

Research Article

RADIO-MAKING AS A PRACTICE FOR YOUTH-LED COUNTERSTORYTELLING FOR RE-EXISTENCE

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Brimbank LIVE is a youth-led radio program created in response to young, racialised people experiencing forms of exclusion and discrimination in public and local spaces within a Local Government Area in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne/Narrm, Australia. Within the context of a community-university collaboration, our team accompanied the Brimbank LIVE program since its inception to document learning with the young people about their radio-making journeys. In this case study, we draw on the radio shows curated by the young people and focus groups and interviews with them to share program experiences and reflect on how radio-making supports re-existence through counterstorytelling. We show how young people used radio-making to forge their own self-determined radio shows and tell stories important to them; producing knowledge about their multifaceted identities and passions, and critiquing dominant framings and narratives on air. Through our analysis, we share key insights about how radio-making as a digital medium positioned young people as authors of their own stories, the importance of forming an intentional and self-determined setting and practice on the ground, and in supporting young people's development, skills, participation and leadership to curate and broadcast stories from below. It is argued that the practices of creating settings for dialogue and critical reflection in addition to using radio-making to curate and broadcast content rooted in lived realities, experiences and dreams enabled counterstorytelling and re-existence. The work at the community-university interface illustrates the possibilities of mobilising research and university capital for the purposes of re-existence through counterstorytelling and self-determined future dreaming.

Keywords: Decolonial Community Psychology, Radio-making, Counterstorytelling, Young People, Alternative Stories

“Being South-Sundanese... we're vilified in the media, we're vilified by politicians, we're a scapegoat for violence... It's a double-edged sword being a young South-Sundanese person... the media only portrays the bad things...But I see them [South Sudanese community] doing a lot of great things...”

(Aly, Young Radio Host from *Brimbank LIVE*)

This article documents the process and experiences of a group of young people within a council-run program¹ in Brimbank, a municipality located in the Western and North Western

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¹ Councils in Australia, also known as local governments, are the third tier in the country's system of government, sitting below the federal and state/territory governments. Council supported spaces in Australia are physical venues, buildings and public areas that

suburbs of Narm/Melbourne, Australia, who formed the youth-led radio station, *Brimbank LIVE*. The council-run program was in part a response to reports that racialised young people in Brimbank experienced higher levels of unemployment, as well as discrimination, racism, and exclusion from public spaces (Brimbank City Council, 2019a; Brimbank City Council, 2019c). The radio program provided resources and support to young people to establish their radio station and shows, where they generated alternative stories about their identities, passions, and experiences navigating local spaces, systems and dominant narratives in their everyday lives (Jayawardana, 2024). In the Australian context, community radio has enabled knowledge production and dissemination with and for groups whose voices and experiences are excluded or marginalised from dominant spaces (See: <https://www.3knd.org.au/> and <https://www.3cr.org.au/>). Community radio has also been used as a practice to support community in representing stories and views that are important and reflective of their lives, elevating sharings that may be concealed or erased from mainstream media, and strengthening their capacity to drive social change (Fox, 2023; Foxwell, 2012). In broadcasting these individual and collective stories through the *Brimbank LIVE* radio station, young people of Brimbank voiced stories about themselves and their experiences on their terms, and contested and countered damage-centred dominant stories about their lives and capacities. The article explores how radio-making within *Brimbank LIVE* became a liberatory praxis, and what it was able to do for young people in creating stories that demonstrate their social, political and cultural awareness and whilst forming content about the complex identities, experiences and capacities in their worlds. It aims to show how dominant narratives about young people from Brimbank were disrupted through the radio-making practice and the alternative and transforming stories carved through the process.

We begin by introducing who we are and outline the wider scope of our community-university interface, including our ways of working within our research network, and the use of creative, cultural, and arts practices as methods. We outline how race and whiteness function within Australia, and the construction and representation of migrants through racial colonial ideologies. This is followed by exploring how race relations in Australia are expressed in the municipality of Brimbank, the area where the radio program was based. We then present demographic characteristics of Brimbank in addition to the dominant constructions that circulate about the area and its people, particularly Brimbank's youth. Operating from council-supported spaces in Brimbank, we then detail the *Brimbank LIVE* program including the process of forming the radio station and shows, and what it meant to young people to engage in the work. The radio content and reflections of young people of *Brimbank LIVE* are then unpacked to show how young people pushed back against dominant stories by narrating alternative stories about their identities, experiences and lives.

1. Who We Are and Why We Are Doing This

This project is part of Community Identity Displacement Research [CIDRN] Network's programs of research and action. CIDRN is based at Victoria University in Naarm/Melbourne and made up

are owned, managed or funded by local councils to serve the needs of the community. Such spaces are designed to provide accessible, inclusive and flexible environments for a wide range of community programs, activities, services and gatherings.

of researchers, academics, community members and activists interested in creating intentional spaces to ask questions about forms of symbolic and structural violence. We draw on theories, principles and methods from critical community and liberation psychology that embrace participatory and empowering research practices (Rappaport, 1995; Sonn & Stevens, 2021). These orientations align with decolonial commitments to epistemic inclusion by uplifting community knowledges to create authentic and new understandings about their identities, lives and processes of resistance, and supporting communities to drive positive change in their own lives (Fernandez et al., 2021; Quayle & Sonn, 2019; Sonn et al., 2021). One avenue of praxis has been mobilising and exploring the role of community arts and cultural practices in raising awareness, activism, storytelling and re-membling (Agung-Igusti & Sonn, 2020; Dutta et al., 2016; Malherbe, 2020; Sonn, 2024). Community arts and cultural practice have been advanced by Boal (2008) and Freire (1970), and we follow this line, where culture is viewed as a site for understanding dynamics of power and possibility for creating settings and narratives for change. Through various collaborative projects, our work has aimed to make visible how coloniality is produced and maintained in research settings, everyday community and organisational contexts, and also to strengthen settings and processes developed by those who are historically marginalised and excluded to challenge dominant stories and promote community and wellbeing.

Roshani came into the space as a research student interested in community research and action, particularly in the context of migrant and ethnic identity making with young people, and connected with Christopher during her studies. Both Roshani and Christopher come from places that have colonial histories and are settlers of colour in Australia. Roshani was born in so-called Australia to parents who immigrated from Sri Lanka, an island country in South Asia with a colonial history marked by the Portuguese, Dutch, and British control. Growing up in as a child of migrants and third culture kid in Brimbank, the area that is at the centre of this work, she is constantly reminded of her racial difference in colonial and white spaces on these lands, with markers of race determining who fits the dominant, white phenotype and the privileges that come from this dominant positioning (Hage, 2012). Her experiences in light of this have shaped her negotiation of belonging and understanding who she is in relation to culture and identity. Christopher grew up in South Africa during Apartheid, navigating within a system that assigns people to statuses in a racial hierarchy that holds implications, before moving to Australia with its own forms of racial categorisation. With others in the network, we seek to explicate and contest ideologies of supremacy and hierarchy and where these are perpetuated in discourse and practice. We work with communities to understand the impacts, experiences and strategies to survive and resist oppression, and create alternative settings for joy, hope and communality.

2. Race, Whiteness and Migration in Australia

The British invasion of Australia marked the beginning of widespread dispossession and colonial violence (Pascoe, 2018). White settlers establishing colonies while ignoring sovereignty of Aboriginal peoples to Country has led to ongoing resistance and trauma for First Nations people (Bradfield, 2024; Pascoe, 2018). These colonial ideologies also underpinned the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, which restricted non-European immigration to Australia to maintain a predominantly white, British-descended population. Whilst the official policy was dismantled in

the 1970s, the legacy of maintaining a “white Australia” persists. Processes of racialisation, through historical, social, cultural and institutional norms, continue to privilege people who are deemed white (Hage, 2012; Shakespeare et al., 2023), as ethnically and racially marked migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Australia are often treated as perpetual outsiders, regardless of how many generations their families have lived in Australia (Udah & Singh, 2019). Additionally, racial and cultural hierarchies continue to shape the treatment of non-white people, in both the local and national sociopolitical landscape, as they are frequently othered, excluded or controlled in systems and spaces, and experience high rates of xenophobia and racism (Anderson et al., 2022; Rowan & Hurem, 2023). As settler colonial societies are underpinned by structures of race (Green et al., 2007), whiteness also encapsulates the associated privileges and norms deeply intertwined with other forms of social power, including class, education and wealth, which may exacerbate experiences for ethnically and racially marked people (Hage, 2012). This shows how race continues to shape who belongs and doesn't belong in Australia, with Angloness and whiteness influencing underlying attitudes and treatment toward settlers of colour (Sonn, 2024).

3. Context of Brimbank: Young People, Race, and Place

Race relations in Australia are often expressed in local contexts and are evident in how place and community are constructed in areas such as Brimbank (Brimbank City Council, 2019a; 2021; Public Health Information Development Unit [PHIDU], 2014). Traditionally owned by the Kurung-Jang-Balluk and Marin-Balluk clans³ of the Wurundjeri people, along with the Yalukit-Willam and Marpeang-Bulluk clans, who form part of the broader Kulin Nation, the City of Brimbank is a local government area [LGA] situated in Melbourne/Narrm, Victoria. As European invasion brought a surge of English, Scottish and Irish settlers to Brimbank, it is the arrival of settlers that followed which crystallises the area's sociocultural and migrant identity (PHIDU, 2014). Migrants from Italy, Spain, Ukraine, Greece, Poland, Italy and Malta settled in Brimbank after World War II (PHIDU, 2014). The 1970s saw the settlement of Vietnamese refugees and migrants, in addition to those from Eastern and Southern Asia (PHIDU, 2014). In the 1990s, communities from the African diaspora began to settle in the area, particularly from South Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea. With over 160 languages spoken in the area, 48% of Brimbank residents born overseas and 70.3% of locals having overseas-born parents, the migration waves throughout Brimbank's history make it one of the most culturally diverse municipalities in both Victoria and Australia (PHIDU, 2014). Figure 1 illustrates events, festivals, gatherings and public spaces within and around Brimbank which represent the cultural and diverse landscape and histories in the municipality.

The area of Brimbank is also considered to be a working-class area characterised by significant socioeconomic disadvantage through lower levels of income and education, and higher rates of unemployment compared to Greater Melbourne and national averages (Van Dyke & Calder, 2021). According to government reports, those living in low socioeconomic areas in Australia are often reported to have experienced trauma, adverse events in childhood and domestic violence

³ Aboriginal people in Australia are comprised of many distinct clans, each with its own unique language, history, and traditions. A clan is a family-based group that is linked through a common ancestry and share a common language and kinship system, which is based on either patrilineal or matrilineal lines of descent. A clan can also be referred to as a language group, grouped according to shared words, grammar and sounds (Chiblow & Meighan, 2022).

in the home (Brimbank City Council, 2019b). Additionally, young people in such areas are presumed to have higher levels of emotional and behavioural difficulties and lower levels of wellbeing compared to young people living elsewhere (Ivancic et al., 2014; Santiago et al., 2011; 2014). Young people in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods like Brimbank are also perceived to be more likely to drop out of school, be connected to child protection services, or have experiences in the youth justice system (De Witte et al., 2013; Malvaso et al., 2019).



Figure 1. Events, festivals, gatherings and public spaces within and around Brimbank⁴

Whilst Brimbank harbours rich culture, history and diversity, the intersections of race, ethnicity and low socioeconomic status combine to create particular framings about young people from the area, which shape their treatment and experiences in unfavourable and harmful ways. As dominant narratives within public discourse and mainstream media paint racialised youth as at-risk, disengaged, delinquent in nature and troublesome (Baak, 2019; Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018; Macaulay & Deppeler, 2020; Majavu, 2020), this is particularly pertinent for young people from Brimbank. Such discourses and labels can be seen in headlines within commercial and mainstream television, radio and print media that describe young racialised people from Brimbank as ‘thugs’ and deem suburbs in Brimbank as ‘hotspots’ for youth crime, unemployment and gang issues (The Age, 2020; White, 2019). Reports and evidence of young people of Brimbank experiencing racial or ethnic based discrimination and being surveilled within and excluded from local and institutional spaces are also prevalently high (Briggs & Yussuf, 2023). In combination with this, young racialised people, such as those from Brimbank, are also subject to limited expectations about their futures and potential given their perceived disadvantage and

⁴ Images can be accessed through the following links: <https://www.alltrails.com/trail/australia/victoria/brimbank-park-walk>; <https://events.brimbank.vic.gov.au/vesak-festival/>; <https://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/living-here/our-community/traditional-custodians/first-nations-places-brimbank>; <https://events.brimbank.vic.gov.au/buddhists-of-the-west-cultural-diversity-festival/>; <https://brimbanknorthwest.starweekly.com.au/news/drums-herald-african-festival/>

social standings (Bok, 2010; Keast & Sonn, 2022; Tiller et al., 2020). Whilst these societal narratives often shape dominant discourse and treatment of young people, they can also be resisted and challenged by elevating concealed and alternative narratives generated in place by, for and with communities.

4. Responding to Issues Young People from Brimbank Face: Creating *Brimbank LIVE* and Engaging in Radio-Making

The work in this paper was done in partnership with Sydenham Neighbourhood House [SNH], a council-run community setting in Brimbank. SNH's work aimed to respond to issues of young people experiencing forms of discrimination and being scrutinised, surveilled and excluded from community spaces through youth-led practices and spaces that spoke to young people's interests and needs (Brimbank City Council, 2019a; Brimbank City Council, 2019c). As part of a partnership between the university and Brimbank Neighbourhood Houses, the documentation of this program started as part of a formalised research project in early 2019, with Roshani and the council workers of SNH engaging and spending time with young people in the streets of Brimbank outside SNH. The group engaged in conversations with the young people, asking what they wanted from local spaces and what had deterred them from formal council spaces in the past. They spent time with young people to build rapport and meaningful connections, holding BBQs and open mics in the streets, and opening the SNH informally for the young people to gather. Engaging and connecting with young people in these ways for over a year helped to understand how young people in the community wanted to connect, and what they needed to create comfortable and safe settings. Figure 2 depicts images of young people, council workers and Roshani at youth gatherings and performances during this time.



Figure 2. Young people gathering and performing outside of SNH in March 2020⁵

Informed by young people's ideas and interests, in January 2020, SNH piloted a youth program that included asynchronous classes in various art forms such as lyric writing, music production and dancing. These classes were facilitated by local young people who represented the community. In addition to the formal program, the SNH space was also open for young people to continue to engage and hang out in, which spoke to requests from young people about the need for informal spaces to gather. As the pilot program brought in high numbers of young people to

⁵ Images can be accessed through the following links: <https://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/map/sydenham-neighbourhood-house>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/B-N4EihhNam/>

the space, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began to surge, forcing the closure of physical and public settings in Narm/Melbourne. This required pivoting and rethinking how to engage and connect with young people around their interests in building and sharing creative skills of storytelling, songwriting and music production in COVID-19 safe ways. In consultation with young people and supported by SNH and Making Media Australia, a professional media company with expertise in radio broadcasting (Making Media, 2023), the *Brimbank LIVE* program was formed.

4.1 Radio-Making as a Tool and Praxis for Young People of Brimbank LIVE

The program of *Brimbank LIVE* provided young people with the opportunity to use community radio to engage, connect, and produce stories and content creatively. Radio-making became an ideal vehicle for young people to lead storytelling in-person and online, which was important given the work took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Community radio is often used by communities that are misrepresented or excluded in dominant and mainstream spaces of storytelling (Green, 2013). The tool and practice democratises communication, affording community access to resources and skills to express their perspectives and opinions that they may not otherwise be able to share publicly, or which are often silenced or drowned about by mainstream media (Green, 2013). It has been utilised in contexts with young people, as alternative creative media forum to engage in trivial conversations and lead commentary about social, political, cultural and economic matters (Green, 2013; Wilkinson, 2019). This is seen in examples of young collectives using radio-making to share their experiences around exclusion in community (Wilkinson, 2019), and reclaiming identity in light of the ways they are dominantly constructed (Ojwang, 2017). The properties and capabilities of radio-making enable young people to become active creators and contributors of media, with the tool and process amplifying their voices and supporting consciousness-raising (Jayawardana, 2024). Radio can also foster meaningful encounters and relationships with community coming together to engage in sharing and curating critical content and stories (Jayawardana & Sonn, 2025).

Thirteen young people from Brimbank were initially involved in the *Brimbank LIVE* program, coming into the program through their previous connections to the SNH before COVID-19 and call-outs from SNH staff. Roshani, a young person from Brimbank herself, also participated in the radio program. As she immersed herself in the radio-making process with the young people, co-creating stories with them, Roshani documented the process and engaged in constant dialogue about the motivations that drove young people's meaning-making, which are conversations encouraged for storytelling practices. The young people of the *Brimbank LIVE* team were aged between 15-27, and came from diverse ethnic backgrounds of South Sudanese, Ethiopian, Sri Lankan, Greek, Macedonian, Congolese, Samoan, and Croatian. Through conversations, young people also shared significant aspects of their identities alongside race and ethnicity, such as being trans, non-binary and queer, in addition to their religious affiliations. These facets were a large part of the stories produced and shared through their radio content.



Figure 3. Brimbank LIVE official⁶

Throughout the process of *Brimbank LIVE*, young people worked with a radio producer from Making Media Australia. The radio producer provided them with professional radio training in planning, hosting, producing radio content, studio time and equipment to record shows. Access to resources such as microphones, recorders and mixers were provided by Making Media and SNH for the team to use at home when COVID-19 restrictions worsened. A mix of digital tools and technologies, such as Zoom, were used to record shows. The radio station broadcast on Making Media’s online streaming platform and app, LIVE FM (www.livefm.online/). The video and audio of all shows were also archived and uploaded to the web page using Vimeo and Soundcloud streaming sites. Figures 9-12 are photos from the studio and live broadcasts of *Brimbank LIVE*.



Figure 4. Snapshots of the young people of *Brimbank LIVE* recording their radio shows in the studio and at outside broadcast

Note. Images Courtesy of Making Media Australia ©

Throughout Brimbank LIVE, the team co-created and individually hosted shows, with radio content platformed in an array of ways and formats, all personalised and shaped by young people’s visions. Through radio-making, the group learned and grew together in leading the radio station; building relationships through the experience of the work, engaging with local, national international guests through on-air conversations and interviews, and flexibly adapting to the online and in-person radio-making processes in light of COVID-19.

⁶ Images can be accessed through the following links:
<https://www.livefm.online/crc-live-on-brimbank-live>

5. The Stories of Young People from Brimbank

In this section, we share some of the radio content curated by the young creators and reflections they offered during interviews and focus groups, through quotes and linked audio excerpts. These illustrate the self-determined, complex stories young people shared about their lives and experiences through radio-making. These sharings are presented from the perspective of Roshani, who worked alongside the young people of *Brimbank LIVE* and co-created radio shows with them. Co-analysis and reflections were supported by Chris. In sharing these stories, the setting of *Brimbank LIVE* became a place where youth could create an otherwise, a sort of space for freedom dreaming. In doing so, they told stories by and from their worlds as young people which were elevated into the public sphere.

5.1 Narrating Their Standpoints And Stories

Through radio-making, young people formed content that represented who they were and their experiences navigating their worlds in light of their social positionings. This was exemplified on the radio show “The Hills” hosted by Charlie and Edward. The show featured music tracks written and recorded by the young hosts and the dissection of the meanings and inspirations behind their songs.



Figure 5. The official promotional image for The Hills show, featuring Charlie and Edward

Performed as a rap, Charlie and Edward shared their song “Hold On”, which depicted their life histories of family life, money struggles and finding one’s place. The song was unpacked on their radio show by Edward: [The Hills- Edward’s Reflection about “Hold On”](#)

In the song, Edward shares his perspective about his struggles, as he recalls being judged and misunderstood in light of his perceived disadvantage. Edward makes note of the ways that many people from his community experience similar struggles, referencing “we” and “us” through his lyrics. Below is the audio excerpt of Edward’s rap verse in “Hold On”, accompanied with the lyrics:

Song- "Hold On"

We're just a couple of Poly brothers coming up from nothin',
We're struggling and tumbling, but we're living for and givin'
Never had no privileges started low from the beginnin'
Holdin' on to faith because this world is full of sinners.
Now listen when I tell you it ain't easy,
you'll never know the struggles of sleeping in a jumper cos you're freezing'.
Not enough beds, on the floor is where I'm sleeping,
worn out shoes for the last month and now they tease me.
Don't talk to me if you've never walked or caught a bus,
waking up at 6 am knowing that you still have to rush.
Quickly have our showers, water's on- lucky us,
went to school struggled to learn, I was out of there by lunch.
So I dropped out clean and started workin' at KFC,
school didn't give me any good to feed the team,
and so I chose to work instead to provide for family,
this is a little message, we seek help, it's all we need.

By articulating his everyday experiences through his lyrics, , Edward exposes the profound discrepancies between his realities and the dominant assumptions that often linger about racialised individuals within his community. For instance, suburb stigma and postcode discrimination circulate for young racialised people of Brimbank, leading to widespread assumptions about those who stray from conventional paths and systems being 'dropkicks' or 'lazy' (Kelaher et al., 2010; Tiller et al., 2020). However, in dissecting the song, Edward reveals that his choice to leave school was motivated by cultural commitments and a desire to support his family. This shows how, through radio-making, Edward takes ownership and authority of his story, reveals his truth around navigating hardship and counters dominant assumptions . This echoes how rather than sensationalising damage-focused narratives told by outsiders or 'looking away' from disadvantage and marginalisation, accurate representations of everyday injustices experienced by communities should be shared from within these locations, through their own voices (Satchwell, 2020).

In light of this, other radio hosts commented on how the process of radio-making within *Brimbank LIVE* provided a space to share content that resonates with them. Brimbank LIVE member Aly conveys:

This [radio space] gave me the opportunity to talk about things I wanted to talk about, and things important to me... the radio show, it amplified my voice

Fellow young radio host Lee also specifically highlights this sentiment, noting that vehicles and processes like radio-making enable the unveiling of community's true realities, in contrast to dominant forms of media that spread social lies about them :

There's so many circumstances where the media can be doing better... so I feel like circumstances like this [radio program]... the little forms of media, are kinda good because it gets more people's voices out.

This illustrates how young people used the process of radio-making within *Brimbank LIVE* to construct and tell stories, from their standpoints and in their own ways. This not only counters

dominant forms of media and rectifies harmful ideas about them that circulate, but fosters their own representation of themselves.

5.2 Challenging Stereotypes and Misrepresentations

In addition to narrating stories from their own positions, young people intentionally called out misconceptions and harmful narratives that circulate in dominant spaces about their lives through radio-making. The radio show “Women of Brimbank”, hosted by myself (Roshani), Aly and Lisa, unpacked social justice issues, politics and pop culture. On our show, we included a segment where we actively challenged misconceptions and myths that are encountered by children of immigrants from racially diverse backgrounds.



Figure 6: Pictures of the myself, Aly and Lisa recording our shows.

Note. Images Courtesy of Making Media Australia ©

In this, we spoke of how stereotypes are constraining, and how although some stereotypes may seem complementary, they often hold negative conditions. This is illustrated in our on-air discussion about how twerking is frequently presumed to be a skill innately possessed by Black women, but how this creates restrictive expectations attached to Black women's bodies:

Women of Brimbank – Being constrained and boxed

We also spoke of the conflation of minority and migrant groups in Australia, and how homogenising us based on race and culture is a form of symbolic violence. We shared how stereotypes which are harmful and constraining can form in light of this, as we unpacked the label of being a ‘Strong Black Woman’ on air:

R: That's another misconception, that women of colour, particularly Black women, are about confrontation and are strong... that's the myth that needs to be debunked

L: Especially when you take a leap of faith to bring something up and you muster the courage to do that, it's taken as you just being confrontational

A: I feel strongly about this. There's this tweet I saw, and it says *“Please stop calling Black women strong as a compliment. ‘Strong’ is why our mortality rate in medicine is high. ‘Strong’ is why our pain is not taken seriously. ‘Strong’ is why there is less empathy for us.*

'Strong' is why we're put last in every movement because we can 'handle it'... We're not allowed to be vulnerable women because we're Black? We don't get the same space to be vulnerable...

L: If you put us on a pedestal, you're elevating us as some sort of superhuman, and it's tricky because not everyone recognises what that does to Black women...

This shows how larger systems of power and privilege shape our everyday lived experiences and the critical understanding we have of dominant narratives. As we created a space to actively and critically challenge these ways of thinking, we also expressed and asserted our identities as complex and multifaceted young women beyond stifling, racial categories:

What We Want People to Know About our Complexities

Through declaring that we seek to exist in our own multifaceted ways on our radio segments, we contributed to the disruption of these colonial processes and ideologies.

5.3 Narrating Stories Beyond Race: Alternative Stories About Identities and Connection To Community

While race, and its negative constructions, were a dominant lens used to homogenise and view youth within Brimbank, cisgenderism and heteronormativity also constrained young people who sought to celebrate queerness, transness and gender diversity. In their interview, Lee, who identifies as trans and non-binary, spoke of the importance of gender diverse visibility and how these affiliations bring connection and community, which they actively work to build and maintain:

I think just understanding how important it is to be in these [community] spaces, for young people to cope and feel welcome... I used to organise massive picnics, like 70 plus young people... we always had them in the city at Birrarung Marr or Alexandra Gardens... that was monthly and that was absolutely amazing... We'd all catch up, everyone would bring food and picnic blankets and we'd sit together and it was amazing seeing all the people like me stuck at home with not a lot of freedom and feeling very... not feeling acceptance for themselves, feeling pretty shit... To go into these spaces and events and knowing that everyone there was going to be extremely accepting of who they were whether it was religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, background

In addition to collective spaces for queer and non-binary youth, young people spoke of how culture, ethnicity and religion connected them to community, citing this as one of the many joys of being migrant kids. This was recounted through their active engagement in Pasifika and African associations, in addition to cultural church groups. Young people draw upon these aspects of their identity to connect, collaborate and actively build communities in both formal and informal settings.

Whilst Brimbank as a place is often viewed subordinately within dominant media and outlets, and characteristics of racial and ethnic diversity are traditionally used to undermine perceptions of the area and its people, young people shared pride in the area's cultural diversity. Young radio host Matthew conveys:

My community... it's really diverse... I think there's so many people from different backgrounds and not just different backgrounds but different backgrounds and age

groups... [there's] elderly people... young families. So it's really diverse and I think the part that makes it most diverse is the ethnic backgrounds like African, Asian, Europeans... which it makes it pretty cool... it's really progressing... it's starting to become really like good sort of thing, like now it's starting to develop and find its feet... it's sort of finding its identity and flourish as a community... it's kind of um really starting to do special things

As we deem the racial and cultural diversity associated with Brimbank as enriching, we also reflected on how the intersections of race, culture and place deepen connections to the municipality of Brimbank and bond us with other community members. Grace (18) conveys:

The bonds that people have, and to me it feels like family. You meet someone you get to know them, you get close. And I feel like the reason I say its family is because we [young people in Brimbank] all go through the same thing in this area. We all know what and how it feels like to be in the area, what it is...

This shows that young people in Brimbank share a strong affinity being connected to our local area, which comes with a sense of solidarity, belonging and comfort, and how we build community not just through our social categories, but through our connections to place. This reflects the way young people see beyond dominant constructions about the area's troubling reputation and negative ideas conflating us through our disadvantage and race. Instead, we speak of rich, diverse and dynamic culture and connections in Brimbank, creating our own and alternative meanings about the municipality.

5.4 Young People of Brimbank's Passions and Capacities

As young people discussed racial, ethnic and gender identities and our strong connections to place through various radio shows and conversations, we emphasised that our sense of self was shaped not only by these identity positions and affiliations but also by our passions and interests. Matthew, a sports fan and an involved member of his local cricket club in Brimbank, hosted a radio show that showcased and analysed sports statistics in cricket, football, soccer and golf, and featured interviews with guests in the sports space. When reflecting on his show, Matthew conveyed why sport was important to him and how talking about sport through the radio-making process was connected to his future goals:

I wanted to do it [create the radio show] to... show people how sport... can bring people together and create a connection between people. So, I wanted to share stories about how people have played sports and how sports have been able to connect them... I'm trying... to make a cricket career and I'm working towards it, I made the Victorian team, so hopefully that happens. But if it doesn't [I'd] probably be a sport journalist to really share stories about people and try to use my voice to influence society. That's my ultimate goal to be able to write things and put it out there and for people to read and hear, and they can be influenced by that... Like what we're doing with radio... That's my ultimate goal... to share people's stories and to influence.

As youth formed diverse shows and conversations through radio-making, exploring how race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and place shape their identities—and emphasising that they are also defined by their passions and interests—it reflects the multifaceted aspects that make up their lives. This was also prevalent as members conveyed how the radio-making process developed

their knowledge and skills connected to their passions, which could transcend beyond the setting. This was evident in Edward and Charlie sharing on air how engaging in the radio-making process, through producing and platforming music, provided a “starting point” to enacting their desired career as musicians:

Dreams Coming True and Doing Music Through Radio

This shows how young people used their radio shows as a platform for their passions and interests, and how the knowledge and experience built through the radio-making process strengthened pathways and supported processes of learning and excelling in various fields. Speaking back to dominant notions about youth from Brimbank being disengaged and lacking capacities, this illustrates how young people are purposeful and resourceful in navigating and building trajectories for future possibilities. Their sharings also reflect how they recognise and possess potential and capabilities to aspire and achieve in these pursuits.

Together, these examples illustrate how young people authored and amplified our own stories and experiences about culture, racial identity, queerness, trans-ness and community to form alternative narratives about who they are. Contesting dominant narratives that misrepresent lives and identities, young people crafted alternative stories claiming Blackness, being racially and ethnically diverse women, being trans, and having pride in our community and identities. Furthermore, speaking and acting on our passions and future possibilities also reflect how radio-making provided space for youth to share our dreams and possibilities.

6. Lessons From this Work: Radio-Making as a Critical Praxis

This section highlights the process and possibilities that came out of Brimbank LIVE through two overarching aspects. The first speaks to how *Brimbank LIVE* was an active site for counterstorytelling, allowing young people to name symbolic violence perpetrated by dominant media stories and assert their complex identities. The second was the alternative setting that was created through *Brimbank LIVE*, anchored by particular mechanisms that supported the world making of young people. Through these aspects, we articulate how the space expanded possibilities for young people on the ground in creating space and process to amplify their voices beyond constraints of being othered and enable knowledge production with and from within their communities. Furthermore, we show how re-existence was fostered for young people, both through their positionings as knowledge holders within the radio setting and through the affirming and sharing of humanising stories about identity.

6.1 Counterstorytelling by Naming Violence and Conveying Complexity

6.1.1 Naming Violence

Through radio-making we named violence as we told our own stories about the disadvantages we face, and countered negative stereotypes, perceptions and narratives which frame our racial, ethnic and place-based affiliations as burdens of risk, delinquency and disadvantage. This showed our awareness and consciousness of the ways these constructions hold violence and aim to restrict and conflate us. In addition to re-narrating our adverse experiences as young racialised

people of Brimbank, we illustrated alternative experiences of what it means to be young people from Brimbank as we spoke about our pride in cultural and migrant roots, gender diversity and connections to our municipality. We also disrupted dominant ideas of our disengagement and disconnectedness as we spoke fondly of how we hold and build rich bonds and community through these personal and local affiliations. This countered colonial ideologies as it circumvented the hyperbolised narratives told by those outside the youth experience, and reflected our authentic experiences and perspectives imbued with humanity, from our own positions and voices.

6.1.2 Naming Complexity

We complicated dominant and colonial categories that depict youth from Brimbank as homogenous in light of culture, race and socioeconomic status, as we spoke of gender and sexuality; facets that are often missed or overlooked in our stories. Through this, we also conveyed how young people's diverse social identities should not be seen to stigmatise, and that while we may experience violence and discrimination in light of these positionings, we exist and function in rich, complex, constructive and affirming ways (Tuck, 2009). This work shows how radio-making supported the production of alternative narratives; giving accurate insight into the lives, identities and futures of young people from Brimbank. In disrupting ideas of having limited capacities for our futures, we carved stories about our strong passions and dreams for the future; fostering desired-focused narratives about our futures, rather than damage-focused. Through this, we used the space and tool of radio to share these passions and build experience to further our possibilities.. Our stories disrupted colonial ideologies and dominant cultural narratives that conflate and harmfully flatten our lives and enabled young people to produce multiple and alternative versions of what it means to be a young person in Brimbank. This enabled resignification and resistance to siloed and homogenising constructions, but also affirmed our complex personhood (Melo, 2023; Tuck, 2009; Walsh, 2022). As reducing complexity is a way in which colonial ideologies are imposed on individuals (O'Sullivan, 2023), by breaking the binaries and categories, we not only disrupted this coloniality to speak about our complex realities, experiences and identities, but become humanised through the process of agentically sharing the expansiveness in our lives.

6.2 Brimbank LIVE and the Praxis of Radio-Making

6.2.1 The Mechanisms of the Brimbank LIVE Program

The radio station and shows crafted by young people within *Brimbank LIVE* responded to mainstream outlets and forms of media and communication that often exclude youth from meaning-making or passively include young people's input and voice. Rather, the radio station exemplified an alternative platform that reflected young people's creative desires and which young people controlled. The *Brimbank LIVE* program brought young people of Brimbank together and fostered engagement through the activity of radio-making. In light of our diverse intersections, the young people of *Brimbank LIVE* formed a sense of community; working together to co-create stories and building relationships in the space, whilst speaking our truths through the practice. The mechanisms of the *Brimbank LIVE* program made tangible tools,

training and support available, courtesy of SNH and Making Media Australia, which equipped youth with skills and resources to drive the storying work. This shows how control can be afforded to community through such vehicles, particularly when resources and support are available. Furthermore, as decolonising work embodies the shifting of power (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), young people being supported in forming and leading a space where they can speak for and about themselves with their own perspectives, memories and complexities intact, reflects this.

Alongside the productive mechanisms and processes within the *Brimbank LIVE* program, barriers and tensions were also experienced surrounding financial support and lack of promotion of the radio station. As leveraging resources and support from spaces within institutions, such as SNH, can be beneficial in disruptive and decolonial work (Fine, 2018), the larger council setting that SNH sits within and which controlled the program's funding was limited, threatening the longevity of the program. This was predominantly due to an underestimation of the cost of running participatory arts programs that continuously supported, resourced and remunerated young people. Furthermore, as substantial promotional bodies within council required content to be vetted and monitored in order to promote *Brimbank LIVE* radio shows and content, these promotional avenues were not engaged with due to their processes contradicting the youth self-determined essence of the space and the authentic, community-driven qualities of community radio-making. Whilst this can be understood as an expression of how institutions control resources, and coloniality operating through resource allocation, we actively unsettled colonial logics to sustain our alternative epistemic setting. We did this as young people along with SNH staff and the radio producer continuously managed financial and promotional matters over the course of the program's two-year duration, through youth-controlled social media pages and engaging in efforts to acquire external funding through grants. Whilst this illustrates the precarious and limiting nature of processes and sites for epistemic inclusion that exist within and are connected to larger institutions, it reflects the agentic ways that young people organised and mobilised within the *Brimbank LIVE* context. This reinforces the need for continuous navigation and flexibility to forge and foster self-determined spaces and process for young people, and highlights how we should not only pay attention to how sites for community-based practices are created and what processes they produce in disrupting colonial ideologies, but also focus on understanding what it takes to maintain these realms within colonial systems.

6.2.2 Praxis of Radio-Making

The process of radio-making showcased young people's navigational capital, as we challenged, negotiated, and subverted negative stereotypes and assumptions about our identities through the stories we created (Yosso, 2005). As young people shared our versions of experienced violence, the complex identities we hold, the joys and connections we have with social affiliations and place, and the passions and interests we aim to pursue, we carved and propelled new possibilities of being through the radio-making process. Radio-making also allowed young people to produce and tell the stories, from our own perspectives and voices, in distinctly creative ways. This shows how community radio can help people create meaning beyond text and produce knowledge through auditory storytelling processes of music, dialogue and conversation (Baker et al., 2020; Osei-Kofi, 2013; Suffla et al., 2014). The process of radio-making supporting and enabling authorship and production of culture, that was led and shaped by young people, reflects

what Fernández et al. (2021) describes as one of the orientations toward a decolonial community psychology praxis, that is, the generation of knowledge with and from within community. Furthermore, young people's voices were also centred and amplified through this as they reasserted narratives about their identities through the radio-making process and claimed agency over their experiences and histories, which are also key dimensions of decolonial work (Fernández et al., 2021). This highlights how the tool of community radio became an accessible and democratising vehicle that did work in levelling hierarchies of power in producing knowledge for and about youth in *Brimbank LIVE* and enabled youth-led processes. Through its transmission processes as a communicative form, radio also enabled audiences to engage and listen as radio shows aired live through the LIVE FM app and webpage, reaching wide audiences in Australia, the USA and Ghana. The visual and audio of radio content was also recorded digitally, and is stored and accessible via Making Media's [SoundCloud](#) and [Vimeo](#) spaces. This demonstrates how the characteristics of radio-making can broadcast stories to reach listeners in real-time, but how digital technologies also enable the archival of stories to sustain absorption and engagement, and allow listeners to revisit and engage with young people's stories.

7. Final Reflections

Coming into the program with cultural wealth and a deep understanding of dominant narratives, systems and processes, young people of Brimbank engaged with radio-making to disrupt dominant lies, and curate and propel their own stories about their lives and worlds. The stories formed alternative perspectives and knowledge from the voices of young people. This disrupted dominant narratives about their identities and experiences, which are shaped by colonial ideologies that paint youth from Brimbank in damage-focused, harmful and restrictive ways, and enabled young people to name and explore structures of violence, speak about the multiple categories and affiliations that constitute their intersectional identities, and share how they experience joy and connection in light of their social positions and place. This process fostered storytelling and countering of homogenising and colonial ideologies about them, but also humanised young people and their complexities. The work showed how the praxis of radio-making within *Brimbank LIVE* contributed to the disruption of colonial knowledge production in dominant spaces told by outsiders, as the radio-making practice and setting was led by and for young people, nurturing a community-engaged and creative process where they could create stories that centred their perspectives and voices. As the radio setting of *Brimbank LIVE* had particular mechanisms that not only supported young people in doing this work, but spoke back to mainstream settings that often dismiss their viewpoints, this highlights the potential of creative practices and tools like community-radio for community-driven counterstorytelling and re-existence.



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