still felt connected to the property, so losing what was hers in this way felt unjust. This likely symbolised a bigger loss of control over her former life and the parts of her that remain there. The importance of creativity for Meena was emphasised when asked if she missed any objects from her home in Pakistan, to which she responded, "No, no, not so much... I brought the important things like my paintings and books." With limited luggage space, Meena's priority was to bring the hobbies and memories she could still enjoy. Athena and Meena's creativity remained constant throughout their transition from one country to another, providing an outlet for expressing their emotions.

Athena took on a more caregiving role for her family. She also alluded that Meena brought all her art materials, but Athena had to leave her supplies behind in Afghanistan. Instead, Athena chose a collection of photos to bring with her, which she had hung up around her bedroom. These mostly depicted her family and friends from various occasions throughout their lives. Athena recalled going through a large, heavy album and selecting her favourite photos to take with her. Athena pointed to each photo and shared where each person was now living. The photos of her family and friends highlighted how many of her connections were now spread across the globe, emphasising the Afghan diaspora caused by conflict. She had lost contact with some friends because of their insecure travel and living situations. Many were now residing in Hazara communities in Australia. However, displaying the photos in her room was necessary to preserve her past, remember people and places, and share stories with others, creating a more homelike space.

The home served as an essential space for cultural activities such as praying, singing, dancing, speaking their first languages, and cooking. However, the loss of belongings affected these practices. Alice was disappointed to have left a large amount of kitchenware in Rwanda that she had been gifted when she got married. She enjoyed cooking the same African dishes every day because they were familiar and comforting to her. Dishes included a popular Congolese dish called *pondou*, made from cassava leaves, and *ugali*, a dough-like,

starch-based meal popular throughout Africa. She shared photos of some of her meals, as shown in Figure 6. Alice had been pleased to find stores that imported specialised international foods. Kaia also enjoyed cooking her favourite foods and had found ways to purchase Colombian food in Aotearoa/NZ, including sweets and snacks that she received for her birthday. Kaia explained she would cook chicken, cassava, plantain and hot soups on rainy days to make her happy. While food helped develop a sense of home through familiarity and comfort, food also made the women reminisce about times and people overseas.



Figure 6 *Alice's favourite homecooked food. Source: Alice*

Simple connections to and representations of culture became highly significant for mothers Kaia and Rose. They wanted their children, who had never lived in their former countries, to embrace their heritage. Both the mothers and their husbands had taught their children to be bilingual. There were physical objects in Kaia's home, such as the photo of Colombian parrots, which served as connections to Colombia. Still, other markers across the city in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton made Kaia feel she could embrace two cultures simultaneously. She shared a photo of a Colombian sportsman printed on a sports shop window at The Base, a large shopping centre on the city's outskirts. She explained that she had shown the photo to her child and that there was also a welcome sign at The Base that said "Hello" in multiple languages, including "Hola," which made her feel seen. Her family also attended the 2023

FIFA Women's World Cup, hosted in Aotearoa/NZ, to watch and meet South American football teams. Kaia mentioned that when Argentina played their match, she was encouraged by people dancing Tango outside the stadium and enjoyed the music. Rose also wanted her children to understand their roots and to continue cultural traditions. She spoke about celebrations:

And then we wear clothes, beautiful clothes. We make henna, we clean our house, buy food, clothes, buy dried fruits or fresh fruits, and make food for our guests. Families... we go to their house; they come to my house... And that's why we want to continue our culture even when we live in New Zealand, we want to continue our culture here as well. Because of our kids, you know, they need to know where we're from, what we're doing. (Rose)

Celebrating Eid and other festivals was an exciting experience for Rose, and important for her children to be part of. Rose enjoyed connecting with other families who shared an appreciation for their faith and culture. These small representations of Rose and Kaia's countries and cultures helped them feel more settled and connected to their new home, knowing that their families could still experience parts of their identity in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. These representations served to preserve culture, nurture and educate their children, so that their culture would not be lost to future generations. Rose shared that her culture meant "gathering and helping each other", and she attempted to represent this in her life. She faced difficulties when her eldest child started school, as she had less control over what they were involved in and what they were taught. She shared that her child was now learning Māori, English and Afghan cultures. While she wanted to respect the learning of Māori and English cultures, she had observed her child wanting to wear certain clothes and eat foods she did not think were suitable. Rose struggled to figure out how to raise her children in her Afghan culture while also being influenced by English culture.

The women's stories highlight the importance of cultural continuity and adaptation in their new environment, showing how food, objects, and traditions act as vital links to their heritage and identity. The participants integrated their histories into their new spaces in Aotearoa/NZ through art, music, photography, television, and ongoing language, customs, and rituals, such as hospitality. These personal effects and household spaces deeply influenced the women's sense of belonging. Despite challenges, their efforts to personalise and adapt to their

surroundings reflect resilience and a desire for connection as they formed social and cultural ties. Expressing themselves linked past and present homes, fostering stronger emotional bonds. Yet, since culture is tied to memory, the lack of familiar objects and spaces sometimes caused frustrations and homesickness.

5.5 Sensory and Emotional Connections to Places

In this study, it was apparent that the women missed both people and places but found ways to connect to them through regular digital contact, culture, landscapes and activities (further explored in Chapter 6). This section outlines concerns for the security of loved ones overseas.

Rose wished for a safer home in Afghanistan, which created a longing for different circumstances. Before Rose's parents and one sibling resettled in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton from Afghanistan, she would dream about them, missing and worrying about them. She mentioned one dream of her mum: "I was dreaming of her a lot. And I was sometimes waking up thinking, oh, my mum is calling me (mimicking voice) "Wake up, wake up." Like [it was] school time. But when I woke up, the home was different, [out of] the window was different." Rose's dreams of speaking to her family disoriented her, making her believe she was still in Afghanistan, talking to them. However, waking up in a different house without them was painful. Rose missed her former homeland and shared her hopes for Afghanistan:

Even though I live here (Aotearoa/NZ) for ten years, almost more than ten years, but still, I love my country (Afghanistan). I want to go there. I want to be there. I wish my country safe forever. Same as New Zealand. (Rose)

Rose expressed her love for Afghanistan while recognising she could not return there until it was safer. She believed that Kirikiriroa/Hamilton was safer than where she had come from and shared that people in Aotearoa/NZ trusted women, making her feel "free." However, in agreeing on this, she felt a longing for what Afghanistan could become. In her hope of returning to Afghanistan, she fantasised that once "there is [an] opportunity for women to work and for the girls to go to school to study," she would relocate. Therefore, the security situation in her former country influenced her settlement in Aotearoa/NZ, making it a temporary place while she waited for change in Afghanistan. This was despite having lived in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton for a decade, with family nearby, and her daughters growing up there.

Returning home was another topic Kaia discussed. Kaia had previously fled Colombia for Ecuador and had resided there without a secure home or belongings. She felt too unsafe in Ecuador because of its proximity to Colombia, prompting her to seek resettlement elsewhere. Kaia shared that while she had seen changes in Colombia's security, she still would not return to live there because Aotearoa/NZ now felt like home. Although she had settled, she spoke of her excitement about returning to Colombia some years after moving to Aotearoa/NZ. She had visited her family in Colombia following the signing of a peace agreement between the Colombian government and Colombia's main paramilitary force, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. She declared, "And as soon as they signed that treaty in maybe August, we bought the tickets." For Kaia, returning had not previously been an option, but the peace agreement had provided a layer of security, allowing her to feel comfortable to visit her family. Alongside feeling safer living farther from Colombia, other factors helped Kaia feel at home, including the landscape of Aotearoa/NZ. She appreciated outdoor spaces, and when asked how she found living in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, she responded by immediately comparing its landscape with the city where she formerly resided in Colombia, indicating:

It has a big river, which is something that, um, reminds me [of] home... Yeah, so it's very similar 'cos it's the valley of a river... my city was quite big, but it's close enough... and the summers, the weather is kind of like home. Yeah. So, I do feel like home. I do. You feel sometimes that you forget that you're not home. (Kaia)

Kaia mentioned the Waikato River, which runs through the city, and how it felt like her hometown in summer. A familiarity with sights and temperatures around Kaia helped her emotionally connect to places and to forget she was somewhere else. A water connection was a recurring theme in Kaia's stories as she shared, "I think the water, it's a big part of us," and "It's this connection of not being there, and then just looking at the water as it makes you feel like you're actually there." For Kaia, seeing, smelling, hearing, and feeling the river transported her from one country to another, linking two places. Kaia also felt connected to the landscape through activities, as explored in Chapter 6.

There were other stories of the wider connections to places abroad experienced in local surroundings, such as landscapes, buildings, and streets that shared similarities and differences. Like Kaia, other women referenced water, reminding them of former homes,

mainly areas like Hamilton Lake, a well-known spot in the city. Rose reflected that she missed going to lakes and parks to share food and spend time with family and friends. She had lived near “beautiful” and historic surroundings in Afghanistan and replicated activities at Hamilton Lake, where she would meet friends for picnics and often for celebrations. Annie and Meena reflected on the Aotearoa/NZ landscape and scenery, including visits to Raglan, a scenic coastal town 40 kilometres from Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, known for its black-sand beach and surfing. While Meena’s sister, Athena, believed the landscape of Kirikiriroa/Hamilton was becoming increasingly homely, a feeling that grew stronger after visiting other places outside the city. Regardless of these emotions, she still considered Aotearoa/NZ a second home, even though she recognised she would likely not return to Pakistan for a long time.

Although Athena and Meena’s roots were in Pakistan and Afghanistan, their studies and work have deepened their bond and connections in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. Meena worked as a kitchen porter and said it did not matter whether one liked a place; through working and living there, “you always feel connected.” Alongside her part-time job, she attended a vocational college, which helped her form a sense of belonging in the city through learning. Places of study, such as Wintec, a tertiary education institute, and Waikato University, became landmarks for the women as they attended classes, including English classes. Therefore, daily or weekly visits to these places of study meant they gained knowledge of the surrounding area, including bus stations, restaurants and shops. Using photovoice, Meena shared photos of her workplace, which included blossoming trees, and of her campus buildings. Meena took the first photo below (Figure 7) of her campus building because she thought it looked beautiful, but she was surprised by what she saw a little later (Figure 8).



Figure 7 *Meena's place of study. Source: Meena*



Figure 8 *Meena's place of study as a metaphor for growth. Source: Meena*

Meena explained her thoughts about the changes in the building:

It reminded me of, yeah, me and my family. Like, it's like when you come here, like you start everything from zero. And then you, I mean, you start growing and improving and changing. (Meena)

As shown in Figures 7 and 8, Meena used these photos to explain her family's growth since they first moved to Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. She drew symbolism in the changing landscapes, explaining the difference between starting from "zero" with the building having few leaves on the climbing plant. She expressed how, over time, as one transitions through seasons, growth occurs, as shown in the second photo, with many leaves on the plants. For Meena, growth came through repetition and through work and study, which helped her and her family build a sense of familiarity and safety, making them feel more settled. Other women, like Alice, also noted the seasons in Aotearoa/NZ and compared them to former countries. Alice struggled with weather fluctuations, disliking the abrupt transition to cold winters and the need to use an air conditioner to stay cool in summer.

Despite their diverse backgrounds and experiences, the women connected to the Aotearoa/NZ environment, including buildings and local outdoor landscapes. They drew on memories and similarities of past places to foster emotional bonds with their new surroundings and engaged their senses, recognising changes in temperatures, seasons, and smells. These same memories also evoked feelings of homesickness and longing for safety in former homes.

5.6 Chapter Conclusion

The women's narratives highlight how refugees forge deep bonds with places, merging their cultural memories with their new environments. Despite facing challenges and threats to their safety and security that hindered their settling into local neighbourhoods, the women found ways to incorporate their cultural heritage into everyday life through food, objects, and rituals. They were resourceful and resilient, transforming their houses into sanctuaries and creating 'homely spaces' where others could gather with them. These cultural expressions served as essential links to their identity and sources of comfort. The participants' engagement with local landscapes and surroundings, such as lakes and buildings, reflects a sustained emotional connection to both their past and present, demonstrating resilience and

an ongoing sense of belonging. These bonds underscore the importance of place in shaping refugees' sense of security, identity,

Chapter 6: Everyday Interconnections

6.1 Introduction

Building on Chapter 5, this chapter presents findings from observations, interviews, and photovoice. The following analyses how a sense of belonging and inclusion was fostered during the women's settlement, focusing on Research Question 2 regarding employment and settlement providers. The first section describes how support services help refugees and migrants in Aotearoa/NZ with arrival and job searches. Then explored are employment, social connections, and cultural ties. The chapter highlights how women have secured jobs and shows instances of workplace exclusion and discrimination. The chapter also explains how women balance employment with family responsibilities, affecting their sense of belonging. This chapter then focuses on the women's transnational relationships and everyday activities that uphold cultural identities and foster community.

6.2 The Role of Support Services in Creating Community

This section explores some of the stories the women shared about their journeys on first arriving in Aotearoa/NZ. These paragraphs highlight how settlement support providers and services actively welcome newcomers, assist other former refugees and migrants, and facilitate their journey toward employment opportunities.

Services that support new migrants and refugees were essential for building the participants' friendship networks, developing skills and knowledge, providing employment opportunities, and supporting overall settlement goals. These initiatives were found to bridge cultures, workplaces, and communities in Aotearoa/NZ, as well as among women, reducing cultural gaps. All participants mentioned three leading settlement providers they accessed upon arrival. However, these organisations continued to support the women and their families throughout their time in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. These providers were the New Zealand Red Cross, particularly its Pathways to Employment service; HMS Trust, specifically their New Kiwi Settlement Service programme; and ROC (see Chapter 3). The organisations offered numerous programmes to assist settlement outcomes, including translation services, after-school classes, road safety and driving schools, digital literacy, leadership development, and gardening and sports clubs. Further, many women began their careers through volunteering or

working part-time at these centres and other non-government organisations in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton.

Staff and volunteers within settlement support services helped Rose and Kaia transition in Aotearoa/NZ, especially when they initially felt an overwhelming sense of being alone. On arrival from Ecuador, Kaia and her husband had no belongings other than a bag of clothes and they knew nothing about their new home, location, culture, or people. Kaia remembered everyone involved in her journey to Aotearoa/NZ, including the names of those who helped her obtain refugee status, assisted her with her move, and welcomed her. On arrival, a decade ago, Kaia was supported by a Red Cross Pathways to Settlement support worker who became a close friend. He aided the family in navigating their new life, assisting with household issues, orientation, finding work and, as Kaia put it, “getting to be a normal person.” Kaia was deeply moved by a stranger's willingness to accommodate people from another country. She shared much about the volunteer's character, stating that he was “amazing, helpful, and a blessing”, and that he had even started learning Spanish to better communicate with her and her husband. Other participants also expressed appreciation for the volunteers, describing them as helpful, friendly, welcoming, and loving. Those volunteering helped create and sustain a sense of normality, familiarity, and friendships, laying the foundation for a future in Aotearoa/NZ.

Compared to the other women, sisters Athena and Meena had different access to settlement services. Instead of arriving from Afghanistan through the Refugee Quota Programme, their family was sponsored by a close relative who had resettled through the programme. Therefore, they were not automatically assisted with a rental property or provided with a Settlement Navigator or volunteer. This meant they were not automatically connected to social services such as Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ), provided with help for translating, or given support to learn about their new city. However, a lady within their Afghan community encouraged them to access free services, including an orientation programme for newcomers run by HMS Trust. This orientation included an introduction to local services, such as emergency services, as well as support such as the Pathways to Employment programme. Through this orientation, the family was offered assistance, with one person volunteering to serve as a referee for their family's rental application. Athena professed that every newcomer should attend an orientation at HMS Trust to understand how to live in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton.

Many of the women were encouraged to register for programmes to support their settlement. English was essential for daily communication and boosted women's confidence, leading many to make friends with others in their Wintec English classes. Rose found Arabic and Afghan friends at Wintec, and as a result, her life became easier and more enjoyable after she had felt very lonely. In addition to these classes, some women signed up as job seekers through Pathways to Employment to support their career plans and apply for jobs. Both Athena and Annie expanded on registering with Pathways to Employment. Athena wanted a part-time job alongside her part-time education. Firstly, she secured a volunteer role, which helped develop local experience, a skill many employers requested. Then she was offered a fixed-term paid position working with youth from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Annie, a 23-year-old Congolese woman who resided in Rwanda before her resettlement, found it very hard to secure a job despite completing studies and internships and being previously employed in Rwanda. She initially felt unsupported and believed companies did not care about her previous experience. She shared:

For instance, getting a job here. It was very, very hard for me because, first of all, I wasn't confident about my English and uh another one, just getting my... knowing how to build a CV to look for a job was very hard. But after that, I learned that there are some organisations that can help you... in the first months, I used to go to those agencies that help people to do their CV and look for a job. (Annie)

Annie's English proficiency was a barrier to finding work because she did not feel confident in her ability. She needed support building her résumé, and she used Pathways to Employment, which specialised in supporting refugees. Annie widened her job search to include opportunities across any field rather than specific ones, assuming, like Athena, that any role would help her build experience in Aotearoa/NZ. Annie secured a role advocating and supporting her Congolese community through a settlement organisation (as shared later). Rose also began her career in Aotearoa/NZ by volunteering to assist newcomers from overseas. She initially volunteered as a translator and, through developing networks, was offered a paid role. She proclaimed that she had a heart for newcomers because she, too, understood their journeys to and within settlement. Rose reflected on her time volunteering:

I didn't get any pay. But I was happy. The reason was, I was helping them, you know, kind of a bridge between the teacher and the student... I just make a connection between teachers and students. So, I feel so happy that time, that I can help them. Then, after a few months, I got my first job, and I got paid. (Rose)

Throughout the interviews and observations, Rose repeatedly expressed her interest and joy in helping others. She served as a link between people and services, using her interpersonal and language skills, which she had worked hard to develop during her time in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. Doing a good job helped her secure a paid role at the settlement support organisation after years of wanting paid work. She later found work at an English-speaking school where she assisted Dari-speaking children. Rose was very social and keen to build friendships, which benefited her role in supporting communities by helping develop trusting relationships. When Rose first arrived in Aotearoa/NZ, she had struggled to make social connections and lacked English proficiency. In reflecting on this experience, she was keen for other newcomers to be welcomed and included better than she was. Rose shared a story about teaching a woman everyday skills such as answering the phone, writing letters, and learning the English alphabet. She became good friends with the woman and taught her how to drive:

I started with a student she was a mum also. She had some little kids. And I was teaching her [to drive]. She was SO happy... And the other thing was she was worried SO much about driving. I said "It's okay, don't worry, I experienced this once I finished the learner [licence], so I will teach you." (Rose)

Rose acknowledged this woman's emotions by empathising with her, noting that she had been apprehensive about learning to drive and was delighted to have been helped by Rose. Rose reassured her that she had also gone through the same experiences and could now drive. In supporting others, Rose gained care in return, for example, the woman learning to drive was also Muslim and told Rose that she was praying for her. I observed Rose being drawn to other Muslim women, and she interacted with strangers who also practised Islam, greeting them with a smile and saying "Salaam⁶." While Rose showed empathy to those in similar situations, she also empowered people, such as by teaching the woman "To stand on her [own] feet. Not to always sit and wait for someone to help." This motivation stemmed from a

⁶ 'Salaam' or 'As-Salaam alaikum' - an Arabic greeting meaning 'peace be upon you'

desire to eradicate feelings of loneliness and dependence on systems. Rose concluded that while people needed support, they also needed to be agents of change, something she actively pursued by being ‘a bridge’ between people and organisations. Rose believed that helping other women was powerful for change, and being able to talk and share problems was important for an enjoyable life.

Settlement organisations emphasised providing services to newcomers to support initial settlement goals by delivering information on living in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. The services provided strategies for cross-cultural communication and met needs by being welcoming, stable and familiar places for building diverse long-term communities. But they also met the longer-term needs of former refugees, with the women remaining linked through friendships, volunteering, and paid work, which helped progress their lives. Many of the women had struggled to learn local systems or to form friendships, and the services brought together like-minded people who were empathetic and advocated for better inclusion of former refugees. Like the providers, the women were able to contribute to improving services, ensuring they would better support the next group of newcomers.

6.3 Social Exchanges and the Workplace

All participants discussed what helped improve their lives in Aotearoa/NZ, and all spoke about their employment. This next section further explores the participants’ employment and workplaces, including social connections and exchanges, and focuses on stories of success, opportunities, and challenges, both personal and social.

The women considered employment, volunteering, and education essential to counteract the setbacks from the disturbances they had faced and to progress their lives toward a stable future in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. While the women considered their long-term futures, most were dissatisfied with their current circumstances despite being employed. A few women enjoyed their jobs but held fixed-term positions, which left them without the long-term security of a regular income. Others saw their jobs as crucial for gaining local knowledge, experience, and finances, but as a temporary step for further employment.

At the time of the study, employment was secondary to education for sisters Athena and Meena, as their education was setting them up for future career goals. The sisters had both

experienced disruptions to their education (see Chapter 5), following the Taliban's recapturing of Kabul. Meena, aged 20, worked part-time on weekends, while her older sister Athena, aged 24, was on a fixed-term contract. Athena was looking for both full-time and part-time work alongside her studies, in the interim before attending university. Meena saw her kitchen porter work as a temporary position, sharing, "My duties in there is like, I'm just washing dishes. So, I'm not very interactive with others. I'm not... I don't have the chance to [be social]. I just have to do my own workload." Meena's attitude towards her workplace suggested she was content for now as the role provided income, but she wanted something in the future that matched her interests. Meena had not invested in relationships at her workplace, which perhaps highlighted the temporality of her work or stemmed from her introversion. She did have a colleague she spoke to in breaks, but she considered her more of an acquaintance than a close friend. Meena felt that in Aotearoa/NZ, people were too busy with work and study, whereas she believed a better balance was needed to spend time on hobbies and with family. She valued Pakistan and Afghanistan's culture and her former routine of shorter school days, rather than the 9 am to 5 pm work hours in Aotearoa/NZ.

Gaining money and experience outside the home were the main motivations for Annie to find work, but she struggled to secure a job. Having previously worked in Rwanda, she noted that in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, it was comparatively easy to earn money, even though securing work was difficult. Annie mentioned her disappointment at being offered interviews but not landing a job. However, she had obtained a new role assisting settlement outcomes for Kinyarwanda-speaking "community members." Roles like Annie's working with former refugees were commonplace for many participants. Annie discussed some of her work activities:

Most of the things is just interpreting. Another thing is accompanying them (Congolese former refugees and migrants) to different organisations like WINZ. Some of them, they used to have their money cut off. Any financial issues, I go there for them. Another thing I help them is... to try to understand their suggestions. Try to connect those suggestions to the organisation that can help them. So, I will advocate for them. (Annie)

Sometimes, while working as an interpreter, Annie observed systems malfunctioning, such as benefits being withdrawn. Therefore, she would assist her clients in finding solutions or connecting them to relevant services. She described this work as advocacy for her

community, serving as a link between clients and service providers. This was similar to Rose's reference to acting as a bridge between people. Annie's employment provided financial support, skills development, and increased independence from her family home, while fostering social and cultural change by improving the livelihoods of her local Congolese community. She also built friendships at work, including with a woman also originally from another country. I observed an example of this advocacy work when she translated English into Kinyarwanda for two women taking their theoretical driving tests. Despite their lack of English, with Annie's translation support, the women passed their tests. I witnessed their excitement as they joyfully praised God and thanked Annie for something they would not have achieved without her.

Working as an interpreter was a recurrent career for former refugees. Alice had also accepted a similar role to Annie's, working with the Congolese community as a translator, but had not yet started at the time of the interview. At the time of the interview, Alice worked full-time at a factory. She had previously worked as a Project Manager at a non-governmental organisation and wanted to continue in this sector. However, she had taken a job at a factory, acknowledging that her previous work experience was not recognised in Aotearoa/NZ. She shared that the reason behind starting her job was her family's financial situation:

And the money that like he [her husband] was making wouldn't be able to cover all the bills... I remember for the two or three weeks we were very broke (laughs), VERY, very broke... We couldn't even have money to buy nappies for our baby... Which was very difficult. And it caused me to make a decision to look for a job. My baby was still ten months... but I didn't have any other option. (Alice)

Once Alice's husband began employment, their benefits were reduced, leaving them unable to cover their expenses. The severity of their financial situation had left them unable to buy essential items for their baby. Despite her job offering greater economic security, Alice's workplace was unsuitable because her workload aggravated an existing back injury. Fearing potential pain, she had told a recruitment agency that she could not work in a role standing on her feet all day. The agency assured her the role was suitable. She suspected the employer had changed her duties, asking her to do tasks such as cleaning that were not part of her job description, knowing she might need to keep the role, given her lack of work experience in Aotearoa/NZ. Alice also experienced discrimination in the workplace and shared that

although some of her colleagues were kind, “some of them were not nice, and they treated me very bad ‘cos I’m black.” This left her feeling sad, rejected, and excluded. Thus, Alice accepted the translator’s role to improve her physical and emotional wellbeing at work, even though a part-time job would decrease her financial wellbeing. Trade-offs like this were typical for the participants. Alice’s experiences underscored the challenges of insecure work and some of the unfriendly and manipulative attitudes toward former refugees, which lack empathy and respect.

Kaia experienced both positive and negative interactions with the workplace, having been in the country for over a decade. Initially, she and her husband received care from their settlement support volunteer, who assisted with CVs and accompanied them to interviews. But Kaia experienced inappropriate encounters with people who were insensitive, including in their lack of awareness or sensitivity towards the traumatic experiences she had endured. During a period of job searching, Kaia was offered a casual care role but decided it was not for her after the employer conducted disaster scenario training, which triggered an emotional response for Kaia. The workplace had role-played a tsunami to see how Kaia would handle the care work. Kaia felt the training was inappropriate, and the staff were joking about something she perceived as serious, leaving her feeling that her family’s safety could be threatened. She responded to the staff, “If this [tsunami] is true, I’m not going to help you at all. I’m gonna go for my child. Like I don’t care.” While the employer likely did not know Kaia’s background, her experience highlighted the importance of sensitive, appropriate workplace training.

After that negative experience, Kaia went on to secure her job as a receptionist through a recommendation from a then-stranger who advocated for her. The stranger worked at the facility Kaia interviewed at and was Cuban. As Kaia was Colombian, they shared the commonality of being Spanish speakers and from Latin American countries. The interviewers told Kaia she did not have enough English for the job, so she spoke to the Cuban lady, who advocated for her, pretending to the employer that she knew her. The lady exceeded Kaia’s expectations by highlighting to the employer the strength Kaia would bring as an employee, namely her ability to speak Spanish with clients. Kaia recalled the memory of the Cuban woman with humour:

And she's like, (mimics) "Of course, girl." She didn't know me. But this is like the Latin community will always help each other. She's like, "Of course, girl, come with me." So, she took my hand, and we start walking to the office. And she went to the owner of the company. And she's like, "She's my friend. I know her for such a long time." (Kaia)

The woman cared for Kaia, shown by taking her hand, which indicated closeness. She bonded with Kaia, wanting to support her, likely because of their shared geographical connection. The woman stressed Kaia's potential as an asset to the company, and the manager took the recommendation and gave Kaia a three-month trial contract. Kaia believed she did not have enough English to do the job, but she did it anyway, "put on a big smile", and was friendly to clients. Her colleagues and clients liked her, so she was offered a full-time contract before her trial ended. Kaia explained that in her role, she received only one week of orientation and relied on YouTube tutorials to learn new systems. Although independent and not expecting help, she believed workplaces should offer extra support to those from refugee backgrounds. When asked whether anything could have been different, especially given that English was not her first language, she explained that patience was needed. Her concerns about a lack of support were less about her employer and more about her colleagues' attitudes, emphasising the need for patience, especially while she was learning English:

Instead of being like, "Hey, you know what? You can say it this way." They just laugh... Yeah, they make you feel like you're stupid... Sometimes, I usually, when that happens, I will be like, "Well, you know what, I speak two languages, how many do you [speak]?" (Kaia)

Kaia felt frustrated by being made to feel inferior, so she countered this by highlighting her skills and intelligence in speaking multiple languages. She expressed that these interactions made her confrontational and put her in "fighting mode" to defend herself. She would reassure herself that, as she had finished her education quicker than most others, she was not stupid, as she had been made to feel. When asked about her friendships with colleagues, Kaia explained that she viewed them as workmates and was not very good at forming close friendships, but she would always be there to help people. She found it easier to connect with people from Colombia and across her continent because of their shared experiences. She had some close friends from Colombia outside her workplace whom she considered family. Kaia

created emotional barriers to stop getting hurt by people. She was sensitive and reserved with those to whom she gave her time. I observed that this sensitivity was self-preservation, likely to protect herself following previous traumas and to commit her free time to her family. Kaia met many people at work with whom she had daily small talk. In addition to exchanging pleasantries, she often helped other Spanish-speaking people access services by providing guidance on procedures. Kaia appreciated the opportunity to use her skills to assist people, but after nearly a decade at the same workplace, she was seeking a new role aligned with her interests.

These women's stories highlight the importance of workplace connections and bridging cultural divides to foster mutual understanding. The kindness of others advocating for them was impactful, helping many women start careers following challenging job searches. All the women sought employment for financial stability, a sense of purpose, and social integration. Not all workplaces were inclusive, though, and some women faced discrimination, leading them to create barriers and make changes to protect themselves and build resilience. Settlement services were key to employment, recognising women's circumstances, valuing their prior skills, and serving as a stepping stone to long-term employment. Many women worked in supportive roles, engaging with and enriching the lives of their cultural communities. Consequently, most stories of connection focused on social bonds with others from similar backgrounds, rather than with local New Zealanders.

6.4 Navigating Interconnecting Responsibilities

All women in this study faced competing priorities that influenced how they interacted with people and places. This section highlights some of these responsibilities, including employment and caring for family members both locally and overseas, and the impact this had on the women's sense of inclusion.

The women often referred to New Zealanders as if they were a separate group from themselves. This dichotomy was despite all the women having residency and being referred to as 'New Kiwis' (see Chapter 5). The participants instead formed a separate group from New Zealanders, associating with people from the same ethnicity, former countries, refugee backgrounds, or religions. When asked whether they would classify themselves as 'Kiwi,' two participants said they had received equal opportunities, and two other women said they

now felt they were New Zealanders. However, one of the women who said yes to calling herself a Kiwi was apprehensive. She concluded that if Kiwis were good people and she was a good person, then yes, she was a Kiwi. Another woman said she did not feel like a New Zealander, nor was she a stranger in the country. The last participant, Rose, did not confirm a yes or no, and instead spoke about New Zealanders being kind but reserved, and referred to the hardship of when she first arrived:

They [New Zealanders] don't ask you "Where are you going?", "What are you doing?" But at the same time, it's hard because [there is] not lots of communication. I only know some of my colleagues here. I wish I had Kiwi friends. But I don't have. First time when I came [here], I didn't have language but now I have language. I'm busy with my life. So, I have to go [to] my job, take my kids to school and look after my little one, look after my family because my family come from Afghanistan. So, I have to take my Mum to the doctor if she needs, uh, I need to buy every week stuff for them, food, whatever they need. (Rose)

In explaining her experiences as a newcomer to the country, Rose described the hardships she faced. These hardships included not knowing English and having no social connections, which made settling difficult as it affected her inclusion and identity as a New Zealander. Being a New Zealander was something she could only claim if she spent time with Kiwis. Rose wished to have 'Kiwi friends' but found they were not forthcoming with her. The language difference had initially prevented communication, but after improving her English, she was now hindered by a lack of time for connections. Like all the women, Rose had many responsibilities in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, including working and caring for family and friends. As Rose had spent more time living in Aotearoa/NZ than her extended family, she acted as a caregiver, helping them transition into the new culture. This role involved assisting with translation, shopping, and driving, as well as dedicating time to daily routines, calling her family throughout the day to ensure they were safe and offering help if needed. As stated earlier, she also cared for people within her faith community. Rose was bonded to Kirikiriroa/Hamilton by her responsibilities and connections to family and her ethnic community, rather than by connections to New Zealanders and their culture.

Supporting the family was a significant component of the other participant's time. Similar to Rose, Athena, who had lived in the country for less than two years, found caring for her

family had tied her to Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. Despite responsibilities, Athena was contemplating the next phase of her life and career. During interviews, the women outlined what their dream job would be if they could choose. Athena excitedly outlined a ten- to fifteen-year career plan and her desire to pursue university studies as the next step. She had three career aspirations: to be an artist, a business owner, and a dentist. During the interviews, it became clear that she had to consider her future and weigh her responsibilities carefully. Athena shared her everyday responsibilities:

So, like, I have a lot of responsibilities at home, like at school, my sisters, so my [phone] number is a caregiver for them, because my mum cannot speak English. So, everything like that, email address, everything... just pops up to my email address. So, like I have to look after everything sometimes, like my mum is not feeling well I have to book appointments for doctors, like regularly she visits doctors... I have to take my sisters to [the dentist] until they are 18 [years old]. So, their teeth should be okay. (Athena)

There were barriers to Athena's career progression, largely because she was the eldest sibling and the most fluent in English, which meant she served her family in a caretaking role. Athena shared that she was the emergency contact for her family, and she liaised with services, booking appointments and ensuring her family attended them. Athena put in a lot of planning for these everyday activities to support the whole family. She kept a record of their appointments and activities on a large calendar in her room, making sure her younger siblings utilised their free healthcare until they turned 18. Her planning was a juxtaposition to her experience in Pakistan, where she reflected, "I didn't even know what the price of a potato was? I didn't know the price of anything because my mum was bringing everything." Her mother had been providing for her family, but in Aotearoa/NZ, responsibilities shifted. Navigating a new country and taking on these responsibilities was difficult for Athena, especially when most of her age group were at university or working. Nevertheless, Athena's family were becoming increasingly independent and confident as they became familiar with their surroundings. As a result of more time settling in, her mother was now independently catching the bus and buying groceries, her youngest siblings were in school, and Meena was driving, working, and studying.

Interconnections between multiple roles and responsibilities were also apparent in Kaia's life. She had a triple burden of reproductive, productive and community roles. Paid work gave Kaia independence and the means to provide for her family. In Colombia, Kaia had been proud to be a nurse, but her dream to become a nurse in Aotearoa/NZ was unattainable because of language and financial barriers to having her qualifications recognised or to retraining. As highlighted earlier, she secured a different role as a receptionist through a community member and shared that the reason she took the role was to provide security for her family:

Um, 'cause that time my mum was sick with cancer. And so, I need to have a job to send her money. And, I was desperate to get out of Work and Income (sighs). (Kaia)

Kaia emphasised her desire not to rely on benefits and to be able to send financial support to her family in Colombia. She believed it was no one's problem but hers and that no one would come to help if she needed it. She shared that this had always been her mentality, born from her previous experiences needing to be resilient and independent, and stated that if one does not work, one does not have money to live. Kaia likely did not want to trust people or systems because she had been left in "fighting mode" as she fought to ensure her family's security.

Alice described herself as a 'busy lady' who enjoyed social outings in Rwanda before relocating to Aotearoa/NZ. In Rwanda, she worked online and, after hours, engaged in various activities such as going to the gym, having dinner with friends, visiting lakes, and spending weekends out with her fiancé, now her husband. Alice expressed a sense of missing social interaction, but her priorities had shifted since becoming a wife and mother, limiting her time for socialising while in paid employment. During an interview at Hamilton Lake, I was surprised to learn that she had never visited the area, as so many in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton used the space. She enjoyed the lake's tranquillity and, after the interview, walked around it with her husband and child. It was apparent she had limited chances for leisure in the city, which affected her ability to get out and explore her surroundings.

The women faced numerous interconnected priorities as they adjusted to their new lives. Many of these priorities involved responsibilities to care for and protect their families. With their social circles reduced in their new homes, most women occupied caring roles, primarily

by acting as translators for their family members. However, while helping their families and working, these additional responsibilities increased daily stress, and most women found it difficult to allocate time for themselves or to develop broader social connections.

6.5 Everyday Activities for Connection

All participants maintained local connections with family, friends, colleagues, and neighbours, while also extending relational bonds beyond their localities into transnational communities. Some family members or in-laws joined them locally, but many had resettled or travelled irregularly, making contact difficult. Being part of a culturally similar community helped the women express their culture and stay connected to their heritage. This section first examines cross-border connections, then digital links, and finally local community gatherings and events that helped the women connect with others and maintain their identities.

In living between two or more worlds, the women did not want to be forgotten and could not forget their overseas communities. Many of the women faced the emotional toll of feeling like they left loved ones behind in unsafe conditions because of war, political instability and different types of persecution. Consequently, the women regularly connected with their friends and families overseas through daily phone and video calls, messages, pictures, and money transfers. In this context, Alice and Rose expressed their regular contact with family overseas:

Yeah, I used to have phone calls. Like every day calling my mum ‘cos I love them so much. I can't sleep without knowing if she's doing okay. Always on the phone asking: how is mum, how is mum, how is mum? (Alice)

But when I get some free time, afternoon or evening, I call my sisters in Afghanistan... I ask them if they need money or if they need anything. Sometimes I can't send them money, I just talk to them. They feel better, they are saying, "I'm happy here, okay." And then I ask them how they are, because of the situation before, it was the worst. Yeah, I was SO worried about them. (Rose)

Regular contact with family and friends was maintained to ensure they were safe and well and to help the women determine the best way to give assistance. The distance from family

made the women feel isolated and lonely, so regular phone and video calls helped create a sense of connection in the absence of physical proximity. Concerns for their loved ones consistently prevented the women from feeling settled or entirely comfortable in their local areas, as they were always worried about loved ones or feeling guilty for being in a safer environment and unable to help. While Alice was the one calling her family from Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, she had originally been on the receiving end of calls from her sister, who had moved to the city first. Alice's sister had prewarned her about what to expect when living in Aotearoa/NZ, which included:

Everything about this country. Everything about our community. And when we just landed here, it wasn't like the first time seeing so many things because we already heard about them so many times. She helped to connect us with people like Congolese people here. And... our caseworker, also helped us to connect with Congolese. It was easy. (Alice)

Alice drew on insights from living in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton through her sister, who had moved to the city before her, and from her caseworker. These contacts helped her build connections within her Congolese community through introductions. Alice also received practical information from her sister about booking doctors' appointments, as she had not had a GP in Rwanda, and about the rental system, including how expensive renting was. The knowledge she gained through long-distance phone calls and in-person meetings once in the country helped Alice become familiar with her new home. Ultimately, this familiarity eased her anxieties and the transition, helping her feel at home more easily.

The women from Afghanistan and the DRC revealed that small groups would visit newcomers' homes to introduce themselves, exchange contact details, bring gifts, and explain life in Aotearoa/NZ. Rose was proud that Afghan cultural traditions of welcoming continued in her new country. She expressed, "They're just trying to support. This is the thing I really love: my culture." While Athena and Meena shared their experiences of receiving these visits, which continued for a few weeks after they arrived:

[Families came] for greetings and for welcoming [us] in the airport. And when we went to our relatives' home, there were more than twenty people there. Just coming and saying welcome... And when we came here [to the house]. So, it's in our culture,

we have a custom that when people are coming from overseas, we go with sweets, something like that, and say welcome... They are always coming and with some fruits, or some of them just bring some blankets, something like that. (Athena)

Athena also noted the hospitality of the Afghan people, who welcomed her family both at the airport and in their home. Her family were given gifts of fruit, sweets, and household furnishings. Athena highlighted the importance of greeting other Afghan families, explaining that because their house was small, they could not invite many people, which upset some community members who questioned why they were not invited. As shared in Chapter 5, the size of their house was not an issue for her family from an aesthetic standpoint, but it did affect their cultural custom of hospitality, as it did for Alice.

Other digital platforms for creating and maintaining transnational networks, in addition to regular calls, included WhatsApp and Facebook. Both the Congolese and Afghan communities used WhatsApp groups to arrange community meetings and to broadcast news of new arrivals to Aotearoa/NZ. These WhatsApp groups provided access to a local community through simple, culturally relevant updates in a shared language. Annie articulated through the group, “We can discuss about anything not going well”, and Rose stressed, “For example, if someone needs anything... or finding about how to study in New Zealand, they always have a group call... They’re helping each other.” The groups provided a support network where others of the same nationality could converse. Moreover, digital communication was used in other ways. Athena’s workplace used WhatsApp to advertise events for local youth, and Kaia used Facebook to interact with her Colombian and broader Latin American culture. Kaia followed Facebook pages to find local Latin American music and dance events. Through these event pages, she would meet people from Colombia, Chile, and Ecuador and dance salsa with them. Kaia and her husband would also teach others, not from Latin America, how to dance these dances so that she could “feel back home. Just for that little night.” Additionally, many of the women used YouTube to learn English, listen to cultural music, watch instructional videos, and, in social settings, watch TV series in their first language with family and friends. Therefore, through digital devices, relationships with people and culture were maintained.

The participants also connected with people through attending events, places of faith and hobbies, many of which were cultural experiences. Rose shared about Islam and about a

community of Muslims she was in contact with in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, who gathered for companionship at religious festivals and events, often around food. She referred to celebrating Eid⁷ and making time to see and bless one another. Rose shared that the Muslim community would meet to discuss needs, from large projects around the mosque to smaller needs, such as where to get Halal meat. Both Annie and Alice also maintained a strong faith, attending and singing in church regularly. Annie shared that her church was diverse, with Congolese, Samoan, and Māori members. Annie was also connected to music in private spaces, and I observed her family watching worship videos on YouTube at home while doing other activities like braiding hair. She shared, “I like singing. Dancing. Yeah, our cultural dance... Every Saturday we go to church. I sing in choir. But dancing when we are here at home. Sometimes during the night, evening, we just sing.” Alice also spoke about church, saying she spent much of her Sunday attending a Congolese service with her family, then sharing food with friends. She excitedly shared that she liked dressing up for church and so missed her access to the bold, vibrant-hued fabrics she would buy in Africa, which could be tailored into dresses, skirts and head wraps.

Kaia also spoke about dressing up and about memorable events where she felt connected to her culture, including a Christmas parade where she wore a traditional Colombian dress and danced. She mentioned, “And everyone was like (mimics), ‘Oh my God, that's so beautiful! Look at them!’... We were having fun showing them our culture. So, it felt very nice and welcoming.” Being able to dress in her traditional clothing, dance, and be complimented by strangers was appreciated by Kaia and brought her joy and a sense of being accepted. Fishing and swimming also brought Kaia joy and a sense of acceptance. She frequented the Waikato River and local lakes, including Lake Karapiro⁸, with her family and met like-minded people there. When Athena and Meena had time, their hobbies for self-expression were art. Athena developed her skills by taking local painting classes and learning design software while studying at Waikato College. Since childhood, she had also been interested in self-improvement tools, such as reading and listening to psychologists, to prepare for a better life. She kept motivational quotes, reminders, and goals around her room to “have a successful life.” These topics motivated her, helped her prepare for the future, and supported her dreams. Meena, who had packed her art materials on her flight to Aotearoa/NZ, often drew and

⁷ Eid al-Fitr – An Islamic festival celebration that marks the end of the month-long fasting of Ramadan.

⁸ Karapiro, an artificial reservoir lake on the Waikato River 40-45 minutes from Hamilton

painted portraits, frequently exploring emotions. Her art connected her to others, as she had recently begun her first commission, which encouraged her to continue expressing herself. While some of these activities were introspective, they helped the women understand their emotions and motivations, enabling them to express themselves more clearly and to find like-minded people who understood their worlds.

All the women maintained strong connections with their overseas communities through digital communication and with their local communities through cultural traditions and hobbies. These connections helped them stay anchored to their roots despite physical separation. These transnational ties provided emotional support, practical assistance, and cultural continuity, easing the women's transition and fostering a sense of belonging in their new environment. The women adapted to their surroundings by finding new ways to connect with activities they loved.

6.6 Conclusion

Settlement organisations are essential in helping former refugee women with their initial arrival, promoting long-term community building, employment skills and opportunities, and cultural connections that are often absent elsewhere. The women's experiences emphasise the importance of workplace relationships, social bonds, and cultural ties for integration.

Although most found it difficult to develop deep friendships outside the settlement centres. These challenges were partly caused by competing priorities, as the women struggled to find time for themselves amid family and community responsibilities. Instead, strong bonds were maintained with transnational co-ethnic communities that served as vital support networks, providing emotional support and a sense of belonging for the women.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion and conclusion that responds to the research questions of this thesis. This thesis set out to explore the settlement narratives of women from refugee backgrounds who have lived and worked in Aotearoa/NZ, with an emphasis on understanding the factors that contribute to a sense of inclusion and belonging. The earlier chapters have situated the research within the broader literature on migration and refugee movement. Chapter 1 briefly outlined the resettlement processes that can protect refugees from persecution, including through settlement in Aotearoa/NZ. As the number of refugees arriving in Aotearoa/NZ continues to grow following forced displacement, in which women have unique experiences, this study advocates for a deeper understanding of women's settlement journeys. Such understanding aims to support efforts that enable those from refugee backgrounds to thrive in the Kirikiriroa/Hamilton region. Specific pathways to settlement in Aotearoa/NZ and the region of Kirikiriroa/Hamilton were explored in Chapter 3.

To facilitate understanding of settlement, conceptual ideas centred on 'belonging' were explored in Chapter 2. This study presented belonging as both an emotional feeling and a connection to group and place. Concepts of belonging involve emotional, relational, and sensory connections to people and places, both locally and across borders, which may influence the construction of home and inclusion within a new socio-cultural and economic environment (Antonsich, 2010; Kale et al., 2019; Tyler, 2024). Feeling at home is synonymous with belonging. The factors influencing this feeling were explored in this study and found to include inclusionary or exclusionary processes from the receiving society that needed to be considered (Antonsich, 2010; Marlowe, 2018). These include the distance from former homes and the degree of freedom to express one's identity (Greenbank, 2020; Marlowe et al., 2014). Additionally, safety and security are essential for belonging, a key theme of results in both Chapters 5 and 6, which link to findings by Hage (1997), Innes (2016), Lee, (2024), and Simpson and Simpson (2024) raised in Chapter 2. Safety and security are needs that persist well beyond resettlement and encompass both material (physical protection, housing, financial protection) and emotional (support and psychological wellbeing) conditions.

This research used a qualitative methodology, drawing on ethnography, to gather rich data on the settlement experiences of six participants from diverse backgrounds living in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, as outlined in Chapter 4. Methods included observations in everyday activities and semi-structured interviews conducted in locations chosen by the participants. Additionally, photovoice served as a creative tool through which the women depicted their personal stories. All but one of the six participants initially fled to neighbouring countries (see Table 5) due to conflict, human rights violations, and violence, seeking greater safety, and remained there until they were granted residency in Aotearoa/NZ. At the time of the research, the women had resided in Aotearoa/NZ for varying periods, ranging from under one year to eleven years.

By situating the women's individual experiences within broader theoretical frameworks, this study will now discuss the most significant findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6 to understand the wider meaning and implications of the participants' stories within the context of existing literature. The chapter will highlight how belonging in a new society is shaped through the interplay of social, cultural and economic factors. The first subsection discusses daily settling practices, including the support systems that facilitate connection and creation of home, and the role of social networks and cultural expressions in belonging. Then employment experiences are explained, emphasising the importance and challenges of employment for former refugees and how work is accessed and sustained through daily routines and support systems. The final section of this chapter will provide a conclusion that addresses the overall aim of this study, which was to understand the settlement narratives of women from refugee backgrounds in Aotearoa/NZ and to identify explicitly what made them feel more included in society.

7.2 How Former Refugee Women Create a Sense of Belonging in Their Everyday Settling

In this section, the research findings are synthesised with the rich evidence from existing literature to address Research Question 1, which sought to understand how a sense of belonging is created, maintained, and impacted in the everyday lives of women settling into Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. Drawing on the participants' visual and narrative accounts, results show that the women regarded belonging as existing on multiple levels—legal, social, cultural, physical, emotional, and symbolic—each shaping their experience in distinctive ways. The

discussion is divided into three subsections. The first subsection will cover the statutory and voluntary support systems available to former refugees to help them forge meaningful connections. This theme focuses on how legal status creates equal opportunities and fosters a sense of national identity. The second subsection presents ways in which social networks are built and sustained through everyday practices. The relationship between residency and social inclusion among local New Zealanders is explored, along with how identity and culture influence networks and are reworked in everyday settings. The third subsection focuses on the affective experiences that occur throughout everyday life, creating a sense of belonging, including those related to identity, place, and people.

7.2.1 Statutory and Voluntary Support Systems Available to the Women to Build a Sense of Connection to Their New Homes

Participants in this study found that formal statutory services and community-based voluntary initiatives profoundly fostered a sense of connection to new local places and people. The women accessed statutory support systems, including Immigration New Zealand, public healthcare, social welfare services, and education. The women also utilised voluntary support systems from non-governmental organisations and charities like the Red Cross, HMS Trust, and ROC, as well as faith-based groups. This subsection highlights how statutory services provide a base level of support, helping with initial arrival experiences. However, it was through voluntary support systems that a stronger emotional connection and integration with Aotearoa/NZ was felt, as explored in the second section.

Results of this study have shown that a sense of belonging was influenced by both statutory and voluntary systems, and by power relations beyond the women's control. Antonsich's (2010) theory of belonging proposed that personal, intimate feelings of belonging to a place can be acknowledged within the context of practices and discourses of socio-spatial inclusion or exclusion. Consistent with Antonsich's conceptualisation, my research revealed that participants encountered boundary discourses and practices rooted in institutional and societal power that affected their sense of belonging to their new home. Both exclusion and inclusion were evident at an institutional level during resettlement processes, where eligibility for belonging in a place was determined, and at a societal level, in how New Zealanders welcomed the women. At times, the participants felt like New Zealanders because they had the same access to government services as other New Zealanders, which made them feel

secure and connected. Other times, boundaries and practices like discrimination or a lack of recognition of past experiences caused the women to feel like outsiders and undervalued. Factors of inclusion/exclusion influence former refugees' sense of a place, and the findings highlight the importance of supportive policies and social environments that foster inclusion to promote integration and stable wellbeing.

At the institutional level, the UNHCR and the Aotearoa/NZ government played pivotal roles in shaping refugees' sense of belonging. By granting legal residency, institutions did more than issue documents; they officially recognised the right to remain, engage, and fully participate in society. The Aotearoa/NZ government works with the UNHCR through the Refugee Quota Programme (RQP), under which the UNHCR refers refugees identified in accordance with internationally recognised guidelines (Immigration New Zealand, 2018). While the UNHCR assesses and selects suitable candidates, the government commits to ensuring a seamless transition for newcomers by guiding them through essential steps, such as pre-health screenings, pre-departure interviews, and welcoming reception programmes that offer both practical support and orientation upon arrival (Immigration New Zealand, 2024c; UNHCR, 2023). For many participants, obtaining residency after these resettlement processes signified more than legal status, as it marked a symbolic milestone signalling their transition into a permanent home.

The participants viewed their residency as granting them the same national and participatory rights as other New Zealanders, forming a sense of connection to their new place. This observation is consistent with Yuval-Davis's (2011) claim that citizenship and residency encompass legal dimensions of inclusion. Core to these legal aspects was equality of outcomes and opportunities for former refugees. Through residency, opportunities included the rights to live, work, vote and access education indefinitely (UNHCR, 2023). Participants Athena and Meena, sisters from Afghanistan who had resided most of their lives in Pakistan, reflected that the right to education was especially important for them, given that it had been denied to them under Taliban rule. In line with Antonsich's (2010) theory of belonging, residency offered them a form of socio-spatial inclusion after periods without fundamental rights. Inclusion reinforced a sense of security and hope, enabling the women to imagine a future and, in turn, shaping their everyday experiences. The stability of residency also helped them build long-term relationships with people, local places, and careers. A sense of stability

was crucial, given the reasons for leaving their countries and the often unsafe journeys experienced, including a lack of legal status in the countries they fled to.

Since this study began in 2023, the NZRRS—a government framework implemented to support settlement experiences—has shifted its focus to align with former refugees' goals for belonging (Office of the Minister of Education, 2023). The updated, more inclusive strategy now includes many pathways to settlement for refugees, as stated in Chapter 3, including the Family Support Category, in addition to RQP individuals. This approach allows more people to access settlement programmes formally. Despite receiving equal residency rights, Athena and Meena, who were sponsored by a former refugee family member before the NZRRS changes, experienced disparities. Unlike those arriving through the RQP, the women did not receive state-arranged housing or assistance from a resettlement case officer. Consequently, responsibility for securing housing, accessing services, and navigating unfamiliar cultural and societal systems fell largely on their family, despite limited English proficiency. In the absence of government support, they received voluntary support from an Afghan community member. By extending settlement support beyond quota refugees, the revised NZRRS addresses inequalities in access to support and ensures that practical resources align with formal residency rights.

All participants recalled the warm welcome and support they received from voluntary agencies such as the Red Cross, ROC, and HMS Trust. While research focusing on overarching governmental policies and strategies in refugee settlement exists (such as Marlowe et al., 2024) considerably less reporting was found in this study on the role, challenges and opportunities of local organisations and charities in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. Nevertheless, my study found that local support centres are crucial for helping former refugees establish initial and ongoing connections, and that they should be recognised as a significant part of the process of making a home. The centres aimed to address gaps in support, aid successful settlement through education and social programs, and raise awareness among receiving communities (HMS Trust, 2024; ROC, n.d.). Kamri-McGurk (2012) found that many former refugee women appreciated volunteers and initiatives that linked host communities with refugee families, helping foster friendships. In my study, the centres embraced ethnic diversity and culture, bringing together migrants, volunteers, staff, and people from refugee backgrounds. Elliott and Yusuf (2014) suggested that co-ethnic communities reduce culture shock and enhance wellbeing. The participants reported that

volunteers and staff regularly offered support when they encountered exclusion, rejection, and discrimination elsewhere. The centres facilitated social bonding, enabling participants to 'get by' and strengthening intra-group ties through their services, as well as social bridging to 'get ahead', by developing new connections (Lancee, 2012; Ryan, 2011). Settlement centres also created additional learning and personal development opportunities, as discussed below (see 7.3). Together with community-based groups, such as places of worship, the centres' welcoming receptions fostered relational ties that helped women feel recognised, valued, and connected.

In answering Research Question 1, results highlight that statutory and voluntary systems are crucial for shaping former refugees' sense of belonging in Aotearoa/NZ by providing essential resources. Statutory services provide structural support for refugees in the areas of residence, welfare, and education. Once in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, voluntary and community organisations provide emotional support and daily connections, making settlement feel meaningful and inclusive. Permanent residency created stability and opportunities for long-term participation for the women, but integration is achieved not only through rights to access resources and to be legally part of a society, but also through equitable involvement and social engagement. Sustainable inclusion, therefore, depends on bridging institutional and relational support and networks, as discussed in the following subsection.

7.2.2 Understanding the Women's Social Networks and How These Are Built and Maintained in Their Everyday Practices

This subsection discusses the participants' social networks, focusing on how these connections were formed and maintained through daily interactions. The role of proactive engagement in Aotearoa/NZ society and how national and cultural identities influence the integration of former refugees is highlighted. The discussion covers developing social belonging through bonding with similar people and bridging with others, and through establishing lasting networks via refugee settlement support centres. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of transnational ties, maintained both digitally and face-to-face with friends and family, emphasising the support roles played by co-ethnic communities. Finally, this subsection emphasises the need for incorporating cultural practices into everyday life to strengthen and maintain community and family bonds.

Building and maintaining social networks were crucial for fostering a sense of belonging in a new society. Still, societal dynamics have often undermined efforts to accept and include former refugees (Antonsich, 2010). NZRRS's vision for former refugees to settle successfully in Aotearoa/NZ included outcomes of participation and inclusion, where former refugees were welcomed and accepted into their communities (Immigration New Zealand, 2024c). Supporting the importance of societal inclusion, authors like Nelson et al. (2016) argued that genuine social inclusion requires proactive efforts to operationalise acceptance and participation within a group, thereby opposing differences. Although the participants in my study were legally recognised as equals with other residents and citizens, echoing Yuval-Davis (2006) and Antonsich's (2010) concept of the politics of belonging, it was evident that societal structures influenced their sense of inclusion. All participants, Kaia from Colombia, Rose, Athena, Meena from Afghanistan, and Annie and Alice from the DRC, recalled experiences with locals that made them feel unsafe or unwelcome in their homes, neighbourhoods, and workplaces. The existing literature highlights that these experiences are not uncommon. Cheong et al. (2007) and Marlowe et al. (2014) raised that instead of welcoming environments, many migrants have faced racism, isolation, a lack of access to basic services and poor living conditions. These results indicate that, despite the NZRRS's stated aspirations for the receiving society to play a role in former refugees' participation and inclusion, in practice, exclusionary conditions and discrimination were still encountered.

Minimal everyday interactions with the receiving society deepened the perceived separation between groups outside of settlement centres. Participants, such as Rose, when reflecting on her early years in Aotearoa/NZ, remarked that although she was legally welcomed, the passive reception from locals and limited interactions hindered her sense of belonging. She expressed a strong desire to have local 'Kiwi' friends. However, Rose also longed to return to Afghanistan, wishing for greater safety there. Her initial experiences were likely shaped by her desire to return to a place where she truly felt at home. Kale et al. (2019) shared that a connection to a place is a social as well as a personal matter, and that feeling undesirable or rejected can spoil a sense of belonging. Although the participants' unwelcome experiences were irregular and beyond their control, these incidents significantly undermined their sense of inclusion, leaving them uncomfortable, particularly when their cultural values conflicted with the hostility they faced. As Poteet (2016) asserted, given the historical misrepresentation of refugees, the receiving society must play a crucial role in welcoming refugees. Building

integration should be a two-way effort between cultures, rather than a process driven solely by newcomers.

Although the women were officially recognised as ‘New Kiwis’⁹, only some participants described themselves as New Zealanders; most identified as migrants or refugees, distinct from those who had resided in Aotearoa/NZ for most of their lives. As Antonsich (2010) stated, the perceived difference between the self and the host society often hinders the ability to settle and feel a true sense of belonging. Participants highlighted the coexistence of diverse cultural groups, though some, like Kaia, expressed concern about the limited visibility and representation of cultures like her Colombian culture. The women largely maintained their distinct cultural identities. This distinction reflects existing research on social bonding versus bridging, where stronger connections form within co-ethnic communities because of mutual loyalties, while links to outsiders, like acquaintances and strangers, tend to be weaker, characterised by lower trust and connection (Cheung & Phillimore, 2013; Elliott & Yusuf, 2014; Gericke et al., 2018; Lubbers, 2021; Ryan, 2011). A greater sense of social belonging arose in communities of shared experience, with participants relating more to those from their ethnic, religious, or cultural backgrounds, including family, former home-country communities, and other refugees.

An exception to the narratives of separation between groups of people emerged when discussing settlement support centres. These centres have created spaces where multiple cultural groups interact and build connections across diverse communities. Such networks are vital for achieving integration goals (Lancee, 2012). Findings from both my interviews and volunteering indicated that the settlement providers (ROC, HMS Trust, and Red Cross) fostered long-lasting networks. Settlement providers’ support extended well beyond structured government support of up to twelve months (Immigration New Zealand, 2024c). The settlement centres actively encouraged independence, facilitated local connections, and supported lifelong settlement through their initiatives (HMS Trust, 2024a). Staff and volunteers from diverse backgrounds collaborated with local communities in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, including emergency services and businesses, to help refugee-background families integrate into broader social networks. Feelings of familiarity, security,

⁹ A term for a New Zealander used by the New Kiwis Settlement Service to describe former refugees (HMS Trust, 2024b)

community, and hope were fostered through regular programmes in areas such as health, financial security, and language development, as well as through communal events. These feelings of hope and familiarity are associated with a sense of home (Antonsich, 2010; Hage, 1997; Ratnam, 2018). The daily routine of attending programmes and services at designated sites, and regularly interacting with like-minded people, fostered emotional bonds and made the women feel included.

Although committed to building new lives in Aotearoa/NZ, the women continued to nurture strong transnational ties, keeping relationships with friends, family, and familiar places at the heart of their everyday lives, both locally and across borders. As Taylor (2013) identified, belonging contributes to deep emotional bonds with one's lost home while coexisting within the process of creating a new home. Similarly, Marlowe (2018) shared that tensions exist between transnational commitments, national belonging, and hybrid identities, as experiences often exist between 'here' and 'there'. In Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, the participants' intimate relationships, built over time on trust and support, were not easily formed or replaced, as they required vulnerability and mutual understanding. Therefore, maintaining frequent communication with loved ones was a daily routine for the women that eased emotional stress about loved ones living in unstable conditions. Without physical proximity, the participants regularly communicated with loved ones by phone, text, video, and money transfers. These findings corroborate Marlowe's (2018) literature, which described how refugees sustain a sense of belonging through their transnational networks, using digital communication and financial remittances to maintain emotional and social connections.

Moreover, upon arrival in Aotearoa/NZ, Congolese and Afghan participants described receiving warm welcomes from people from their countries of origin and from the neighbouring countries where they had sought refuge. These networks offered emotional and practical support through both digital and in-person interactions, including sharing guidance, gifts, meals and prayers. Living among others with similar backgrounds or refugee histories, as recommended by (Immigration New Zealand, 2024b), and staying in contact with overseas family, helped preserve these bonds. These findings reveal that transnational connections became a vital mechanism for experiencing a new place and maintaining stability, highlighting that belonging is as much about relationships as it is about a place.

Lastly, the women built and strengthened community and family bonds through practising cultural heritage, which was essential for maintaining identity. Participants emphasised passing on their culture to networks and other New Zealanders to foster a sense of belonging (also found in Fitzgerald (2017); Kamri-McGurk (2012)). During shared activities, participants expressed their culture with me through food served on special tableware, music, TV programmes, and photovoice, sharing treasured objects and places. Bhugra and Becker's (2005) research supports my findings in highlighting that assimilation can erode cultural identity as dominant societal values are adopted. For example, Rose worried her children might fully assimilate into frameworks distant from Afghanistan, where Islamic traditions influence life. Reflecting a shift away from acculturation as the primary marker of settlement, the NZRRS's 2023 update emphasises 'settlement outcomes' over 'integration outcomes,' focusing more on former refugees' needs and aspirations (Office of the Minister of Education, 2023). The significance of passing on cultural heritage was evident in stories from mothers, Kaia from Colombia, Rose from Afghanistan, and Alice from the DRC, whose children have spent all or most of their lives in Aotearoa/NZ (see Chapter 5). They maintained networks at home through rituals, language, and traditional celebrations, reinforcing cross-generational bonds. Outside their homes, they expanded their networks in community activities and places of worship, connecting with others from similar backgrounds and involving their children. Their children experienced multiple cultures. Baker et al., (2016) shared that children of refugee-background parents adapt quickly to the receiving society, particularly in education, language acquisition, and the formation of friendships. The women actively incorporated and shared cultural practices into their everyday routines, maintaining familial and communal ties with co-ethnic communities as they integrated into a new culture.

My findings show that while the New Zealand government's efforts aimed to promote participation and social inclusion of former refugees, societal power dynamics and discrimination and experiences of past traumas pose significant barriers. Responding to Research Question 1, building genuine social networks remains essential for creating a sense of belonging, yet former refugees can face challenges, such as passivity and social exclusion, within the receiving society. Social networks were built and maintained through settlement centres. These centres were a key aid in bridging gaps in social inclusion by providing opportunities to better understand systems and services, and by creating access to a range of social opportunities and connections. Many participants valued their social bonds, as they

enabled the sharing of cultural practices and provided familiarity that helped them integrate effectively into a new country.

7.2.3 Uncovering Affective Experiences That Create a Sense of Belonging Throughout the Everyday

Conversations with the participants revealed that sensory experiences and material objects that embodied memories were significant to their process of settling into Aotearoa/NZ. The following subsection explores how belonging was shaped through affective experiences and physical interactions that linked the women with their environments and culture. Emotional bonds with former homes continued with positive memories of places that helped establish connections to the surroundings of their new homes. But negative memories also emerged and were linked to trauma and losses of earlier homes. Recognising and maintaining cultural traditions served as anchors of continuity and familiarity through embodied practices—hearing, smelling, touching, and seeing—part of daily cultural routines. Additionally, material cultural objects were little pieces of home that held meaningful memories and sentiments and were used to bridge different places.

Many participants expressed the cultural, historical, and personal significance of certain spaces for developing a sense of belonging and home. Spaces become places when they are physically and materially invested with affective, sensory associations, transforming them into sites of significance (Tyler, 2024). Places are defined by people and institutions that occupy them, but also by the interplay of symbolic meaning. In the process of crafting home, the participants drew on memories to connect with their present surroundings. As Kale et al. (2019) explained, the stimulation of senses evokes memories of places, allowing individuals to inhabit multiple places simultaneously and to form transnational or plurilocal place attachments. For women, senses such as sound, smell, texture, temperature, and sight often transported them back to their former homes. Hage's (1997) account of nostalgia as an affective building block for feeling at home corroborates my research, as it states that people draw on specific situations of the past to connect with the present. For the women in my study, connections were not just to people but also to landscapes like beaches, rivers, hills, and to the smells of cooking and water, the sounds of traffic and silence, as well as activities like dance and football. In many cases, nostalgia fostered a sense of belonging, bridging and

comparing multiple places, including the old and the new homes, thereby activating connections through shared similarities.

The mediation of memories between places also involved a sense of loss, homesickness, and longing for safety and opportunity. Antonsich (2010) argued that homesickness is inevitable, as sentiments are an unavoidable aspect of migration. As Kale et al. (2019) noted, former refugees must mediate the past, present, and future to regain a sense of security and manage their grief. Most women in my study generally sensed that Aotearoa/NZ (as a place and its people) was safe. Yet some feelings from past traumas affected their sense of feeling safe and, therefore, their ability to settle. These observations can be compared with Lee's (2024) findings on the affective dimensions of 'fear of crime', which consist of emotive responses to the perceived prospect of victimisation. These fears can manifest as ongoing concern for future harm, physical reactions to immediate threats, and lower-level emotions tied to uncertain future events (Lee, 2024). The women discussed their lower-level emotions regarding employment and education, and some shared concerns about reactions to potential physical harm and threats. Alice gave an example of the native bush directly outside her residence, where she felt a heightened sense of insecurity, and compared this area to hazardous sites in her former country, where people hid before attacks (Chapter 5). Therefore, the stimulation of senses brought forth a mixture of feelings as past, present and future were mediated.

Affective experiences informed the women's negotiations of identity and belonging, emerging from the recognition, expression, preservation, and communication of cultural traditions and histories. The role of culture in settlement, particularly in relation to identity and belonging, is well documented in migrant and refugee literature (Ager & Strang, 2008; Antonsich, 2010; Baker et al., 2016; Berry et al., 2006; Longhurst et al., 2009). Baker et al. (2016) described identity as learned, practised, and sustained through culture, which serves as a toolkit for adaptation. Marlowe (2018) emphasised that cultural markers are common symbols that reinforce and construct national identities. Antonsich (2010) highlighted that autobiographical and cultural factors—memories, histories, activities, and family ties—collectively form identities and are part of place-belongingness. In my study, the women's histories and cultural expressions helped shape their identities, enabling them to navigate displacement and settlement. Practising culture also fostered a sense of security by protecting identities amid change.

The cultural practices of the participating women revealed a strong connection between sensory experiences and the creation of home, as they aimed to preserve and share their heritage in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. They also sought recognition and acceptance of their histories. This connection between daily cultural practices and sensory experiences resonated with existing research by Hage (1997); Kale et al. (2019b); Longhurst et al. (2009); and Ratnam (2018). The participants incorporated cultural practices into both intimate, personal settings, such as homes and small groups, and larger communal spaces, including places of worship and settlement centres. Hage (1997) conceptualised home as an affective construct, grounded in the pillars of security, familiarity, community, and hope, and as shaped by homely feelings. Ratnam (2018) emphasised that comforting sensory experiences are linked to becoming familiar with home, which aids in understanding experiences of the self and the world. Likewise, my findings showed that cultural practices and traditions helped build emotional foundations, fostering comfort, familiarity, and community that anchored women to local and broader places internationally. Drawing on memories and learned behaviours to perform everyday activities was especially helpful in the early stages of settlement, as it placed the women between past and present, and eased culture shock and feelings of loss.

Similarly, Simpson and Simpson (2024) concluded that daily practices are inherently bodily and sensorial, impacting the body, self, and inhabited spaces. Participants' daily routines included a variety of activities that impacted them and their spaces. The practices encompassed music, television, dance, cooking, eating, clothing, reading, language, and hospitality, which became essential sites for remembering and transmitting culture. Recognition of their heritage and the means to sustain practices encouraged hope and affirmed their place in the wider community. For example, Rose would teach Latin dance to non-Latino people in social settings (Chapter 6). Through these cultural practices, the women engaged multiple senses, producing positive feelings and fostering inclusion toward people and places, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging.

Material culture also played a crucial role in preserving the women's identity, memory, and sense of belonging in their settlement. Material culture for the women consisted of physical items considered central to their identity. Parkin (1999) observed that during rapid flight from a place, private mementoes might replace interpersonal relationships as repositories of sentiment and cultural knowledge, carrying socio-cultural identity into resettlement.

Therefore, mementoes are tangible possessions that serve as cultural expressions, including songs, dances, and rituals, as well as objects that act as containers of identity. In Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, belongings and cultural expressions helped women maintain continuity. Having lost belongings, careers, and access to familiar people and places during movement, participants used objects in cultural practices to preserve elements of their identities. These served as bridges to reconnect with their former homes and families and to foster social ties with others from different backgrounds. As found also in Kamri-McGurk's (2012) findings on Burmese women in Aotearoa/NZ, weaving was used to keep traditions alive and express culture to others. Pathak and Karmakar (2022) described those who have suffered trauma would use “material memory” to preserve stories and histories into objects that act as tangible markers of the distant lands. Further, McCarthy's (2020) studies on homeless women and material objects demonstrated that material culture enabled personalisation, control and comfort in otherwise alienating environments. Cultural practices highlighted the affective role of objects, evoking memories and familiarity and maintaining ties across different places and times.

This study adds to research on material culture by Parkin (1999), McCarthy (2020), Pathak and Karmakar (2022), as mentioned above, but concentrates on creating a home rather than focusing on flight or homelessness. As participants were separated from loved ones and communities during their movement to other countries, objects held emotional and cultural significance, reflecting their sense of self, home, and comfort across countries. Cultural belongings included items from their former countries, such as art, clothing, and cooking utensils, as well as those acquired in Aotearoa/NZ, such as religious books, furnishings, streaming international programmes, and foodstuffs, often sourced through community networks (see Chapter 5). The women also discussed treasured objects that they longed for (such as Alice's sofa in Chapter 5), but could not access because of financial limitations or supply issues.

Material objects included clothing, cooking utensils, henna, and rugs, and carried deep symbolic and emotional significance. The objects acted as vessels of movement, transporting culture, memory and meaning between “there” (former homes) and “here” (Aotearoa/NZ). Similar to Parkin's (1999) and McCarthy's (2020) findings, these objects fostered continuity and connection in the absence of loved ones, aiding a sense of home through sensory experiences. Personal belongings not only preserved cultural heritage but also facilitated

integration by incorporating new items and practices acquired in Aotearoa/NZ. Examples of adaptation and continuity were given by Kaia, who socialised locally through Colombian dance and clothing, and by Athena and Meena, who bought a dining table alongside rugs to sit, eat, and socialise (See Chapter 5). In this context, culture was seen as “mementoes of the mind” (Parkin, 1999), including cultural expressions such as dances and language, as well as material objects. Remembering and expressing culture through everyday activities and objects was articulated in social and personal processes that anchored identity, sustained wellbeing, and bridged old and new homes, despite the distance.

Responding to Research Question 1, the women’s sense of belonging was shaped by affective connections to memory, culture, and place. Memories and nostalgia strengthened these connections by highlighting similarities between the past and present, but also served as reminders of lost possessions, people, and places. Adverse affective experiences included past traumas affecting belonging, sometimes heightening fears and insecurity, which in turn influenced how some women adapted to new environments. Simultaneously, key elements of belonging were identity and reliance on cultural and autobiographical factors, which helped establish a sense of security. Belonging was maintained through the preservation and sharing of traditions, fostering recognition within society. Recreating cultural practices and engaging with meaningful objects provided continuity, comfort, and community through both local and international connections.

7.3 Factors That Give Women in Employment a Sense of Inclusion

This section addresses Research Question 2 by exploring the potential factors that have influenced the women’s sense of inclusion in the workplace. The subsections integrate observations and evidence from interviews about personal experiences in seeking and obtaining paid employment in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, and frame these within the participants’ broader perspectives on their workplace experiences overseas. I draw on findings from the literature on inclusionary and exclusionary practices in refugee employment, and my own insights from volunteering at settlement centres that supported participants’ employment. The discussion is divided into two parts: first, focusing on the participants’ employment experiences; second, highlighting how the support services have facilitated their access to

work. Both discussions emphasise the significance of employment for positive settlement experiences.

7.3.1 Understanding the Women's Paid Employment Experience

The participants' employment must be understood within the context of their often-busy schedules, which involved family, community, educational, and settlement responsibilities. All participants dedicated time to caregiving for family members, both locally through practical assistance and some globally through emotional and financial support. These findings align with global data on women's uneven workload, balancing reproductive, community, and productive work (Moser, 1989), and local findings that more women than men perform unpaid work (Stats NZ, 2025a), which often create unrecognised burdens (Cornwall, 2000). For instance, as stated in Chapter 6, Athena, who lived in Aotearoa/NZ for less than two years, had prioritised establishing her family's future over her career goals, despite having long-term career aspirations. Similarly, Kaia, Rose, and Alice worked to support their children while managing paid jobs. In this context, this subsection examines their previous paid roles, employment in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, and workplace inclusion and exclusion, including credential devaluation and the significance of language skills for employment.

During interviews, participants' stories indicated that they were thankful to have legal employment, given the difficulties in securing it and the benefits it offered (as discussed later); however, none of the women were satisfied with or committed to their jobs in the long term. This study selected participants who held current paid work positions. Their roles included both permanent and fixed-term contracts, ranging from part-time to full-time. Previous surveys on women's employment conducted in Aotearoa/NZ revealed that nationwide, nearly two-thirds of women work within four industries: social assistance and healthcare, retail and accommodation, administrative and support services, and education and training (Ministry for Women, 2025). Locally in Waikato, women's occupations predominantly occurred in healthcare and tertiary education, with more women than men working in administrative and clerical, sales, and community and personal service roles (Stats NZ, 2025a). Consistent with these statistics, three participants worked in education and community roles: Rose, in a fixed-term, part-time translator position at a school; Annie, as a community development officer; and Athena, in a fixed-term, part-time youth worker role.

Kaia worked in administration and clerical healthcare as a full-time receptionist, and Meena worked as a part-time kitchen porter. Lastly, Alice worked full-time in a factory as a quality checker. Their roles largely aligned with findings on women's work in Aotearoa/NZ, highlighting that the segregation of women's work can lead to women being in insecure, undervalued, and underpaid work (Ministry for Women, 2025).

The women's narratives highlighted barriers many former refugees face when seeking employment in a new country, including a lack of recognition for their past work and experiences. Many women struggled to secure long-term roles that truly matched their passions. To start a career in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, they adjusted their work preferences by broadening their job search to include a wider range of roles. A key barrier to obtaining work that aligned with their interests was the lack of recognition of their credentials, which made it challenging to pursue fulfilling careers. Refugees often struggle to find meaningful work despite relevant qualifications, as many overseas qualifications require additional training for recognition (de Vries et al., 2023; Kamri-McGurk, 2012; Marlowe, 2018; Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2021). Comparable issues were observed in economies similar to Aotearoa/NZ. Tomlinson (2010) highlighted the universality of gender inequality in both paid and unpaid work. Tomlinson's study discovered that the professional qualifications and experience of refugee women were not officially recognised in the UK. Aligning with Tomlinson, not having qualifications recognised was particularly evident for some participants in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. Kaia had worked hard as a nurse before resettlement, a role requiring extensive training. However, she now worked as a medical receptionist and could not attempt to requalify because of the time and financial costs involved. Alice had advanced to a project manager role but was now working in a factory to support her family and was dissatisfied with her job. These stories give insight into the systemic labour-market barriers that prevent former refugee women from securing roles that match their qualifications, leading many to accept lower-skilled, lower-paid positions to gain local experience.

Evident in Kaia and Alice's stories was a sense of purpose and pride in their former employment, yet the lack of recognition and devaluation of previous skills impacted their sense of identity, causing exclusion. Both women had held respected roles in society that affirmed their identities as hardworking, high-achieving women (see Chapter 6). A similar pattern appeared in my study as in Tomlinson's (2010) research, showing that a lack of

recognition of qualifications left former refugees marginalised in terms of income, age, and status, leading to feelings of being outsiders when trying to restart their careers. In the context of unemployment, Ibañez and Lopez (2019) found that negative emotions can damage one's identity and self-narrative, further highlighting the emotional and social challenges faced by marginalised groups. Reflecting Ibañez and Lopez (2019) and Tomlinson's (2010) findings, my study shows that the same phenomenon occurs in underemployment. In my study, the devaluation of expertise led to disappointment, frustration, and rejection, as many women felt stagnant in their employment, which in turn affected their professional and personal identities. They yearned for something more and envisioned their ideal careers during interviews. Beneria et al. (2015) stated that decent employment should enhance women's self-esteem, power, liberation, and autonomy, yet this was not happening for some women.

Findings from the literature suggest that decent work helps reduce aid dependency and poverty levels (International Rescue Committee, 2019) and has positive effects on individuals, including empowering women and improving health (Rydzik & Anitha, 2020; Shishehgar et al., 2017). However, in Aotearoa/NZ, participants who moved into lower-status roles lost opportunities to showcase their learned skills. Alice even experienced health issues related to her factory work (see Chapter 6). Reports have highlighted structural and attitudinal discriminatory and prejudicial feelings toward minority migrant and refugee groups (McCarthy, 2022), which threaten successful settlement (Marlowe et al., 2014) and social cohesion (Cheong et al., 2007). Both Kaia and Alice experienced belittling behaviour and discrimination in social settings within employment, while Rose noted that New Zealanders showed little interest in her life. This behaviour affected the women's sense of self, as being treated and perceived as inexperienced, 'stupid', or outsiders in workplaces, created a dissonance that left them feeling unseen, disconnected and disrespected. The perception of being 'something less' than they once were was echoed in many stories. Mackenzie-Davey and Jones (2020) similarly observed refugees' fears of being 'nothing' in their study, rooted in experiences of loss. In my research, the loss of work identities and the visibility of achievements meant that, rather than employment serving as a pathway to belonging, it functioned as a reminder of exclusion, where identities were questioned. Creating empowering workplaces and fostering understanding of refugee experiences are essential to addressing the impacts of loss and supporting effective integration and positive self-awareness among colleagues.

Strewn throughout the narratives on employment in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton was the subject of both English and first languages. Proficiency in English has consistently been a prerequisite for securing work. These findings are mirrored in the literature (Ager & Strang, 2008; Rezaei et al., 2021; UNHCR, 2002), with consensus that proficiency in the receiving country's language is central to integration and the most common barrier to employment. Locally in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, in de Vries et al.'s (2023) research, all participants with refugee backgrounds discussed how low English proficiency affected their entry into employment. As Tomlinson (2010) observed, employers can favour hiring candidates with greater local language ability over those with greater transferable skills but lower language ability. Based on observations, interviews, and my volunteering, it was concluded that all the participants had relatively advanced English compared with other former refugees. Many had gained this skill through consistent efforts such as studying abroad and attending local English classes. Hence, their education gave them an initial advantage over many others with less English proficiency. By repeating daily tasks, such as shopping or attending medical appointments, the women gradually enhanced their proficiency. Reception programmes strongly emphasised attending English lessons, highlighting their importance in employment (Immigration New Zealand, 2024c). Tensions arose because employers demanded strong English, but the women also relied on employment itself as a context for developing language skills with other English speakers while meeting practical needs such as earning an income.

The workplace then became a site of inclusion and exclusion because of these language issues, hindering job prospects due to limited confidence in English. Annie, from the DRC, hesitated to apply for jobs because she lacked confidence in her abilities. In comparison, Rose found that attending Wintec language classes increased her confidence and helped her meet other English learners with similar backgrounds. Kaia, however, was almost denied a job because her written English capabilities were not up to the expected standard, despite her experience and fluency in spoken English. Furthermore, once employed, Kaia experienced mocking from colleagues who teased her about her language skills, an incident that left her frustrated at a lack of sympathy for her situation (see Chapter 6). As Rezaei et al. (2021) argued, mutual respect builds social connections and promotes language development; Kaia's experience indicated that a lack of respect reinforced exclusion. Language was both a gateway to employment and a significant barrier that restricted opportunities. These insights emphasise the dual nature of language abilities in the employment experiences of former

refugees, as well as the importance of fostering patience, kindness, and cultural awareness at work to promote genuine inclusion.

Language abilities also facilitated belonging and connection. Speaking the same language improved the ability to engage in everyday life, form new friendships, and feel more confident in social settings. Most of the women had secured employment where they could converse in their first languages. Kaia had Spanish-speaking customers, while Athena, Annie, and Rose worked with people from their former countries. Alice was preparing to take on a similar role as a translator. These opportunities enabled the women to maintain their identities and feel more 'at home' in Hage's (1997) viewpoint, where home is imagined as a place with maximum communicative power grounded in shared language, morality, and values. When both English and the first language could be used, there was a greater likelihood of forming relationships. Inclusion did not require assimilation into English alone but could be improved by fostering linguistic diversity in the workplace.

In answering Research Question 2 in understanding women's experiences of paid employment, the participants' narratives revealed significant barriers to securing meaningful work. These barriers included systemic discrimination, attitudinal barriers, unrecognised credentials, and English proficiency. Despite being grateful for legal work opportunities, many adjusted their career aspirations and accepted lower-skilled jobs because of obstacles to securing work. Stories of women like Kaia and Alice exemplify how credential recognition issues and economic pressures have deterred them from pursuing their professional aspirations. Overall, these experiences underscore the need to improve recognition of overseas qualifications and to address gender and labour-market inequalities, thereby fostering inclusion and enabling refugee women to reach their full potential in the workforce.

7.3.2 Services Available Towards Finding Employment

This section builds on the discussion of women's employment journeys by synthesising insights from existing research and the study's findings, shedding light on the diverse services that help women find and retain employment. Participants' narratives highlight the pivotal role of government initiatives and charity programmes in creating employment opportunities.

Additionally, this sub-section emphasises how neighbourhood and community networks often served as vital sources of belonging and work support for many women.

Findings from this study emphasise that settling in Aotearoa/NZ is a lengthy and complex process, and that employment services play a vital role in fostering inclusion. Although pre-departure and early-stage orientation programmes that offer employment guidance exist, such as the Māngere Refugee Resettlement Centre's five-week reception programme, participants rarely mentioned these services. However, local community groups in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, such as the Red Cross, HMS Trust, and ROC, as well as educational institutions like Wintec, featured prominently in stories. These organisations provide tailored employment support. For example, the Red Cross's Pathways to Employment service assists individuals with career planning, training, CVs, cover letters, and job interviews (New Zealand Red Cross, n.d.-c). For Annie and Athena, Pathways to Employment boosted their confidence and provided networks they could not access on their own.

HMS Trust also delivered community settlement support to refugees under the government's annual quota system through its New Kiwis Settlement Services (see Chapter 3). The centre provided practical support helpful for workplace matters and skill development, including a driving school, leadership training, interpretation services, and community connection and engagement (HMS Trust, 2024b). Similarly, ROC has had similar programmes that included computer and education programmes, assistance with paperwork such as banking and Work and Income services, and supporting letters (ROC, n.d.). The centre also operated an entrepreneurship programme, offering comprehensive financial and strategic support to turn work ideas into reality (ROC, n.d.). Support services created opportunities for inclusion and skills development while recognising the challenges refugees face, but participants still faced persistent barriers, such as job rejections. This demonstrates that while the services could equip former refugees individually, especially with local knowledge, they could only go so far in addressing broader issues of employer attitudes and systemic change. This highlights the need for broader societal shifts to improve employment outcomes and refugee inclusion.

In addition to using the settlement support providers, some participants also worked with these organisations voluntarily and in paid positions. Volunteering was often the participants' first step towards employment and eased them into the Aotearoa/NZ labour market, as relationships were already established. Volunteering has enabled participants to gain exposure

to workplace systems and procedures, develop their English language abilities, and build networks and confidence through working with other former refugees. Recruiting former refugees into settlement support roles also benefited settlement providers, as the women brought lived experience rather than just theory. Lived experience, including cultural insights, linguistic skills, and empathy, informed their practical guidance to newcomers, which improves services. As Gardner et al. (2022) found in their study of women with refugee backgrounds in Australia, volunteering helped women gain local experience, increase their competitiveness for paid roles, and align with cultural and religious values of helping others. Participants, such as Rose and Annie, who ultimately secured paid roles as translators for their Afghan (Rose) and Congolese (Annie) communities, shared a desire to support and empower others to become more independent and integrated in Aotearoa/NZ. Having received support from individuals and settlement centres, Rose and Annie recognised the power of encouraging other women to take ownership of their settlement. In acting as mentors, they felt a sense of achievement from seeing other women thrive. Marlowe (2018) noted this link between employment and agency, which shifts the focus from traumatic experiences to gainful employment, and reflects an individual's ability to support themselves and others.

The women who worked with members of their own ethnic communities (Annie, Rose, Athena and occasionally Kaia) appeared to be more deeply connected to their broader society, as their roles required them to act as bridges between local systems and newcomers. Through supporting others in accessing services and navigating institutions, the participants not only expanded their own networks but also strengthened their confidence and knowledge of Aotearoa/NZ. Importantly, participants reported that positive employment experiences were mainly due to the intervention of settlement service providers, who acted as mediators, advocates and employers, rather than mainstream workplaces. This finding emphasises that employment can, in theory, promote inclusion, but it does not automatically achieve it. For inclusion to be meaningful, there needs to be greater organisational awareness beyond tokenistic diversity markers to recognise skills equitably, provide mentorship and social support, and foster culturally responsive environments that acknowledge personal histories and strengths.

Social networks served as bridges to employment and inclusion. Participants formed stronger bonds within their co-ethnic communities and among people embedded in migrant and

refugee communities through the settlement centres. These networks fostered a sense of inclusion and belonging for the women through emotional and practical support, such as when a Cuban woman recommended Kaia for a job (Chapter 6). Social resources are foundational assets, as they influence other resources (Poteet, 2016), such as cultural knowledge, language, and safety in a new environment (Rezaei et al., 2021), and they offer opportunities for social inclusion (Mansouri & Lobo, 2016). In this context, Ibañez and Lopez (2019) have argued that social support lessens the adverse psychological effects of employment. Once in employment, though, many of the women described their interactions with colleagues of different nationalities and ethnicities as mostly surface-level. These findings contrast with nationwide data suggesting that employment fosters network development (MBIE n.d.). While employment provided opportunities for daily interactions, it did not always lead to stronger friendships in the workplace, particularly for those working in secular industries. Caregiving and community responsibilities outside of work left little time for deeper social engagement, regardless of where the women worked. For some women, establishing connections at work also required a level of vulnerability they were reluctant to demonstrate, often due to limited time, emotional capacity, or past traumas affecting trust.

Responding to Research Question 2, this section outlined how, in supporting employment, neighbourhoods, settlement centres and community networks provided a sense of familiarity, shared knowledge, and collective understanding. These networks laid the foundation for women's professional journeys. The findings revealed that inclusion goes beyond mere access to employment as it is deeply connected to the quality of social relationships and the recognition of one's identity within those spaces. Personal stories of care, solidarity, and resilience highlight the vital role of community-driven efforts in empowering women and fostering a genuine sense of belonging.

7.4 Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has explored how former refugee women cultivate a sense of belonging in their everyday settlement experiences in Aotearoa/NZ, with particular focus on the roles of employment and social connection. This research reveals that belonging is a fluid, evolving process, shaped by the dynamic interaction between individual agency and broader societal frameworks (Antonsich, 2010; Marlowe, 2018; Ratnam, 2018; Tomlinson, 2010). For the

women in my study, belonging was not a fixed goal, but an ongoing negotiation based on past and present experiences, extending across people and places. The women's legal residency has provided stability, allowing them to envision a political and economically secure future in Aotearoa/NZ, while also enabling them to maintain social ties to their countries of origin and secondary countries. The women's ongoing relationships with loved ones abroad, who knew them deeply, enabled them to sustain their identities and supported emotional wellbeing.

Belonging was constructed through everyday acts of adaptation, participation, connection, and cultural continuity within both inclusive, such as with other former refugees, and exclusive contexts, such as unwelcoming work colleagues. While the NZRRS aimed to promote participation, inclusion, employment, and self-sufficiency, the reality on the ground was that belonging was also influenced by the attitudes of employers, colleagues, neighbours, and local communities, some of whom embodied these goals and others did not.

Discrimination, undervaluing and unrecognised qualifications, limited English skills, and restricted social networks served as barriers to full participation and connection.

Nevertheless, the women demonstrated agency and resilience in navigating these obstacles. Participants found solidarity with other migrants and refugee communities through volunteering, forging strong relationships with peers, and sharing cultural and religious practices. In these practices, the women were active agents creating their own spaces of belonging rather than passively relying on settlement support, even when societal structures posed challenges.

Voluntary and charitable organisations emerged as key sites for fostering inclusion and bridging the gap between national policies and lived experiences. These environments offered familiarity, safety, and a sense of belonging, empowering the women to develop confidence and independence. Staff, volunteers, and service users provided both practical and emotional support. They often served as stepping stones to employment through skill development, workplace opportunities and social integration. The women's participation in these organisations also reflected the cyclical nature of belonging and settlement support, as those who had once been helped later became supporters themselves, guiding newcomers through systems often in a shared language to help them feel at home.

Results regarding employment were ambivalent in this research. For many women, benefits included financial security, independence, structure, and career growth (Greenbank, 2020;

MBIE, 2018). However, interviews highlighted that a sense of belonging was not guaranteed through employment, further supporting my assertion that belonging is fluid. Belonging is also unpredictable, especially during early settlement stages. There are fluctuations in how deeply women experience belonging when settling in a new home and work environment. Unfriendly colleagues, cultural misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and unequal power dynamics often hindered inclusion (Antonsich, 2010; Greenbank & Marra, 2020; Rahman, 2021). Nonetheless, when employers or colleagues showed patience and cultural sensitivity, and recognised the participants' prior skills, the workplace became a space for mutual learning and empowerment. Ultimately, in the context of global refugee crises, these findings agree with Marlowe (2018) that (re)settlement should not mark the end of support. Instead, belonging depends on the interaction of safety, recognition, and inclusion, and requires time, empathy, and fair systems of support to help former refugees flourish in their new 'home'.

My study aimed to offer participants a platform to express their challenges and needs for successful settlement. For genuine inclusion to occur, belonging must be approached as a relational process, and policies and practices must express the lived realities of former refugees. Based on the research findings, I propose several key recommendations to inform policy and practice decisions and to outline next steps for research.

Firstly, pre- and post-employment support must be enhanced. Although existing programmes prepare former refugees for work, there is an urgent need for ongoing follow-up before and after employment. Networking events should be organised to allow employers to meet informally with former refugees, exchange views, explore job opportunities, increase understanding of their experiences and skills, and hopefully reduce discrimination. As some women reported feeling 'thrown' into work, employers should adopt structured mentorship programmes pairing trained mentors with new employees from refugee backgrounds. This would help reduce workplace isolation, promote greater integration, and support skill development.

Secondly, workplaces need to enhance their cultural competency, anti-discrimination, unconscious-bias, and diversity and inclusion training. One participant, Kaia, noted that recognising refugees' experiences boosts confidence and inclusion when colleagues are patient, supportive, and guide, not judge, mistakes. This involves integrating cultural awareness into everyday operations, including training on communication strategies, creating

accessible environments, and fostering intercultural collaboration. Employers should be able to recognise, in a respectful manner, some of the traumas and hardships faced by people with refugee backgrounds, and acknowledge their capability, adaptability, and resilience empathetically.

Thirdly, since settlement centres and voluntary organisations are vital for women in this study, increased investment in these spaces is essential. Greater collaboration between local communities, especially Aotearoa/NZ-born residents and centres, through shared cultural activities, would benefit former refugees. As stated, service providers are key bridges between newcomers, communities, and governments, yet there is limited public data on them, including outputs, opportunities, and challenges. Therefore, I encourage greater research, learning, and impact measurements.

Lastly, safety and security, which encompassed physical, financial, and emotional aspects, resonated throughout this research and became a central theme in the women's narratives. The unexpected focus on women's safety was a surprising finding, given that there were no specific questions about safety and security in the interviews. However, the women's contexts included experiencing significant turbulence, leading them to flee their former homes. Therefore, it was apparent from narratives about inclusion, exclusion, and belonging that, even after settlement, the need for safety remains prominent. These narratives revealed that feeling secure in one's home and community forms a foundation for other aspects of belonging, and long-term settlement success depends on ensuring safety is not only included in policies but also experienced in daily life. I recommend further research on creating safe and secure environments with women (and others) in refugee contexts. Policies should continue to prioritise safe housing, fair employment, and accessible healthcare as practical measures, while also promoting emotional security, such as counselling.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Massey University's in-house Ethics approval



16/07/2023

Dear: Kezia Geange

Re: Low Risk Notification - 4000027745 - Settlement Stories: Former Refugee Women's Employment Experiences

Thank you for your notification which you have assessed as Low Risk.

Your project has been recorded in our database for inclusion in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

If situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your ethical analysis, please contact a Research Ethics Administrator.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research."

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director - Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz."

Please note, if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to complete the application form again, answering "yes" to the publication question to provide more information for one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

Professor Craig Johnson
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 951 6841; 06 95106840
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz; animalethics@massey.ac.nz; gtc@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 2 Research Information Sheet

Settlement Stories: Former Refugee Women's Employment Experiences



Invitation to Participate in Research

kia ora, my name is Kezia Geange and I am a Master of International Development student at Massey University. I am originally from the United Kingdom, but now live and work in Waikato.

I am exploring the experiences of new Kiwis, specifically women from refugee backgrounds who are living and working in Hamilton. I am looking at connections locally and overseas and how being employed has impacted feeling included in Aotearoa New Zealand society. I seek to understand what aids creating a sense of belonging or feeling at 'home.' This study is an exciting opportunity to carefully highlight women's stories to greater understand settlement experiences including challenges and aspirations.

I would like to hear your stories through interviews and observation if you are:

- Female;
- have journeyed as a refugee;
- work in Hamilton;
- and have lived in Aotearoa New Zealand less than 10 years

As part of this research, I will invite you to take photos that represent your experiences of settling. I would also like to spend some time (a couple of hours, or up to a day) observing and taking part in activity/s of your choosing, such as at your workplace or in your local community carrying out daily tasks. I will then conduct an interview that will take up to one hour and will be semi-structured to capture your thoughts and perspectives. During the interview, I will invite you to discuss the photos you have taken.

All observations and interviews will be conducted by myself at a place of your choosing. If you wish to invite a female friend to join the activity or interview you are most welcome, however, I will only be recording data related to yourself.

The details you provide will be confidential and as such I shall ensure any personal identifiers will not be revealed in analysis or the write-up of findings. I will only use real names if expressly given permission to do so in publications or presentations. As standard practice, I will keep audio recordings, transcriptions and observations in a safe and secure place.

The findings of the transcribed interviews and observations will primarily be used for my thesis. Findings will also be disseminated to settlement service providers, such as the New Zealand Red Cross and Settlement Centre Waikato; scholarship providers; and through academic conferences and publications. The results of the study will be available to everyone who participates in the research.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- pause or stop the interview at any time;
- ask for the voice recorder to be turned off;
- take photos of whatever you feel comfortable with;
- withdraw from the study up to four weeks after the data collection stage;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name and image will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- request your interview transcripts and have up to four weeks to make any edits;
- be given access to a summary of the findings of the project when it is concluded.

Please contact me or my supervisors if you want more information or wish to participate.

Thank you

Kezia Geange



kezi



+64

Supervisors

Dr Maria Borovnik
Senior Lecturer, Development Studies
+64

Dr Robyn Andrews
Associate Professor, Social Anthropology Programme
+64

Ethics Statement

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director - Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 3 Research Invitation



Settlement Stories: Former Refugee Women's Employment Experiences

INVITATION TO RESEARCH

☐ I wish to participate in the research and receive more information.

☐ I am interested but wish to receive more information before taking part.

Please provide your details below in **block letters**.

Full Name:

.....

Email Address:

.....

Phone Contact:

Date:

.....

.....

This is not a formal consent to participation. If you agree to participate, I will meet with you individually, provide more information as required, and provide you with a consent form.

Appendix 4 Research Consent Form



Settlement Stories: Former Refugee Women's Employment Experiences

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

- ☐ I have read the Information sheet and understand the details and requirements of this study. I understand that I may contact Kezia (the researcher) to ask any questions at any time.
- ☐ I agree to have my interview recorded with the understanding that I can ask for the recording to be switched off at any time.
- ☐ I agree to spend time with Kezia (the researcher) and to have her observe some or all of my day-to-day activities, understanding that I can ask Kezia to leave or not record any observations at any time.
- ☐ I am happy to share photographs that I will take that show my settlement experiences. I understand that I have the right to only share photographs that I am comfortable sharing and that I can discuss with Kezia (the researcher) details about the use of these photographs.
- ☐ I would like to receive a transcript of my interview and understand that I must supply any amendments within four weeks unless agreed otherwise.

Full Name (block letters):

.....

Signature:

Date:

.....

.....