

Disturbing the Storm

Narratives from the liminal space: investigating the commonalities between older Afghan Hazara women and Calabrian exiles through theories of storytelling and creative led research

Submitted by

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Statement of Authorship and Sources

“This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No parts of this thesis have been submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees”

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jema', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Jema Anna Stellato Pledger

Abstract

This research draws from my lived experience as a second generation immigrant of Calabrian exiles and explores the commonalities between older Afghan Hazara women and Calabrians. Working with culturally diverse groups the research examines liminality through the narratives of both cultures and investigates whether the experiences of recent female refugee populations in Australia, reflect those of previous immigrant communities. Applying theories of storytelling and liminality, the research asks, “Can a multidisciplinary arts approach reflect cultural commonalities through the process of becoming other?”

The research observes the process older Hazara Afghan women¹ embark upon when negotiating change post war and dislocation. My experiences from a family of Calabrian exiles draws from personal histories of my mother and grandmother as they attempted to find a sense of connection in Australia.

Little is known about the stories within the liminal space, a pivotal point between one’s past life and potential future. Further, the commonalities between two such diametrically different cultures have yet to be investigated. Becoming “other” is an empathic strategy and a methodological approach in my creative led research project to explore the overlaps between these two cultures.

¹ These women are Dari speaking, predominantly Shia people of central Afghanistan, and who have been victims of genocide for hundreds of years.

The Hazara's narratives capture the women's perspectives and experiences against current Australian public perceptions and politics and these testimonials are juxtaposed against my family's journey as exiles.

The theoretical discourse adopts storytelling, narrative inquiry, and auto-ethnography located in qualitative traditions. The creative component is a multilayered body of work set against a backdrop of personal and socio-political histories that crosses cultures and generations. The films are documented from live performances developed from a theatre script. The recorded performances have been transferred to video in conjunction with photography and poetry which thread liminality; magic realism; female identity and the immigrant journey to illustrate the impact of war and displacement, while simultaneously demonstrating the agency of the women.

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Introduction

This research draws on my experiences as an artist and second generation immigrant of Calabrian exiles and explores the commonalities between older Afghan Hazara women and Calabrians. Working with culturally diverse groups, the research examines liminality through the narratives of both cultures and investigates whether the experiences of recent female refugee populations in Australia, specifically the Hazaras, reflect those of previous groups, the Calabrians. Applying theories of storytelling and liminality, the research asks, “Can a multidisciplinary arts approach reflect the commonalities of Hazaras and Calabrians through the process of becoming *other*?”

When I first began this creative led investigation, the research question examined whether storytelling assists moving through the liminal space from the perspectives of the Hazara women’s stories and experiences. These perspectives were compared against current public perceptions and politics juxtaposed against the artist’s migration journey. While storytelling and liminality are the significant elements in the project, the turn towards cultural commonalities and becoming other became apparent early in the candidature and the original overarching question was abandoned. The project became more personal and multi-layered and, while I had an overall vision for what I wanted to produce, I also had a sense that I was walking into the unknown. How could I create a work and write eloquently about something I knew little about?

Coming from a family committed to social justice, the research also considers the influence of working with the Hazaras in relation to clarifying my sense of place as the daughter and granddaughter of exiles. Additionally, how has their commitment to human rights affected my work as an interdisciplinary artist working in diverse communities and their influence on this enquiry? Within the context of my family, specifically my

grandparents, parents and older brother, social justice and human rights were not separate entities, but instead rather directed the way our lives were led. As a writer, artist, educator, and, the tenets of social justice were intrinsic to my practice across these disciplines. Social justice is one of a few elements in my life that has remained constant throughout the years. There were difficulties in a family such as mine, as they were not part of the broader Italian community due to their social and political beliefs and their capacity for forward thinking, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, at a time when migrants of the 1950s clung to the old ways.

I continually questioned my place as a descendant of exiles and as an Australian. This subsequently created instability in the way I perceived myself and the two cultures I straddled. For me these two cultures were not linked and to develop an integrated self, I engaged in superstitions and cultural mores specific to the Calabrians. If we were a religious family, I may have found some connection to the Italians through the cultural/religious festivals in the Italian community. Consequently, storytelling became a way for me to understand my Calabrian nature.

My grandmother would tell me old Calabrian ghost stories which were filled with mysticism and magic. The stories would be recounted in dialect and though I had minimal understanding of the language, the atmosphere she created, aroused my ancestral memory, which in turn enabled me to connect to my identity as culturally hybrid. It is important to note, that my family did not generally speak dialect, except amongst themselves. This was the language of peasants and this was not how they wished to be defined. We were different. English was the main language spoken with my grandparents and parents. However, Italian and dialect were heard between my mother and grandparents, which I intuitively absorbed. This became evident when I went to Italy and I drew on the language that had taken root but

remained dormant until needed. The stories of my grandmother inspired an interest in women's multicultural storytelling and motivated me to find the stories of other cultures that resonated with the Calabrians.

It was many years later that I encountered the Hazara Afghans, and the Tampa incident ignited my interest in Hazaras, as I had only read about the Hazara genocide when the Taliban came to power.² In August 24, 2001, Norwegian Captain Arne Rinnan of the *MV Tampa* rescued 433 asylum seekers from international waters off the coast of Christmas Island. The majority were Hazaras from Afghanistan fleeing the Taliban (Burnside, 2015). The Howard government refused the Tampa entry into Australian waters. After five days, Captain Rinnan declared a state of emergency and subsequently entered Australian waters without permission taking the asylum seekers to Christmas Island. The *Tampa* asylum seekers were subsequently sent to Nauru for offshore processing. Nauru was the beginning of the *Pacific Solution*, (2001-2008, 2012-present, Phillips) and had great affect as it re-activated my sense of social justice and my innate desire to engage in social change. The ensuing years brought me into contact with several Hazaras through my work with *Actors for Refugees* (2001-2007), a group of performers who travelled Victoria to raise awareness of the plight of asylum seekers. I became friendly with several Hazaras and one was artist, Shafiq Monis. What was most reminiscent of that first meeting, apart from his art work, was being served bruschetta, an Italian tomato savoury dish. Shafiq's wife had worked in an Italian restaurant and explained to me that the Italians had much in common with Hazaras. Due to the language barrier, she could not elaborate further, however I recall reflecting on what she had said.

² In 2001, the Howard Government of Australia refused permission to allow the freighter *MV Tampa* entry into Australian waters after rescuing 433 Asylum seekers, predominantly Hazaras, and 5 crew from a distressed fishing boat. The boat was approximately 6 hours from Christmas Island, an external Australian territory.

Finding commonalities between disparate groups, while honouring the differences, has been a theme in many of my artistic endeavors. As an artist and activist, I have constantly reflected on connections between cultures, objects of cultural significance and the people themselves. Moving into the realm of researcher, my past works may appear to pre-empt the answers I search for in this creative led research. Hence my past experience working in human rights and social justice are a lens used in creating the artwork.

As the asylum seeker and refugee situation has become increasingly fraught, questions that pertain to links between cultures have occupied my creative approach and production of work in arts activism. Investigating the commonalities between Hazaras and Calabrians is a new area of knowledge and has the potential to positively influence and affect an audience in relation to social change. If a culture is understood from the perspective of one's own, and commonalities considered from that position, a shift may occur in the way new waves of migration are viewed.

When considering how to make a creative body of work based on this research, several questions were addressed in respect to whether the experiences of recent female refugee populations mirror those of earlier groups and the role that multidisciplinary arts plays in reflecting these similarities. Achieving this successfully meant I needed to investigate a way to become other, both inter-generationally and transculturally: to understand the Hazara women through their narratives and their socio-political and personal histories. This approach to performance, stepping into another's skin, allowed empathy to be the driving force to communicate their stories through live performance and scripted theatrical performances, mediated and documented on video.

It was also important to address Australia's current immigration policy, juxtaposed against past policies to give an understanding of the interconnection between public and personal

narratives. Further addressing the effect political rhetoric has on exiles, refugees and migrants. My personal experience in human rights and art activism illustrates how the arts raise awareness in order that issues of social justice affect the audience.

Chapter I introduces the concepts of narrative inquiry and autoethnography and my experiences as an artist of second generation immigrant Calabrian exiles. The commonalities between older Afghan Hazara women and Calabrians are acknowledged in relation to these similarities and reflected through a multidisciplinary arts approach. The methodologies based on Clandinin and Connolly's (2000) concept of narrative inquiry and Sarah Pink's *Walking with Video* (2007) are applied. These methodologies are used to investigate the narratives of twelve older Hazara Afghan women, between the ages of forty-seven to seventy-five, as they negotiate cultural change in Australia during the first decades of the 21st century.

In this chapter, I address how Clandinin and Connolly's (2000) concept of narrative inquiry captures the lived experiences of people over time and assists in understanding the way people create meaning through personal stories. It also observes both the individual and the cultural context from which the narratives are derived. I also discuss how *Walking with Video* (Pink, 2007) is a visual ethnographic approach that is both collaborative and participatory. It applies walking with a video and recording participant's experiences across social, cultural and personal environments. Pink (2007) asserts that walking with another person can enable researchers to learn about their participants from the perspective of an empath. Pink's concept of being empathetic was instrumental in terms of investigating the process of becoming the other.

Theorists Ellis, Adams & Bochner's (2010) article *Autoethnography: An Overview* is discussed to provide a number of auto-ethnographic approaches, three of which are relevant to this project. As the researcher and artist, autoethnography allows me to critically reflect on

my personal and creative experiences (Pace, 2012). Bochner and Ellis (2006 as cited in Adams Bouchner and Ellis 2011) maintain, “an autoethnographer is first and foremost a communicator and a storyteller” (p. 111) who applies auto-ethnography as a means to assist finding meaning through the re-enactment of a story.

I position myself as an artist ethnographer and discuss my past works as a lens through which the current project developed. These works explore liminality and commonalities between diverse cultures. I discuss how the artworks were developed and exhibited throughout, as a result of the creative led research. These works give perspective and contextualize my approach from a conventional style of theatre making to a multidisciplinary arts approach grounded in social and political content. The development of this creative led research project illuminates the refugee, asylum seeker and political dissident in transitional spaces which introduces, interrogates and reimagines my family story of exile.

Chapter 2, explores van Gennep (1909), Turner (1967) and La Shure’s (2005) theories of liminality in relation refugees and asylum seekers. An exploration of two diverse arts based projects, the first with a group of Hazara asylum seekers in Albany, Western Australia and the second a participatory theatre project in Afghanistan. Both projects explore liminality and the impact of war and dislocation from different perspectives. Investigations into the liminal experience of asylum seekers in Australia on and offshore detention facilities are also examined. Through the lens of these works, my personal experiences in the liminal space as an artist and second generation immigrant are also viewed.

Through these arts-based projects, the chapter addresses the narratives around asylum seekers and my art activism work in the early years of candidature. All of which aimed to counter ill-informed public narratives. Chapters 1 and 2 ask:

How does the arts play a role in understanding the liminal phase?

Chapter 3 addresses storytelling from the standpoint that a story can change preconceived ideas. Visual storytelling draws from writer/curator Selena Wendt's essays and exhibition *The Storytellers: Narratives in International Contemporary Art* at the Stenersen Museum in Oslo (2012) and is examined in relation to my current project. Cultural critic and essayist Walter Benjamin (1936) is discussed in reference to his position on the dying art of storytelling juxtaposed against contemporary storytelling genres.

A history and examination of *magic realism* is discussed with specific attention to Italian literary critic and writer Massimo Bontempelli (1878–1960) and contemporary Latin American writing that includes Todorov's *Fantastic* (1975) and the Carpentier's (1904-1980) theory of *marvellous real*. Additional scholars, including Erik Camayd-Freixas (2014) and Wendy Faris (2004), are discussed. Further, the significance of *magic realism* in the research project is reviewed in terms of my film/play script, which is developed for both the videos and live performance. Towards the end of chapter two, theatre practitioner Anne Bogart (2014) is considered in relation to the role of storytelling in theatre and performance. I further discuss my approach to the development of the performance script in the creatively led research applying Bogart's ideas about coming from a place of unknowing to knowing, while addressing storytelling as a means to build bridges between people.

Bogart's (2015) concept of questioning the stories that performers tell in relation to whose stories are being told and why, assisted moving into the space of the storyteller. I also adapted Bogart's (2015) idea of self-trust in performance, particularly when delving into unfamiliar areas. This was significant in making connections between the Hazara and Calabrian narratives and understanding the commonalities between both groups.

Chapter 3 considers,

What it is to be other? How inhabiting the role of a storyteller, narrator and performer can shift positions from not knowing to knowing?

Chapter 4 consolidates negotiating groundwork and establishing the processes for community engagement. Ethics clearance is discussed in relation to the twelve women involved in the project as well clarification of their backgrounds and the specific interview questions posed. The observations that emerged from conversations with the Hazara women and the commonalities between Hazaras and Calabrians in Australia are examined. I briefly discuss changes to the original research question in respect to understanding the liminal space post migration. Ethical considerations are discussed in terms of the rights of the participants as well as issues that arose during the candidature. Moreover, cultural appropriation is studied from the perspective of the performance aspect of my project and ethical matters arising from performing as the other.

Chapter 5 focuses on understanding Afghan women and Afghanistan using art activism and transitional justice. I examine women and the arts as casualties of war and discuss the revival of the arts that slowly took place after the US led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Artists in Afghanistan are explored with an emphasis on female artists who risk their lives in a bid to shift perceptions of women in Afghanistan. The concept of a truth and reconciliation tribunal in Afghanistan, similar to Argentina and South Africa is considered as means to enable the country to come together as one nation, across ethnic groups as has occurred in the Afghan art world. Hazaras are situated in the context of the arts in terms of their contribution as well as the difficulties they have endured in pursuing the arts. Much of this chapter echoes discussions with the Hazara women and their need for a unified Afghanistan.

Chapter 5 addresses:

Understanding Afghan women and Afghanistan through the lens of art activism, by applying tenets of transitional justice³.

Additionally, my investigation into the arts in Afghanistan gives an historical and current context to the women in my study as well as an understanding of contemporary arts in Afghanistan. The chapter further addresses the impact Afghan female artists and their current impact on women's rights in relation to arts activism. Thus, reflecting many of the issues discussed with the Hazara women in my inquiry.

The discussion of art activism which continues in Chapter 6 considers a number of female artists that hail from southern Italy, Latin America and Iran. These visual storytellers have been chosen due to their art activism, time in self-imposed exile and their commitment to transnational feminism through their art. Their works are introduced to highlight phases of liminality and the current socio-political issues in their respective countries. The influences of these artists on my creative led research are discussed. The chapter segues into filmmaker Guy Ben-Ner (1997) and his influence on the creative methodology, specifically my approach to filming the performances in a domestic setting and how this propagates a do-it-yourself (DIY) film set aesthetic. According to Saltz (2008) "all art comes from other art, and all immigrants come from other places" (p. 2). From this standpoint, Ben-Ner's work resonates with the story of both the immigrant and the artist.

The theory of transnational feminism is reflected in the multicultural nature of these artists and their works. In this chapter, I analyse the work of these artist through a transnational

³ Transitional justice occurs when countries emerge from a state of violence, oppression, and large scale human rights violations to a desire for these societies to rebuild social trust, repair fractured political systems and create a democratic system of government. This may occur in a number of forms including, but not limited to, reparation, truth and reconciliation commissions, memories and memorials or the international criminal court.

feminist lens. I wish to note that while I was brought up in Australia, my understanding of feminism came from a southern Italian perspective and often conflicted with a western perception.

There is a strong focus on the commonalities between Hazaras and Calabrians from a non-western perspective while considering how they intersect with experiences from a western perspective (Valoy, 2015). The interrelationship between Hazaras and Calabrians is further highlighted by common themes located in the women's narratives including motherhood, grief and ancestral memory. Additionally, *magic realism* is used to highlight these connections between the cultures to engage audiences.

The artists whom I have chosen for this chapter infuse their works with elements of *magic realism* where the creation of different realities and worlds are told through their visual stories. These works have significant impact on my creative led project as they have informed my direction across a number of arts disciplines, storytelling, and feminism from both western and non-western perspectives. One of the questions I address in this chapter includes: How does arts activism tell a story that will affect social change?

Chapter 7 explains the project and draws on elements discussed throughout the thesis. The chapter focuses on the production of the artwork informed by the Hazara and Calabrian women's stories. My approach to performance is discussed from an empathic perspective applying two of Ekman's (1972) three types of empathy - cognitive, compassionate and emotional, with my emphasis on Ekman's emotional and compassionate empathy. These two empathies are compatible with a performer's understanding of living in the liminal space which is intrinsic to making a creative work that affects the viewer.

A comprehensive explanation of the development of the film script based on the lived experiences of the Hazara women and past conversations with the Calabrian woman is

clarified. Two performance videos are discussed, based on observations from my research with the Hazara women and the Calabrian woman's story as representative of the Italian exiles' journeys to Australia which also mirrors the many lives lost at sea. This section draws further on filmmaker Guy Ben-Ner's (1997) influence in the creation of my films through his do-it-yourself (DIY) or ad hoc set construction using everyday domestic settings.

This chapter includes a thorough description of the social experiment engaged by the researcher and inspired by Augusto Boal's (1979) *Invisible Theatre* and the Tate Modern's performed work *Actions and Interruptions* (2007). As such, by inhabiting the bodies of the women as an empath, we are shown how the women feel about acceptance by the broader community.

The overall aim of this chapter is to give a comprehensive account of the artworks against the dissertation.

Chapter 1

The Artist as Ethnographer.

As researchers, we come into the inquiry living our stories. Our participants come into the inquiry field in the midst of living their stories. Their lives do not begin the day we arrive nor end the day we leave. Their lives continue (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000, p. 1).

As narrative researchers, we enter an inquiry field in the midst of living stories - our own and the participants. Like a three dimensional space where “we learn to see ourselves as always in the midst-located, somewhere along the dimensions of time, place the personal and the social....” (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000, p. 63). Working in this field, the researcher must constantly negotiate; allow changes and re-evaluation while maintaining this flexibility throughout (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000).

This creatively led research project draws from narrative inquiry and is informed by the rich, raw stories of the Hazara women. The methods of dialogue, developed by Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1968) and further extended upon in theatre by Augusto Boal have influenced this project. According to Boal in *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), conversational dialogue is the most equitable means of exchange between people regardless of gender, class, politics and education. In the context of researcher and participant, Boal’s methods support equal status between both parties. Further, conversational dialogue elicits the most appropriate information for this research as it is the most natural interaction between people and one in which most people are capable of engaging (Boal, 1979).

Narrative inquiry will employ the three commonplace frames used by Clandinin and Huber (2010) including *Temporality* which is located in time and understanding that

everything is in transition and is temporary. Secondly, “sociality”, is concerned with the personal and social conditions of the participants and inquirer in terms of feelings of hope, desires and moral dispositions. Thirdly, “place”, is best described as, “the specific concrete, physical topographical boundaries of place or sequences of place where inquiry and events take place” (p. 480).

Theories of walking with video and narrative inquiry, apply techniques used in the *Shoah Testimonies* whereby stories are told straight to camera with minimal editing⁴. I used these techniques interchangeably, depending on what information I intended to elicit, the circumstances surrounding participants on a particular day, and the environment.

Walking with video is a recognised means of visual ethnography. Sara Pink (2007) discusses this methodology as a “phenomenological research method that attends to sensorial elements of human experience and place-making” (Pink, p. 240). In this research, the participants’ stories are recorded in several environments to understand their lived experiences from social and cultural perspectives. Pink observes walking with participants as a means for researchers to learn about participants’ experiences from an empathetic space. In her article *Walking with Video* (2007), Pink examines “how the integration of video into this method can serve as a catalyst for creating ethnographic understandings of other people’s experiences and representing these experiences to a wider audience” (p. 240).

Narrative inquiry and walking with video are complimentary, given that most narrative inquiry begins with the researcher interviewing or conversing with the participants to obtain their stories and experiences. Therefore, I combined these approaches to capture the participating women’s narratives. The common thread between narrative inquiry and

⁴ The Shoah Testimonies are a visual history archive based at the Shoah foundation in the United States. Its aim is to make audiovisual materials from survivors and witnesses of the Jewish holocaust and other genocides available to the public in order to both educate and construct a voice for action.

walking with video as methodologies is the researcher and participants travel together as one story. There is also a sharing of the process on a number of sensory levels aural, tactile and visual. Pink (2007) contends that researchers who have shared the sensory experiences of their participants can promote “heightened understandings of the identities, moralities, values, beliefs and concerns of the people they do their research with” (p. 244).

Pink (2007) makes links between academic analyses that emphasize perceptions of a specific environment. Tim Ingold (2004), a social anthropologist, discusses feeling through the feet in his paper *Culture on the Ground* (2004) and addresses concepts of embodied skills of footwork which in turn opens up new ideas in the study of environmental perception.

It is surely through our feet, in contact with the ground (albeit mediated by footwear), that we are more fundamentally and continually “in touch” with our surroundings (p. 330) [thus suggesting that] locomotion, not cognition, must be the starting point for the study of perceptual activity (p. 331).

This idea is reminiscent of my Italian grandparents telling me to take my shoes off in their vast vegetable garden to feel the earth’s energy as I walk. My grandfather said that walking on the earth has its own story. More than thirty years later, I realised that this was a pivotal point in my life in terms of understanding the Italian connection to the land. In that moment, there was a sense of belonging to my southern Italian culture and to the exile’s soul that lived within my grandparents. What took root was a sense of connectedness that has never wavered. This experience of my family’s story connected me to the experiences of the Hazara women. It became clear that we walk with people throughout our lives and are generally unaware of the many meaningful connections that take place. “Walking” with my grandparents and later my mother, was an ethnographic study from both Pink’s and Ingold’s standpoint. I was not seeing their world, I was experiencing it with them, perceiving it as they

did. I encountered a similar experience walking with the women in my study which reflects Pink's importance of connecting to the participant on a sensory and empathetic level.

Ingold (2004) contends that movement should be the point at which one commences any study based on perception and related activities and that feeling the earth under our feet gives a sense of connectedness, for both participant and researcher, to one's environment. Whether in a war zone, climbing a mountain, or performing daily activities, there is perpetual motion. In these moments, narratives come to life and are potentially more accessible to an audience.

While much of Pink's work is from an anthropological ethnographic perspective, walking with video is transferable across disciplines. The very nature of artists' and anthropologists' work is often intertwined, particularly in terms of documentary photography and filmmaking. Pink's concept of walking with video is underpinned by the development of an intimacy between participant and researcher. Such familiarity stems from the sense of freedom that occurs when walking: whether purposeful or pleasurable, conversation may naturally develop, which was my experience with a number of the Hazara women. According to Clandinin and Connolly's (2000) narrative inquiry captures the lived experiences of people over time that assists in understating the way people create meaning through personal stories. As with walking with video it also observes both the individual and the cultural context from which the narratives are derived.

Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011), in their article *Autoethnography: An Overview*, maintain there are a number of autoethnographic approaches, three of which are relevant to this project. As the researcher and artist, autoethnography allows critically reflection on my personal and creative experiences (Pace, 2012). Much of my work in the PhD project is performative, and an autoethnographic approach acknowledges both my work as a researcher and the audience with equal significance. For example, the audience may experience the

ethnographic work internally through feeling, reading or hearing, while the external manifestation may be an emotional reaction. As a performer, visual artist and ethnographer, my overall aim is to have affect and inspire social change.

The project consisted of twelve Hazara Afghan women aged forty-seven to seventy-five who consented to four in depth interviews and observations over a sixteen-month period at Southern Migrant Refugee Centre, Dandenong. The women's backgrounds ranged from farmers, to landowners, business women, teachers, doctors and nurses. Although most of the women preferred to remain anonymous, they all wished to be involved in the project and share their stories.

Attendance at festivals, vigils, protests and dinners organised by the Australian Hazara Women's Friendship Network (AHWFN) assisted in gathering data. In these instances, I applied walking with video and generally a conversation would ensue. Written notes were taken, as well as audio material captured from impromptu poetry or anecdotes not caught on video.

By immersing myself in the Hazara women's world I developed relationships on both a group and an individual basis which provided a deeper insight into the women. Further, my engagement in the community itself enabled me to meet men, other women and children, thus a comprehensive appreciation of the community and lives of the women was established.

When I commenced the interviewing period, I had a set number of comprehensive questions relating to the Hazara women's experience in Australia: their identity, their connection to the broader community, and living in an in-between space. It became apparent almost immediately that the women had their own stories to tell. While their stories related to many of my initial questions, they wanted to share their lives pre- and post-arrival in Australia: the impact of civil war; how their rights as women were curtailed; and the cost of

being from a persecuted ethnic group and feeling they were in between two worlds or cultures. In effect it became participant-led. Clandinin and Connolly (2000) maintain that researchers need to be flexible and allow for unforeseen changes. It was at this point that I shifted my interviewing approach and engaged with the women applying Boal's (1979) dialogic method which is considered the most equitable form of exchange between people regardless of status. This method was originally developed by Paulo Freire while working with marginalized communities in Brazil. His book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) examined stories as evolving through dialogue between teacher and student and was responsible for an innovative approach to adult learning and social change.

Freire's methods resonate in my work in the Hazara women's community in insofar as his methods are aimed at strengthening a people's capacity to communicate by whatever means is relevant to them and this is what the women did, thus illustrating their agency. While Freire's storytelling methodology was innovative at the time, Boal, guided by Freire, applied these methods to theatre. Boal developed a number of approaches under the umbrella of a *Theatre of the Oppressed* or *Liberation Theatre*, a conceptual approach to performance that takes a situation which causes conflict and rehearses the situation many times to develop an understanding of the experience. This understanding is then applied to 'real life' in order to change a difficult situation, thus liberating one from the experience. This method can be applied to an individual issue or social issues to bring about change. *Invisible Theatre* is a performance method presented in unusual and unexpected spaces such as a shopping centres and was an approach I used to create the series of passport photos titled, *You can only Wear that Scarf for Religious Reasons*⁵. This artwork is discussed in greater detail in chapter 6.

⁵ Invisible theatre is a technique, featured in Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979). It is a form of theatrical performance enacted in unusual places such as the streets or in a shopping centre. The audience is unaware that a performance is taking place.

Boal's work interests me in terms of where and how his work overlaps with narrative inquiry and walking with video to produce a sense of theatre within the women's narratives. Walking with video provides a physical element and captures "the expressivity of the body as an emitter and transmitter of messages" (Boal, 1992, p. 60). Boal perceived that the body's movement is thought communicated in a physical form (Boal, 1992). The women, communicated with their whole bodies, both in one-on-one conversations and in group discussions. At times, I did not understand everything, due to linguistic limitations, however the physicality of their storytelling was compelling. For example, the way they gestured with their hands and acted out events, was similar to theatre performers, emphasising their stories which were embodied and activated through retelling to them to an audience.

Linds and Vettriano's (2008) article on *Collaborative Story Telling through Image Theatre* supports my adoption of Boal's storytelling method in that "Boalian techniques work with that which is real; with stories which are individuals' truths." (Linds & Vettriano, 2008, p. 1). Narrative inquiry also works within this paradigm of presenting individual truths through personal narrative or storytelling. Lipson, Lawrence and Mealman (1999) speak of a 'storytelling space' with "... fertile soil where the collective knowledge takes root." During informal group discussions, the women shared quite personal information and exchanged ideas that helped create more concise narratives, which, in Boal's terms, reflects the inner realities of the women.

Boal's principles of dialogue focus on creating parity between people where an imbalance of power generally applies, such as researcher and participant, teachers and students, authority figures and the public. From my experience, when a sense of equality is felt, conversations or dialogue are more open and truthful. When stories were exchanged between the women and myself, in reference to our personal history and respective cultures, I felt a

change in the dynamic between us occur. This enabled further discussion about commonalities between Southern Italian and Hazaras. By engaging in dialogue and sharing cultural stories with the women, an understanding of the Italian community developed. Overall, I found applying dialogue an effective conversation tool as discussion shifted into an exchange of ideas, personal and political stories which gave the women a sense of empowerment. Engaging in cross-cultural storytelling activated the directional shift of the creative led project.

As a researcher and artist working with the Hazara community, the emphasis shifted from retelling the Hazara women's stories, to how these stories informed and influenced the telling of my own migration story. Tedlock (1991) would refer to this as narrative ethnography, as my family story is incorporated into those of the Hazara women. The project also corresponds to Toyosak, Pensoneau-Conway, Wendt and Leathers (2014) concept of community autoethnographies, whereby my personal experience, in collaboration with the Hazara women, demonstrates how a community reveals specific social and cultural issues.

Autoethnography

As an artist, I have only recently placed myself, or my family's journey, into my projects, though it could be argued that an artist's work, consciously or unconsciously, is affected by the environment in which they grew up. According to Ellis (2004) and Holman Jones (2005 as cited in Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011), "autoethnography uses personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*) (p. 1). Applying this methodology to my studio-led research has meant that I am self-reflective and examining my personal experiences or narrative in relation to a larger narrative that encompasses understandings of cultural, political, and social natures. The relationship that I developed with the Hazara women has been particularly challenging insofar as their stories have reflected much of my

family story. Therefore, I have had to unearth cultural and family issues which have remained dormant or unaddressed for years. It has also meant questioning not only how to approach my artwork, but how to incorporate my story in relationship to others into my work in a socially aware, ethically and culturally sensitive manner. Moreover, autoethnography contests established methods of doing research and considers this approach as motivated by acts that are politically and socially just (Adams & Holman, 2008). Ellis et al (2011) discuss various forms of autoethnography and the significant difference is the amount of stress placed on investigating others, "the researcher's-self and their interaction with others, traditional analysis, and the interview context, as well as on power relationships" (p. 5).

Two forms of autoethnographic approach resonate within this project. Firstly, as Tedlock (1991) argues, there are narrative ethnographies that combine stories from texts that are integrated into the ethnographer's narrative. As opposed to choosing between written research where the self is the primary focus or choosing to apply a standard approach which centres on the *other*, the research can be organised as a single narrative ethnography, focusing on the ethnographic dialogue process and the character. In effect, the *other* and self are combined as one story.

The second autoethnographic approach is reflexive. This approach documents ways that the researcher changes because of doing fieldwork. By studying, one's own life alongside a specific group, "the ethnographer's backstage research endeavours become the focus of investigation" (Ellis, 2004, p. 6). In my work with the Hazara women, I have attempted to find an equal balance between their stories and my family story. The emphasis is on the Hazara women and how their lived experiences inform my artwork and integrates with my family's migration story. The execution of the work seeks a balanced link between southern Italian exiles and

Hazaras which reflects the commonality of human experience. The interviews, as discussed in chapter four, employed Augusto Boal's method of dialogue, which is conversational in style. This maintains a balance between researcher and participant. By working in this way, I found not only commonalities between the cultures, but expanded my understanding of our family's migration journey and its impact on my life. Honouring my grandparents' and mother's activism has not only acknowledged their contribution, but the lineage of this activism in my family and how it is continued in my work as an artist activist.

My grandfather was an anti-fascist (a "red shirt") in Mussolini's Italy and an anti-fascist leader in Cosenza, Calabria. He came to the attention of the Mussolini's black shirts and had no choice but to leave (Abiuso, 1991). I recall my grandmother telling me of leaving the children asleep alone in the dead of night and walking miles to meet a group of partisans, to give them the money and papers to secure my grandfather's freedom. The rest of the story is unclear, however he boarded a boat in Naples for Australia. I can only imagine the difficulty escaping the inhospitable Calabrian hills and the fear of death or imprisonment on Lipari or Ponza were he caught. Once in Australia, he continued his fight for justice, became involved with the Italian anti-fascist movement, and founded the Relief Operation for Italian War Victims. He also established the Italian newspaper *Il Risveglio* (*The Re-awakening*) which continued for more than twelve years (Abiuso, 1991)⁶. The circumstances surrounding my grandparents' departure from Italy meant they gave up their family, a community and to some extent economic hardship. They were not the impoverished Italian migrants of the 1950's. They were different, and that difference made some of their children and I feel as though we were living in between two cultures: I did not fit with the Italians of my

⁶ Abiuso G.L (1991) 'The Italian Left in Australia', *An Italian in the Australian Militant Left 1927-1983 Luigi Stellato*. PhD thesis. Victorian University. This chapter is dedicated to my grandfather (and grandmother's) political activities.

generation, nor was I a fully integrated Australian. When in Italy, I feel strong ancestral ties, yet on my return to Australia, I feel at home, although the longing for Italy remained. Thus, I perceive myself as someone with a hybrid or transnational identity. I understand my identity to be quite fluid as I live at different points and periods in time within the context of two or more very different societies, populations, laws, morals, and cultural codes. (Bradatan, Popan, & Melton, 2010). Perceiving myself with a transnational identity, I function in different, and at times conflicting, spaces particularly in terms of my interactions with each respective community (Kivisto, 2003).

Baldassa (2011) discusses the concept of circularity in migration and transnational identity in relation to Italians. She maintains many Italian migrants and their descendants engage in visits home and other forms of transnational interaction that demonstrates the circularity of the migration process. From this perspective, I am very much a circulatory migrant, as I regularly return to Italy. Baldassa (2011) maintains that second generation immigrants who grew up in the 1980s and 1990s experienced multiculturalism and plural approaches to education and health care, thereby exposed to an environment which promoted diversity and ethnic identity. I would argue that this occurred in the 1970's when Gough Whitlam (1972-1975) came to power and introduced free healthcare and education. According to the National Museum of Australia website, the Whitlam government removed the White Australia Policy in 1973 and replaced it with Multiculturalism. Prior to this time migrant parents and older second-generation Italo-Australians had to struggle with assimilation, which generally meant, a negation of your ethnic culture. From my experience, multiculturalism really did not embed itself in Australia until the late 1980s to 1990s. However, I agree with Baldassa (2011) that multicultural politics was a factor that promoted ethnic identities and connections to Italy. This in turn was a factor in creating my sense of a hybrid and transnational identity.

From 2005 to 2014, I was engaged with community cultural development music-based programs between Australia and Italy. Through an Australian organisation (Singabout), I was engaged in assisting with cultural exchanges between Australian choirs and musicians in conjunction with Italian counterparts. Much of the work was community-based arts, thus enabling me to connect with my culture through music. Moreover, I had the opportunity to introduce Italian culture to Australians from an Italian perspective *in* Italy. The work between Italy and Australia generally comprised of a concert or a series of concerts in Italian Piazzas, Il Campo in Siena, or in community halls with larger events held in Santa Maria della Scala, a museum in Siena. Working in cultural exchange programs further consolidated my sense of transnational identity. Spending so much time in Italy allowed me to see the country from a socio-political perspective, particularly in terms of human rights.

Baubock (2003) discusses transnational politics whereby the migrant creates overlapping memberships between independent politics in different countries. In my case, I became involved with the politics of Italy through its humanitarian approach to asylum seekers and refugees. I have presented at conferences and espoused the Italian approach to asylum seekers compared to the inhumane tactics employed by Australia. Baubock does indicate that political transnationalism generally applies to a limited set of activities, such as my involvement with asylum seekers in Italy. However, he does maintain that collective identities and ideas of citizenship among the populations of both countries are affected. I suggest from my own experience the main effect this has had is in addressing Australia's policies in relation to Italy's as a mean to offer an approach that is more humane⁷.

My past arts projects contextualize my sustained contribution to art activism. The excerpt from my family's migration story, situates my personal experience in the current project. The

⁷ The new far right government in Italy no longer has the same humane approach as the previous one.

creative led research investigates how the migrant narrative plays a role in the arts in terms of understanding the liminal phase through storytelling. From a performer's perspective, the artwork illustrates the way in which inhabiting the role of a storyteller can shift the performer from a position of not knowing to knowing. Further, art activism can apply tenets of transnational feminism to create both visual and performed stories to affect social change. Commonalities between Hazaras and Calabrians are presented through the artwork to reinforce similarities between disparate communities. The process of unearthing my family's story helped me to recognise my own liminal position as an Italian-Australian. Moreover, acknowledging this space, has strengthened my understanding of the Hazara women and inspired my multidisciplinary arts approach to reflect the commonalities of Hazaras and Calabrians through the process of becoming other which is discussed in the next chapter.

Building a personal history using a narrative inquiry approach

To give perspective on the current PhD project, it is important that I discuss past works that examine liminality, commonalities between cultures, and women dislocated by war and persecution. These works contextualize my multi-disciplinary approach from re-defining the conventionally produced play, to works focused on socio-political content and the application of visual aids such as projections and videos. Furthermore, the development of the work illuminates the refugee and political dissident in transitional spaces. The majority of my past works in theatre and performance have been developed using a narrative inquiry approach, consistent with my current creative project. I have been collecting and collating stories from men, women and children of migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds for more than 18 years. Through grants and commissions, I have produced plays, installations and storytelling events around the issues of war, persecution, migration and settlement. Through

the arts, I have employed research skills consistent with the protocols and expectations of ethics committees, as vulnerable populations need specific care.

The body of work I made prior to my PhD has been generally [performance] site specific, ranging from the Malthouse Theatre in Melbourne, to a suburban house in Elwood, to churches in St. Kilda and open spaces at the Melbourne Museum. *Blood in the Garden* (1995) performed at the Malthouse Theatre aimed to illustrate commonalities between Indigenous Australians and Italians. Material for this work was collected using a narrative inquiry approach with members of both communities in Lake Tyers and Gippsland as well as input from Italian and Noongar communities in Western Australia. The project provided a positive space in which people and societies work collaboratively and focus on issues relating to the stolen generation from an Italian perspective. It also highlighted the common connection both communities have to family and land. Written in Italian, English and Aboriginal English, *Blood in the Garden* was accessible across cultures and language groups. The play emphasized the “in-between” space occupied by Indigenous Australians and an acknowledgement of that space from the Italian community.

In 2000, my company Kommonground Inc. was commissioned by the Melbourne Museum to perform a previous work (*Southern Cross*, 1999) created with a group of refugees originating from the Ethiopian Circus. The troupe came to Australia in February 1998 to perform at the Adelaide Festival. Fifteen of the troupe, aged 13-24, sought asylum and were subsequently cared for by the Ethiopian community and a number of advocates and lawyers in Melbourne (Webb, 2002). Told through narratives, physical theatre, music and languages other than English, *Southern Cross* addresses the stories of the refugees’ journey to Australia. The project focused on asylum claims, loss of identity and deconstruction of family and aimed to raise awareness about unaccompanied youth seeking asylum. *Southern Cross*

(1999), written and performed at the beginning of the Howard years (1996-2007), examined issues surrounding the immigration policies that were being developed in that period. It was also at this time that there was a shift in my artistic practice. My work became more political in content and included multimedia approaches to communicating my artistic and conceptual concerns.

My Country, My Killer, My Home (2003), performed in a small house in Elwood, ensured an intimate, interactive experience for the audience. The overall aim was to re-create a sense of “walking in the shoes” of asylum seekers so that the audience experienced a sense of displacement and living in limbo. Initially the “play” began with the audience cramped in a small room waiting for admission into the performance space. “Guards” were stationed at each entrance and exit and checked each person’s identity/ticket when they were finally “permitted” to enter. The audience was herded into one corner of the space and faced an antiquated television. A deceased Jewish holocaust survivor told his story, interspersed with the promise of what may come socio-politically in Australia with respect to asylum seekers. Three live performances of stories followed. After each story, the performance space was left black and the ‘guards’ moved the audience to a different position. The guards ensured silence from the audience by moving menacingly close to them. The feedback received post performance reported feelings of mild anxiety, claustrophobia and uncertainty. Many also commented on feelings of hostility towards and from the “guards”. Our objective was realised in terms of audience affect.

When *Songs of Captivity* (2005) was performed, it was at the height of asylum seeker controversy and was one of a few multidisciplinary theatre works created. The play examined women in an historical context living under dictatorships that had spanned nearly four decades. This play has informed the current research in terms of the treatment of women,

living in limbo and becoming other. Although all the women in my projects have lived in patriarchal regimes, they did not perceive themselves as victims. *Songs of Captivity* was created through the City of Port Phillip Cultural Fund and collected stories from local women from Somalia, Argentina and Afghanistan. Narrative inquiry was employed in conjunction with photography and music. While the women wanted to have their stories told, they all asked for anonymity and actors were used. Initially there was concern about cultural appropriation, but the women gave permission for the performers to tell their stories. In her book, *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law* (2005) Susan Scafidi, Professor of Law at Fordham University, New York, defines cultural appropriation as using traditional and cultural knowledge, expressions and artifacts of a given culture without their permission. While we had permission to use actors, complexities did arise, particularly with the Argentinian story. This woman's story was told to me by her male friend who had been imprisoned with her in Campo de Mayo during Argentina's Dirty War (1976–1983). This was challenging as the women's story relied on a witness. The woman in question died giving birth in the camp, and the story was told from the perspective of how her friend believed she would speak from the dead, to her child. This background was significant in the context of the creative led research as it informed my approach to acting as a conduit when performing the Hazara women's stories. I was also aware of issues surrounding appropriation.

In brief, when retelling the Hazara women's narratives and the women in *Songs of Captivity*, I was aware of my responsibility as the storyteller representing them. The women gave consent to their stories being told in whatever means that I, as an artist, chose. In Rebecca Garden's (2015) article *Who speaks for whom? Health humanities and the ethics of representation*, she draws on feminist science scholar Donna Haraway's work on the 'inappropriate(d) Other' which is primarily an obligation to ensure the agency of the

represented. That is, the power of those we represent is not shifted to the author or performer. Haraway reframes these representations as articulations that remind us “we cannot speak for another (or perhaps even for ourselves) except in flawed and potentially dangerous ways, while at the same time accepting the risk of ethical pitfalls to open up channels for understanding and agency” (p. 80). Therefore, I have ensured there is a social context, an understanding of place, as well as the historical, political and economic conditions that shape the women’s lives. Telling the stories of the Hazara women was a privilege and that spirit in which I represented or retold their narratives through my artwork. Ethical issues relating to this creative led research will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.



Figure 1. Wall of Memory, Still from *Songs of Captivity*, June 2005

Songs of Captivity was performed in the Sacred Heart Mission Church in St. Kilda. With the permission of the priest, we used the altar area to display photographs of the Disappeared (Desaparecidos) from countries around the world. Beginning with Plazo di Mayo in Buena Aires, to Northern Ireland, to Chile, Guatemala, Somalia and Afghanistan, the project paid tribute to women who lost their lives, homes, and identity under some of the harshest regimes of the past four decades. The use of a church was important in this project as the concept of

sanctuary is embedded in the social justice ethos of the Catholic Church (quite separate from other issues) and the use of the altar signified the sacredness of the memory of the dead.

Site or the location selected to stage this body of work was important for the representation of both country and spirit. Throughout the performance, the dead and the living spoke as one, with the intention that the spirit and physical world are interchangeable⁸. Australian immigration policies at that time were also woven into the women's stories. A cross-generational Italian choir comprising of forty women also performed, to underpin the trauma and hope of the stories with music.

The use of places of worship as sanctuary in *Songs of Captivity* (Fig 1, *Wall of Memory*) is as significant now as it was in the past. The concept of sanctuary or refuge assisted numerous people from fascist Italy. In 2016, Churches, Mosques and Synagogues offered sanctuary in direct opposition to the Federal government's action (Tomazin, 2016) when the Turnbull government prepared to return 267 people to offshore processing centres in Nauru after medical treatment in Australia.

In 2013, I created *Limbo 24/7* at the Northcote Arts Centre when Tamils and Hazaras were being returned to Sri Lanka and Afghanistan respectively by the Abbott government (Mares, 2013). This project has resonance with the PhD project in terms of its multidisciplinary approach; content that addresses the liminal space and commonalities between two diverse cultures as well as the lived experiences of both groups. The video and photographic installation opened with a live performance and was accompanied by the installation of three monitors interspersed throughout the space where the audience could watch stories from Hazaras and Tamils. The main film, which ran on a loop, was projected onto a concertina

⁸ The photographs used for this project were sourced from the website Abuelas de Plazo de Mayo, and www.desaparecidos.org. Permission was granted to use the images of the 'Disappeared' for the project by the Abuelas, via their website.

curtain that showed the commonalities that Tamils and Hazaras faced prior to fleeing their respective countries and also spoke to the dangers of deportation. The film was short and sharp. The soundscape from the main film was a combination of spoken narratives and music which further aimed to increase the dramatic effect of visual storytelling. This work informed my PhD project as I also looped the films and relied on the human voice and music as an evocative backdrop to the photographs and objects on display in the gallery space.



Figure 2. Poster for *Limbo 24/7* Melbourne March 21st, 2013

Similar to *Limbo 24/7* (2013), the video installations in my PhD exhibition are on a loop and a plaintive Italian folk song and narratives from the videos are used as an immersive soundscape. This aims to submerge the audience in a dynamic sensory experience of visual, spoken and harmonic narratives. In *Limbo 24/7* the aim was to give no relief from the horrors of war in order to stimulate empathy in the audience, so that social activism may follow.

This artwork was pivotal to my current PhD research because it focused on socio-political, and humanitarian issues in Australia, and established how a multidisciplinary art approach could raise awareness, because the audience was forced to have a corporeal response and feel physical and psychological discomfort when experiencing the work. This response

contributed to the viewer's understanding of the inhumane processes and procedures experienced by asylum seekers, with the intention of inspiring a shift in audience perception, consciousness and a voice for change.

In the first months of my PhD candidature the direction of my current artwork was crystalized when Multicultural Arts Victoria asked me to include my family's migration journey in the 2014, Piers Festival. *Though Calabrian Eyes* (2014) documented my grandparents' and my mother's journey from fascist Italy to their eventual exile in Australia. As part of the work, I performed a short piece to introduce the installation and began with the *Bandiera Rossa*, a famous song of the Italian labour movement. The installation was composed of prose, poetry, photographs, video, objects and notebooks. I created a piece that established the genesis of my artwork in terms of human rights and arts activism. I sifted through dairies and letters and old photographs to make the installation and came to understand the liminal space that my grandmother, Elisabetta Stellato, called the in-between. In my family's story, I walked with the dead and heard the call of the Calabrian hills that had remained a silent echo in the recesses of my memory. Objects such as a fur stole, a judge's hammer, an old battered suitcase, a half-written notebook were transitional objects standing in for deceased others. The audience became part of the installation as they read the poems in the notebooks and engaged with the objects. I observed them moving in and out of my family's history and personal narrative.



Figure 3. *Stellato Pledger Though Calabrian Eyes*, Piers Festival, 2014



Figure 4. *Stellato Pledger Ancestors*, Piers Festival, 2014

Another opportunity arose during my candidature to experiment with art activism and transitional justice, both of which have the same aim - to raise awareness of a specific issue⁹. In February to April of 2016, the *#Let them stay* campaign saw the streets of many Australian capital cities become the creative site to freely express one's political opinion (Doherty, 2016). The campaign was run by *Get-Up*, an Australian progressive activist group. In brief, the campaign aimed to shed light on 267 people in Australia, from Nauru and Manus who were to be returned in a matter of days. Many were initially evacuated from the offshore camps due to emergency medical reasons ranging from pregnancy, rape, illness, mental illness or the sexual abused of children. The medical facilities on both camps were not equipped to cater for patients in need of critical care, therefore, medical care in Australia was the only option. At the time of the campaign, many were not well enough to be returned to the offshore camps, particularly those with cancer (Doherty, 2016). Among the 267, there

⁹ The arts have the capacity to transform the individual stories and narratives of a group. To that end, the arts combine and highlight differences existing between religions, ethnic groups, and generations. Further, the arts give the audience a decisive role in order that they can reinterpret issues of conflict with an aim to promote healing (Golebiewski, 2014).

were thirty-seven babies born in Australia to mothers seeking asylum and fifty-four children, several of whom attended Australian primary schools (Doherty, 2016).

The campaign became a subject of discussion with the Hazara women, who, like many were visibly affected by the potential deportations. This prompted me to make my suburb a gallery and site for political protest. I initially began posting photographs of the children who were the face of the *Get-up* campaign. For weeks I posted photographs and signs protesting the potential deportations in children's playgrounds and draped around trees in parks. I used these spaces because this is where children and parents spend much of their time and I hoped the photographs would assist Australians to empathise with those being deported.

The first three attempts of covering parks and playgrounds in my area of Melbourne were removed. By week three, my persistence paid off and the reinstalled photographs remained. I then created posters stating *#Let them stay*, in Italian, Persian, Dari, Hebrew and Spanish, with photos of the babies likely to be deported. While most of these photographs and posters were installed at night, I still had to be covert and subsequently the photographs were attached quickly and held firmly together by string or tape. This was particularly important when hanging posters and photographs outside Town Halls and building sites. If caught, I would be perceived as a public nuisance and incur a fine.



Figure 5. Building site in Ripponlea, Melbourne April 2016

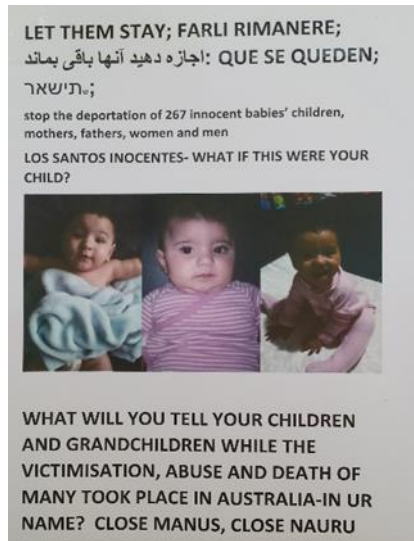


Figure 6. The Babies, Ripponlea



Figure 7. Little Girl on Nauru



Figure 8. St. Kilda Town Hall April 2016



Figure 9. Ripponlea Playground April 2016

These stealthy interventions were a means of raising awareness of social and political issues in urban spaces. Furthermore, it is a way to address communities divided on issues such as the potential deportation of the 267 asylum seekers. In relation to my creative led research, this type of activism was a useful part of my development as an arts activist. It also became my trademark in terms of reaching a diverse audience, as I now use this approach whenever issues pertaining to asylum seekers and refugees reach a critical point. Quantifying

the impact of art activism in public spaces is difficult to measure. In the case of the *#Let them Stay* campaign, more than 150 people, including 37 babies, were not returned to the offshore camps (Rierner, 2016). While 117 people were returned, I contend that public outcry did affect some change. However, those who stayed are currently in community detention with minimal rights and under threat that Immigration Minister, Peter Dutton, will return them at some stage. According to Rierner (2016), the *#Let them Stay* campaign illustrated how fast a protest can attain its objectives and that all participants involved can experience an appreciation of their potential as political actors.

In the lead up the closing of Manus on October 31st, 2017, I again took to the streets of Melbourne and used it as a gallery to display faces of the Manus men. My aim was to give a human face to those suffering in our camps. I had to put the works up quickly in public places and move on, as I did not want to receive a fine. This means that the photographs are expeditiously taped on posts, trees and poles; however, the affect is the same.

In one area of Melbourne, I encountered a man doing his own performance art on a tight rope. I asked him if he would allow me to photograph him tight rope walking next to 20-year-old Mamud's smiling face. The idea was to show symbolically the similarity between precariously balancing on a tight rope and the instability and uncertainty of the limbo state in which the detainees live. The open smiling faces of two, very different young men, also speak to the commonalities of hopes, dream and aspirations.



¹⁰Figure 10. Aziz-Manus Island Refugee, St. Kilda Melbourne 2017

Figure 11. Behrouz-Manus Island Refugee St. Kilda Melbourne 2017

Figure 12. Mamud-Manus Island refugee, St. Kilda 2017



Figure 13. Mamud and tightrope Walker, St. Kilda Park in Melbourne, 2017

My conversation with the tight rope walker revealed that he had been in the armed forces and made three tours to Afghanistan. His story was interesting particularly in the context of art interventions and activism as he spoke of the street art in Kabul as courageous social and political commentary (Performer, personal communication, 28th October 2017).

Throughout my candidature, I have instigated numerous art interventions, with the objective to highlight current human rights injustices occurring in Australia. My recent interventions aimed to raise awareness for illegally detained asylum seekers in Australia's

¹⁰ The three men from Manus pictured above have given permission to use their faces in protests and art installations.

offshore detention camps. These art interventions aim to challenge the audience to question these policies and became advocates for change.

Recent Human Rights Committee interrogations on October 19th 2017, questioned Australia's Ambassador to the United Nations, John Quinn, regarding concerns about Australia's policy and its compatibility with the human rights agreements, of which Australia is a signatory. The official statement by Australia indicated that Australia does not have a mandatory detention system and people were not arbitrarily detained. Clearly, this is untrue and the UNHCR subsequently delivered a damning report which targeted the untenable situation on Manus demanding Australia take responsibility for those on both Manus and Nauru. The UNHCR concerns were specific in the light of Manus Island closing its detention centre without proper arrangements in place for the 1000 plus men left languishing without proper food, water, medical and trauma assistance (UNHCR).

Making art in public places has not always been an enjoyable exercise. I have been abused, had my photos spat on, sneered at, or told to go back to my own country. These insults only strengthened my resolve to use art interventions to raise awareness and achieve justice for the many punished for seeking our protection.

During February 2017, in the final year of candidature, I was again invited by Multicultural Arts Victoria to join a group exhibition *Waves of Love and Emotion* at the South Melbourne Heritage Centre. I presented an installation about my family's exile from Italy. This work came directly from my current creative project. The installation included a framed photo storyboard, my grandmother's opera gloves, her gold-plated coffee set, my mother's wedding headdress and my baptism decoration. Though much of the written story depicted my grandfather's political activities, most of the transitional objects I had kept for many years as reminders of my identity, belonged to my mother and grandmother. I also

included my grandparent's poetry that spoke of their relationship and loss of family. These objects and written works were/are indicative of the family's connection to cultural Catholicism, socialism, the arts and literature. Within the story board, I wrote a section dedicated to my grandmother and her personal journey as a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

At the exhibition opening, discussions ensued about my grandmother's English proficiency, her business acumen and involvement with my grandfather's anti-fascist activities. I also had the opportunity to discuss my thesis in terms of commonalities between Hazara women and Calabrians, specifically my grandmother. This in turn led to debate on comparison with new communities, how they fared in relation to the more established groups. Raising similarities was of particular interest, as the idea of such diverse groups having anything in common seemed remote to many.

When making comparisons about Calabrian exiles in the light of my grandmother, it became clear that the issue which resonated most was that both cultures were not accepted into the broader community in their own countries; both had been maligned or persecuted and neither felt accepted into the broader Australian community. This was particularly true of my grandmother due to her support for, and activities in, the Australian labour movements as the majority of Italians were pro-fascist or anti-socialist. Moreover, both the southern Italians and Hazaras were committed to the education of their children, particularly the girls. In my grandmother's case, it was imperative that all four of her daughters were university educated, which during the Second World War was uncommon as education was not an option for most Italian girls, who were expected to get married and raise families. The Hazaras however had come from a system where education was denied to women not just by the family and the culture, but also by the state.

In the story portrait below, *Walking with my Ancestors*, I have taken an excerpt from *Waves of Love and Emotion*. The stories displayed at that exhibition are used in this thesis. The following excerpt begins when my grandmother arrives in Australia. *Walking with my Ancestors* encapsulates leaving and arriving, political changes and the loss of a child (Figure, 14). Liminality is understood through my grandmother being on the threshold of a new life, but also being frozen in time while simultaneously needing to move forward.

My grandmother's experiences resonate with the Hazara women participating in the current research from the perspective that they too are in the process of adapting to a new culture. Both feel or have felt the full weight that change brings which can be fraught with difficulties and welcomed freedoms.

The excerpt from my family's migration story, situates my personal experience in the current project. The creative led research investigates how the migrant narrative plays a role in the arts in terms of understanding the liminal phase through storytelling. From a performer's perspective, my artwork illustrates the way in which inhabiting the role of a storyteller, can shift the performer from a position of not knowing to knowing. The process of unearthing my family's story helped me to recognise my own liminal space in terms of constantly straddling two cultures. Acknowledging this space, has strengthened my understanding of the Hazara women which is discussed in the next chapter.

The works produced prior to and during this candidature have been instrumental in developing this creative led project. There are similarities between some of the past works and the current project in relation to finding commonalities between groups and inhabiting the liminal space. However, the past works have not deliberately looked for specific cultural connections, these came about organically throughout the course of a given project and were not grounded in evidence-based investigations. While heuristic research has played a role in

my current project, I have had to apply a number of theoretical approaches to articulate the commonalities between two specific cultures.

Walking with my Ancestors

Excerpt from Multicultural Arts Exhibition: Love and emotion
February 2017

Letter to Elisabetta.

A thousand memories will live on in the hearts and minds of our children, our children's children.

We cannot count the stars at night without being reminded of the thousands that have died.

And will die in this war and the wars to come.

For they are not the end, not now, we are only the beginning of the end.

I touch your face in my mind's eye

I remember your smile, our children, it is for the future we must be strong

May a thousand winds blow the cries in your heart to me.

Do not weep I am soon to be with you (interpretation of the letter and memories told to me by Elisabetta)

Letter to Louis

Ricordo sempre quel

Giorno che partisti

Quel Giorno che da me

Lontana andarti

Pensando a quel triste momento

Il mio cuore

E sempre più dolente



Elisabetta and my mother
Guiditta (circa 1929)

Though the family settled into a semblance of normality, the house was always open to the anti-fascist cause and a myriad of people sought help from legal to migration issues. The ensuing years saw Elisabetta give birth to two more daughters and one boy, Francesco (Frankie). Frankie had a disability and died of yellow fever, at age eight. The death of Frankie, rocked the family to its core. Louis would not allow one photo of him in the house. Their grief was palpable, even years later. My Nonna told me that he said "No one could have been a better mother". She would tell me with tears in her eyes, "the little boy, had never moved from my heart." She used to take out photos of Frankie in secret and look at them. After Louis' death, photos of Frankie were put up around the house. And a sense of healing finally began.

As well as managing the family, Elisabetta also helped run the business. This allowed Louis to continue his political work, in which she also had involvement. Her passion for learning ensured that she taught herself to read write and speak English and she also developed skills in poetry writing.

From the outside their marriage appeared fraught, but there was an underlying love. Louis always referred to Elisabetta as mia Regina (my queen).



Francesco 6 years old. (n.d.)

Figure 14. Walking with my Ancestors, *Love and Emotion* Exhibition, South Melbourne, February 11, 2017

Additionally, the research for this creatively led project is multidisciplinary both academically and artistically, while past art projects relied purely on storytelling, often set against socio-political backgrounds. The knowledge gained over a twenty plus year career in community cultural development and human rights has been drawn upon and used as a lens to inform and produce the project.

The following chapter discusses the liminal space which many of the Hazara women describe as being in-between, in limbo and unable to assimilate. The chapter references stories from the women in my study, asylum seekers in Australia's on and offshore detention camps and applies two theatre projects in Australia and Afghanistan respectively. The chapter aims to highlight the Australian situation in relation to refugees, the unrest in Afghanistan and the cost of living in a liminal space.

Chapter 2

Liminality and the in-between space, illuminated through the arts.

Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, 'edgemen', who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status, incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination. In their productions, we may catch glimpses of that unused evolutionary potential in mankind, which has not yet been externalised or fixed in structure (*The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Turner, 2008, p. 128).

Liminality, which I often refer to as the “in-between”, was first introduced by anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep and further extended by Victor Turner (1967). Van Gennep’s seminal work, *Rites of Passage* (2004), describes transitional periods throughout one’s life. For Van Gennep, a liminal phase is a state of uncertainty when a person is standing on a threshold of a new life, and simultaneously leaving the old life or phase of life behind. This could be marriage, death or migration. More recently, Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra (2009) argue that liminality can include political and cultural change. During liminal periods, social order might be overturned or temporarily disbanded, the continuity of traditions becomes uncertain, and expected future outcomes are thrown into confusion. Similarly, Turner (1967) extended Van Gennep’s initial concept of liminality “to represent the unlimited possibilities from which social structure emerges” (La Shure, 2005, p.3). However, La Shure (2005) describes Turner’s notion of Liminality as “a midpoint between a starting point and an ending point, and as such, it is a temporary state that ends when the initiate is reincorporated into the social structure” (p. 3). These periods can be difficult as they are accompanied by a lack of connection to the world.

From both Van Genepp's and Turner's perspectives, The Hazara women are in transit, neither Australian, nor Afghan: not quite here but no longer there. They are in-between and yet to come to terms with a hybrid or transnational identity.

Cultural theorist Homi Bhabha sees the liminal state as disruptive and echoes how the Hazara women feel: "This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 45). This reflects the uncertainty expressed by the women who fear loss of identity or disappearance. It is unsettling from Bhabha's perspective; however Van Genepp maintains the liminal state is a natural progression from one life to another where identity may dissipate and create internal confusion. Ultimately, it is perceived as an open space for something new to occur.

La Shure (2005) speaks to the liminal state as hard to identify and maintains that it is generally a temporary condition. However, in terms of the Calabrian woman in this research, it can be permanent, unless conscious action takes place. My grandmother's story was steeped in metaphor and often hung between *then and now*, with a touch of magic realism. Her experience of the in-between when coming to a new country was well illustrated. She spoke of moments in time, like a bird flying in and out of an open window; the glimpse of the last flutter of its wings as it disappears into God's hand. She acknowledges that a decision to walk into the waiting future must be made, otherwise one remains forever in the shadows of the past. These moments where time stands still and where one is compelled to move through the liminal space are significant. For my grandmother, the decision was based on the sum total of her life to that moment. She likened it to standing on a precipice, as a pivotal point between life and death. However, once the leap forward has been taken, you move on, arm in arm with your decision (Elisabetta Stellato, personal communication, 1990)

Turner (1969) maintains “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (p. 95). While much of Turner’s work was with African tribes, he was also interested in contemporary societies and coined the term liminoid. The main difference between liminal and liminoid experiences is choice. For example, when a Latin girl turns 15 she makes her Quincenera - a coming of age celebration like the Jewish Batmizvah. This would be regarded as a liminal experience which provides a positive space in which people and societies work collaboratively. But attending a music festival is liminoid. Turner (1974) maintains that the liminoid is not mandatory and is more to do with choice, thereby much freer than the liminal (p. 86).

Turner (1974) posits that a liminoid phenomenon exists in terms of cultural activities across art genres such as performance, exhibitions and concerts. Deflem (1991) proposes that the liminoid for Turner “originates outside the boundaries of the economic, political, and structural process, and its manifestations often challenge the wider social structure by offering social critique on, or even suggestions for, a revolutionary re-ordering of the official social order” (Deflem p. 11). From this perspective, art works become opportunities for reflection on current social order. They are a means to explore moral and legal rules, social structures and roles within these structures which in turn create possibilities for socio-political change. Turner further proposes that elements of anti-structure reside within the liminoid which generate a sense of connection with those joined by common experience.

Sociologist, Jennifer Couch, in her article “*Neither here nor there*” *Refugee homelessness in young people in Australia* (2017), discusses the experiences of young refugees who have fled war and/or persecution in relation to the term liminality. She stipulates many arrived unaccompanied, lived in refugee camps in numerous countries, and spent time in Australia’s

off or on shore detention facilities. As a result, they arrived in Australia with lives already storied with trauma. There are parallels in Couch's article with respect to the Hazara women in this study. The young refugees also found themselves in a liminal state both pre- and post-arrival in Australia. Many of Couch's participants had taken on adult roles such as negotiating language and culture for older family members and for many this created conflict sometimes resulting in homelessness. Adults in such families' experience loss of authority when depending on children to assist with tasks that require an understanding of the language and culture that they are yet to possess (Hugman, Bartolomei, & Pittaway, 2004). This reversal of roles is quite common in migrant or refugee communities. The Hazara women in this study shared similar experiences. Similarly, in Australia during the Second World War and post 1950's many children of Italian immigrants were required to interpret and translate for their parents. This caused considerable resentment particularly within the southern Italian culture where public presentation of familial wellbeing and success had to be upheld at all cost (Vasta, 1995). The participants in my study, while revealing that they depended on their children to assist navigating the Australian housing, medical, banking and school systems, intimated that they were in charge.

Australia's on and offshore processing centres are clearly liminal spaces as the refugee's bid for protection and freedom is not only interrupted, but also kept in limbo. Marianne Dickie (2014) writes of these centres as "The Twilight Zone" (p. 6). The processing systems, or lack thereof, maintain the liminal state sometimes for as long as five years ("Manus and Nauru", 2016). Refugees in on and offshore centres have also been described as living in 'no man's land' (Manser, 2016) which is reminiscent of Turner's liminal space. They remain in exile, in an 'indeterminate state simultaneously existing within two states but belonging to neither' (Leung, 2011, p. 2). Leung (2011) continues, "These exiles now occupy a place where they cannot 'realign' themselves and belong. They have become hybrid, their

‘placement defined by displacement’ their identities defined by contradictory realities such as “freedom and imprisonment, origin and destination” (p. 2). While Bompiani (2001, as cited in Dickie, 2014) in her article *Australia Incognita: the law declares 'here there be monsters'* also describes the refugee status in Australia’s processing centres: “Outsider and outcast are two words that can bind together two disparate things: a unique being, composite in its nature, undetermined, unrelated and self-existing...belonging to a lost chain of beings” (p. 6). This would indicate that the Australian immigration system has thrust asylum seekers into a game of political football that maintains their liminal state. For some, this limbo state has been in excess of five years: their punishment for seeking protection. The continuous harm and systematic cruelty since the implementation of this policy far outweighs the damage done in earlier policies. Moreover, long term detention has been shown to result in negative psychological issues (Newman, Procter & Dudley, 2013)

In Sampson, Correa-Velez and Mitchell (2007) in their paper, *Removing seriously ill asylum seekers from Australia*, published more than ten years ago, further supports current findings that long term indefinite detention is significant in the development of mental health issues. The length of time detained corresponded with the severity of mental illness. According to Special Rapporteur, Juan Mendez, Australia breaches the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Doherty & Hurst, 2015). The asylum seeker, refugee or exile does expect a period of change - of liminality – but for a short time. My creative-led research reflects these issues in the women’s stories, which also, gives an historical perspective as a number were detained in on and off shore camps for significant periods.

The artwork illustrates the women’s stories from their journey pre- and post-arrival to Australia. In my video *The Story of the Light between an Afghan Dress and a Heart-shaped*

Italian Glass Bowl (2017) about the Hazaras and the Calabrian migration journey, there are pertinent references to Australia's camps which allude to the negative effects of being detained. One of the narratives is by a woman who at sixty made the boat journey to Australia and was subsequently detained on Nauru. The following is an excerpt from her story as she describes her boat journey to Australia. Initially, her husband, two children and herself fled Afghanistan in the late 1980's to Iran, but due to the worsening conditions for Hazaras they fled Iran for Australia. I tried to maintain her linguistic style when I performed her story. This excerpt from her narrative is indicative of the public narrative around asylum seekers.

When I was sixty, I and two of my children made the long journey to Indonesia where we met people smugglers. My son and daughter had arranged the smugglers through friends in Iran who had made it to Australia safely. We paid the smugglers maybe AUD \$1000 which is a lot for us. The man was nice and understood that this was our only way to get freedom. But the boat was small and there were many of us. We had to stand. There were children and babies in mother's arms. They were from everywhere that there is war. The journey was very frightening. The waves were so high. The boat nearly sank. I felt dark inside and just wanted to let the water take me. So, I thought to myself, all the struggles for so many years would have been for nothing. Then we were "saved" by the Australians. I thought "now we will be free". But they kept us on Nauru for a long time. I couldn't speak English much and my children could a little. We met different Australians, sometimes they got the wrong interpreter. I will never understand why we had to stay on the camp. We were not criminals.

This testimonial reflects the inflammatory two-decade public narrative around asylum seekers. Ruby Hamad (2016) debates the strategies that the government uses to remove the asylum seekers' individuality. In her article *Dehumanisation 101: The tactic that explains*

why we are turning our backs on asylum seekers, she maintains that the very language used to describe asylum seekers objectifies them, and in doing so allows the inexcusable treatment of these people in our detention centres to continue with little recourse. The narrative around asylum seekers positions them as “illegals”, “criminals” and “queue jumpers”. While these are false claims according to the Refugee Convention (1951, 1967) to which Australia is a signatory, asylum seekers continue to be classified as people who do not belong and are a threat to our national security. Thus, the rhetoric is designed to strip them of individuality and identity. Again, Hamad asserts that this objectifying is a deliberate means to break any human connection with asylum seekers.

Writer Richard Doyle (2011 as cited in Hamid, 2016) stresses that “Language is such a powerful lens for shaping reality that we frequently forget it is a tool at all and take it for reality” (p. 4). From Doyle’s perspective, the government’s use of language is not only persuasive, but appears truthful, thereby influencing public perceptions. In turn, it becomes the public narrative around refugees. If political figures continue to encourage negative opinions of asylum-seekers, then integration into the community is likely to be further hindered and the current fear among the Australian public will thrive (Klocker & Dunn, 2003). In light of the women’s stories, the Australian narrative becomes one of the mechanisms that could potentially impede connectedness¹¹.

Though the Australian narrative towards asylum seekers and refugees worsens, particularly for those on Manus Island and Nauru, where life in limbo has become untenable, I believe activism and arts based projects can assist in countering negative narratives. The

¹¹ According to Ruby Hamid (2016), our government has become skilled at creating a culture of xenophobia through dehumanising asylum seekers.

following two case studies in Australia and Afghanistan are indicative of the way in which the arts can have an impact on refugees in Australia and internal displacement of Afghans.

Australia: using participatory art projects to give voice to the refugee experience

The arts can play a role in moving through and understanding the liminal phase as well as promoting human rights issues through working with refugees in participatory arts projects that allow them to give voice to their experiences. Tilbury, Toussaint and Davis (2005) have investigated the way in which rural communities interact with asylum seekers and refugees in Albany and surrounding regions in southern Western Australia (WA). The demographics of Albany and the neighbouring areas are quite eclectic with mixed populations including a small but diverse migrant community, traditional farmers, ‘sea changers’, alternative life stylers, and a small refugee community. The article *Drawing on Turner: Liminal engagements between artists, advocates and refugees in regional Western Australia* (Tilbury, Toussaint and Davis 2005) recounts the work of a group of artists and advocates called the *Mix*, who interacted with refugees, specifically the Hazaras to develop an exhibition in 2005. The *Liminal* exhibition brought together artists, advocates, and refugee communities with the common aim of bringing to light the many difficulties refugees face living in a liminal space through artistic practice. The *Liminal* art exhibition, which involved the *Mix* collective and was led by curators Shaaron du Bignon and Annette Davis, included 17 Australian contemporary artists and 4 communities from the region and was linked to the Perth International Arts Festival (PIAF). The festival theme *Transformation and Transcendence* corresponded well with the Albany exhibition concept.

The underlying aim in developing *Liminal* was to collaborate with refugees and artists, across disciplines and community groups to develop works that reflected the liminal space. While refugees were seen to inhabit a liminal space, the curators acknowledged through

previous consultations with artists that on some level contemporary artists also exist in a liminal space on the fringes of the mainstream. By developing the *Liminal* exhibition, artists were requested to reflect on circumstances that exist between where boundaries of change were moveable and to demonstrate how the creative act has the potential to bring about transformation and the capacity for transcendence. The Afghan Hazaras associated with Albany Community for Afghan Refugees (ACFAR) were of particular interest as their experiences of “leaving their home country, arriving in Australia, being granted Temporary Protection Visas, and waiting for their applications for Permanent Resident Visas to be processed—locate them in a transient space, both physically and emotionally” (Tilbury, Toussaint & Davis, 2005, p. 3). The same refugee group had also been involved in the *Welcome: Visions of Journey* (2004) exhibition, a project that demonstrated an artist’s view of their experiences of “welcome” in regional Australia. A number of workshops were conducted in which ACFAR members participated to investigate the concept of the liminal and potential involvement.

The artworks in *Liminal* crossed all arts disciplines and showed collaborative and individual works. The ACFAR group created an image of a temporary passport, with the face concealed, thereby leaving doubt as to the identity of the passport holder. The work articulated the necessity for those on temporary protection visas (TPV) to conceal their identity. Bringing attention to themselves could directly impact their applications for residency, were they seen to be criticizing the government. On the other hand, the artists also acknowledged that the anonymity of the TPV holder illustrates how the refugee is compromised in terms of being heard.

The use of passports in my project has resonance with this aspect of the *Liminal* exhibition in the sense that the passports are identifiers. Although I was the subject of each photo, I was

acutely aware that I was representative of the women I had interviewed for my research. I wanted each photo to represent a different subject and I tried to capture their personality, style, and facial expressions, so they appeared as individuals and visible members of Australian society. The Hazaras in the *Liminal* project obscured the passport photos, thus rendering them invisible. My participants are significantly more fortunate than the Hazaras in the *Liminal* project as they all have permanent residency or had taken out citizenship. Therefore, the ability to be critical of government actions does not put them at risk. However, during the 2016 election when discussion on banning Muslims immigration and refugees was used as a political tool, the Hazara women became fearful of being named or seen in my project. Though there was no risk of deportation, their past experiences saw them err on the side of caution and withdraw consent for any identifiable features in my PhD research. This was also a defining moment in the creative outcome, because I had to decide with their consent to perform their stories.

Another piece by the Western Australian group ACFAR was constructed around newspaper articles, correspondence with immigration and other official documents which demonstrated the bureaucratic hoops that Hazara refugees jump through in a bid to find a future in Australia. The curators displayed these documents on two panels which were hung opposite each other at either end of the gallery. The work also consisted of enlarging the hand writing of individual Hazaras to create a montage of words and images. A soundscape was included which consisted of a pre-recorded song by a Hazara singer which could be listened to through head phones. This is a device that I used in past projects, however in the current creative led project, I used the singing and narratives as a soundscape to immerse the audience in a visual and spoken experience, as well as create an other-worldly atmosphere.

A participatory aspect of the *Liminal* exhibition was a communal work-in-progress installation of the community's postcards. Participants and visitors were asked to write their own liminal experiences and/or their perspective of the exhibition on semi-transparent postcards which were hung against the gallery windows. The viewers could look through the post cards to the ocean outside which added a multi-layered effect to the images. As opacity is also representational of the liminal, the postcards also alluded to travels, short term and temporary movements and memories of the refugee communities they represented (Tilbury et al, 2005). This installation included several handwritten statements by the Hazaras reflecting the refugee in the liminal space. Throughout the exhibition, others responded to the words and poetry and visuals by creating a work that explored the diversity of experiences from a variety of exhibition participants. An example of these statements:

REFUGEE

To leave behind your home & family
& your human rights
to be at the mercy of governments
who decide your fate
while you wait and fill in forms
and wait some more

This statement reflects how the ACFAR installation depicts the frustrations felt by the refugee community in dealing with bureaucrats. It also represents a man acutely aware of his situation and the trauma of possessing little power to change his circumstances.

Prose and poetry are also used in my creative led research as a strategy to draw attention to the women and their relationship to the liminal space. The following is a segment from a poem I wrote from conversations with the women. It appears in full in my PhD exhibition. Throughout conversations with the women, I would write down phrases or sentences that

embodied how they felt living in the in-between. The poem was realised by compiling phrases, words or sentence that I had heard over the course of our time together. It was subsequently integrated into the performance script.

I AM HERE

I have citizenship,

I have a house. I live with my community.

My husband is dead.

My children are scattered

Like dust across the world.

I am here

But a refugee always until I find my way home.

Another artwork from the *Liminal* exhibition was situated in a room next to the hallway and reinforced the message of the ACFAR panels. Albany video artist, Linda Hadley, created *Between Two Worlds* comprised of 100 small origami boats floating on water and projected onto a screen. The boats were initially launched together, and then slowly drifted apart. To reinforce her message, which also echoed the plight of Hazara refugees, Hadley added the following written passage from Palestinian academic and exile Edward Said to contextualize her artwork.

Just beyond the frontier between "us" and the "outsiders" is the perilous territory of not-belonging: this is to where, in a primitive time, peoples were banished, and where in the modern era, immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons (p. 140).

The *Mix* collective showed a clear understanding of liminality, illuminating though the arts the challenges that refugees confront living in a liminal space. For the artists of the *Mix*

collective, engagements with the Hazara through the arts provided a vehicle for expression and communication for both parties. Both artists and refugees were able to get recognition for their concerns about immigration policy in a public forum. The event also provided an opportunity to educate the broader community. For the Hazaras, it was an opportunity to work with artists to make their voices heard. Despite the risk of the Hazaras being relegated to the status of “otherness” to meet the artists’ needs, Hadley suggests that, as a regional artist, having experience of liminal space generates a desire to connect with others in variations of that space.

The *Liminal* exhibition can be perceived as demonstrating “three things: a temporary celebration of the achievement of *communitas*; a step in a longer-term community-building project; and an opportunity for communication of an alternative vision of an inclusive society” (Tilbury et al, 2005, p. 10). This is consistent with Mills and Brown's (2004) view that the arts are intrinsic to creating inclusive communities in regional Australia and their suggestion that engagement in the arts contributes to active citizenship. The artist and advocates who were interviewed for Mills and Brown’s study, which was funded by Australia Council for the Arts, indicated that participation in human rights and social justice themes illustrates a distinct connection between activity in the arts, social justice and moral concerns in regional Australia.

The following studies are not specifically about liminality, but address inherited conflict, which I suggest, places one in the liminal space. Further it gives an understanding of the environment from which the women in my study come and shows how the arts can play a pivotal role in understanding social justice for change and representing the legacies of war and its impact on ordinary citizens in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan: participatory theatre in Afghanistan through arts based storytelling.

A study of participatory theatre in Afghanistan which began in 2008 draws from Siddiqui, Marifat and Kouvo's (2014) *Culture, Theatre and Justice: Examples from Afghanistan* and Siddiqui and Joffre-Eichhorn's (2014) article *From Tears to Energy: Early Uses of Participatory Theater in Afghanistan* which address participatory theatre in Afghanistan through arts based storytelling. While both articles discuss several projects in Afghanistan, I will focus on *Infinite Incompleteness* included in *Culture, Theatre and Justice: Examples from Afghanistan* (2014) that reflects aspects of this creative led research.

Participatory theatre is an approach where public/audience and actors interact, based on a real issue. Throughout the event or show, the audience participates to modify, change or correct circumstances that cause pain and share knowledge to promote positive social change. After the performance, audience and actor/s accompanied by a facilitator discuss the impact of the work. The originator of many of the techniques that we consider to be participatory theatre was Augusto Boal. Boal's methods in *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) are now used globally and adapted to various situations.

Siddiqui and Joffre-Eichhorn (2014) maintain that a participatory theatre approach has the potential to address personal and shared narratives to create a space for people to share their lived experience and create understanding and meaning about conflicts within their country. By applying political features of participatory theatre, Siddiqui and Joffre-Eichhorn aim "to situate these methodologies within the context of arts-based and memory-related efforts to promote transitional justice, specifically raising awareness around truth-seeking opportunities in Afghanistan" (p. 369). These theatre projects concerned with transitional justice were instigated in 2008. The first was in association with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The second was supported by the International Center for Transitional Justice

(ICTJ) in conjunction with Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization (AHRDO). The work aimed to introduce participatory and traditional theatre techniques, developed by the *Theatre of the Oppressed* for activists interested in creating cultural approaches to transitional justice in Afghanistan. The projects aimed to explore the benefits and potential dangers of participatory theatre facilitated by human rights groups in Afghanistan to support transitional justice in countries during times of conflict.¹² (Siddiqui et al., 2014)

In 2009, the AHRDO was formally established by this group of human rights activists who were committed to creating theatre that focused on gender issues and transitional justice. The AHRDO has been dedicated to producing a series of war victim theatre undertakings that applied principles from the *Theatre of the Oppressed* and *Playback Theatre*. While *Playback* is generally concerned with experiences of the individual that connect people through personal stories, it is similar to *Theatre of the Oppressed* as the methodology is applicable to both professional performers and those with no acting experience. It supports the concept that “artistic expression is the domain of all people” (Siddiqui & Joffe-Eichhorn, 2014, p. 372). The majority of AHRDO theatre works were executed with a variety of war victim communities around Afghanistan to document experiences of conflict as emphasised in their mission statement:

The overarching goal of this work is to use theatre to create a space for war victims of Afghanistan to come together and analyse the past, in the context of the present, in order to initiate grass-roots strategies for how to deal with the truth of the past and become active protagonists in shaping a more peaceful and just society (p. 125).

¹² Transitional justice, be it through the arts or truth and reconciliation commissions, is generally addressed post conflict.

In 2010, *Infinite Incompleteness* was developed partially from the requests of groups involved in prior workshops with the AHRDO who wanted to create a work based on their own experiences. This meant AHRDO could realise its aim of producing nonfiction performance employing actual stories and words from victims of war and introduce the narratives across Afghanistan and abroad. They collected the stories for script development by applying several participatory methods including *Playback Theatre* and *Documentary Theatre*. This allowed them to incorporate pre-existing documentary from earlier projects as a foundation for performance (Siddiqui et al., 2014)

The AHRDO team invited members from these groups to participate in a total of 20 workshops in different parts of the country. Approximately 120 stories were shared with the participants' consent. They then selected 10 stories which were carefully edited and organised into a basic narrative or storyline. Attention was given to the diversity of Afghanistan's ethnic and linguistic groups, and three local languages were used in the script. The script covered Afghanistan's conflict from 1978 to 2010 and both men's and women's experiences were equally represented. These true stories were accompanied by a corresponding storyline which involved a series of fictional events performed by the characters to create a narrative set in the past, present and, hoped for, future of the country. To create an atmosphere that would resonate with victims of war, contemporary Afghan and Iranian poetry and music were incorporated into the piece. *Infinite Incompleteness* was first performed in December 2010 at the French Cultural Center in Kabul to an audience of 250 Afghans and included a post-performance discussion in honour of both Human Rights Day and Afghanistan's National Victim's Day. The play was also performed at the National Victim's Conference organised by the Transitional Justice Coordination Group (TJCG) in March and December of 2011. Because the work covered human rights abuses across three

periods of the Afghanistan conflict and was performed in all three local languages, it resonated with many audiences. This often resulted in spontaneous sharing of testimonies from audience members from different parts of Afghanistan. The work also toured the United States in a bid to continue raising awareness of injustice in Afghanistan.

The case of AHRDO applying participatory theatre methods in conjunction with transitional justice was an enormous undertaking in a country which has endured more than three decades of conflict. While Afghans have developed the ability to survive violence and endure hardship, moving to a period of long term positive social and political change has proven almost impossible for many ordinary citizens. After the United States-led military invasion in 2001, there were great hopes for a more peaceful and just future. But as the coalition withdrew troops, the re-emergence of the Taliban and other terrorist style organisations took hold. Furthermore, the lack of accountability enabled warlords and politically driven military leaders connected to illegal armed groups to flourish (Siddiqui, Marifat, & Kouvo, 2014). Currently they now make up parts of the new national and community-level elite, of which many are alleged perpetrators of war crimes. All these factors have promoted the recurrence of violence and any expectation of a peaceful Afghanistan has been crushed. Consequently, issues around transitional justice are highly sensitive and political. Furthermore, opportunities to articulate opinions on past and current human rights violations, or challenge Afghanistan's current elite on war legacies, are rapidly diminishing (Siddiqui, et al., 2014).

The work in Afghanistan is indicative of the way arts-based projects and participatory theatre explore the damage of inherited conflict as well as creating spaces for dialogue about grass-roots action. However, Afghan practitioners face many challenges when carrying out this work ranging from access to participants, places to run workshops and the need for a financial incentive to work with the theatre. Regardless of the difficulties, this methodology appears to resonate in the communities which AHRDO has worked and the process of

Afghanizing has begun (Siddiqui, et al., 2014). This is evidenced by participants asking that their own narratives be developed into a theatre performance integrating traditional Afghan symbols and poetry. Even more significant is women choosing to participate in *Theatre of the Oppressed* workshops and creating and changing theatre games that reflect the Afghan perspective (Siddiqui, et al., 2014).

As one theatre activist reported, “Participatory theatre... is a very useful and effective means which would need to be accompanied by complementary means in order to mobilise civil society on transitional justice” (Siddiqui, et al., 2014, p. 129). Therefore, recognising participatory theatre is only one method of bringing transitional justice issues to the fore. Without the support and endorsement of other organisations, significant change is unlikely. It is important that various human rights and justice networks work closely with the artistic communities and participatory theatre is an excellent method for inspiring fundamental efforts to:

...deal with the painful truth of the past because they can create spaces for discussion and allow for local ownership of the process of remembering, by taking into account its religious, ethical, cultural, social, and psychological dimensions, addressing individual and collective needs (Siddiqui, et al., 2014, p. 130)

Participatory theatre methodologies in Afghanistan have created tenuous spaces for debate about long term conflict. It has offered the beginnings of network building for victims and enabled female participation, thus illustrating a degree of agency to victims in general, particularly women. While the arts serve as a means to push boundaries, the Afghan theatre activists take risks doing this work. However, the advantage that keeps the AHRDO activists safe is the way transformative theatre is underestimated in Afghanistan. While the theatre activist may be mocked, these attitudes serve as safety measures that enable theatre makers to

continue their work. Such works provide opportunities to address creatively what happened to them personally and communally. Moreover, the issues are dealt with respectfully by the performer/activists while maintaining the Afghan's struggle for justice.

The arts play an integral role when such large-scale debates are not yet possible particularly in countries with ongoing conflict. In the public domain, theatre can provide a means to articulate personal and collective feelings. Under a repressive regime, self-expression is perceived as an act of defiance or rebellion directed at the establishment. Such actions counter official attempts at silencing historical accounts. Performance in such environments serves to condemn and defamiliarize or denormalize the day to day violence that people live under, thereby exposing its absurdity and its degrading effects in a lucid and coherent manner. These sentiments are reinforced in the following statement: "By enabling participants to investigate the possibilities of life after violence and mass crime, theatre can contribute to laying the groundwork for transitional justice, indeed turning tears into energy" (Siddiqui & Joffre-Eichhorn, 2014, p. 392).

Siddiqui and Joffre-Eichhorn (2014) perceive participatory theatre as a means to tell collective and individual stories to assist in healing post conflict. Taylor (2003) believes that traditionally, theatre has a more significant function than storytelling alone. While this might be true, theatre is made up of stories put to performance. More and more we are seeing storytelling, theatre and visual arts combined to narrate personal and historical stories that may also serve as way to healing.

Infinite Incompleteness has resonance with my creative led research. Though participatory theatre was not applied in the strictest sense in the study with the Hazara women, it was participatory in nature and addressed issues of conflict pre- and post-arrival in Australia through storytelling. The study also reflects techniques used in the Afghanistan project based on Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) which has been successful in communities,

particularly with victims of war who share personal narratives to create collective meaning. In relation to the women in my study, many were victims of war and while only two went into detail about their actual war experiences, I observed a sense of relief in respect to being in Australia where they felt they could heal. One of the participants said:

You cannot imagine, the rivers of blood, you cannot imagine.... When I came to Australia, I was so tired, I don't know why. There were no more bombs, no more dead children on the streets. I should not be so tired (Z, personal conversation, May 2016).

This participant expressed herself well throughout our conversations. From the onset it was very important to her that I understood the impact conflict had had on her, her family and friends. She was a teacher and botanist, fluent in four languages and understood the need to share her story. Though living in Australia in relative peace, I perceived a correlation between my study and the Afghan project. Like Siddiqui and Joffre-Eichhorn's (2014) participants, the women in my study could examine the real possibilities of life post violence and war crimes. Both my creative led project and the theatre works from Afghanistan strengthened my belief that engaging in the arts through storytelling and participatory approaches does have the potential to create social change under difficult circumstances.

In the following chapter, I address the power of storytelling through traditional and contemporary narratives. I discuss artists as storytellers through visual narratives. The use of magic realism as a device in the development of my performance script to integrate the Hazara women's stories and the Calabrian narrative is also explored.

Chapter 3

Artists as Storytellers

“If you listen carefully, at the end you’ll be someone else.” (Vyasa, *Mahabharata*, 1951)

Storytelling is a common thread throughout the communities in which I have worked and, although facts and perceptions differ widely, a deeper understanding of each culture emerged through their narratives. Stories communicate who and what we are, our feelings, why we pursue a particular path, and how the past resonates with the present and a potential future. I am reminded of the impact of storytelling when at the beginning of the Indian epic poem *Mahabharata*, the storyteller, Vyasa, addresses the audience implying that a story has the capacity to change the listener. This encapsulates storytelling as a means to affect change from the personal to social and political.

Selena Wendt (2013) discusses the growing importance of storytelling and narratives in contemporary art and its development in conjunction with documentary art practice. Storytelling, according to Wendt, is gathering momentum and increasing as a theme explored in exhibitions that predominantly focus on storytelling.

Whether historically, politically or personally based, narrative tendencies in contemporary art range from highly straightforward and factual to magical and fairy tale-like. There is no shortage of contemporary art that conveys narratives relating to topics of sexuality and race, identity issues, philosophy, politics, and life in general. At a time when storytelling in art is so firmly established, there are also many artists whose work is directly inspired not only by narrative strategies, but also by literature in particular (Wendt, 2013, p. 1).

In 2012, Wendt curated the exhibition entitled *The Storytellers: Narratives in International Contemporary Art* at the Stenersen Museum in Oslo. The initial concept

followed the theme of “literature without borders” and included works inspired by writers such as Italo Calvino, Virginia Woolf and William Blake. Latin American writers and poets also informed the art works. The actual exhibition title originates from Vargas Llosa’s book *The Storyteller* (*El Hablador*, 1987), a work of magic realism that depicts the search for meaning and truth and a personal struggle to find inner strength against the constant and unexpected changes on life’s journey.

In Wendt’s essay, *The Art of Storytelling*, she draws on both Walter Benjamin’s essay *The Storyteller* (1936) and exhibition *The Storytellers: Narratives in International Contemporary Art* exhibition. Wendt reflects on Benjamin’s notion of a true storyteller’s power and discusses his fears for the loss of traditional storytelling. Benjamin’s emphasis on the true quality of storytelling, as occurring between the teller and the listener, is arguably transferrable to visual arts by simply substituting the teller and the listener with the artist and the viewer.

In Wendt’s exhibition, artist storytellers bring an innovative quality to expressing narratives when detached from language or text. While the play between text and visuals is not a new phenomenon, the artists unmask their individual and specific connection to literature, reinforced by the curatorial rationale: “The essence of the exhibition lies in the references to specific literary narratives as well as the individual narratives that are also inspired by literature and books” (p. 2). *The Storytellers* exhibition is a visual translation of some of the oldest and timeless stories that have captured audiences’ imaginations for centuries. It also represents modern literature where it has woven its magic into the artists’ lives in recent decades. The reframing of their chosen literary works has the power to merge itself into the viewers’ own life stories thus increasing the impact. *The Storytellers* takes the

viewer on a journey through centuries, across continents via text, imagery, poetry and poetic subject matter as the thread that bind these elements.

Visual stories have not always inherited the traits of traditional narratives in terms of a beginning, middle and end. The traditional storyteller is perceived as a teacher, espousing sound values and stimulating understanding of life through the very process of listening and imagining. In a visual narrative, the viewer may decide on the placement of the beginning, middle and end based on both conscious and unconscious reactions to the work. This is evidenced in my exhibition which is accessible from any point of entry: there is no clear delineation between the beginning, middle and end. Each section of the exhibition could be viewed as a standalone work, but there is a conceptual thread that connects each of the works. It was my intention that traditional beginning, middle, and endings of storytelling do not apply. This resonates with my understanding of Calabrian and Hazara narratives, they stand alone at the threshold of a new life, while maintaining connections from the past. Hence, it was important for me to create a tension between the works on display by ensuring the soundscape was an ambient soundtrack and backdrop for viewing the exhibition. The transitional objects, the glass bowl and the Afghan dress - props performed within the video works - are physically present in the space. These curatorial decisions represent the maintaining of ties with the past and embracing a new future and are not mutually exclusive.

A number of themes in *The Storytellers* exhibition resonate with the storytelling of the Hazara women. Their stories were akin to an on-going journey as they wove their personal narratives around social and political issues. Their language was accompanied by gestures, body movements and often raw emotions, which captivated me as the researcher, artist and their audience. As I listened to their stories, I came to see the women as knowledge keepers whose words and gestures aimed to educate as they sifted through the fragments of their

lives. In turn, the women evoked memories and images from their lives that inspired both my imagination in practical ways to incorporate these qualities in the artwork. By applying *magic realism* to both the Hazara and the Calabrian narratives, I was able to integrate these disparate stories through the mediums of performance and video. *Magic realism* as a literary genre allows the realistic world to be presented in combination with magical elements. Moreover, the supernatural is not questioned, but rather an accepted part of the tangible or real world. From my perspective as a writer and performer, the genre allows a significant amount of creative or poetic licence; therefore, I can adapt features of magic realism to suit the needs of the project. These included bringing the dead into the living world and the use of melancholic singing which aims to engender a sense of being in-between two realms.

Franz Roh (1925) initially coined the term *magic realism* and Italian writer Bontempelli (1926) was influential in developing and promoting the literary style (Keala, 2008). While *magic realism* lost influence in Europe post 1930's, it became popular in Latin American literature during the 1940s and again in the 1970s. As the genre declined in Latin America, different national traditions of world literature applied elements of *magic realism* that are evident in contemporary literature, art, film and theatre today. The continued expansion and redefinition of *magic realism* currently makes defining the genre both a challenging, yet interesting theoretical problem in contemporary literature (Camayd-Freixas, 2014).

Bontempelli is acknowledged as creator of *magic realism*'s theoretical framework using his own novels and short stories to develop this literary model. His theories on *realismo magico* originated from Futurism, an Italian avant-garde art movement that took speed, technology, violence, youth and modernity, including Fascism, as its inspiration. Bontempelli proposed his own progressive literary formula "*precisione realistica e atmosfera magica.*" (realistic precision and magical atmosphere) which involved "normalizing a supernatural

atmosphere by describing it or narrating it in precise realistic detail— [which] remains to this day a core technique of magical realism (Camayd-Freixas, 2014 p.6). Bontempelli's ideas followed the surrealist concept of encouraging writers to connect with their primal past. This signalled a return to myths, legends, archetypes and national traditions. These concepts resonated with the young Latin American writers, many of whom were living in Europe at the time. In due course, the Latin Americans would develop and introduce their own versions of *magic realism*, specific to their various ethnicities, cultures and backgrounds (Fiorucci, 2015).

Bontempelli was an active fascist and saw fascist Italy as the new European model with its foundations in Latin and Mediterranean culture and with Italy as the link. However, once the fascists began censoring writers and their ideas, he dissented as he maintained that this would destroy spontaneity (Keala, 2007). In time, this led to him being stripped of his party card and freedom to speak publicly, notwithstanding his refusal to take up a university position previously held by a Jewish academic. With increasing internal pressure in Italy, political censorship and threats on his life, Bontempelli chose to live out the war in exile (Keala, 2007). His theories on *realismo magico* survived well after the defeat of fascism and Bontempelli literary works such as *Il figlio di due madri*¹³ (1929) and *Vita e morte di Adria e dei suoi figli*¹⁴ reflected the dichotomy in his life. Post WWII, Bontempelli became an ally of the political left. He won a seat in the Italian senate, however his fascist past led to the annulment of his election.

Bontempelli's work influenced the development of different genres within *magic realism*. The diverse ways that writers have chosen to perceive and shift concepts around *magic*

¹³ *The Son of Two Mothers*

¹⁴ *The Life and Death of Adria and her Children*

realism places it in a countercultural and counter-hegemonic literary style. For instance, in post-colonial Latin America, writers sought national archetypes and reclaimed aboriginal traditions. Asturias became the first Latin American to define his writing as *magic realism*. Writer and diplomat, Miguel Ángel Asturias (1949), drew on Mayan culture, particularly his surrealist understanding of the “primitive” Mayan spirit. Carpentier’s writing was influenced by neo-African culture in the Caribbean and was informed by Haitian Voodoo and Cuban *santería*¹⁵. Carpentier’s theory of *lo real maravilloso americano* (“the American marvellous real”) also termed “marvellous real” involved recognizing and conveying the buried historical and cultural wonders of Latin America. For Carpentier (1949), the marvellous can be seen in the very nature of Latin America with its “continuous clashes of disparate belief systems (European, indigenous, African) over five centuries of tumultuous history, and the hidden syncretism generated by such clashes” (Camayd-Freixas, 2014, p. 7).

These “primitive” practices are characteristic of everyday reality (*magic realism* to the reader) supplanting the generally accepted customary realism and becoming the accepted norm in magic realist text. Latin American *magic realism* errs on the side of historically and socio-politically specific styles common to contemporary authors whose works display a distinct literary influence. These include Carpentier’s *El reino de este mundo* (The Kingdom of This World, 1949), García Márquez’s *Cien años de soledad* (One Hundred Years of Solitude, 1970), Isabel Allende’s *La casa de los espíritus* (The House of the Spirits, 1985), Laura Esquivel’s *Como agua para chocolate* (Like Water for Chocolate, 1996) and Vargas Llosa’s *El hablador* (The Storyteller, 1987). Three common denominators describe their style of writing. They all embrace a provincial narrative viewpoint and combine both new and old

¹⁵ Santería or Lucumi is an Afro-American religion of Caribbean origin that developed in the Spanish Empire among West African descendants. *Santería* means "worship of saints" and is influenced by and syncretized with Roman Catholicism (Santería, n.d) <http://babalawoweb.com/santeria/>

forms of reality which the reader both believes and questions. The result is a version of Latin American history that tells a story different from the official version “perpetrated by the structures of power” (Faris, 2004, p. 12).

The works of these storytellers have particular relevance to the development of my performance script. I have integrated *magical realism* theorist Wendy Faris’s five characteristics into the performance script. In her book, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (2004), she states that these characteristics contain:

an irreducible element of magic; a strong presence of the phenomenal world; some unsettling doubts on the part of the reader in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events; the narrative’s merging of different realms; and the predilection for disturbing received ideas about time, space, and identity (p. 7).

Several of Faris’s *magic realism* characteristics are present in my performance script to greater or lesser degrees. Through bringing my dead grandmother back from another realm into the Hazara women’s world, narratives from different realms merged. The fusing of these narratives aims to disconcert the reader or viewer and challenge the conventional ideas of time and space. I also wanted to generate an acceptance of the magical, the extraordinary and contradictory perception of events. The film uses different devices to achieve this such as applying black and white film when the Calabrian, my grandmother, speaks which fades into colour as each of the Afghan women speak. The use of black and white and colour aims to move the script between past and present or one realm and another. The simple fades from the Calabrian to the Hazaras aim to bind the stories as one narrative that moves unquestionably between time space and identity. The exhibiting space is large and the works are positioned well apart. When the large space is entered, the intention is that the viewer be

encompassed by sounds and visuals simultaneously and feel slightly disorientated in terms of the directionality of the voices. Additionally, the plaintive singing from the Calabrian video, representative of the past is juxtaposed against the Hazara women telling their stories which gives the exhibition a sense of otherworldliness.

Faris (2004) maintains that by studying *magic realism* from a global perspective, one runs the risk of colonising different traditions. Therefore, specific elements of a culture may lose their potency if the writing is placed under one umbrella or rubric. The more rigorous and narrow the definitions of a genre, fewer works will meet the criteria. Conversely, the more inclusive the term, the genre's definition will become more elusive. This is evident in the works of authors such as Günter Grass, Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison and José Saramago.

There are several primary traits in *magic realism* with which most critics agree: the extraordinary is made to appear conventional and the ordinary, bizarre or exceptional; the narrative perspective is crucial in terms of its non-conventionality and its ability to naturalise implausible events. The narrator's viewpoint is collectively, culturally or individually bound "that is, relative to an individual as a universal representative of the species, or of the human condition" (Faris, 2004, p. 13). While I have broadly applied these primary traits to my performance script, they are augmented by secondary characteristics (Faris, 2004). Therefore, from an epistemological perspective, primary features should be considered as common denominators. Secondary traits connect broadly in terms of shared or overlapping characteristics. The connection between works from the same linguistic, ethnic or national tradition may form "a core or nucleus of magical realism, while other works that share a family resemblance may be placed in closer or farther proximity to this relational nucleus" (Camayd-Freixas, 2014, p. 14). When comparing *magic realism* within Latin America, there

is a linguistic and, in some areas an ethnic connection such as the Guarani Indians who live in Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina. However, in Italy, Spain and Portugal, the shared characteristics are lessened: as Latin countries in Europe, intersecting features in secondary traits are apparent.

The application of *magic realism* in writing the film script for the PhD drew heavily on author Isabel Allende. Her specific style of *magic realism* informed the way that I wanted to introduce the commonalities between Hazara and Calabrian women. Allende informed several of my earlier performance works, *Ti Vedro in Paradiso/See you in Heaven* (1994), *Blood in the Garden* (1995) and *Songs of Captivity* (2004) which reflected the sense of a world within a world, no separation between the physical and spirit world which merge and separate with ease. This belief is embedded in southern Italian mysticism and continues to play a role in my life. For example, when my youngest daughter was born, I saturated a piece of red cotton in my spit, rolled it into a ball and placed it on her third eye to ward off the *Malocchio*, the evil eye. The evil eye is not only significant in southern Italy along with numerous other Pagan-Catholic rituals, but also in many Muslim countries including Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq (Wong, 2012).

Allende's views on the mystical or spirit world are clear in her work, such as *The House of Spirits* (1993). Much of her earlier work addressed the political turmoil within Latin America and corruption within governments. There is a Kafkaesque feeling "that no matter what you do, you won't understand the government. The world is shifting, undependable" (Allende, 2017, p. 5) and thus, to Allende, the spirit world is possibly more dependable; a place which is not defined by good or evil, but as a space where rules are flexible: "there is only intention, there is just being" (Allende, 2017, p.5). In the spirit world, there is a sense of ambiguity, a delicacy and a blurriness where safety is experienced. It is a realm of security where

decisions do not have to be made, where everything just “*is*”. Thus, there is a parallel world to the pain, sorrow and death of the real world which Allende describes as unconditional love. It is in this space that she generates her stories. In effect, she is speaking to the agelessness of the soul where love sits without question. In the ‘real’ world, this does not happen (Allende, 2017). The impact of Allende’s works is their ability to act as a bridge that crosses worlds, ideas, politics and cultures.

My research further draws on the work of the critic and essayist, Walter Benjamin (1999). His ideas regarding ‘true’ storytelling and its traditions form the basis of many genres including elements of *magic realism*. Benjamin’s ideas have led to the adoption of traditional conventions of storytelling in this project. *Magic realism* forms the basis of the film scripts I have written, performed and presented in the PhD exhibition, but it also has strong elements of oral traditions. Like Benjamin, my interest lay in recapturing the story, resembling what is traditionally termed as fiction, but facts are combined with fiction. Regardless of the form a story takes, to Benjamin it has a sacredness in that it shares the commonality of human experience (Sturgeon, 2016).

In Maria Popova’s (2015) article, *Walter Benjamin on Information vs. Wisdom and How the Novel and the News Killed Storytelling*, she draws from Benjamin’s *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (1968) which explores his ideas on language, literature, and life. Benjamin maintained that the art of storytelling had become more about information than wisdom. His essays, executed with great beauty, insight and intuition, describe the loss of wisdom that comes from afar in the form of “fairy tales” possessed with knowledge and tradition that gives the whole notion of storytelling weight and truth. In reality, storytelling is probably no more exact than in earlier centuries, though storytelling does not apply the miraculous, the romantic realism of tales told from long ago. From this perspective, “it is indispensable for

information to sound plausible. Because of this it proves incompatible with the spirit of storytelling” (Benjamin, 1968, as cited in Popov, 2013 p. 2).

While Benjamin maintains that information is incompatible with the essence of storytelling and in effect, has lost its ‘magical’ quality, I contend that storytelling has shifted and *magic realism*, though somewhat *passé*, is evidence of this. However, as a theorist, Benjamin seems more concerned with the actual artistry of the storytelling genre, which requires patience and time and involves a spiritual-like connection between storytellers and listeners. I believe this unique otherworldly experience, where the author gives the reader an entry into another realm, is what Benjamin believed was lost in the contemporary story telling genre.

However, movement into the digital age has fast become a means to disseminate information and digital platforms are available to tell stories which can be either scholarly or creative works. In a matter of minutes, stories or information are uploaded to the internet, or streamed as part of a live creative project and can be made available to an international audience in a minimal amount of time (Craig, 2006). We have seen how digital media assisted accelerating the uprising in Egypt and informed us on the war in Syria and the conditions in Australian detention camps. The stories that have come from wars, persecutions, refugee camps and uprisings are available to millions who otherwise would have remained unaware of the gravity of a given situation. Depending on the genre, stories told today still involve weaving a tale that both informs, fascinates and challenges the listener. Storytelling conventions can still apply even though they are used differently. As an artist storyteller, I apply Benjamin’s principles while simultaneously including facts and information to pervade the stories told.

As a community cultural development worker, much of my writing and theatre making featured storytelling. When people of different cultures shared their personal narratives, the process served to connect people and encourage dialogue. Storytelling is a means to communicate and in my experience, generates compassion, empathy and acceptance of cultures different from our own.

Theatre practitioner and storyteller Anne Bogart (2015) perceives this methodology as a means to build bridges which relates well to my creative process in terms of writing performing or directing. In her speech at the 2015 Humana Festival, Bogart spoke about *The Role of Storytelling in the Theatre of the Twenty-First Century* with specific reference to how to tell stories effectively and how to be communicative and clear regardless of how tentative one might feel. In the case of developing the performance script *The Story of the Light between an Afghan Dress and a Heart-shaped Italian Glass Bowl* (2017) from the women's narratives, these questions were particularly useful. I also recall a level of uncertainty and unknowing when I began writing about the Hazara women and questioned if I knew enough to write of the women and their stories effectively. I realised it was not going into a space of unknowing, but rather an ethical dilemma of performing the women's stories that needed to be addressed.

Working from a space of not knowing or a feeling that I did not know, meant I had to find a way to tell their stories. Anne Bogart's book *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (2003) discusses different ways to tell the story. Several of her ideas were pertinent to my writing. The first, debates the concerns that a writer, director or performer has in terms of, whether enough research has been done. She maintains that the research can get in the way of a good story. As a writer, and director, one needs to trust they have done their homework before they start to write. Bogart (2003) maintains that a writer or director can

overthink and “You need to be available and attentive to the doors that open unexpectedly. You must leap at the appropriate moment. You cannot wait” (p. 134). I concluded that my accumulated knowledge needed to guide the process. This was challenging as I was the writer, director and performer. I was unsure as to how I could apply this to myself. The most appropriate approach was to inhabit the role of a storyteller, narrator and performer. To that end, as a storyteller, I became the women, and in part appropriated their experiences to perform their stories. I found I could resituate myself from a place of not knowing to knowing. The concept of wonder being both not knowing and knowing is summed in the following quote from Emily Dickinson’s (1830-1886) poem *Wonder*: “Wonder is not precisely knowing, and not precisely knowing not” (Amherst College Digital Collection #1331). In order to allow the sense of not exactly knowing or not knowing, I took a risk with this quote in mind and allowed myself to inhabit not just the women, but an in-between space as it is both creative and fecund (Bogart, 2013).

The content of the Hazara narratives were both confronting and humbling. The individual stories were quite dense and reflected the chaotic nature of the women’s lives both pre- and post-migration. Interestingly this was also true for the lives of my grandmother and mother. Therefore, my aim was to take the most salient aspects of all their stories and connect them into one succinct clear performance script. Again, I was reminded of Bogart (2003) in that “If your work is too controlled, it has no life. If it is too chaotic, no one can see or hear it” (p. 133). This also refers to the idea that we must allow for the unexpected to happen in writing directing and performing. I have come to believe that this is often where great theatre occurs. Further, as Bogart maintains, if too much is controlled the performance may lack moments of spontaneity. Similarly, if there is no structure to the work, it can appear messy and confused and the audience will lose the thread of the story. Therefore, in terms of Bogart, a balance between the two is preferable.

The Hazara women's stories and my family's history were tumultuous, as war and conflict was the foundation of their narratives. I felt a level of unrest when working the women's narratives into the script. I questioned how to maintain the "madness" of a war zone within a script structure that would also uphold raising awareness of the plight of the Hazaras and create understanding of experiences between recent and past groups of refugees. Moreover, it was equally important to ensure the audience were affected by the women's lived experiences. What makes any project worthwhile and endure over time "is the significance of the question that lies at its core" (Bogart, 2013). Throughout the process of creating the performance script, I was constantly questioning the placement of words, whether to have long narratives; how to integrate the narratives in simple cohesive way; and how to connect the narrative to the visual work.

I returned to Benjamin's concept of traditional storytelling which is also consistent with the Afghan history of oral storytelling. There is a feeling of ritual in the way the stories are told, as the raconteur is seen as an instructor who adopts and shares beliefs thus inspiring the listener to consider life by means of listening and imagining. Having decided to commence with this approach, I wanted to bring social and political facts into the script. I was aware, both from experience, and as Bogart (2013) noted in relation to socio-political narratives, "people do not remember facts" (p. 4). It is not necessarily facts that will change a person's view; attitudinal shifts come more often through simply telling a story. The process became a puzzle of fitting a number of elements that cross history and personal narratives. The latter infused with the *magic realism* that connected to the photographs and the transitional objects I had included in the exhibition.

I aimed for a minimalist approach to the writing. I drew on the women's testimonials and used short sentences, musings, and poetry and mini-monologues from the video recordings

made during the interviewing period. As there were similarities between the narratives, I grouped the twelve women into four different characters. I chose the most emotionally charged pieces from the narratives and wove them into a story that also expressed socio-political issues from the women's personal perspective. The next part of the process was linking the Hazaras women's stories to the Calabrian experience. I decided to use my dead Calabrian grandmother as representative of both the archetypical storyteller and mystic. I drew on *magic realism* in terms of placing her in a space between two worlds: the past and present, the dead and living. This was a valuable device as she had an unquestionable or natural ability to move between this world and other realms. Her story was then interlaced with the Hazara narratives which then become one story. It was easy to differentiate between the Calabrian and Hazaras stories, while simultaneously seeing the commonality between the women's journeys through their respective narratives.

Possibly the most difficult aspect of sifting through the videos of the women's narratives to write the script was that each story epitomised the devastating effects of more than three decades of war, notwithstanding the ongoing conflict. While there have been moves to address the victims of war in Afghanistan through participatory arts based programs such as those by Siddiqui and Joffe-Eichhorn (2014), the investigation of Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization's (AHRDO) in addressing victims of war through participatory theatre has proven that Afghanistan has a long way to go to achieve their mission. This includes continuing to work with communities; creating a space for the victims of war and, through theatre, developing strategies to cope with past and present atrocities to create a more just and free society in the future. This is evident in the following chapter where the women's stories are addressed through methodological approaches and research design. Though they hope for a conflict free Afghanistan, they are pragmatic about Afghanistan's immediate future which is evident through their narratives.

Chapter 4

Visual Arts Methodology

This chapter will discuss the community engagement with the Hazaras; introduce how this engagement was established; and the project design such as the number of participants, their backgrounds, the focus questions. Also included are the participant responses and observations that emerged from conversations with the women. Additionally, the commonalities between Hazaras and Calabrians in Australia and ethical issues that arose during the candidature including cultural appropriation are examined.

In 2013 through my work as a human rights advocate, I met Zakia Baig, the President of the Australian Hazara Women's Friendship Network (AHWFN). This connection laid the foundation for my creative led project with the Hazara women. I emailed Zakia Baig my PhD proposal which she read and found interesting. We had several meetings to discuss this proposal and how I could incorporate the Hazara women into my socially-engaged research. It was, and still is, important that the Hazaras gain visibility in the broader community so engagement with researchers, filmmakers and artists was generally welcomed. This was due to many Hazaras being deported back to danger by the Australian government as they believed that Hazaras, a known persecuted ethnic minority, face no greater risk than any other ethnic group (Doherty, 2016). Despite the continued attacks on ethnic Hazaras in Afghanistan and Quetta, the Hazara plight remains relatively unknown in Australia. The AHWFN president Zakia Baig believes that raising awareness around the Hazara people is imperative. In terms of Hazara women, more needs to be done to assist them in becoming part of the Australian community as they are at risk of being isolated due to lack of language and skills.

This is evident in their mission statement¹⁶. After discussions with the Zakia Baig, I was introduced to the women to discuss the project. I found that several women were interested in being involved. Ethics clearance was needed. This was an exacting process and I had to be very specific about the demographics of the group which included their ages, ethnicity and education. My relationship with the Australian Hazara Friendship Network had to be verified. I also had to ensure that counselling and interpretative services were in place if needed. The ethics committee then decided whether they were in a high or low risk category as they were/are asylum seekers and refugees and deemed a vulnerable population. Ultimately, I had to ensure that the women's rights were respected and that they signed a participant information letter that included the option of withdrawing from the project. Once I had met all the criteria, the women were considered low risk and ethics clearance was given.

The project consisted of twelve women from the Australian Hazara Women's Friendship Network (AHWFN) who have been living in Australia for varying amounts of time. Four, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher and interpreters were used as required. I attended and observed activities that this community participated in, such as festivals and events organised by the AHWFN. The women, aged between 47-75, came from diverse backgrounds, ranging from rural women who were married at sixteen, to landowners and farmers, to business women, teachers, doctors and nurses. Their level of education was dependent on their age and whether they had remained in Afghanistan during the Taliban reign.

¹⁶ To bridge diaspora Hazara women from Australia, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and around the world. To develop a network of friendship among all women in the broader community of Australia and promote harmony and togetherness and inclusion with respect for multiculturalism. We aim to work for capacity building and empowerment of refugee and disadvantaged women in Australia and abroad. We aim to: 1. Reduce isolation, 2. Enhance harmony and integration, and 3. Promote multiculturalism by keeping and celebrating our cultural beauty." (AHWFN, 2017).

Questions relating to their experience in Australia including, but not limited to, were:

- Do they feel they are living in an “in-between” space?
- What is their sense of identity as Hazaras, Afghans and new Australians?
- What life changes had been experienced since arriving in Australia?
- Did they feel they had access to multicultural communities?
- How did they feel about their place in Australia in terms of being part of the broader community?
- What is the impact of ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and Quetta?

Most of the interviews/conversations were conducted from May 2015 to June 2016 in Dandenong, Melbourne at the Southern Migrant Refugee Centre where the Australia Hazara Women’s Friendship Network (AHWFN) is located.

After several meetings with the women, I knew instinctively that as a researcher, if I did not immerse myself in their lives, my understanding of this extraordinary group of women would be quite limited. While the women were welcoming and curious they were also quite reticent. I found that by engaging in community activities, I could connect with the women on both an individual and group basis. These activities included, attending festivals and dinners. I also attended vigils for Hazaras who died in Australian detention camps and protests against deporting Hazaras back to Afghanistan. When participating in these events I photographed and filmed the women in a variety of situations. I heard and wrote down their stories in different environments. I learned some Dari and taught basic Italian. Towards the end of my official time with the women, we exchanged information about our cultures. These situations offered a deeper understanding into the women and their community.

A summation of my observations are as follows:

- The women faced numerous unanticipated difficulties on arrival in Australia and the majority reported complete exhaustion after arriving in Australia. “I was so tired when I arrived here, extremely tired, you cannot imagine” (A, personal communication July 2015).
- They lacked the necessary language skills and as a result lacked independence.
- They felt that the Hazara narrative was not understood in Australia and that their stories of persecution did not protect Hazaras from being deported back to danger (Doherty, 2016). “This year (2014) four Hazara men are sent back. The Taliban tortured them. Why do this if they know the Hazara persecution” (A, Personal communication, may April, 2016). Other women felt that Hazaras were gaining a stronger presence in multicultural Australia. The protests in Canberra on April 3rd, 2017 against the visit of Afghanistan’s President Ashraf Ghani to Australia was indicative that the Hazaras had made their presence felt in Australia, which was further emphasised by mainstream and non-mainstream media coverage (Doherty, 2017).
- They wanted more access to multicultural communities, however they found the cultural subtleties of Australia very complex. Zakia Baig, reports: “The cultural differences are also an issue. Many Afghans, and particularly women, have no understanding of other cultures and so no way of making friends from other cultures” (“AMES News”, 2014, p. 4).
- Those in their late forties to early sixties, from educated or professional backgrounds, wanted to resume their careers and experienced a loss of self-esteem when this did not

occur. For example, “I am nobody here, before I was a teacher, a scientist, I had respect, now I am nothing” (Z, personal communication, September 2015).

- The older women are at risk of becoming isolated due to not achieving skills necessary for an independent life in Australia.
- There was a continued sense of responsibility for family back home. Some expressed guilt for being safely in Australia. Despite this, there was an unwavering determination to create a new life regardless of the difficulties.
- Transnational politics (Baubock, 2003) play a significant role in the Hazara community globally as the issues facing Hazaras in Afghanistan are connected to and addressed by communities outside of Afghanistan, “My daughter and I send money to my family in Afghanistan when we can” (B, Personal communication September 2015).
- The women identified strongly as Afghan Hazaras, though many had been born or lived outside Afghanistan in Quetta, Pakistan, or Iran. While they all maintained that life was ‘better’ in Australia, there was a longing for home. Some stated they could no longer tolerate the Hazara persecution. Even in Iran and Quetta, once safe havens are now becoming increasingly dangerous.
- Those who had lost children during the war, suffered persecution, kidnapping or survived the boat journey to Australia, had a sense of guilt if they found happiness. Others were quite pragmatic and felt they would be doing a disservice to those left behind if they did not embrace the freedoms that Australia offered.
- The most obvious change for the participants was the experience of peace. However, the reality of navigating the employment, housing, medical and employment systems, particularly with little language created extreme stress for the women. “When we got

out of the detention camp, I needed help to find somewhere to live. It is hard when you can't speak English" (B, personal communication, September 2015).

According to Turner (1967), the women were at a point of change, of releasing the old and moving into the new. The women's stories lay between developing a sense of belonging or remaining connected to a history that was unsustainable in their current situation. The new culture posed many challenges for them and their stories embodied an uncertain pivotal point in their lives where great changes were in process.

While the primary research question asks how a multidisciplinary arts approach reflects commonalities between the Hazaras and Calabrians through becoming other, it is the stories of being in the liminal spaces that assists answering this question. The stories not only relate experiences in the liminal space but reflect current societal perceptions and policies from the women's perspectives. Over time, I came to see them as the story keepers embodying a wealth of information of a history left behind. Though their faces bore witness to pain, their narratives reflected an unwavering endurance. It was during earlier conversations with the Hazara women that I let myself become part of their narratives. I recall sitting at my computer trying to write what I had heard, but was distracted by the noise of their stories. Furthermore, revisiting films of the interviews/conversations left me feeling impotent. What was happening in the subtext of these narratives disturbed me and much of the information could not be made public. I felt the weight of the narratives and could only imagine what the women must experience in the retelling. I was over empathising and aware that this is part of my nature; I put it to good use and embodied each woman as I wrote their story. I believe this signalled the beginning of the idea of becoming other.

The ongoing issues in Afghanistan were extremely difficult for the women, making it problematic for them to leave their past behind and make a new life. These stories resonated

with those my grandparents and mother told me. They spoke of the turmoil of living in peace in Australia, while family and friends struggled during the war or were taken by the fascists. From my observations, the burden of this knowledge could pose a hindrance to connecting with a new way of life. Through their stories, I found a strong connection between the experiences of the Hazara women and southern Italian women, specifically to my maternal grandmother and to some extent my mother. This enabled the weaving of my family narrative through those of the Hazaras and suggests that connectivity to the broader community is fundamental to successful settlement in a new country. This was specifically noticeable when I shared stories of my mother and grandmother and the difficulties they endured when resettling in Australia. The more I discussed my family, the more interest the Hazara women showed in different cultures and this is demonstrated when one of the women said, “Oh we are like the southern Italians sometimes” (A, personal conversation May 2016). My family story aroused the women’s interest in the narratives of more established communities. Furthermore, I believe it gave them hope that they too would find a place in Australia.

The Calabrian Hazara Connection

The relationship I developed with the Hazara women through community immersion meant that for a time our lives were connected in a very meaningful way and I found a natural link simply because of our gender. Through discussion with some of the more vocal women, there was a strong resonance of transnational feminism at work. A sense that we had to work together as women. According to Valoy (2015), western feminism endeavors to find and emphasise commonalities between women across countries and ethnic groups. Conversely transfeminism distinguishes disparities across the vast diversity of groups thereby addressing a variety of issues. Therefore, it is important that all women are not placed in a homogenous movement. The way we are affected by world issues differs, and is dependent on privilege,

education, colour, ethnicity and changed geographical locations. Transnational feminisms must consider the global influences for the groups they are advocating (Valoy, 2015).

In terms of the study and connecting commonalities between the Hazaras and southern Italians, I could be accused of not advocating according to Valoy's interpretation of transfeminism. I propose as a southern Italian, who has been *othered* in both Australia and Italy, with a family desperate to make us "all the same", that I speak from personal experience. The creative research aims to explore the commonalities between two disparate cultures, while respecting the differences, in an ethically and culturally sensitive manner.

In the beginning, I caught myself wanting to "fix" the thing which I perceived impeded the women's ability to have a full life. As an Italo-Australian, western arrogance was fiercely challenged from the perspective of an exile's descendant. It was an interesting conundrum. My middle class educated background did not immunise me from memories of the "wog", "spick" or "dago" chants during my teens. Such memories returned with force, thus allowing me to appreciate the women experiences. These memories are reminders that the Australian narrative has changed little since those teenage years. More likely, the target of such abuse has simply shifted. As one woman stated, "I am sometimes scared on public transport. I have been sneered at, sworn at and told to take off my headscarf. It is nearly always men. This is unacceptable" (Z, personal communication, May 25, 2016).

Applying walking with video was significant in relation to developing intimate discussions with the women and I recorded some interesting conversation about Islamophobia which has become quite a complex issue in Australia. Stories were told directly to the camera in a variety of situations and later deleted due to the women asking for anonymity. The most important aspect of these discussions was that it enabled me to connect with the women in relation to my family's experience around Italia phobia which was prevalent until the late

1960's. The women soon related to me as having experienced *otherness*, a connection that enabled freer discussion.

This was evident in conversations with the Hazara women, particularly around Australia's immigration policy. These talks often turned to the Calabrian's story. While the Italian migrants/exiles ultimately represented one of the many established cultures that found a sense of home in Australia, the southern Italians did not fit into the narrow paradigm of the Australian migration policy which was forged under a British regime. According to Matt Novak (2016), in his article *The Secret History of Australian Whiteness*, immigrants from Italy, specifically the south "have constantly negotiated and re-negotiated their 'whiteness' with the government and the Australian people at large" (p. 2). Both the United States and Australia perceived Italians as non-whites, considered as "others" in predominantly white countries.

For Italians who wanted to immigrate, it was essential that they had white status. This meant conforming to the British model of appearance, behaviour, linguistic ability and being of the protestant faith (Novak, 2014). Southern Italians did not fit this model which made them stand out amongst other white migrants. The Ferry Report of 1925 questioned the racial fitness of southern Italians, which was indicative of the overt racism in Australia at that time (Dewhirst, 2014). However, while the white Australia policy did not actively exclude southern Italians from migrating, there continued to be a preference for white migrants until 1966. According to the Australian Government website, it was not until 1973, when the Whitlam government came to power, that race as a factor in Australia's immigration policy was removed. Nonetheless, this study shows that the experiences of the Calabrians of the 1940s, through to the late 1960s are mirrored in the experiences of the Hazaras of today. Like the southern Italians, they are othered due to colour and ethnicity.

Sharing my family history of Italia phobia, particularly Novak's article (2016), prompted the women to speak more openly about Islamophobia. Their feelings were reflected in a study by the University of South Australia's International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding. It stated more than 10 percent of Australians are Islamophobic (Della Bosca, 2016). While this is a relatively small number, other polls showed that more than 49 percent of Australians want to stop Muslim immigration (Della Bosca, 2016). One Nation party leader Pauline Hanson stated in her first speech to parliament, "We are in danger of being swamped by Muslims, who bear a culture and ideology that is incompatible with our own" (Medhora, 2016).

Huffington Post's article *Half of Australia Would Ban Muslim Migration. Here's Why That's Shocking* (Butler, 2016) reported on *Essential Service* poll which asked, "Would you support or oppose a ban on Muslim immigration to Australia?" Of the 49 percent that supported this ban, 40 percent maintained that Muslims are unable to integrate into our society; terrorist attacks and threats were cited by 27 percent; while a lack of shared values was also revealed (Butler 2016). The impact of Islamophobia on many Australian Muslims has become an exercise in terror. The Sydney Morning Herald's article *Muslims on What It's Like to Live in Australia* (Donnelly, 2016) reported considerable fear of the general population among the Islamic community.

Parallel stories from World War II and beyond were strong elements of Italia phobia in Australia. Although many Italians came to Australia to flee fascism, once Italy declared war on Britain and her allies, Italians in Australia became political pawns (Spizzica, 2011). Resentment towards Italians was prevalent throughout the country and regardless of age,

health or political views they were detained behind barbed wire fences¹⁷. Spizzica, in her article (2011) *Why Australia must apologise to Italians interned during World War II*, states that “There was limited acknowledgement of the widespread xenophobia against Italian families throughout the war years” (p. 3). She maintains that, after 70 years, some Italians who lived through that period have unresolved pain. In November of 2011, a bi-partisan motion was moved by South Australia’s Labour member Tony Piccolo to admit to the unjust detention of Italians in Australia during World War II. This included human rights violations and the numerous political and military errors of judgement which in turn caused great hardship for the detainee’s families. There was no inclusion of deaths and the denial of essential medical care in Piccolo’s motion (Spizzica, 2011). As in the case of deaths on Manus and Nauru, the Italian deaths were avoidable while others were simply not reported. Thus, a historical theme around the treatment of detainees in Australia’s camps re-emerges.

These commonalities became evident through applying walking with video, which documented the women’s sensorial experiences. This assisted in *feeling* the stories shared by the women, as I found myself becoming the other, when I retold their stories to camera. The blend of walking with video, narrative inquiry and Ekman’s concepts of empathy, allowed me to experience becoming other. This in turn meant ethical issues needed to be addressed in respect to representing other.

Ethical Issues

As a Human Rights activist and artist for more than 20 years, the ethical consideration of the most vulnerable has been of great importance to me. In terms of my artistic work, I have generally ensured that all participants in a given project are familiar with ethical standards.

¹⁷ My grandfather was one of very few Italians not interned as he was a known anarchist, socialist and anti-fascist (Luigi Stellato, Personal Conversation, October 1987).

As an artist and advocate, I have constantly tried to be mindful that no group I work with is left feeling vulnerable. I have always been attentive to the political and social changes in our society and felt it important to act accordingly and adapt any current research project to protect the participants.

Due to societal changes during my candidature, I found myself in an ethical quandary. With the 2016 Australian Federal election in July, anti-Islamic and anti-immigration rhetoric was uncensored and this created anxiety for the women. It was at this juncture in the research, most of the women requested complete anonymity and I found myself having to revise my whole approach to the artwork. My concerns became an unexpected research question: how do I represent the women's narratives in the artwork to ensure their agency was reflected? It was imperative to my research to address the negative narratives around Muslims and its impact on the women. Moreover, it was crucial that all identifiable markers were removed. I remember thinking the project would lose its power and validity if I could not use the women in the film footage I had already taken. This in turn further positioned my concept of becoming the women as the most cogent way to proceed. I did not make this decision lightly due to the ethical minefield in which I was about to place myself.

Educator Tsitsi Chataika (2005) discusses four major concerns that centre on the ethical process in conducting narrative inquiry. These include assessing benefits versus harm, confidentiality, the conflict of the researcher's role, and informed consent. These concerns were all addressed in my research when I filmed and documented my participants.

I ensured that ethical considerations were adhered to throughout the research process, particularly in relation to tensions between the aims of the research and the creation of knowledge, and the rights of participants in respect to privacy. Applying appropriate ethical principles, harm can be reduced, and the participants' protection ensured. Batchelor and

Briggs (1994) maintained that failure in research can be a result of researchers not anticipating potential problems or being ill-equipped to deal with the unpredictability of qualitative research.

Qualitative researchers focus on exploring, examining and describing people in the natural environments. The power - equitable or differential - between researcher and participants is embedded in qualitative research and the desire to participate in a study depends on the participants' willingness to share experiences despite this (Orb et al 2001).

Narrative inquiry is dependent on the researcher/participant relationship, and personal connections are likely to occur when sharing stories. To avoid compromising relationships, ground rules were set. Whatever was out of my jurisdiction, such as counselling or legal issues, the women were referred to appropriate agencies. Interviews were limited to a specific time; and unrelated discussion was curtailed as much as possible. As it happened, the women were very self-contained and the process maintained its professionalism. Even though some stories were extremely personal and disturbing, the women always displayed what can only be described as grace.

Educator, Jill Sinclair Bell (2002) discusses the implications of taking people's stories and placing them into a larger narrative, in effect imposing [their own] meaning on participants' lived experiences. While good practice demands the researcher to share ongoing narrative constructions, participants are never quite free of the researcher's interpretation of their lives. As psychologist Josselson (1996) claims, when developing a story from narratives, storying is imposed on participants and the effects can be very powerful (Josselson, 1996). The researcher needs to avoid creating any hierarchy which positions him/herself as the expert, if the participants' experiences are to be positive and productive.

The publishing or exhibition phase of the research can also reveal ethical issues unique to qualitative inquiry. Josselson (1996) has reflected on the impact that ideas have when published, “we have paid less attention to how and what we write down may affect those about whom we write.... we often lose sight of the additional authority our words and ideas carry when transferred to the permanence of print” (p. 61).

The researcher also needs to be self-reflexive and consider their influence on the community they are investigating (Chataika, 2005). If we are not, then research can potentially harm an already vulnerable community.

Having examined the ethical implications for this project, my original idea of filming the women telling their stories to camera changed and any reference to the identity of the women, apart from the two co-founders of AHWFN has been removed.

Another ethical issue that has been prevalent in the news across arts disciplines is cultural appropriation. I recognise cultural appropriation as an ethical issue and elements of my artistic practice may be perceived as cultural appropriation, therefore it is important that my methodology and ethical considerations be discussed. Cultural appropriation is the adoption of specific features from another culture without the permission of people who belong to that culture. Kovie Biakolo (2016), writing for *AlterNet* magazine, maintains that cultural exchange should be based on mutual reciprocity between cultures.

Australian indigenous writer, Nayuka Gorrie (2017) contrasts cultural appropriation and cultural exchange. Gorrie proposes that when a group is forced to integrate, their culture is stolen and appropriation as opposed to exchange causes disempowerment. When a culture’s artefacts, such as the didgeridoo, are marketed and sold as a sex toy, or used in a pub to drink shots from, it is not only disrespectful but is a reminder of the loss of culture. This is theft by the dominant culture because “it is the colonial mentality at play. It is a mentality that makes

the settler feel they are entitled to take from the colonised and the impacts of it don't matter”⁸ (p. 3). According to Gorrie appropriation of indigenous intellectual property is nothing short of theft as it is “Aboriginals only currency when it comes to our authenticity” (p. 3) For years, artefacts from indigenous communities the world over have been sold in market places or used in high fashion, while the cultures from which the works have been appropriated do not benefit. In her article, *Explainer: why blackface (and brownface) offend* (2016), Marion Gray maintains that the dominant culture, mostly white, has taken from people of colour with little thought given to history. This includes not just artefacts but also stories.

Hungarian journalist Boglarka Balogh (2016) photoshopped her own face onto portraits of black women and posted the project *I Morphed Myself into Tribal Women to Raise Awareness of Their Secluded Cultures* (Nolan, 2016). Her intention was to raise awareness of African tribes facing extinction and to celebrate the beauty of the women and their artefacts. I question why the African women's photographs were not used and if photoshopping a white face on a black face will achieve her objective. Similar questions might be asked of me as I photographed and filmed myself dressed as a Hazara woman. This needs clarification. Firstly, I worked with the women and I came to understand their culture and their situation in Australia. In turn, they came to understand me as an Italo-Australian and we exchanged cultural knowledge. Secondly, although I was initially given permission to use the women's photographs to inform my artwork, I responded appropriately when this permission was withdrawn. The project's rigorous ethics clearance process discussed earlier ensured that our interactions followed strict protocols and I was conscious that our interactions were non-hierarchical, reciprocal and a positive and empowering experience for all participants. This is evidenced by the women's willingness to interact, share stories, laughter and food. Furthermore, their confidence to decide the extent to which they would be involved in the project is indicative that they felt in control. All these factors point to a positive experience.

The overriding issues that pertain to cultural appropriation as Johnson (2016) asserts in her article *5 Things You Don't Realize When You Defend Cultural Appropriation* is that people need to have a clearer understanding of the problems associated when the dominant culture takes cultural elements from a marginalized group without considering the impact of their actions. The point Johnson (2016) makes is the fact that power dynamics are the most significant elements of appropriating cultures. It involves a dominant group taking from a culture which has been systematically oppressed by that group (Johnson, 2016).

Johnson also discusses misconceptions regarding cultural appropriation such as the appropriation of another culture was necessary to develop the modern world. What needs to be remembered in this case are the numerous inequalities that were visited on the marginalized groups including genocide, colonization and imperialism, all of which were designed to dehumanize and force oppressed groups to abandon their cultures. The Hazaras have been victims of dehumanising forces in Afghanistan over many decades, however, the Hazaras fought back, they did not abandon their culture and comply with the dominant Afghan culture. Yet, how the Hazaras in Australia develop is an unfolding story and one which this project aims to document and archive, as its contribution to new knowledge.

In the context of this project, I researched cultural appropriation and how it informed the creating of the artwork. Even though I felt I was working in an unknown space, I was more confident in my role as a conduit for sharing the Hazaras stories and experiences. When I explained how I would tell their stories, through the lens of *magic realism*, it was a foreign concept, so I gave them examples of a magic realist story. The women did not appear interested and replied “Good! tell my story, don’t show my face” (M, Personal Communication, August 2016). I interpreted from this reaction that they just wanted their stories told, in whatever creative way I deemed appropriate. Taking on the role as storyteller

for the women was challenging and I drew on Haraway (2015) in relation to my obligation, ensuring social, historical and political contexts were addressed when relaying the circumstances that influenced the women's lives.

The following chapter investigates the historical, artistic and socio-political impacts on the Afghan women. These influences are explored in relation to both the invisibility of the women and the art forms produced throughout the years of civil unrest. The chapter also examines the re-emergence of the both arts and female artists in Afghanistan. Moreover, the development of women's voices through visual art is discussed as well as its capacity to bridge ethnic disharmony. Understanding current issues within the arts in Afghanistan assisted in the development of the Hazara characters in the artworks. The female artists of Afghanistan gave me an insight into the hardships experienced by the women living in Afghanistan which, in turn, gave a background context from which to draw when creating the personas for the artwork. I also gained a deeper understanding of some of the women in my study which also helped produce strong well rounded, three dimensional characters.

Chapter 5.

The Arts in Afghanistan: Arts and Women Casualties of War

"The trouble is that once you see it, you can't unsee it.
And once you've seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing,
becomes as political an act as speaking out.
There is no innocence. Either way, you're accountable."

Arundhati Roy

The longer I worked with the Hazara women, the more it became clear that separating their lives in Australia and Afghanistan did not give a clear understanding of the women. Their narratives pre- and post-migration were in fact a continuous story, particularly in light of the current situation in Afghanistan. Thus, the women are part of a broader narrative which I will elaborate upon using art to reflect the lives of the women in my study. Transitional justice through arts activism will also be addressed in respect to the Afghan artists discussed in this chapter. My creative led project identifies the intrinsic role of arts activism and storytelling in the Afghan artists I have researched and their methodology has influenced the artworks I have produced for this PhD. This correlation between my work in arts activism, Afghan female artists and the Hazara women in this study is discussed.

While the women interviewed in this doctoral research are not artists apart from one spoken word poet, the art activism being practised by female artists in Afghanistan is significant in understanding how women and the arts can be perceived as casualties of war. In this chapter the impact of war on Afghani women in relation to the arts has relevance to the majority of the women in my study. The Hazara women have all expressed, at some point that they believe in a unified Afghanistan commencing with the end of the Hazara genocide.

As an artist I see the arts as a means to achieve this end in relation to transitional justice which encompasses various modalities such as stealth art and art activism.

The Women and artists of Afghanistan

Not only have women's rights been severely compromised during and post the Taliban years, but the arts community also came to a total halt. From this standpoint, the arts and women's rights are interconnected as they both disappeared. The disappearance of the arts is described by Mujumdar (2008) in her article *Beyond the Frame*:

Even when not directly damaged due to State policies, art suffered during the decades of conflict as people struggled for survival, being forced to pack their belongings and move — again, again and again. Art, a luxury, became one of the first casualties of war (Mujumdar, 2008, para 6, The Hindu).

Women too, are directly damaged due to decades of conflict. The detrimental impact of the Taliban on women was particularly evident in Dari-speaking urban centres such as Kabul and Herat where women had enjoyed a greater degree of freedom than in the Pashtun cities of Kandahar and Jalalabad (Barakat & Wardell, 2001). According to Horia Mosadiq (2013), an Afghan human rights activist and journalist currently working with Amnesty International, “Afghan women were the ones who lost most from the war and militarisation” (2013). She remembers women's rights in Afghanistan as being quite progressive until the conflict of the 1970s. From the 1980s onwards, civil unrest between Mujahedeen groups and the government saw the rights of women in Afghanistan decrease until they “disappeared” once the Taliban came to power (Women in Afghanistan, 2013). The residual effects of past social and political advancement still echo in the generational memories of Afghan women today, enabling them to preserve that former identity as women with agency. This made it possible for the women to operate underground schools, to seek asylum, to create art, and to

maintain contact with women's movements within and outside of Afghanistan, such as the Revolutionary Afghan Women's Association (RAWA).

Rostami-Povey (2007) argues that Afghan women have never been devoid of agency and have consistently challenged the conservative and patriarchal structures forced on them by years of civil war and Taliban rule. Current perceptions surrounding Afghan women are generally from a western perspective, with minimal understanding of their history.

From the early years of the 20th Century, the push for women's personal freedoms, particularly in the cities, was won and lost under an array of regimes (Ahmed-Gosh, 2003). However, the power of tribal and rural communities, which are resistant to change remain a constant presence, often ensured the loss of women's rights. Generally, past reforms have been confined to cities, while rural communities preserved their traditional and conservative customs. Change in rural areas is minimal, however some rural women influenced by the idea of education are taking small steps to affect change.

In the eyes of Ahmed Gosh (2003), women have not lost their agency; they are fighting back. Women such as poet, Meena Intizar, fled Kandahar in 2014 after reporting a complaint against a police officer who ransacked her house and threatened to rape and kill members of her family. Even though this officer had been previously indicted for a number of rapes, he was never prosecuted. This is the reality for many Afghan women. Moreover, if you are an artist or poet, you are at considerable risk as poetry is considered a sin (Doucet, 2013).

Poetry, oral storytelling and performance in Afghanistan has been a long standing tradition which has reflected myths, religious epics, history, daily lives and pride in the Afghan landscape. These stories and poetry show a love for the traditions, rituals around listening, performing and remembering. Further, these arts forms served as a vehicle for exchanging ideas that relate to social change (Siddiqui, et al., 2014). According to Naderi (2006) the arts, specifically poetry was utilised by successive Afghan governments to support varying

political ideologies that came and went under an array of regimes throughout the twentieth century. By late 1978, when the Communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan rose to power via a coup, creative expression was closely connected to their political and ideological structures. At the same time competing Mujahideen groups used the arts to support their narratives and artists that did not subscribe to either ideology were persecuted. Consequently, like many other Afghan citizens', artists fled the country.

The arts, literature and poetry are currently used as a form of resistance and Afghan artists, across genres and ethnic groups, put themselves in jeopardy every time a poem, a work of street art, or public performance is produced. In 2014, the BBC's *100 Women* series met a group of Afghan poets and writers' intent on protecting their recent hard won liberties. The program confirmed that amid deeply religious and conservative neighborhoods of Kabul, a dozen or more women meet in a tiny room to share landais. Landais are two lined traditional poems, usually performed and their words are like their swords as they rage against the injustices in Afghanistan. My understanding from conversations with the women in my study, is that landai poems have been used as a secret form of rebellion for hundreds of years and continue today.

Afghanistan's largest women's literary society, *Mirman Baheer*, is a contemporary version of a Taliban-era literary network known as the *Golden Needle Sewing School* (Ellis-Petersen, 2015) founded circa 1996 in Herat, in western Afghanistan, and was one of many underground schools for girls and women during the Taliban rule. In an article by Ron Synovitz, *Author Awaits Happy Ending to 'Sewing Circles of Herat'*, Christina Lamb author of the *The Sewing Circles of Herat* (2002) is cited as telling Radio Free Europe:

They would arrive in their burqas with their bags full of material and scissors.

Underneath they would have notebooks and pens. And once they got inside, instead of

learning to sew, they would actually be talking about Shakespeare and James Joyce, Dostoyevsky and their own writing. It was a tremendous risk they were taking. If they had been caught, they would have been, at the very least, imprisoned and tortured. Maybe hanged (p. 1).

Like the “Golden Needle Sewing School”, *Mirman Baheer* is held in relative secrecy as women pretending to sew, gather to discuss literature and current events. But in Kabul, the literary society has little need for subterfuge. Its 100 strong women only members are drawn primarily from the Afghan elite: professors, parliamentarians, journalists and scholars. They travel on city buses to their Saturday meetings, their faces uncovered, and wearing high-heeled boots and shearling coats. In the outlying provinces of Khost, Paktia, Maidan Wardak, Kunduz, Kandahar, Herat and Farah, the society’s members number 300 and *Mirman Baheer* functions largely in secret. These women, from tribal and rural areas, must telephone their poems to Kabul in secret. Each time they telephone through their poems they risk their lives. Meena is one such poet and desperately wishes she had the opportunities of her urban sisters. She says, “I want to write about what’s wrong in my country” (Meena, 2014 as cited in Lamb). Over the phone, she recites a landai:

My pains grow as my life dwindles,
I will die with a heart full of hope.

These female activists use their poems to inform the global community of life in Afghanistan. "It's our form of resistance," explains one of the society's founders and member of parliament, Sahira Sharif (Doucet, 2013).

Throughout the Taliban reign, the ban on all forms of entertainment had a detrimental effect on Afghan arts from which it is still recovering today. Paintings were taken from homes, offices and museums and burnt. Art books were destroyed, museum collections were

systematically annihilated, and film archives were purged to cleanse them of any “unIslamic” depiction of life, especially anything in human form (Mojumdar, 2008). Artists were forced to keep a low profile as they were targeted by the Taliban. If caught, or if their art “offended” the regime, beatings, prison or death were likely outcomes.

Shafiq Monis, a father, husband and a talented Afghan Hazara artist and carpet maker was pursued by the Taliban as his works were deemed “evil”. The Taliban burned his art work and what followed was unlawful imprisonment that saw him tortured and sentenced to death. Shafiq did escape execution and when released, his family had vanished and his home was occupied by strangers. After much unsuccessful searching for his family, he chose to seek asylum in Australia. Several years later he was reunited with his family.

His *Death of Bamiyan*, (Fig.15), was painted in Woomera Detention centre as a reminder of the destruction of the ancient Buddhas as well as many other beautiful artifacts destroyed under the Taliban (Monis, Personal communication, 2011).



Figure 15. Monis, *Death of Bamiyan*, 2001 (courtesy of the artist)

In response to and defiance of the Taliban, several underground art movements developed, similar to the underground girl’s schools operating at the time. Rahraw Omarzad is an

interdisciplinary artist, journalist and renowned photographer whose works echo a combination of Italian neo-realism. Omazard encouraged artistic ventures and, despite the danger, produced a magazine that displayed the work of contemporary Afghan artists. By 2004, he developed this project further and formed *The Centre for Contemporary Art in Afghanistan* in Kabul which is still operational today.

For women, both during the Taliban reign and currently, the danger of engaging in educational or artistic endeavours comes with great risk. If caught, not only the girls suffer, but the teacher could be killed. In his article, *Head teacher decapitated by Taliban* (2016), Walsh describes Taliban attacks on pro-government clerics, aid organisation and teachers who ignored their demands to stop teaching girls. A group of suspected Taliban militants beheaded Malim Abdul Habib, a teacher in Qalat the capital of Zabul in central Afghanistan, in front of his family. In Helmand province, a teacher was dragged from his classroom and shot at the school gate because he ignored the order (Walsh, 2016). Zakia Baig from the Australian Hazara Women's Friendship Network (AHWFN), who was also interviewed as part of this doctoral research, ran an underground school for girls in Quetta and explained that it was an extremely dangerous undertaking, but a necessary risk as education creates opportunities for girls to have a chance in life (Zakia Baig, Personal communication, May 2016). Currently, education for girls continues to be a perilous journey, laced with the dread of capture, torture, murder or worse. The courage needed to attend these schools is a testament to the courage of the Afghan women (Coughlan, 2015).

Farzana Wahidy, now a well known Afghan journalist, was a teenager when the Taliban controlled Afghanistan and was publicly beaten in the streets of Kabul for not wearing a burqa. Schooling for women and girls was banned during those years, but Wahidy found use for the burqa and hid her books under its folds as she made her way to an underground school

in Kabul which educated approximately 300 girls, all of whom risked their lives and those of their parents and teachers to attend (McGrory, 2013). After the Taliban was “removed” by the US-led forces in 2001, Wahidy attended high school which gave new educational opportunities and further prompted her need to share the Afghan women’s experiences on a global scale. She then attended Aina, a photography institute in Kabul run by Iranian- born photographer brothers Manoocher and Reza Deghati who were committed to educating and empowering Afghan women and children through the media. Wahidy built her storytelling skills through photojournalism and her works illustrate both the negative and positive aspects of Afghanistan. For example, *Teaching School*, tells the story of educator Ruqea Rahimi teaching at a Primary School in Kabul in 2004 when education had just been reintroduced in Afghanistan (Fig 16). The photograph shows the sparseness of the classroom with obvious limited and outdated resources. Despite the photograph only showing boys in the learning environment, Wahidy’s photographs leaves a glimmer of hope in terms of changing attitudes towards education.



Figure 16. Wahidy, *Teaching School*, 2004, (courtesy of the artist)

Prison in Parwan Province below tells a very different story as it illuminates the lives of women in Afghan prison (Fig 17). The wide semi-aerial photo depicts the conditions in which the women survive. Barbed wire surrounds the top of the prison walls, a metaphor of control by the Afghan patriarchy. The clothes line, heavy with sheets and women's dresses, buckets of water scattered about, and children playing in the dirt filled yard, narrates the mundanity of life. Against the semi-painted decaying cell blocks, a woman stands staring. The scene is an amalgamation of daily life sharply contrasted against crimes against women and the hopelessness of their situation. *Prison in Parwan Province* is one of many juvenile detention and adult prisons in Afghanistan which house women arrested for "moral crimes". These "crimes" usually involve fleeing from a forced or child marriage or domestic violence. Some of the women and girls are jailed because they had sex out of marriage, which generally means they were raped or sold into slavery and prostitution.



Figure 17. Wahidy, *Prison in Parwan Province* Afghanistan, 2010 (Courtesy of the artist)

Despite women's rights having improved since the Taliban fell in 2001, the imprisonment of women and girls for "moral crimes" such as escaping arranged marriages (or *Zina*) will be very difficult to change (Ijaz, 2015). An article on the Human Rights Watch website, *Surge in Women Jailed for 'Moral Crimes'* (2013), states that

Running away, or fleeing home without permission, is not a crime under the Afghan criminal code, but the Afghan Supreme Court has instructed its judges to treat women and girls who flee as criminals. *Zina* is a crime under Afghan law, punishable by up to 15 years in prison. (Watch 2013)¹⁸

Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, reports that women are sent to prison for unsubstantiated 'crimes' while their abusers, the real criminals, simply walk free (Ijaz, 2015).

In her article *Portraits of Afghan Women Imprisoned for 'Moral Crimes'* (2015), journalist Alice Tchernookova spoke with Gabriela Maj a Polish-Canadian photographer who interviewed more than 100 women imprisoned for "moral crimes" in seven Afghan prisons. Maj (2015) noted that the women live in an open prison with other dangerous and potentially violent female criminals. Moreover, while many of the women convicted of *Zina* suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), no mental health provision is available.

Wahidy's photographic works speak to the disenfranchised in Afghanistan and her interest comes from an intimate sense of belonging to her country (Pundir, 2015). The lives of the women her photographs provide an insight into the women as well as the social and political world they inhabit. Wahidy also speaks to her own lived experiences as an Afghan woman through her work. In an interview with *Indian Express*, she spoke of the dangers of working

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch March 28, 2012 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/28/afghanistan-hundreds-women-girls-jailed-moral-crimes>

as a photographer in Afghanistan, particularly in the provinces and as recently as 2013 she faced threats to her life. She stated, “When I leave for assignments, I just leave a note for everyone because I do not know if I will return or not” (2015, p. 5).

While none of the Hazara women actively discussed moral crimes, they intimated there was a significant amount of abuse towards women that was rarely heard about in the west. I got a sense there were some things that they did not want to talk about. This made me curious and I searched the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) website where I found horrendous abuses of women such as self-immolation, women forced into prostitution due to poverty and imprisonment for minor crimes. Though there was no evidence any of the Hazara women experiencing such horrors, I ascertained that these crimes against women would have inspired their leaving Afghanistan. The lack of discussion around crimes against women inspired me to find artists who brought such stories to light and Farzana Wahidy was one of them. Her photographs narrate crimes against women and give me a deeper appreciation of the Afghan women of all ethnicities.

The stories expressed by the women in my study and my exposure to the artworks created by Farzana Wahidy give a sense of justice to the invisibility of women and the Hazara genocide narrative. Afghanistan continues to remain in the mist of conflict and I continually wonder how justice can be served while atrocities continue. Siddiqui et al (2014) examine the role of Afghani artists who are in transitioning contexts where decades of conflict have eroded every aspect of the country from infrastructure to public trust and ordinary cultural production. They provide examples of how the arts deal with these concepts using participatory theatre work in the Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization (AHRDO). Light is shed on the cultural implications of transitional justice and how art practices can play a significant role in moving Afghan society towards accountability of

human rights abuses. To that end, the female artists presented in this chapter are indicative of the role that artists play in highlighting a myriad of issues in Afghanistan. The female artists and Hazara artists discussed throughout this chapter have been, or are currently involved, in the Kabul Art Project.

The Kabul Art Project

The Kabul Art Project was founded by Christina Hellman in 2013 an illustrator and graphic designer from Cologne, Germany. Her aim was to promote and assist Afghan artists as well as support the resurgence of their cultural identity. The Kabul Art Project is primarily an internet platform that allows the artists of Kabul to connect with art collectors, galleries, art lovers and the media globally. Since its conception, the artists involved have exhibited in European countries and Canada (Gurova, 2015). The power of the imaginary displayed in the works from the Kabul Art Project are as diverse as its multifaceted, multilingual society. The works tell the stories of an Afghanistan almost unknown to the outside world. They reflect intimate, personal and community insights into the history of a country long tainted by the ravages of war, persecution and genocide.

Kandahar street artists like Malina Suliman fled Afghanistan due to her artistic practice and Suliman's artistic growth has been in secret. Her family removed her from the Kabul art school and relocated to Kandahar, an extremely conservative city in a bid to stop her from making art. The move only increased her desire to make works that spoke to the atrocities occurring in Afghanistan. On World Disability Day, she made a sculpture of a disfigured child and was criticised by the government for daring to create a three-dimensional figure (Deasy, 2013). Suliman maintains that many children were disabled by war and need proper attention as they represent part of Afghanistan's future. Her aim as an artist is to be the voice of youth and of the women in Kandahar who face constant restrictions. In order that her

narratives of Afghanistan were heard, she took to the streets and created works such as the blue Burqa draped over skeletons chained to a wall with red chains (Figure 18), (Pennington, 2015).



Figure 18. Suliman Graffiti, 2012

This work, according to Suliman, is a self-portrait and one of many burqa clad skeletons, painted on walls and rocks all over Kandahar (Minto, 2016). Like Wahidy, Suliman's inability to comprehend the disparity of gender differences in Afghanistan led her to question the normalising of violence, injustice and the oppression of women on all levels, as well as rewarding the men who performed vicious attacks on women. Suliman's provocative art caught the attention of the Taliban and subsequently her home was attacked, her father's legs were crushed and the family were left with one option - to flee.

Suliman's confrontational works also attracted the international media which raised awareness of the gross violation of women's rights. One cannot underestimate the risks that artists take in showing their works. However, street art enables Suliman to exhibit her work despite institutional constraints and limited financial resources. The work below illustrates

the darkness of the lives of women in Afghanistan (Figure 19). This semi-bodiless skeleton is quite chilling and on closer inspection, the eyes bleed tears of blood and the mouth spews an almost invisible blue. Again, the burqa, the silence of the women and the tears of resignation are represented in this street artwork, *Tagging the Taliban*.



Figure 19. Suliman *Tagging the Taliban*, 2013

Graffiti is not illegal in Afghanistan however, but the very act of creating street art is still considered one of rebellion and an effective method to promote messages of resistance. Although Suliman has her detractors in Kandahar, she also has support from other women who tell her their story which Suliman then translates into street art (Sadar, 2014).

Like the semi-secret *Mirman Baheer* poetry society who use their words as weapons of resistance, Suliman's spray can is her tool of resistance. Artists from all disciplines in Afghanistan make art that raises international awareness in solidarity against a regime that uses brute force to maintain a fragile status quo. Her visual landscapes of burqa-clad skeletons, prison bars, blood and disabled bodies created in muted colours contrasted against defined sketch lines, embody the concept of adversity and symbolise the claustrophobia experienced by the women of Afghanistan (Sadar, 2014).

While Suliman's supporters include Afghan President Hamid Karzai, whose daughter is also an artist, Suliman's art with its radical agenda comes at a high price. Like Wahidy, she and her family have been exposed to numerous death threats, particularly from Taliban and insurgent controlled provinces. Regardless of the potential cost, Suliman is committed to artistic interventions. What is most intriguing about Suliman's art is her ability to express the challenges of the marginalized and repressed while contesting narratives about Afghan women that have been engraved in the minds of the Afghan women, their families, men, the government and the west. Her works reflect many of the tenets of transitional justice as her version of history cuts to the truth and narrates the mourning experienced by the Afghani people over the past three decades (Sadar, 2014).

Despite the numerous issues in Afghanistan, female visual artists are developing a strong voice. Regardless of the danger, these women continue to create works that have affect. Another important artist is Shamsia Hassani whose work as a street artist aims to raise gender issues in Afghanistan. In Beenish Ahmed's article *Afghanistan's Female Artists Have a Lot to Show You about Their Country* (2015), Hassani reveals that she always wanted to be an artist "because the language of arts belongs to everyone, it does not belong to a tribe or specific language" (p. 4). By using the street as her canvas, she believes that she can introduce art to everyone and "to bring back women to the streets for reminding people that women exist in the society, to change the damaged faces of women in the society, and give women a powerful face." (p. 4)

Ahmed (2015) interviewed Hassani and several other female Afghan artists, all of whom revealed that it is still very difficult for woman to go against the social norms as they are dealt with in the most inhumane ways. The rights of women are a work in progress. Many still do not have access to school as parents and tribal leaders can ban them from attending (Ahmed,

2015). Work and marriage choices are not generally accepted. Nonetheless, a few women do serve in parliament and girls do attend school despite death threats from religious fundamentalists and even their families. The pressure for women to be contributors in Afghanistan on any level is difficult and according to Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka the Executive Director of UN Women “violence against women in Afghanistan is “pandemic,” with 87.2 percent of women experiencing some form of physical, psychological, sexual, economic or social violence” (Mashru, 2014).

When Hassani paints the streets of Kabul, she takes enormous risks, yet she is well received in Italy, Germany and Iran as well as numerous foreign embassies in Kabul. She brings art to those who would not go to a gallery or even perceive the arts as important. Hassani sees street art as a way to speak to the people, particularly to women. Her burqa paintings, such as *Rote Fabrik* reflect the changes needed to occur in Afghanistan (Figure. 20).



Figure 20. Hassani, *Rote Fabrik*, 2013

Hassani’s use of the burqa in her works are to remind people of the tragedy that women have endured for decades. Her blue burqas painted throughout Kabul in varying shapes are

reminders that the plight of Afghani women must never be forgotten and must be addressed in order for their lives to change. Hassani aims to highlight the societal issues through the burqa and portray the women as larger than life using contemporary forms and shapes that give movement and show strength.

In the article *Afghanistan's First Female Street Artist Has Taken Over Kabul's Walls to Glorify Its Women* by Das (2016), Hassani states that she wants “to find some way to remove them [women] from darkness, to open their mind, to bring some positive changes, trying to remove all bad memories of war from everybody’s mind with covering sad city’s walls with happy colors” (Hassani as cited in Das, 2016).



Figure 21, Dream of Graffiti (Hassani, 2014)

In *Dream of Graffiti*, Hassani’s imposing blue burqa stands out against the contrasting flatness of what appears to be a market place surrounded by mud (Figure 21). The viewer’s eye is immediately drawn to the oversized blue figure on a dilapidated building

overshadowed by a white moving serpent shape with one eye that appears to be observing the area below. There is a woman in full pink burqa who appears to be staring at the camera behind an empty oil drum decorated with graffiti. The blue burqa in its free movement makes a beautiful contrast to the stationary woman in pink. This is one of my favourite Hassani works as it draws the viewer in while at the same time feeling repelled. In some ways it reminds me of areas of the old Calabrian city of Cosenza with its graffiti and its starkness. When I look at this photograph I feel a sense of hopelessness.

Street art is quite new to Afghanistan, but it is a growing medium and one that has many layers. Even though Afghanistan's street art is embryonic, it has the potential for great affect when addressing current issues. As Hassani maintains, "Art cannot change anything directly ... Art can only change people's minds, and then people's minds can change the society. That is what I hope for" (Delgadillo, 2016).

The work of the Afghan street artists resonates in my own street installation in that the aim is to affect change among those who view my work. Again, I am reminded that the street artists of Afghanistan, unlike many in western countries, risk their lives to awaken the society around them.

Jahan Ara Rafi, like Hassani and Suliman, is from the Kabul Art Project¹⁹. She is one of the five founders of an art centre for women in Kabul. The centre's aim is to teach painting, professional photography and modern art. Rafi is a painter, documentary filmmaker and photographer. She explains that coming from countries like Afghanistan, where there are continued political and social failings, an artist's work cannot help but be affected (Ahmed, 2015). In an interview with *Powder* magazine (n.d), Rafi discussed the arts as almost disappearing due to three decades of war, as the value of arts and the artists are not perceived

¹⁹ The artists from the Kabul Art Project have not named or dated their artworks.

in a particularly positive light. Notwithstanding job opportunities are rare, yet there is a small but a growing number of arts centres developing in Afghanistan which aim to encourage understanding of the value of the arts. By taking exhibitions to many provinces in Afghanistan, Rafi believes that an art revolution is beginning to take root in Afghanistan.

Like the other Afghan artists, Rafi does not separate herself from her art and discusses her internal turmoil and the need for freedom, human dignity and prosperity as fundamental rights as well as fighting against all types of discrimination (Powder Zine, n.d). She further elaborates that as someone who has suffered from a lack of freedom for much of her life, her paintings reflect this as well as the turmoil of living in a confined society. She does believe that Afghanistan is beginning to change through women's art activism in a few provinces.

In Figure 22, Rafi's impressionist painting of the woman depicts sorrow, loss and grief. But the vibrant colours belie any hopelessness; rather the boldness of the red scarf inspires hope and determination to move past the decades of war. In the eyes, there is sorrow, but also defiance. Rafi creates a mood that speaks to the Afghan women as having agency while simultaneously feeling trapped.



Figure 22. Jahan Ara Rafi (Kabul Art Project, n.d))

The contrasting boldness of the colours that Rafi uses creates a dichotomy between what is and what will be in terms of freedom for Afghan women. In an interview with the online magazine *Think Progress*, she stated, “I believe that it is every artists’ duty to portray their society’s realities, because...artists are like a bridge that connects various unconnected societies” (Ahmed, 2015, p.1). This reminded me of the theatre maker and storyteller Anne Bogart (2015) who advocates storytelling as way to build bridges. Rafi’s proposal that the arts can bring diverse groups together is somewhat idealistic given Afghanistan’s long history of violence between ethnic and religious groups (Ahmed, 2015). However, her words echo those of fellow Kabul Art Project artists, Hassani and Suliman, implying the great need to change Afghan society and make women visible through the arts.

These young female artists continue to fearlessly take to the streets, engage in photography, filmmaking and paintings to create works that challenge the Afghan patriarchy. They are all assisted through the transfeminism movement, via the internet, in exhibitions across the Middle East, Europe, the UK and the USA.

Afghanistan’s visual culture was vigorously revived during the period of US involvement in the country (2001-2014), despite ongoing conflict after the Taliban retreated in November 2001. Contemporary artists could assist in the country’s revival by documenting the importance of history in the reconstruction process (Berman, 2014). Additionally, the arts has been a constructive way to deal with the wars that had so severely damaged the Afghan culture.

Visual artist Mariam Ghani investigates the construction and deconstruction of histories, places, communities and identities combining a personal and public narrative within her work. Border and conflict zones, nomads, transitions and national imaginaries are some of the elements seen in her work. She achieves this by working across several disciplines, using

site-specific spaces. Ghani maintains that “the constants in my practice are video, site-specific and site-responsive work, database forms (linear and interactive, on and off-line), and art as public dialogue (and vice versa)” (Mariam Ghani para.1, 2014). Ghani developed her work *Kabul 2, 3, 4* over 3 years. This work provides a picture of Kabul from 2002-2004 under the US led invasion. Ghani tracked the reconstruction of Kabul with her video camera and over two years drove through the city and documented the changes that Kabul underwent.

During this period, 2 million refugees returned to Afghanistan, signalling dramatic changes in real estate prices and economic aid that enabled international aid workers to assist in the redevelopment of Afghanistan. Ghani’s work also depicts the political cycles of idealism and disillusionment that produced billboards, monuments, graffiti and riots — all of which were reflected in images of the city (Ghani, 2015).

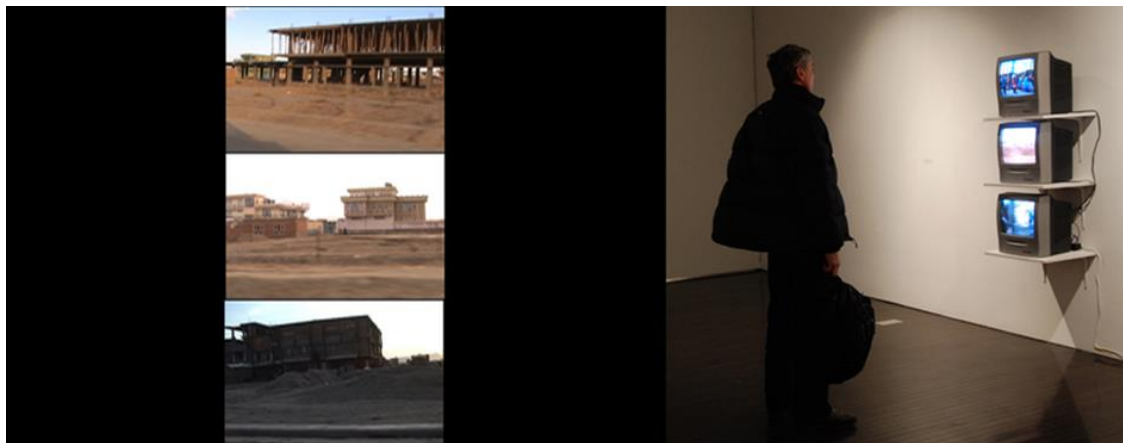


Figure 23. Kabul 2, 3, 4 (Ghani, 2002-2004)

In her essay *Afghan Bloom* (2013), Ghani raised the issue of the need for Afghanistan to reconcile with their past to move forward. She argues that the unpleasant truths that infected Afghanistan throughout its many wars needs to be confronted for a different future to emerge. Ghani is not alone in this thinking. Many contemporary artists across all disciplines believe in

a dialogue or truth commission, transitional justice approach similar to Argentina's 1993 *National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons* which produced the *Nunca Más* (Never Again) report, or *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) in South Africa (Krog, 1999).

Siddiqui, et al. (2014) investigated community arts-based approaches that enabled people to share stories of war and justice. According to Siddiqui et al. (2014), artists can provide communities with opportunities to create solutions that help people live as opposed to simply survive. In the chapter by Siddiqui et al, *Culture, Theatre and Justice: Examples from Afghanistan* in *The Arts of Transitional Justice: Culture, Activism, and Memory after Atrocity* (2014), the authors discuss the connections between cultural expression and transitional justice as the voice of human rights violations. According to the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) ²⁰:

Transitional justice is rooted in accountability and redress for victims. It recognizes their dignity as citizens and as human beings. Transitional justice asks the most difficult questions imaginable about law and politics. By putting victims and their dignity first it signals the way forward for a renewed commitment to make sure ordinary citizens are safe in their own countries – safe from the abuses of their own authorities and effectively protected from violations by others (International Centre for transitional Justice, 2017).

The concept of the arts in conjunction with transitional justice examines how artistic and cultural projects can translate political thinking, possibilities and action into public spaces (Garnsey, 2016). Applying artistic or cultural interventions can assist in the contribution of

²⁰ Transitional justice consists of judicial and non-judicial measures implemented in order to redress legacies of human rights abuses. Such measures "include criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations programs, and various kinds of institutional reforms" (<https://www.ictj.org/about/transitional-justice>)

making victims visible. It is in this context that the Afghan artists in this chapter should be viewed - as the voices of the invisible.

Truth commissions bound in transitional justice have been successful, but when civil war is ongoing, I contend that the tenets of transitional justice cannot be achieved. This is evidenced by Uprimny and Saffon (2006) in their paper *Transitional Justice, Restorative Justice and Reconciliation. Some Insights from the Colombian Case* that there needs to be a desire to overcome past wrongs and look toward a new future to which a nation may build. Ultimately, transitional justice is concerned with achieving and maintaining stability between the demands of justice and peace. The primary aim is that the outcome is long lasting and more importantly, there is a non-recurrence guarantee of past behaviour. While Ghani maintains that Afghanistan needs to resolve the atrocities, the actual atrocities must stop. After working with the Hazara women, I understand that Afghanistan is yet to be ready to face its past. It takes courage when confronting such a dramatic and tragic past and this courage, for now, is coming from within the visual arts culture of Afghanistan.

Currently, artistic projects created through art activism are the way for Afghanistan to arouse potent reactions among the audience in terms of its human rights violations (de Greiff, 2014). The symbols, metaphors and poetry that are emerging from Afghanistan are “linking individual and personal experiences to collective narratives and artistic endeavours and can capture public attention, trigger empathy and foster dialogue” (Ramírez-Barat, 2014, p. 22 as cited in Haider, 2016).

Empowerment for the artists of Afghanistan, once lost amongst the ruins of war and persecution, is again finding its voice. When Steven Spielberg set up the *Shoah Visual History Foundation* in 1994, the aim was to record visual testimonies of both survivors and

witnesses of the Shoah²¹. The *Visual History Archive* has documented numerous examples of genocide which include the 1915 Armenian genocide; the 1937 Nanjing Massacre in China; the 1975 Cambodian genocide; and the Rwandan Tutsi genocide of 1994. The survivors of these massacres were given voice through their stories to educate the world and future generations about the impact of ethnic cleansing. The Shoah Foundation aims to raise understanding of individual experiences reflected in witnesses, perpetrators and survivors. (USC Shoah Foundation, 2017.) The Hazara stories of genocide, as well as the stories of artists, political dissidents and women would provide an excellent addition to the Shoah collection.

Though Ghani maintains that significant digging into Afghanistan's past is necessary before any form of reconciliation can take place, this is an onerous task given the nature of the Taliban, ISIS and other such groups. However, Ghani does speak to the arts as promoting transitional justice from the perspective that:

Some unpleasant truths may have to be uncovered, and some ugly histories dragged into the light. But once the muck has been raked through, those poisons that linger from the unexamined past, recurring in generation after generation, may finally be leached out (Ghani, 2013, p. 7).

The stories of Hazara genocide are all too similar to other genocides illustrated in the Shoah Visual archives. Since Ghani's article, Arif Hussain and fourteen other Hazaras in the Ghor province have been murdered on November 26, 2013. On January 24, 2015, nine Hazara passengers travelling on a bus were killed by the Taliban (Rizae, 2015). Protests

²¹ The Holocaust- mass murder of Jews under the Nazi regime during 1941–5.

against the genocide of the Hazaras are beginning to surface and on November 11, 2015, Afghan people across ethnic and religious groups marched in Kabul to protest Hazara killings. These events are a positive sign that the people of Afghanistan are rising up against the government and the Taliban with a united voice.

A new Afghanistan is gradually emerging led by youth groups using social media to gather in Kabul to protest against the government's inability to broker peace. Amrullah Saleh, an opposition politician, claims that this new society is driving Afghans to the streets demanding education and economic opportunity. They are driven by "the fear that the Taliban might take power again" (Saleh as cited in Swami 2015 p. 3). According to *Indian Express* writer, Praveen Swami (2015), the Afghan people are unanimous in demanding that the government be held accountable across all areas.

However, throughout 2016-2017, hopes for peace in Afghanistan have disappeared. Amnesty International's 2016-2017 Annual Report on Afghanistan maintains armed conflict has intensified, widespread human rights violations continue, and thousands of civilians are killed, tortured or displaced. Child soldiers continue to be recruited and used by anti- and pro-government forces. The increase in violence against women and girls has persisted, while human rights defenders in Afghanistan are continually threatened.

Hazara Artists

The Arts in Afghanistan present a rich and colourful understanding of the socio-political issues currently at play. Unlike the West, any acts or perceived acts of activism in Afghanistan are too often met with imprisonment or death threats. Hazara artists and members of the Kabul Art Project, Mohsen Taasha, Amin Taasha and Azizullah Hazara, were arrested in 2012 and taken into custody for what the government considered un-Islamic artworks (Wahidi, 2012).

The painting in question shows the systematic genocides of the Hazaras by the tyrant king, Amir Abdurahman Khan at the end of 19th century. This massacre annihilated more than 60 percent of Hazaras. The painting not only represents this genocide, but also illustrates the subsequent enslavement of Hazaras. Azizullah Hazara's painting *A Combination of Letters and Words* (n.d.) is unIslamic according to the Ministry of Information and Culture as the artist is playing with Arabic words and numbers, challenging the Islamic religion (Fig. 24). *A Combination of Letters and Words* was subsequently banned and confiscated by the Ministry of Information and Culture. Public outcry in support of the Hazara artists followed which is indicative of artist's activism as the Ministry actions were a direct attack against Hazara artists.



Figure 24. *A Combination of Letters and Words* (Azizullah Hazara, n.d.)

Taasha's work *A Man Reading Quran; without knowing the Meaning* (n.d.) is an interpretation from a painting in the National Gallery of Afghanistan called *A Man Reading Holy Quran*. Moshen stated that his work was not meant to be divisive, but rather highlight the fact that when one does not understand the meaning of the Quran, the letters feel like they

are dancing in front of you. In fact, he claims that to be a good Muslim, one must be literate to understand the Quran. This was not well received by the Ministry of Information and Culture as Moshen was perceived as criticising the appallingly low literacy rate in Afghanistan. According to the CIA Fact Book in 2015, the literacy rate in Afghanistan was 38.2% for men while women's literacy rate was 24%.

The art works in my creative led project represent the Hazara women in my study, in terms of their ethnic discrimination. Discussing these Hazara art works gives some context to the issues surrounding the history of the Hazara ethnic group in Afghanistan.



Figure 25. A Man Reading Quran, Without Knowing the Meaning (Moshen Taasha, n.d.)

Over the course of this chapter, I have endeavoured to examine the environment of the Afghan artists from all ethnic groups, particularly the women as it is essential that the works created resonate with the numerous issues surrounding all Afghan people. The female artists discussed have not lost their agency as seen through their street art, paintings and photography. While I have drawn from a small number of artists, their methods and motivations have a synergy with my interdisciplinary, arts activist approach. The aim of the artists explored in this chapter is their concern with raising awareness through a variety of

storytelling techniques which resonate with my project. I have demonstrated that women are casualties of war much like the arts in these countries, as they were both removed from view.

By understanding Afghan art, the environment in which these artists practice and the stories they wish to tell, the Afghan Hazara experience is foregrounded. Introducing transitional justice through art activism, I have attempted to privilege the hardships these artists face, as well as give insight into their hopes for a unified Afghanistan. By all accounts the arts are developing in Afghanistan and as Kabul Art Project artist Rafi maintains, there is an artistic revolution happening in Afghanistan (PowderZine.com. n.d).

Currently, the Taliban are making a comeback and ISIS has already claimed to be responsible for several terror attacks (Shirzad, 2017; Qazi, 2017). As foreign troops leave Afghanistan there has been a rise in Hazara kidnappings, disappearances and murders. This is evidenced by the kidnapping of 31 Hazaras in April of 2015, when travelling between towns and the bus they were in was stopped by unknown militants, and the passengers kidnapped (Georgatos, 2015). This was one of the worst kidnappings and resulted in global attention. Melbourne hosted a huge demonstration at which I was a speaker. Further, in July of 2016, more than 80 Hazaras were killed and hundreds injured during a peaceful protest on the streets of Kabul. The outcome of this protest rocked Hazara communities the world over, particularly as ISIS claimed responsibility (Rasmussen, 2016). More recent attacks include a suicide bomber killing 10 people and wounding 18 near a mosque in Kabul. Ethnic and religious minorities were the target, specifically Hazaras (Kramer, 2018). Though the bombings of 2016 did not affect my study as I had completed collecting most of the data, it gave me an opportunity to witness the women's grief individually and collectively. This also meant attending vigils with the community where I experienced their shared sorrow. Though I could not ethically apply the bombings to my research, it gave me a greater insight into the

Hazara Afghan narrative and the strong connection most of the women continue to have with Afghanistan.

Throughout this chapter, I have explored a number of Afghani artists whose works have assisted in my understanding of the Hazara women and their love of storytelling. The low literacy levels in Afghanistan has served to preserve their long history of oral storytelling which echoes politics, history, traditional myths and legends and simple narratives of daily living. Their visual arts also tell similar stories, particularly reflecting the last three decades of civil war. Throughout the sixteen month period I spent with the Hazara women, everything was communicated orally and this included the poetry from the one spoken word poet whose impromptu verse told the story of the Hazara genocide. In retrospect, I cannot remember anything being written down by any of the women, even by those who were literate, in their language or in English. On reflection it was the most natural way to communicate, particularly as oral storytelling, historically has been a means to voice societal issues such as inequality, injustice and the need for change (Siddiqui et al., 2014).

The artists also clarified the social and political landscape from which the women came as well as giving a strong visual sense of Afghanistan's topography. Between the Hazara women's stories and the artists' works, I could visualise the countryside and the cityscape. When writing the (play) script, I could imagine each of the women's characters in the settings they described in their narratives. I also used the paintings and street art as a lens to view the physical, social and political Afghan landscape. The artists' activism, and stealth art resonated with arts in transitional justice, reflecting the integration of human rights narratives in my artwork. With hindsight, I believe that understanding contemporary arts in Afghanistan coupled with the women's narratives gave me a holistic view of the country. This in turn enabled me to draw from my perceptions, the women's narratives and the artist's stories to

create a work that offers the viewer an honest, albeit an atypical, story of contemporary Afghanistan.

From the Afghan artists I move into artists from my own or similar cultural backgrounds whose work relates to the Afghans in terms of art activism; the need to use visual stories to affect change, as well as a connection to transfeminism. This has been made possible by way of assistance from the women's movement in both the Middle East, Southern Europe and the West.

Chapter 6.

Artists, Activism and Exiles

“All good art is political! There is none that isn’t” (Toni Morrison).

The artists chosen as visual storytellers in this section are from Latin American, Southern Italy and the Middle East. Their works speak to phases of liminality and are grounded in social and political activism. Their works often have a sense of other worldliness, where reality and the supernatural intermingle. Their contemporary works address current issues and real people. Elements of *magic realism* run through many of their works which have influenced my creative led research in relation to raising human rights issues by way of art activism and transitional justice.

The artists in this chapter, and indeed the Afghan women in the previous chapter, reflect transnational feminism based on the cross-cultural nature of the artists and their works. According to Grewal & Kaplan (2006), transnational feminism refers to the contemporary feminist model which corresponds to its activist movement. Transnational feminism understands the numerous inequalities that women throughout many nations face and is committed to activism promoting discourse for change. Transnational feminism is not to be confused with a universalized western concept of women’s liberation that celebrates modernity and individuality. The western model has been criticised for being used as a reference for communities of colour. Moreover, it calls for a decentring from hegemonic western debate as it does not universalize women, nor subscribe to a patriarchy that effects all women in the same way (Colling, 2011). The emphasis is on intersections across nationalities, race and ethnicity, sex, gender, and class (Valoy, 2015).

In Valoy's article, *Transnational Feminism: Why Feminist Activism Needs to Think Globally* (2015), she debates the concept of western feminism being primarily based on the over emphasis of gender roles as the sole reason for women's oppression. As such, white women in developed countries do not need to consider intersecting oppressions of colonialism and imperialism and the impact this has across colour and class lines. They are able to work within mainstream society structures to advance political and social gains by integrating powerful positions; thereby, conforming to Eurocentric and patriarchal models of leadership and justice. From this standpoint, non-western women are often perceived as being oppressed and lacking agency. This is demonstrated through mainstream media's implication that veiled women lack agency. However, a different story is told through groups such as the Zapatistas who fight to improve lives of indigenous women in Chiapas Mexico. The Revolutionary Afghanistan Women's Association (RAWA), now based in Pakistan, has been active since 1977. It is the oldest socio-political women's organization that raises awareness on a global level. These are two of many groups that do not reflect the western idea of third world women.

Feminism in Italy needs to be briefly addressed as I believe it sits between the western and non-western paradigms, particularly in the south where the 'Ndrangheta (Calabrian Mafia) and its traditions control Calabria. The following two articles are quite contrasting as the first is more typical of the north whereas, the second is indicative of the southern Italian women who raised me.

In her article entitled *The Failure of Italian Feminism*, Soncini (2017) maintains that the state of feminism is under-developed in Italy and the concept of transnational feminism is clearly not evident. Soncini (2017) states that to pronounce oneself a feminist in other countries means you are a defender of women's rights in terms of equal opportunities and control of one's sexuality; not so in Italy. While there are many reasons for this, Soncini

considers that the broader place of women in Italian life means they must fight for leftovers which in turn creates competition. She maintains, “there is room for only one sort of feminism here, and it is mine (or my friends’)” (p. 3). Soncini perceives one of the factors in a lack of feminism as per the western model is Italy’s Mafia history with the belief in an all-encompassing loyalty: “Our family, our friends, our clique will always come before abstract concepts of right and wrong” (Soncini, p. 3) and ultimately, it is the patriarchy you know that is more attractive or “safer” than a feminist movement in which none of your friends are involved.

While Soncini has a point, she has neglected to reference the women in southern Italy who together or individually have defied the ‘Ndrangheta and subsequently brought down a number of Mafia families.

Photographer, Francesco Francaviglia’s (2014) book *The Fasting Women (Le Donne del Diggiuno)* documents in text and photography one of the various forms of protest against Mafia violence. In the summer of 1992, Palermo was rocked to the core by grief and rage as the Mafia’s violence ripped families apart. Bombs and bullets sprayed the Palermo streets killing magistrates, police and civilians. *The Fasting Women* was a powerful protest against Mafia control. Over a period of one month, thirty-one women occupied Piazza Castelnuovo, near the historic centre of Palermo to make a stand against the slaughter, calling their protest “hunger for justice” (Kearns, 2014). Francaviglia’s portraits are a testament to the courage of these women. Though more than twenty years have passed since their protests, their dignity, beauty and bravery has not been dulled by time. Francaviglia’s faces remind us to challenge silence and fear. The faces ask us to counter the actions of the Mafia and other forms of terrorism that continue to bloody our world today (Casper, 2014). The photographs by Francaviglia below are representative of three of the thirty-one fasting women. They are also indicative of women who use activism to make a social or political point. Further, the women

come from violent areas of Italy where they must mobilise together as one voice. They are representative of transnational feminism as they live the inequalities women face daily. It is through their unwavering commitment to activism that enabled new discourse for change at a time when the south of Italy was besieged by violence. Most significant is how their activism twenty years ago has affected their lives. Several of the women continued to remain politically active, or engage in law, advocacy and journalism.



Figure 26.
Bice Mrtillaro Salatiello
(Francaviglia, 2014)



Figure 27.
Cettina D'Donofrio
(Francaviglia, 2014)



Figure 28.
Giovanna Gioia
(Francaviglia, 2014)

My critique of this work highlights an awareness that transnational feminism requires caution when speaking for others. As Colling states, “Speaking to be understood in a nexus of listening, responding and interpreting, is only available to those who will be heard in institutions of power” (p. 1). This is a reminder to activists and academics to participate in self-reflective debate and activism to empower the oppressed whom they represent. It is imperative that their histories are recognised and this will promote positive conditions for their voices to be heard.

The female artists in this chapter have created conditions for the disenfranchised to be heard. Each artist, whether discussing slavery, Islamic fundamentalism, deaths in the barrios of Los Angeles, or the turbulent years of Brazil’s military coup, provides a space to speak for the oppressed. The following artists have been instrumental in influencing my artistic

practice, through providing practical means to find a voice for the Hazara women's through the development of my artwork.

Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons is an artist whose work resonates with my own, as her practice embodies generational memory, ancestors, rituals of Santería and marginalisation. Campos-Pons grew up with the practice of Santería and Catholicism²². This resonates with members of my family's involvement with pagan Catholicism which reveres Mary and semi negates the patriarchy of the church. The concept of "pagan Catholicism", which I refer to as cultural Catholicism, is simply the weaving of older religions, spirituality and voodoo into the dominant belief and practice of Calabria. Generally, the Calabrese have always believed in the evil eye (Malocchio) and many, including me, carry protective talismans such as cornicello, a small red horn used to ward off the Malocchio. There are many common elements in the practice of Santería rituals which are consistent with rituals of the Calabrese, further connecting me to the work of Campos-Pons. In *The Storytellers: Narratives in International Contemporary Art*, she examines space and memory which connects to my interest in the Hazara Afghan women's process of developing an identity in a fragile in-between space. Campos-Pons states, "A space can bear the imprint of its inhabitants even in their absence. An object can personify an individual even more than his or her portrait".

Her work *Softly Spoken with Mama* (1998) is of particular interest to my creative led project as this mixed media cross-generational installation pays tribute to the women in Campos-Pons' Afro-Cuban family. My project pays tribute to my recent female ancestors and current generations whose lives have been affected by those gone before them. Campos-Pons' descendants are survivors of the slave trade between Nigeria and Cuba and she captures their lived experiences through her performed fragmentations of their stories via video. The

²² Santería is of Caribbean origin that developed in the Spanish Empire among west African descendants. *Santería* is a Spanish word that means the "worship of saints". Santería is influenced by and syncretized with Roman Catholicism. Its sacred language, a variety of Yoruba, is the Lucumí language.

videos narrate life in Cuba and blend individual and collective family memories projected onto old fashioned wooden ironing boards of varying shapes covered in an assortment of fabrics.

This portrait of Campos-Pons' family is exposed through household objects such as irons, used by generations of the women in her family to make a living. The Campos-Pons women worked in the homes of the wealthy, carefully washing and ironing clothing and sheets as well as cleaning expensive crockery, glass and porcelain. To honour the women, Campos-Pons replaces the ordinary materials of ironing boards, irons, and sheets with beautiful wood, glass, and translucent fabric respectively (Fig. 29). This signifies "the transcendence of their endeavours and the innate fragility of human relationships" (Berger, 1998, p. 2).

Softly Spoken with Mama (1998) reconstructs games and fantasies of youth indicative of mythological identities possibility from her Catholic Santería beliefs. She incorporates family photographs within the three video narratives which metaphorically show her passage into womanhood. She then projects these scenes onto to the actual object in order that they embody family and its history. Berger (1998) perceives all these elements as melding "a magnificent altar in visual and poetic praise of the women's fortitude that nourished family and friends following the end of slavery" (p. 2).

Observing this autobiographical work, I find myself engaged in memories of my maternal great-grandmother (bis nonna). She was a woman of imposing stature and like the women in Camps-Pons' family, she practised pagan Catholicism. Her room was decorated with icons, images of Mary, all placed in positions of reverence. I recall both respecting and fearing my great-grandmother for she was the one who held the family's ancestral knowledge and, on her death, which was imminent from the time she was brought to Australia, I knew that knowledge would be passed on to my grandmother, and was something I wanted to be passed on to me one day. *Spoken Softly with Mama* evokes deep and sometime dark memories, the

past and present come together and the matriarchal lineage is revealed in a complex and nuanced form of visual storytelling.



Figure 29. Spoken Softly with Mama (Campos-Pons, 1998), Photo of Installation

Campos-Pons' ironing boards made of fine wood, covered in beautiful fabric become a surface on which she projects her family images (Fig. 31). At the feet of the ironing boards are the household utensils (Fig. 30). She has positioned them to look like boats moving across the oceans, reminiscent of the slave boats transporting her family to distant lands. Campos – Pons' matrilineal heritage is strongly represented in this work. Her pride in the family matriarchs is evident in the life-sized projections of these women and the way they tower over the household objects they would have used as housekeepers. This poetic installation exposes stories deep within ancestral memory. Campos-Pons' use of objects inspired my use of the heart shaped Italian bowl from Italy and an Afghan dress in my project. The bowl is

significant as it came from Italy and was handed down from grandmother, to my mother and to me. The bowl represents generational memory and bringing the past into the present. The Afghan dress has quite a different significance as it was bought from an Afghan rug maker in Melbourne the late 1980's. The shopkeeper had recently escaped Soviet occupied Afghanistan. I remember being fascinated by his story as it was my introduction to Afghanistan. Both of the objects hold meaning in terms of memory and storytelling.

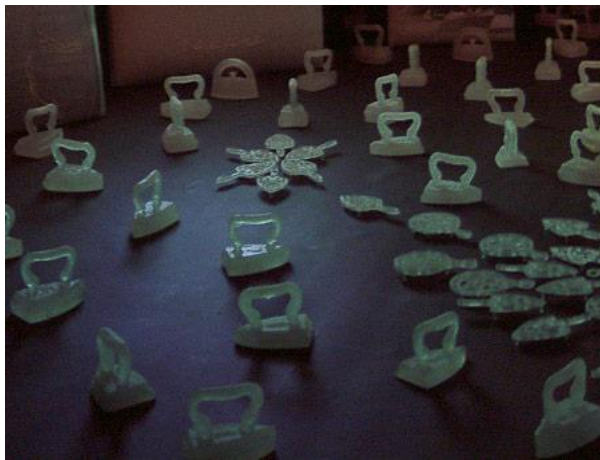


Figure 30. *Softly Spoken with Mama*
(Campos Pons, 1998)
Detail cast glass iron and trivets

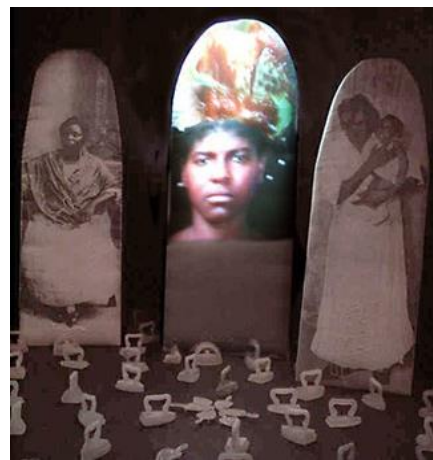


Figure 31. *Softly Spoken with Mama*
(Campos-Pons, 1998)
Detail canvas and glass

The work of Iranian artist, Shirin Neshat, also reflects female experience and Iran's contrasting identity pre- and post-revolution. While the works of Neshat are discussed in terms of her socio-political ideas, her life history is intrinsic to much of her works. Both Neshat and Campos-Pons deal with identity, as exiles or migrants, and their position as non-white women in north America. Furthermore, both Campos-Pons and Neshat position themselves as the subject in much of their work which has been influential in developing the artworks in my creative led project although I generally use actors to perform the characters I create.

Neshat's *Women of Allah* (1994-1997) is one of her earlier works and was borne out of her return to Iran after 10 years of self-imposed exile. Neshat recalls returning to a country

unrecognizable due to its transformation by Islamic fundamentalism. While she maintains that the *Women of Allah* is not specifically autobiographical, she admits that it developed around her desire reconnect to Iran and understand the “new” Iran, and ideas, behind Islamic fundamentalism. (Bertucci, 1997). Under the Shah and prior to the Islamic Revolution, secular culture was supported and promoted, and the veil was not only perceived as negative, but banned. Post revolution saw the veil as a symbol of empowerment as it signified anti-Shah views, while adhering to religious devotion and cultural mores. Thus, the new Iran that met Neshat was by all accounts a cultural shock.

Neshat put her knowledge of the “new” Iran into the *Women of Allah* with the aim of understanding Iranian Muslim women who were often used as propaganda in the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988 to promote morality and to withstand foreign assault. From this standpoint of bloodshed, propaganda, repression and total government control, I found the series very confronting. Neshat’s self-portraits and other female subjects are covered in traditional chador; the women hold rifles and guns with calligraphy decorating their bodies written in Farsi. Historically a woman’s body has been used for various types of politically ideology in Islam. From this perceptive, a culture and its identity can be appreciated from their status in the society, the dress code they are expected to adhere to, as well as the rights they do or do not enjoy (Shadi, 1999). Each of the images is constructed to amplify incongruity. The notion of traditional qualities of innocence and beauty are juxtaposed against violence and hatred within what Neshat perceives as the complex constructs of Islam.

There is also a beauty in the contrasting softness of the veil’s fabric, against the guns inflexible metal and the graceful quality of the black ink on flesh. While these physical materials seem incongruent, there is a fluidity within the differences. The calligraphy

covering all areas of the visible body is symbolic of the woman's inability to have a voice while reflecting their silence.



Figure 32. *Rebellious Silence* (Neshat, 1994)

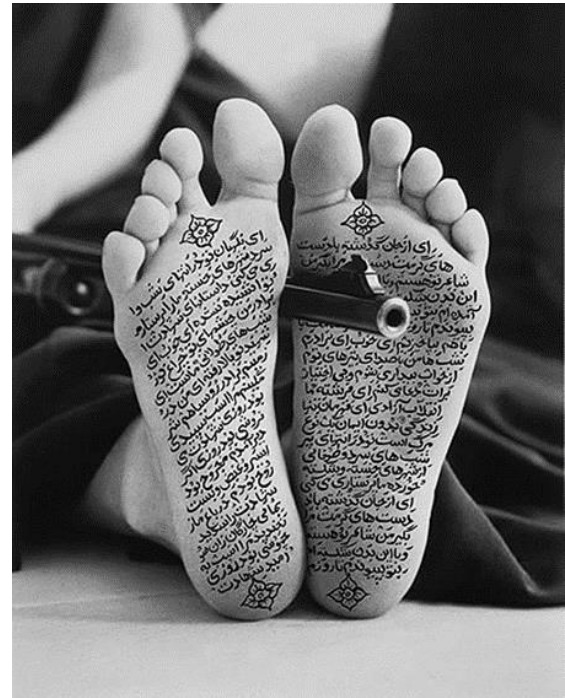


Figure 33. *Allegiance with Wakefulness* (Neshat, 1994)

According to Allison Young (2015), calligraphy references the importance of text in the history of Islamic art. The words in the Persian calligraphy are poetic and comply with the severity of the veil as the text echos the Iranian martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war.

In *Rebellious Silence*, the script written across Neshat's face and feet is an excerpt from female poet Tahereh Saffarzadeh's work, *Allegiance with Wakefulness*, honouring the courage and bravery of revolutionary martyrs (Fig. 32; Fig. 33). However, some of the texts that Neshat has chosen are feminist in nature as well as writings by women, expressing a collection of perspectives pre- and post-the revolution (Young, 2015).



Figure 34. Faceless (Neshat, 1994)

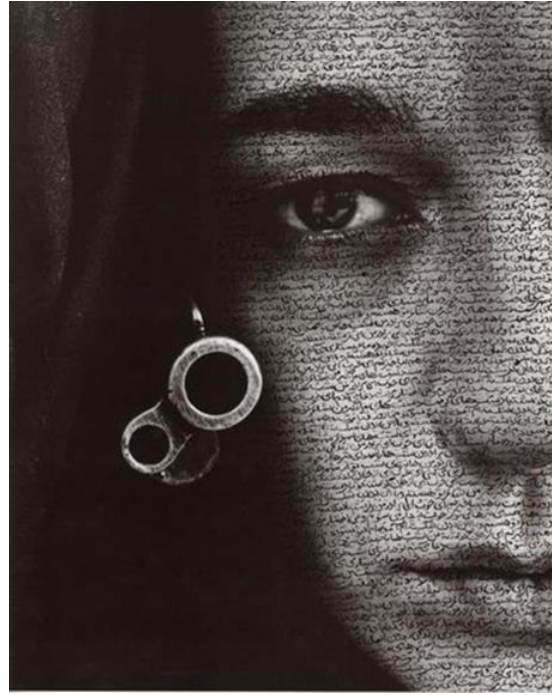


Figure 35. Speechless (Neshat, 1994)

One of the many issues that Neshat raises as a feminist is the way in which she counters Islamic stereotypes in her representation of both genders. She is more concerned with exploring the social complexities that shape Muslim women's identity. Many of her photographs incorporating calligraphic poetry address themes relating to exile, identity, femininity and martyrdom. *Women of Allah* has inspired Neshat's interest in photo-journalism as its realism, immediacy, and a sense of drama work well with her subject matter. *Women of Allah* visualizes the personal lives of women living under extreme religious commitment. Yet in 1994 when the series was made, the Iranian women had a sense of liberation from previous class structures and social restraints under the Shah (Shadi, 1999). In terms of the Iranian women involved in the Islamic revolution, they only felt equal to men in the context of fighting a mutual enemy. There is a great deal of self-contradiction. They are carrying rifles to fight a revolution, but they are also veiled, and endure the religious laws that place constraints on their public lives (Shadi, 1999).

It is interesting viewing Iranian women in the *Women of Allah* from my semi-western perspective as I made a connection to the Calabrian women born into the 'Ndrangheta²³. The commonalities between the Iranian women that Neshat represents and indeed the Afghan women are characteristically framed by strict patriarchal rules which are reflected in the 'Ndrangheta society. Young girls have no sense of identity and must submit and serve the men of the family. In the stricter clans, women do not have bank accounts, are prohibited from driving and must have their husband's permission to leave the house or be chaperoned by a male (Agius, 2016). 'Ndrangheta women are men's property, therefore, they can be engaged at 12, married at 13 and pregnant by 15. Under the laws of 'Ndrangheta women have no rights and if a husband dies, the 'Ndrangheta widow must remain in mourning for seven years, until her husband's soul reaches paradise (Saviano, 2016).

It is almost impossible to leave the family without dire consequences. But women are speaking out and going into witness protection, however this does not always secure freedom. Maria Concetta Cacciola came from one of the most powerful 'Ndrangheta families in Calabria. When she turned state's evidence and went into witness protection, she was hunted down and subsequently murdered by her family. Initially it appeared Cacciola suicided by swallowing acid, but coronial investigations indicated the acid was forced down her throat by her parents (Agius, 2016). Crimes such as this have not prevented women from speaking out. Giusy Pesce, a relative of Cacciola and also part of a powerful Mafia family spoke out against her 'Ndrangheta clan. She found a new life under witness protection and lives without the restraints of an archaic patriarchal system. Pesce has been an inspiration in

²³ 'Ndrangheta (Calabrian Mafia) means courageous and virtuous. The verb *'ndranghitiari* means have a defiant and valiant attitude. The 'Ndrangheta has a strong presence in Australia and controlled Victoria Market, where my family had a business. However, they were never involved on any level with the Mafia.

Calabria and on International Women's Day her courage was honoured at one of the Calabrian Secondary schools (Agius, 2016).

Writer Roberto Saviano and photographer Alberto Giuliano (2016) created a series of articles and photographs based on the Mafia in southern Italy titled *Malacarne*. In *#Malacarne 3, Married to the Mob 'Ndrangheta Women*, Giuliano's photographs depict the lives of the women living under the constraints of the 'Ndrangheta. These photographs are reminiscent of those in Neshat's *Women of Allah*, however, they do not reflect their agency.

In the photograph below (Fig. 36), Giuliani depicts the woman with eyes half closed and cast down, thereby showing her as subservient and shut off from the outside world. She appears resigned to her fate to the expectations of her clan.



Figure 36. 'Ndrangheta woman (Giuliani, 2017).

Saviano (2016) explains in this article that a woman's life in the 'Ndrangheta is extremely complicated particularly in terms of their rules or laws. The photographs of Giuliani reflect the "Impenetrable rules, brazen customs, inseparable bonds. Where the Mafia governs, women are subordinated to a rigid, immovable code of conduct, requiring them to perform a perilous balancing act between tradition and progressiveness, between moralistic constraints and illimitable coolness in business affairs" (Saviano, 2016, p. 1).

In Figure 37, another ‘Ndrangheta woman looking defiantly into the lens of the camera. Her face is lit up, arms are crossed, and her eyes are clear with anger. To whom these feelings are directed is unknown, but there is a sense that she has reclaimed some part of herself. Conversely, she might be one of many women who accept the life, the customs built on loyalty, the blood ties, and the manipulation of family that enables the Mafia to control the family and ensure that criminal dealings remain secret and adhere to Omerta, a vow of silence.



Figure 37. ‘Ndrangheta woman (Giuliano, 2016).

When I consider the *Women of Allah*, I see Calabrian women in similar situations, as the property of men, as steeped in tradition and cultural mores, designed to control and deny self-identity. A westerner or non-westerner may perceive Neshat’s works very differently depending on their lived experience and encounters with Islamic cultures. However, Neshat touches on delicate issues that affect women particularly in terms of resisting patriarchal structures that influence and continue to affect them socially, economically and politically. From the perspective of a Calabrian who has seen the damage of the ‘Ndrangheta, Neshat’s work explores the identity of women in relation to society. Its function is to challenge the repression of female voices in any community (Young, 2015).

Neshat's recent works are important to address as they have directly affected and influenced aspects of my approach to the creative led project, specifically my use of colour verses black and white photography, placing myself in my work and the use of large portraits and/or faces. Neshat's exhibition consists of 22 large scale colour photographs which are unmatted and framed in black. The photographs were hung against white walls in both the main gallery and the second floor of the Rauschenberg Foundation Project Space (Knoblauch, 2014). In *W Magazine* (2014), Kat Herriman discussed Neshat as having spent her career recording the "struggle for civil liberties that still rages throughout much of the Islamic world" (p. 1). Neshat's project *Our House is on Fire* was commissioned by the Rauschenberg Foundation to be part of the foundation's One-to-One artist initiative, which supports artists working towards cultural understanding, international peacekeeping and human rights. *Our House is on Fire* explores the 2011 Egyptian Revolution from the perspective of those left behind to mourn. Neshat's approach to creating *Our House is on Fire* was to photograph people on the streets of Cairo post the 2011 revolution. When I initially saw this work, it had a significant impact, as Neshat choose to work with older members of the Egyptian community and this resonated with my creative project with the older Hazara women. From Neshat's perspective, the use of older people was significant as their own personal journeys have spanned many wars and they have witnessed the rise and fall of Egypt from varying perspectives (Knoblauch, 2014). The lived experiences of older people reveal a collective history which goes as far back as the 1952 Revolution when Egypt fought to become a republic. These include the six-day war with Israel over the Sinai in 1967 in which some of the men in Neshat's photographs fought. Additionally, Anwar Sadat's assassination in 1981 and the 30-year reign of Mubarak which ended in the 2011 uprising would have been very difficult years for Egypt and her people. The series of photographs resonates with my current work from the standpoint of memory, heritage and human rights.

They also echo elements of Campos-Pons' work as they share a commonality of ancestry, oppression and gender. I have a personal connection with the subject matter explored by these women artists, such as family narrative, ancestral memory, ethnic diversity and human rights.

In Tome's (2014) article *A Specific Imagination. Shirin Neshat Our house is on Fire*, two inspirations that informed Neshat's work are discussed. The first, were the recent events in Egypt which are the subject of the exhibition. Second, is the death of her long-time collaborator, Larry Barnes' daughter Teal. Such motivation as death in the context of war and personal experience pervade the content of Neshat's work. I imagine being in a state of mourning would have informed this body of work and influenced unexpected emotional exchanges about respective sorrow between Neshat and the subjects in *Our House is on Fire* (Subin, 2014). This is confirmed in the following statement: "In a way that Neshat had not foreseen, the series became a meditation on the process of mourning—both personal and national" (Subin, 2014, p. 1). All the people whom Neshat photographed had suffered their own losses in the Egyptian uprising and were in mourning.

Tome (2014) describes the installed works as covering two rooms featuring 22 photographs of isolated body parts. The feet, hands and faces are large scale close ups. The images below depict the confronting scale of the photographs (Figure 38). The viewer can observe the photographs as one, in a long shot, or experience them as close ups to see the fine calligraphy that covers the faces and hands (Figure 39). The portraits have a ghostlike quality, the faces storied with pain as they stare out from the darkness. Neshat's applies her signature calligraphy in tiny, almost indecipherable text across each face to blend into the lines of age. The faces are deliberately washed out and softened to give an almost monochrome appearance interrupted only by the whiteness of the men's hair and whiskers (Knoblauch,

2014). While contemporary photography has seen the prevalence of large face portraits, “Neshat’s Egyptians are more than just rugged exoticism; they bravely tap into fresh wounds that have yet to heal” (Knoblauch, 2014, p. 1). The raw emotion in *Our House is on Fire* speaks to the commonality of the human spirit which is what makes these works so powerful and accessible. Neshat lays bare the emotional lasting effects of those left to mourn and rebuild post the 2011 Arab uprising.



Figure 38. Our House is on fire (Neshat, 2014)



Figure 39. Our House is on Fire (Neshat, 2014), Photograph.

In an interview with Ruth Tam (2014) from the *Washington Post*, titled *Exiled Iranian artist Shirin Neshat looks at the Egyptian Revolution* (2014), Neshat discusses combining

calligraphy with the dark disturbing faces as a “work of labour”. Every wrinkle in each photograph was covered in thousands of Persian words and poetry. The title of the work comes from “My house is on fire,” a line from “A Cry” by Iranian poet Mehdi Akhavan Sales whose poetry features in the exhibition. Neshat also explains the significance of adding text to the faces and faces to the text in the following:

But all of my work has a strong footing in dark, disturbing political reality. So, the beauty, darkness, violence and spirituality in this exhibit is paradoxical. This is my signature as an artist and it’s also the signature of the Iranian people that they’re so divided in their poetry and their politics. So, the calligraphy for me and the inclusion of text in the image comes directly from tradition. It’s a way of adding a dimension about humanity, it’s all of the positive things echoed into a concept that is extremely disturbing and dark (para 6, as cited in Tam, 2014).

The photograph of Ghada (Fig. 40) is indicative of the combination of text and portraiture and to me represents every woman as she retains a youthfulness despite the experiences of life etched across her face with both deep and fine lines coupled with calligraphy that narrate her life history. The lighting of this and other portraits is compelling as the face stands out almost three dimensionally, which immediately draws the viewer into her story. The incredible sadness in the women’s eyes cannot help but illicit compassion and sympathy.



Figure 40. Ghada (Neshat, 2013).

One of the most striking photographs in this series is the feet. The image *Hossein* (Fig. 41) shows feet tagged and uncovered as though slowly sliding out of a morgue draw.

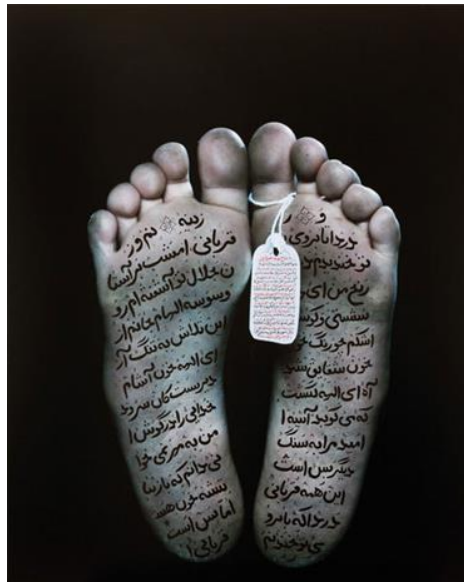


Figure 41. Hossein (Neshat, 2013).

One might also perceive this photograph as moving from one world into the next as the feet appear to be floating in space, neither here nor there. While identification tags are on

some feet, others have none, thus we could assume, an unclaimed victim or the collateral damage of war. Within *Hossein*, an imagined biography is written in Farsi on the soles of his feet which gave me the sense that his life had meaning, that he belonged to someone and was part of Egypt's historical narrative.

In the second room is the poem, "A Cry" by Iranian activist Mehdi Akhavan Sales; a series of impassioned outcries fill the room. Each successive call builds on the previous one symbolizing the escalating flames of the "house on fire" where the narrator is trapped. The poem further illuminates that, as his neighbour's sleep, they are unaware of both the fire danger and the surveillance of the enemies. As the narrator is engulfed in flames, the poem ends with "I shout, scream, cry!" While "A Cry" expresses undeniable passionate rage, fear and dissent, the narrator appears to accept death with the words "Who will ever know as my being turns into the non / being by the sunrise" (Sales, as cited In Tome, 2014). Thus, his suffering and anger is accentuated by deep resignation and acceptance of his inevitable fate (Tome, 2014).

Our House is on Fire portrays such extreme emotion and is delicately constructed to translate a cultural experience to assist the West in understanding the outcome of extraordinary upheaval such as the Egyptian revolution. Neshat's works isolate primal emotions of survival, death and grief to allow the viewer to witness the rawness of emotions and feel compassion. This is the ultimate aim of my work to provoke the viewer into action.

Our House is on Fire (2014) records the Egyptian revolution from the perspective of the mourners. Several Hazara women told me the damage of war is not easily forgotten, and mourning is always part of your life (B, H and Z, personal communication, August 2015). There is a misconception, that once a war is over and people find refuge in the new country (or old), all is well. However, memories embedded in the deepest parts of the mind are like loosely stitched wounds that can open with the slightest prompt. This is shown in Neshat's

photographs, captured from people she met in the streets of Cairo. The works visually narrate the cost of war from a human rights perspective. I would hope that the viewer is confronted by the human suffering shown in these works and be affected enough to act. The photographic portraits in Neshat's *Our House is on Fire* are striking examples of how artists can create artworks that have a social justice agenda and can raise awareness to human rights abuses and affect on those who view it.

Neshat sees her work as political and in her interview with Ruth Tam (2014) from the *Washington Post*, she sums up *Our House is on Fire* and her works in general in the following way:

Political art that is affective doesn't have an agenda. It's politically conscious but not politically didactic. People need to decide for themselves what they believe, it's not my job. I'm trying to be very careful. It's completely wrong for an artist to tell people what to think. But it's important to inspire them, to provoke them, to mobilize them (para, 11).

Neshat's work aims to affect and shift perceptions and move audiences towards making positive social change. Her provocative photography, filmmaking and multimedia installations address issues in contemporary Islamic societies. Her focus is on the sociopolitical and psychological aspects of women's experience within the Iranian Islamic world. She acknowledges the multidimensional influences that shape the identity of Muslim women. The autobiographical nature of much of Neshat's work reveals a woman in self-imposed exile - forever caught between two worlds. This evidenced in *Soliloquy* (2004), "a dual projection and sound installation which portrays spatial and psychological dichotomy of a woman in exile" (Traficante, 2015, p. 1). The two opposing videos capture the dual lives of Muslim women. One video captures Neshat as she travels between two cityscapes

representing the Middle East and the West. There is a space between the projections where the audience sits, encouraging them to shift their gaze from one projection to the other, but not allowing them to be viewed simultaneously (Traficante, 2015). *Soliloquy* is an expression of Neshat's transnational position of being situated in-between her Iranian and American cultures (Maes, 2014).

According to Milosz (2015), much of Neshat's work is tied to her identity as an exile: as someone that is neither totally here nor there, yet ironically can live in both or neither. Neshat illustrates the difficulties of a transnational identity (Maes, 2014). Her work "...encourages us to grapple with the impossibility of existing in two cultural contexts at once while revealing the potentially rich and complex experiences of the in-between" (Milosz, 2014, p. 2). *Soliloquy* quite literally applies Neshat's migration experience while sensitively creating an exile effect, as the audience physically inhabits an indeterminate space between two visually diverse milieus (Milosz, 2015).

In a 2010 TED Talk, Neshat described herself as being in an unusual position as an Iranian American. She is the voice of her people, even though she has had little to no access to her country and its people. Her work opposes the Iranian regime that has committed many crimes against humanity to remain in power. If you are an artist in Iran, Neshat maintains that you are not safe, "Our artists are at risk. We are in a position of danger. We pose a threat to the order of the government" (Neshat, 2010). At the same time however, she challenges the western perception of Iran in terms of their politics, women and religion.

Neshat argues that the Iranian situation has empowered artists "to inspire, provoke, mobilize and bring hope to our people" (Neshat, 2010 as cited in Wright, 2015). After all, are artists not "central to the cultural, political, social discourse in Iran?" (Neshat, 2010 as cited in Wright 2015,). Artists for decades and throughout the world have been central to social,

political and cultural discourse. The difference in places like Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan is that governments actively oppose any artistic contribution that disagrees with their policies (Wright, 2015).

The influence of Neshat's work in respect to my own, is the way it communicates the need for change and the hope that the viewer will engage differently with the world. Neshat recalls returning to Iran post 1979 and seeing the country so ideologically different that it was unrecognizable. A woman in my study returned to Afghanistan post-Taliban and voiced her deep sadness of a country changed irrevocably by the Taliban and the continued occupation by the coalition forces. As one woman said "I do not know this Afghanistan. I wanted to leave as soon as I went. It is my country but not my country" (J, Personal communication, October 2015).

Life in Afghanistan, according to the Hazara women, had become so dire that to seek asylum, regardless of how perilous, has proven to be a preferable alternative. The parallels between the Hazara women and Neshat's work are clear. As she became absorbed in the study of the Islamic revolution, she saw the extraordinary changes in the women's lives and found the women's embodiment of Iran's "political transformation" held the key to "reading the structure and the ideology of the country" (Neshat, 2015).



Figure 42. *Unveiling* (Neshat, 1993).

Unveiling (1993) is representative of this new construct that left Muslim women immersed in an ideology not of their design (Fig. 42). Returning briefly to the *Women of Allah* and the photograph *Unveiling*, the focus is on the chador and its relationship to a woman's body. The work also observes the contradiction between the concept of invisible and visible in relation to the chador. Neshat maintains while the chador conceals a woman's body it has the opposite effect, of bringing attention to the female form. The poems in calligraphy across Neshat's face are by Forough Farukhzad who lived during the Shah's time (1935-1967). She was the quintessential feminist poet as she spoke openly through her poems about women's emotional needs, sexuality and desires. Forough Farrokhzad was Iran's first female poet to be publicly recognized. Given the content of her poetry, which addresses her experience and feelings of love and sex, she is arguably deemed to be one of the most courageous and transgressive writers in 20th century Iran. Writers like Farrokhzad were a challenge to the clergy and the societal expectation of the submissive, invisible woman.

Neshat's work records and makes visible Iran's current attitudes towards women. It illuminated the changes in the Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution which had a huge impact on women rights. Shari'a law was implemented across all areas of Iranian life and immediately

gave men superior status (Price, 2005). Girls were prohibited from attending school, the marriage age was decreased and the use of birth control was outlawed. Further, women were forcibly made to resign from positions of power in the government and judicial system. By 1980, mandatory veiling was introduced (Price, 2005).

The impact of the Iranian Islamic revolution has many similarities to Afghanistan with respect to women's rights. The changes that Neshat saw in Iran also reflected the changes that the Hazara women saw in Afghanistan. Their narratives spoke of an Afghanistan changed in both structure and ideology. The Iran that Neshat returned to after her self-imposed exile echoed the Hazara women's narratives. Those who had returned to Afghanistan post-Taliban and the U.S led invasion spoke of a country that has changed beyond recognition. I sensed an underlying grief for their country that was no longer home. As one women in the study said "I escaped to Quetta during the Taliban, I went back after 2003. They (Taliban and the Coalition) killed my country" (H, personal communication, May 2016).

Doris Salcedo also addresses issues surrounding grief relevant to the Hazara women in my study. Her works are a combination of implied violence juxtaposed against the fragility of life. Salcedo's sculptures and installations often have an understated appearance which contradicts the complexity of themes inherent in her work. Her works deal with subjects that pertain to trauma, racism, colonialism and events of mass violence including genocide. As an artist, she maintains her work represents social consciousness and her role is that of a witness and conduit to illuminate social and political issues (2015).

One of Salcedo's more recent works *Plegaria Muda* (2008-2010), literally translated as *Silent Prayer* but generally translated as *Mute Prayer*, focuses on parts of society where a thin line is drawn between 'right' and 'wrong' and basic ethical concerns merge. While *Plegaria Muda* comes from a three-year study into the poorest and most dangerous *barrios* of

south east Los Angeles. It also speaks to the atrocities committed by groups within the Colombian army between 2003 and 2009.

The work does not tell individual stories, but a collective story of grief and trauma from the ghettos of Los Angeles to Colombia, to the disappeared in Argentina, the camps on Nauru, Manus and Christmas Island in Australia, and to the victims of the Taliban and ISIS in the Middle East.

Plegaria Muda or Silent Prayer uses between 69-166 pieces, depending on the size of the exhibiting space. Each piece resembles the length of a coffin with a layer of dirt lining each upturned table, atop an identical sized table (Fig. 44; Fig. 45). In the detailed image below, shoots of green grass push through the dirt as though looking for light or sun (Dahlberg, 2011).

The installation is reminiscent of a theatrical setting, allowing the performer/audience to walk through the narrow aisles and witness the dead, the disappeared and their survivors in a “cemetery” of unmarked graves. Audience members become performers because they stand in for a family member searching for a loved one as they move carefully between the thin aisles of ‘coffins’. *Plegaria Muda* is testimony to Salcedo’s ability to transform ordinary objects into moving art works (Carlos, 2011)



Figure 43. Plegaria Muda (Salcedo, 2008-2010)



Figure 44. Plegaria Muda (Salcedo, 2008-2010) Detail



Figure 45. *Plegaria Muda*, (Salcedo, 2008-2010) Detail

Plegaria Muda is “Removed from a private, anonymous invisibility to the very centre of an abysmal grief that is suppressed and unprocessed, that can find no place wherever violent death is reduced to complete insignificance” (Salcedo, 2015). Salcedo’s works are by nature political. They engage and inform about marginalised communities. Salcedo’s overtly sociopolitical works, like Neshat’s, aim to awaken compassion and empathy and bring to light what is conveniently kept in the shadows.

Disremembered (2014) by Salcedo is a series of three sculptures made of 12,000 needles woven into raw silk (Fig.46). Salcedo sees this work as “society’s inability to mourn” (Cox, n.d.). She describes the underlying meaning as follows: “The work thus embodies a sense of paradox. Beautiful yet dangerous, it is unclear whether these sculptures, with their thousands of needles, are intended to protect or to harm” (Salcedo, 2016).

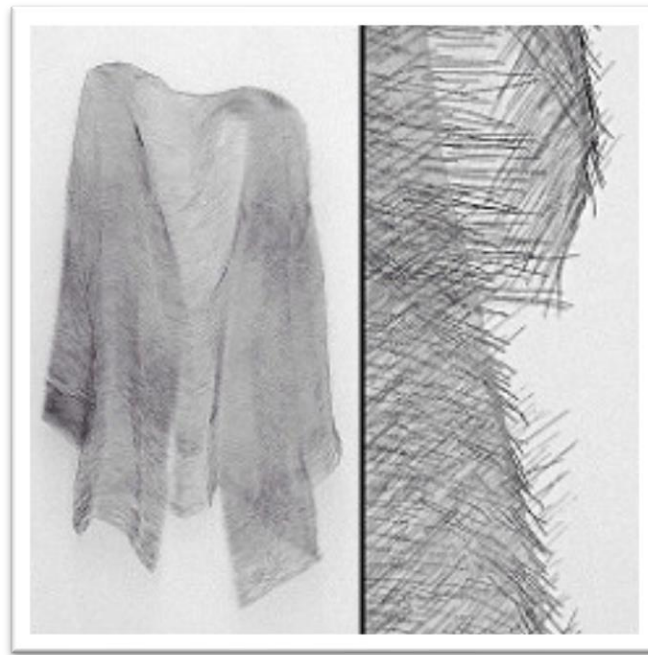


Figure 46. Disremembered (Salcido, 2014)

In documenting the stories of Hazara women, I aim to raise awareness of the grief across Australia's refugee situation. This grief is familiar to those who advocate for the women, men and children on Nauru and Manus who are repeatedly brutalized and degraded for seeking our protection. The issues that confront these communities resonate with Salcedo's notion of a society's lack of empathy. Mieke Bal is a Dutch literary theorist whose book *Of What One Cannot Speak* (2010) focuses on Salcedo's political art. Bal raises the issue of the "politics of memory and forgetting in work that embraces fraught situations in dangerous places" (Bal 2010, para 1). Bal's book takes the reader on a journey, not unlike Salcedo's art, where the viewer confronts uncomfortable events that for many have been erased or compartmentalised. Salcedo addresses the fragility of collective grief, always there, waiting to be disturbed. Her work *Plegaria Muda* (Silent Prayer), influenced my performance script, specifically, in how I understand grief as a liminal space, and how I represent it from the perspective of asylum seekers.

The last female artist who has made an impact on my work is Italian-Brazilian artist Anna Maria Maiolino. Maiolino was born in 1942 in Cosenza Calabria, not far from my family's village, which is possibly why her works resonate with me. She is as Brazilian as I am Australian as the family moved to Brazil when she was in her early teens. Much of Maiolino's art has been shaped by the repressive Brazilian government of the 1960s and 1970s. Though she spent some of this time in New York, her return in to Brazil in 1971 saw her art driven by the turbulent, disordered oppression that the military imposed on its people: "the military became increasingly repressive, censoring the press ever more stringently, provoking an armed guerrilla movement, and using torture in their efforts to stamp out all opposition" (DiQuinzio.p.1). As one of many artists whose work reflected one of Brazil's most brutal regimes - one that lasted for almost twenty years - the socio-politics of Brazil became the subject of Maiolino's work. Her work, which includes four videos, was shown in an exhibition entitled *Matrix 252* (Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2013) and focused on using the body to express living under oppression. Most of the works were originally made on super 8 film and the works illustrate experience under Brazil's totalitarian regime.

With *In-Out (Antropófagia)* (1973), we see a close-up of male and female mouths blocked by objects such as tape, egg and string (Fig. 47). The video was inspired by Oswald de Andrade's 1928 *Manifesto Antropófago* (Cannibal Manifesto). Literally meaning eating human flesh, *Antropófago* is a work of prose that illustrates Brazilian modernism, anti-colonialism and primitivism. De Andrade believed Brazil needed to cultivate its own identity. He asserted that Brazil's best asset was "its ability to "cannibalize" other cultures by incorporating them, re-appropriating them, and regurgitating them as an entirely new and unique creation" (de Andrade 1928, p. 24).

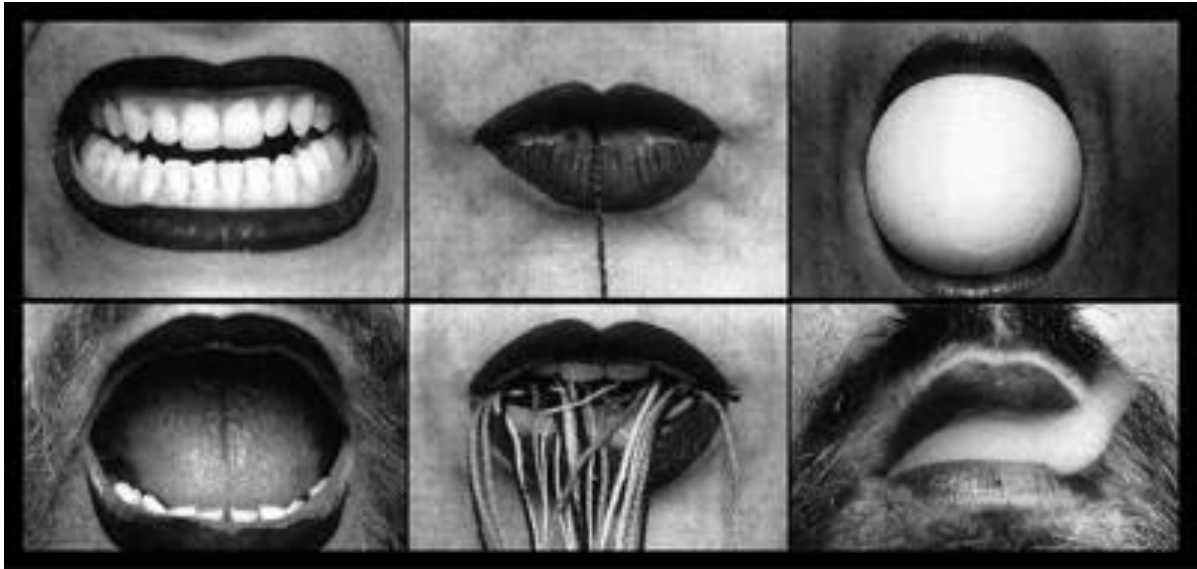


Figure 47. In-Out Antropofagia (Maiolino, 1974)

In BAMPFA (2014), Maiolino draws on the Tupi tribal tradition of consuming its enemies to develop physical strength and states: “This is the perfect meaning of this Super 8 [film]: to eat the repressive organs of the dictatorship, the enemies of freedom at that time” (Maiolino as cited in DiQuinzio 2014, p. 1). Communication between men and women as well as the openings of the external and internal bodily orifices are themes that run through this work. Thus, the photographs show the women’s mouths blocked by objects thereby illustrating the male dominated culture of Brazil during the 1970’s (Di Quinzio, 2014)

The subsequent works, *X and Y* (1974), show Maiolino with a pair of scissors trying to cut off her tongue and nose, and nearly stabbing her eye (Fig. 48). These disturbing images show the enormous struggle of artists and the general population alike to find a means of expression while living under censorship and political suppression.



Figure 48. X and Y (Maiolino, 1974)

At the time, Maiolino wrote: “It is a way of reflecting, making, or trying to make of this act of poetic freedom one of resistance to that which is established and imposed by the military dictatorship that has taken control of our life” (as cited in Casavecchia, 2010, p. 1). Such brutal works became the means for Maiolino to speak as a woman in her own right, to mark her territory within the art world and to individuate herself from a strict upbringing and the shackles of political oppression (Casavecchia, 2010).

During the 1970s when these films were made, Maiolino made a series of photographs from the videos and performances called *Fotopoemação*. One of the most beautiful photographs which she refers to as a photo–poem–action is *Por um Fio* (*By a Thread*, 1976). This work is quite a departure from the fierce confrontational works shown above. *Por um Fio* (Fig. 49) shows the matrilineal lineage between Maiolino in the middle and her mother and daughter on either side chewing on the same thread. The work shows a sense of connection and an ancestral heritage that continues deep into the past and on into the distant future. This photograph was also part of the 2015 *The Great Mother* exhibition at the Palazzo Reale in Milan which featured more than one hundred and twenty international artists.



Figure 49. *Por um Fio* (Maiolino, 1976)

The *Great Mother* (2015) exhibition looks at the essential characteristics of motherhood as the epitome of nutrition, a stereotype often linked to the image of Italy. The exhibition celebrated the women's power from her creativity, generativity and her ability to be transformative. The feminist struggles within the women's movement were also addressed as well as ideas or indeed pre-conceived ideas around the body (Zevi, 2015). *Por um Fio* inspired the Split Faces series of photographs used in my exhibition which is discussed in detail in chapter seven. The series uses photography to merge faces from past and current generations and draws on the matrilineal link between my grandmother, mother, two daughters, my niece and myself. The works speak to ancestral memory and connections between past and current generations.

The final artist in this chapter is Israeli video artist Guy Ben-Ner whose works frame the in-between space between art and life though creating satirical and surreal performance videos that investigate the dynamics of modern society. His influence on this creative led

project is his do-it-yourself (DIY) film sets that make use of what is available in his domestic setting. He uses domestic objects as props to perform with, which is reminiscent of Salcedo's application of everyday objects in works such as *Plegaria Muda*. However, Ben-Ner's work often has a playfulness that belies the seriousness of his social commentary.

As a consummate storyteller, Ben-Ner weaves historic fiction and allegory. His commentary concentrates on contemporary themes applying DIY aesthetics framing an assortment of players or performers, mostly friends, family, passers-by and professionally trained animals. Similarly, I have used domestic objects and items available to me, such as furniture, cushions, colourful throws and the day of the dead altar, as backdrops and props for storytelling. I was drawn to Ben-Ner's use of humour as a strategy for storytelling and applied this aspect to the video of the Calabrian women where I exaggerated my grandmother's movements or speech patterns and accent. For example, she would raise her eyebrows and purse her lips simultaneously when she expected agreement from others, or begin a sentence with "you know, someatimes". Through my performance of the Calabrian woman, I was asserting that southern Italian women have agency and were not willing victims of the traditional patriarchy. This resonates with Neshat's portrayal of Iranian women in her films and photographs that dispel cultural stereotypes, by illustrating a resilience embedded in their history which is unknown to westerners (Denson, 2013).

Ben-Ner's work titled *Stealing Beauty* (2007) is an 18 minute video of the artist, his wife and two children who inhabited Ikea furniture showrooms across the globe (Saltz, 2008). Ostensibly, the family was staging guerrilla theatre (without permission) in Ikea's immense showrooms. The video shows the family moving amongst the displays as they replicate family life. The housework is done, quarrels break out and they retire to the numerous beds in Ikea. This all occurs as customers meander through the store. A debate

around private property and service-based commercial enterprises is conducted, from a Marx/Engels viewpoint, loud enough for those in earshot to hear (Saltz, 2008). Ben-Ner gestures to his surroundings as shoppers move through the camera frame and cries out, “This house belongs to us. We are the only ones who have the right to use it and the right to exclude others from using it.... Private property creates borders, son” (Ben-Ner, 2007). What I found particularly engaging from a filmmaker’s perspective was the lack of continuity. Because Ben-Ner did not ask permission, the film was shot secretly. When caught by Ikea staff, he then had to find another location within the store or a different Ikea. The lack of continuity in the film created tension as the many locations was reminiscent of refugees having to constantly uproot and find temporary shelter. It also challenged the concept of private property through public representation, recreating private spaces into ‘private’ spaces (Mason, 2007). Ben-Ner was not just confronting the store's proprietorship, but the shoppers themselves. Ikea’s deliberate attempt to “imitate” life ingratiates itself with the consumer with the belief that the Ikea concept is the answer to a beautiful home. In effect, Ikea has cleverly created a ready-made theatre set which encourages consumers to imagine themselves living in it, thus happiness will follow.



Figure 50. Stealing Beauty Still (Ben-Ner, 2007)

In Smith's (2012) New York Times art review of *Idea Is the Object*, she suggests that *Stealing Beauty* is fiction performed within a larger narrative and implies that Ben-Ner's underlying objective is that society is best understood through art forms. I could relate to Ben-Ner's, use of everyday objects and the activist nature of stealth art to confront larger issues within society. In Saltz's (2008) article *Artist in Residence: When Guy Ben-Ner goes to Ikea, he's not there for the meatballs*, he discusses Ben-Ner's work practice:

What makes Ben-Ner's art stand out is that he puts these ideas together so well, continually cannibalizing the culture and objects he encounters, trying to make these things work for his art and his family. In this way, he echoes the immigrant's story and the artist's quest (Saltz, 2008, p.1).

In this chapter, I have highlighted the artists who have influenced my work. I have discovered how they apply arts activism to create social commentary, change policy, record history and raise awareness of socio-political issues. Neshat's has used her transnational identity to highlight issues in Iran and her works created from the post-Egyptian revolution narrative. Salcedo has created three public interventions in Bogotá streets in honour of Jaime Garzón, a popular political satirist murdered (allegedly) by right-wing paramilitary forces in August of 1999.

As part of the human rights movement pertaining to refugees, I have integrated numerous art interventions into my PhD research. These include Get Up's #Let them stay campaign, and with the Manus Island detention facility preparing to close on October 31st, 2017, I was engaged in Get Up's "#Bring them here" campaign (Get Up, 2017). Melbourne streets have become my gallery with posters of the "Faces of the Men on Manus" displayed in public places. I also teamed up with performance artists and created impromptu theatre for the #Bring them here campaign (Figs. 16-19).

More than 600 men linger in the Manus Island detention facility with the majority found to be genuine refugees. Further, the Papua New Guinea (PNG) government has ruled that it is unlawful to detain people who have not committed a crime in PNG (Asylum Seeker Resource centre (ASRC), 2017). However, the Australian government refuses to assist with third country or Australian resettlement. This is due to the 'No Advantage Policy', which means that any boat arrival would be immediately transferred to Nauru or Manus Island. Under this policy, there was/is no hope of ever being settled in Australia (Timeline - Refugee Council of Australia, 2016). Bringing about change is a long process and takes much patience and determination.

While the men on Manus currently continue to languish in untenable conditions with no water, power, minimal food rations and no medical assistance (Fox, 2017), artists continue to shed light on the situation in the hope that enough awareness will be raised to change the current immigration policy affecting refugees.

Artists also record history across disciplines and over the last five years they have recorded ongoing atrocities in our camps. These records which include research, writing, photography, films and exhibitions have assisted documentation recently reviewed by the United Nations (2017). Furthermore, Australia has received international condemnation from countries such as Italy whose policies reflect a more humanitarian approach to migrants fleeing war, civil conflict and persecution (Proverbio, 2017).

The artists in exile discussed here have had significant influence on my work from the perspective of ethnography and social justice and in regard to the methodologies of walking with video, storytelling and narrative-based inquiry. Their works also speak to a liminal space. Many of their works draw on ancestral memory that fuses reality and other worldliness contrasted against the relevant sociopolitical issues. The works also give an insight to women

living under harsh patriarchal and /or military regimes. Collectively, the artists give a sense of the adverse consequences of such governments through their work. As artists who are activists, it is imperative that our works reflect the current socio-political situation in Australia, specifically in relation to human rights. While change takes time, sustained art activism that creates opportunities for social commentary and raises awareness can assist future generations and potentially change policies that malign and vilify vulnerable populations. In chapter 7, the creative led project is explained and discussed in relation to its capacity as a social and political commentary substantiated by personal narratives from Hazara and Calabrian women.

Chapter 7

The Creative Led Research Explained

The fact of migration is extraordinarily impressive to me: the movement and the precision of one form of life transmuted or imported to another....and then, of course the whole problematic of exile and immigration enters into it, the people who simply don't belong in any culture; that is the great modern, or if you like postmodern fact, the standing outside of cultures (Said in Howe, 2003, p. 1).

What emerged from my time with the Hazara women was a body of work that responded to their narratives, their impact on me as a migrant, artist and a woman. Through employing themes of *magic realism* to the artwork, coupled with an empathic approach to performance, I was able to experience becoming the other. Themes of home, belonging, exclusion and lives-well-lived are apparent throughout the artwork. My involvement with the women left me reflecting on how a move from one country to another, be it by choice or by force and particularly in times of civil and political unrest, was baffling to me yet also familiar because I too had experience of “standing outside of cultures” and my works come to terms with that contested space.

The artwork is divided into 5 sections under the umbrella of *Disturbing the Storm*: The Script; The Films; The Passport Photographs; Split Faces and The Prose. The works were not made in any specific order. Rather, as I commenced the creative process it inspired the other works. For example, when I started working on the passports, they inspired my development of the Calabrian/Hazara film. Alternatively, the Calabrian film, with its haunting singing, inspired me to juxtapose this video work with the video of the women telling their stories, so the soundscape fills the gallery space and acts as an ‘audio-bridge’ connecting the two cultures. The soundscape was very effected in terms of audience response to the exhibition.

One young woman said, “The sound was eerie and pleasant and made the space seem full” (personal communication with exhibition visitor, date). The majority of the viewers chose one particular piece that resonated with them. For instance, my cousins and daughter, became quite emotional when they saw the split faces and the video of the Calabrian woman singing. An indigenous artist friend was intrigued by the “*You can only wear the scarf for religious reasons*” series. The general consensus was positive and most came away with new knowledge about the Hazara women. What was most significant was that the empathy I felt and portrayed in my performance was transferable to most of the visitors. The majority said they found the exhibition confronting, empathetic and affective.

Introduction to character development: Creating the Hazara and Calabrian subjects in my video works:

- Twelve women were interviewed.
- I created twelve characters from their narratives.
- These twelve women/characters are represented in the passport photo section of the exhibition.
- The main film featured 4 characters. Each character represented 3 of the women interviewed. I combined stories that were similar.
- The Calabrian woman is a standalone character developed from conversations with my grandmother in the years prior to her death in 1994.
- She weaves the stories of the Hazaras and Calabrian film through her return from the dead.

It was a challenge developing ways of integrating my understanding of both the Hazara women and my grandmother through performance. This became a research question: How could I ethically, truthfully and authentically represent individuals from a cultural group of which I was not a member? In past works, I identified empathetically with the communities

that I was working with, but choosing to position myself as a conduit for the Hazara women and perform from a space of empathy became a strategy to experience becoming the other. Performing the Calabrian character was less challenging because I could draw from my lived experience growing up with Italian mother and grandmother and incorporating their stories.

It was important for developing my performances to research and understand how empathy informs the psyche of the performer. Daniel Goleman (2007) discusses three types of empathy defined by clinical psychologist Paul Ekman (1972). Cognitive empathy is knowing how another person feels and what they might be thinking. Compassionate empathy is based on understanding and feeling another person's predicament, as well as wanting to help them. Emotional empathy has more to do with physically feeling what another person feels as though their feelings are yours. According to Alford (2016), the nature of emotional empathy is dependent on mirror neuron cells in the brain which ignite when we feel another's emotional state. In turn, an echo effect is reproduced in our minds. Emotional empathy, coupled with compassionate empathy, is of most interest to me as a performer as both perspectives allow understanding the women's situation and how it impacts on them, physically, emotionally, and psychologically. The audience experience of the works was also of interest. If I had experienced empathy for the Hazaras, would this transfer, second hand, to the audience and would they see how I interpreted it in my artwork? As the commonalities between the Hazaras and Calabrians became apparent, working as an actor from an empathetic space came quite naturally because I had generational and cultural memories from which to draw.

While there is little published research on performers coming from an empathetic standpoint, Lindsay B. Cummings, author of *Empathy as Dialogue in Theatre and Performance* (2016) examines techniques for promoting dialogic empathy, specifically in

theatre that aims to promote social change when working with and in marginalised communities. Cumming's idea of empathy holds elements of Ekman's ideas, but it is more concerned with the engagement of dialogue where all participants are responsive to each other. "It is a provisional process that involves thinking and feeling, imagining the other in the other's situation, allowing his or her affect to resonate with us, and communicating our interpretations back to the other whenever possible for feedback" (Cummings, 2016, p. 8). This idea, coupled with Ekman's theory of emotional and compassionate empathy, resonates with my performance approach and allowed me to confidently "become" the women.

Although telling other people's stories is not new, I believe to be truly effective, and to have affect, the artist needs to embody the subject they are investigating. Performance theorists, such as the Russian theatre practitioner, Stanislavski (1863-1938, Boal in Brazil (1931-2009), and American Adler (1901-1992) advocated for actors identifying or feeling the character. Empathy as a lone method is not considered a viable approach. Theatre maker and activist Augusto Boal was generally opposed to using empathy. He preferred that audience or spectators watched theatre in a detached manner (Robinson, 2005). My aim has been to forefront empathy as a single approach when telling the Hazara women's stories so it evokes empathy in the audience. A second approach included Boal's *Invisible Theatre* where performance is enacted in unusual environments. These approaches are evident in my films which weave the lived experiences of the Hazara women and the Calabrian exile.

Coming from the perspective of an empath, storytelling enables the raconteur to move into a self-imposed liminal space. In the process of my study, once the Hazara women's narratives were told, I held their stories in an in-between space until a script was written. As a writer, the story I wanted to tell, was only fully realised when all the women's narratives were collated and I was able to reflect on the overlaps between my family's immigration journey

and the Hazara women I interviewed and synthesise the narratives into a script.

Understanding why I wanted to write about commonalities between Hazaras and Calabrian exiles was also important. Apart from raising awareness of the Hazara narrative and older female refugees, I wanted to write about my grandmother and mother so they will never be forgotten. I wanted the stories of the individual Hazara women told, so they are visible and perceived as women with agency. I was interested in portraying a sense of cohesion in terms of the human experience. I also wanted to experiment with the women's narratives through a range of artistic approaches and give a truthful account of the lived experiences to potentially affect the viewer.

Kearney (2017) discussed dispensing with conventional notions of truth and understanding it through interpretations of the data gathered in the field. Throughout the script, I have deliberately sought ways to ensure that the stories reveal the essence of the women's experience. At times, I found the stories unbelievable and wondered how anyone can endure such suffering and survive. I originally considered interpreting the data in a traditional format, however, magic realism allowed the facts or data to move fluidly between reality and fictitious worlds without corrupting the narratives or taking away from the truth (Plummer, 1983).

While I used characteristics of magic realism, based on Faris' (2004) five characteristics, I have applied the genre broadly and minimally. I have endeavoured to establish the implausible through simple filmic devices such as fading between black and white and colour to merge past and present and the use of the Calabrian female character as a "ghostly" apparition to bridge the living and the dead. Performing the Hazara women and my Calabrian grandmother implies that I am the conduit for all their stories, but at the same time my position as a storyteller is communally, (inter) culturally and individually bound. The

haunting soundscape produces an otherworldly atmosphere and is a bridging device that connects the multi-disciplinary exhibition. It also emphasises the oral tradition of storytelling through song and the spoken word which permeate and unify all cultures.

Salman Rushdie's (1982) review of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, by Garcia Márquez, further maintains that *magic realism* enables socio-political ideas to be expressed in a manner not consistent with more conventional literary styles (see Juul, 2014). The women's narratives are framed by social and political issues that affected their lives. Their stories have been threaded with short sharp statements contrasting their lives in Australia with their past and are interlaced with the Calabrian woman's story. The latter's symbolic return in the film blends elements of ritual and ancestral memory enabling the script to move between two worlds while simultaneously representing the liminal space.

Grief

There is a sense of collective grief in the women's narratives. Their loss is palpable and covers dead children, incarceration, persecution and torture of self or a loved one. As much as possible, I have tried to incorporate both the Hazara and Calabrian women's grief into the performance script. I have also aimed to promote the notion that they will not be defined by their grief, even though it lies just beneath the surface. There is the presumption, that once a person has reached a place of refuge, all will be well. However, underlying grief remains with the women in my study, my family and other refugees which resettlement agencies and policy makers do not properly acknowledge nor address. I refer to Murray, Davidson, and Schweitzer's (2008) research into post-migration resettlement and the importance of emphasising the numerous stresses that impact on migrants experiencing ostensibly positive settlement outcomes. The script illuminates the women's grief through the mini-narratives -

the one-liners and the demeanour and body language that I try to convey when I am relaying their stories to camera.

Mother

The concept of the mother is important in terms of archetypes that are centrally common to both the Hazaras and the Italians. These are traditionally the Madonna, Mother Mary or Maryam. In both Catholicism and Islam, she is the quintessential Mother. It is not common knowledge outside of Islam, that Mary or Maryam is one of the most revered women in Islam. There is a chapter in the Quran dedicated to Mary and both Catholics and Muslims refer to her as the mother of Jesus, a prophet of Islam and the Saviour in Christianity (Waheed, 2008). According to Penelope Johnstone (2005) a British Catholic scholar of Islam, most Muslims do not pay great attention to Maryam in a religious sense. Johnstone (2005) reports on the ways in which folklore and local customs blend aspects of Christianity (specifically Catholicism) and Islam: “The veneration of saints and their shrines, or final resting places, is deep-rooted in Islam (and in human nature perhaps), and where there is an existing Christian shrine to Mary, local Muslims may well adopt it” (p. 46).

In a cultural context, Mary is a common thread connecting Hazara and Calabrian cultures, and Latin Americans understand her as the archetypical mother. For example, in Mexico, *Our Lady of Guadalupe* (Fig. 51) and in Southern Italy, the *La Madonna Nera* (Black Madonna) (Fig. 52) are both perceived as strong women who bear a resemblance to the mother goddess in feminine divinity (Erasmus, 2013). These two Madonnas are connected to the women in the projects. The qualities of Guadalupe and the Black Madonna are women of strength, sorrow, devotion to children and family, but also the decision makers and keepers of stories. These women are representative of the quintessential mother, grounded yet otherworldly, whilst also embodying strong feminist values. The Madonna is important as she permeates

the script in subtle ways such as when the women speak of their children, their sense of responsibility to the family and ensuing its wellbeing. Furthermore, the black Madonna is used as a prop in the Calabrian woman's film and is featured in the Day of the Dead altar.

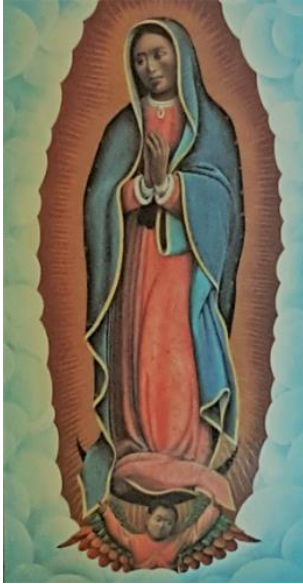


Figure 51. *Our Lady of Guadalupe*
(Stellato Pledger, 2017)



Figure 52. *La Madonna Nera*
(Stellato Pledger, 2017)

The Performance Script

The Story of the Light between an Afghan Dress and an Italian Glass Bowl

Hazara/Calabrian Film

As a writer, I tend to work collaboratively and give minimal directions in my scripts. Directions are generally developed in rehearsal with performers, directors, visual artists and musicians. This allows for change depending on who the performer is and what approach they will apply.

My role as a performer is to approach the characters in the script through an emotional, compassionate and empathic model. Emotional empathy, coupled with compassionate

empathy, embodies an understanding of a person's situation as well as the physically feeling of what another is experiencing. This corresponds to Masumi's (2002) meaning of affect in terms of a biological component that has an abstractness that is all encompassing and transmittable. The transmission of affect can be a potent force that communicates socially, personally and environmentally, and applies to the performer and audience alike.

When creating the film script from the Hazara women's narratives, their stories had a physical impact. The more time I spent with the women, the easier it was to embody their story as a performer and understand them from their perspective. The women used many non-verbal cues when I interviewed them. For instance, one woman would draw herself to her full height when sitting and smile. This signaled the end of the conversation. Another woman would look down, while another would slightly purse her lips, indicting a change in the conversation. I began to look for micro expressions when the women told their stories. This strategy was informed by Jon Henley's interview with Paul Ekman (2009) about understanding micro expressions: those intensely felt emotions that flit across the face and are imperceptible to the untrained eyes.

This knowledge helped me clarify and focus on the women's nonverbal communication which, in turn, assisted with character development. I deliberately included them in the scripted film as it helped find commonalities between each narrative and define four personality types. I was then able to reconstruct the twelve women into four characters, with each character embodying three women. Below are the four characters I developed from the broad range of women in the study. To create a portrait of each of the characters, I documented them so I had a photographic reference for the performance. Each of the women in the photographs, regardless of background, status, or personality would speak straight into the camera, asserting their presence and agency so I replicated their gaze.



Figure 53. Hazara Character/Persona 1



Figure 54. Hazara Character/Persona 2



Figure 55. Hazara Character/Persona 3



Figure 56. Hazara Character/Persona 4

The Calabrian woman was quite different because she was my grandmother and I had had a long, personal relationship with her, she felt like an extension of me. I had re-read her poems, watched old home movies and spent time with dusty photograph albums. These served to reawaken the relationship with my Calabrian grandmother and reconnect with my ancestral memory. As a performer, this process allowed me to feel her and see her in my mind's eye, which in turn enabled her to emerge through me physically.

The Calabrian is a standalone character who symbolizes all twelve women while representing an established cultural community confronting similar issues to the Hazara women (Fig. 57). She is called back from the “dead” by the plight of the Hazara women to be a voice of knowledge and understanding of the commonalities between the two cultures. She

also bears witness as a survivor of the trial and tribulations experienced by the Hazaras spoken from her own experiences.



Figure 57. The Calabrian

Character breakdown: The Characters are referred to as Personas (P1-P4) in the script:

The Calabrian- Southern Italian woman. Strong sense of social justice.

P1: Well-educated women with a high level of English proficiency. Displays an over-developed sense of responsibility for family. Has made significant headway in Australia in terms of feeling connected. Is able to help fellow Hazaras. Quite regal. Very proud.

P.2: Women who have been on the run from one camp to another and made it to Australia by boat. Intelligent but with little education.

P.3: Women who are, or have seen, the casualties of war; they are deeply affected or traumatized by their experiences. Some are educated, from rural backgrounds with a love of the land. Very resilient.

P.4: A migrant/refugee who has fought for freedom in their own country, such as setting up underground schools for girls; they have a high level of confidence. Not to be underestimated. Generally, well-educated both academically and has life experience.

All the characters have experienced war, displacement, exclusion in their own country or in Australia due to political, religious or social beliefs.

It is important to bear in mind that the film does not follow the script verbatim. I found all the five characters would go off script, but maintained the essence of the text. There was a strong sense of being inside the women. It was as though each character had taken over and found their natural rhythm and consequently changed what didn't coincide with their character. No matter how often I tried to go back on script, it consistently reverted to the idiosyncratic expressions or gestures of the characters. Therefore, a copy of the actual script accompanied the film for audience reference.

The script, originally designed for film, is transferable for live performances as a standalone piece for which an alternate ending has been written. The main difference is the narratives are performed live with the exhibition as the set design. The live performance space would be large and feature the objects, passport photos and photography. The videos and accompanying soundscape would play intermittently from the beginning to the end of the live performance. In effect, the exhibition becomes alive.

The Story of the Light between an Afghan Dress and a Heart-shaped Italian Glass Bowl

Calabrian: *I died in 1994, I returned in 2017.* I listen to the Hazara women and they bring me back...

Shows Afghan dress and Murano/Italian glass

It is the colour, the invisible lines of the beautiful dress and the glass that bring me back...

When I came to Australia, many little things happen... There is a moment in time, like the seconds it takes for a dove to fly in and out of a half open window, it is almost desperate, lost. But it has courage and you glimpse the last flutter of its wings as it flies into the eye of God.....these are moments when I knew that I could no longer walk the shadows of the Calabrian Hills. I knew I must leave them behind. I remember it so clearly. Time stood still. I felt entire memories flood back to my then present. It was so clear, like the gentle lines on my mother's face, the smile in my brother's green eyes, the partigiani (the partisans). I was standing on the edge of a cliff and my arms became wings, I was in mourning and liberated at the same time.... I jumped...the blood in my warm body froze and I said goodbye - per una vita migliore (for a better life).

- P. 1:** We had a large beautiful home in Quetta on the Pakistan / Afghan border. I am psychologist in my country. My family and I now live in a unit in Dandenong.
- P. 2:** My husband and I with three children fled Afghanistan in the 1980's. Too much conflict; so much persecution. We knew it would get worse. We lived in Iran for a long time and two more children were born there. We were always refugees.
- P. 3:** You know, I have witnessed many target killings... many target killings. You cannot imagine the screams when a bomb goes off. The rivers of blood on the streets.... You cannot imagine.
- P. 4:** *My Heart is heavy
My soul is depleted.*

I came as a migrant with a degree in English literature. I built my house in Pakenham with my husband and children. Always I am haunted by the devastation in my country. I bleed tears too often. No one hears the screams of the Hazaras. It is my purpose that they are heard.

My feet are scarred

I keep walking

P. 2: I was in my early 60's when I and two of my children took the boat to Australia. The journey was very frightening. The waves were so high. The boat nearly sank. The darkest part of me just wanted to let the water take me. Then all the struggles for so many years would have been for nothing. We stayed in Australian camps for a few months...I do not understand why. We had committed no crime... Always a refugee.

P. 1: It has not been easy. Many of the women have been traumatized. In our culture, emotional assistance is not sought. This makes healing difficult.

Calabrian: I remember having to take the money to the men in the middle of the night. The Calabrian hills are frightening yet beautiful. The moon was a slither, the stars so bright.... I could not stop to enjoy the night sky because we had to get my husband on a boat before the black shirts caught him and put him on the political prisoner island of Lipari. It was expensive and dangerous.

P. 3: My husband came first. By boat, he was in detention, such sad letters.

"What have I done, that they imprison me. I cannot tell you how long I will be here. Time runs like a dying creek. I am sorry. Inshallah I will be free soon. I have a good lawyer. You are in my heart". When I arrived, I was so tired... so so tired.

Photo/film: The grieving/weeping/lamenting woman.

Calabrian: I can still remember the letters my husband wrote before I arrived.

"And in the time it takes to leave these mercilessly, punishing Calabrian hills, I will have a cried a million tears. But, tears will not bring you to me. We can only hope that when our children and their children ask us what we did in the war...we can say with pride that we fought for freedom."

P. 2: The last letter from my husband.

"My dear wife, I write to with love and respect. It has been so long and I fear my health is failing, do not give up. Remember Freedom has its own price."

P. 1: There was a time I thought I should go back. It was harder for my husband than me. It was my responsibility to keep the family happy. I believed freedom was our only chance. I was so tired when we arrived.

P. 2: I left behind some of my children. It was too risky to take everyone. We couldn't afford all of us to come. Their letters ask me to bring them. It has been so long...I see their faces every day in the young refugee and Australian adults. I close my eyes and watch my children laugh. I have been so tired since I arrived.

P. 3: You know, I was a botanist. I was also a science teacher. I had many friends. It is different now. It was quite wonderful in many ways... except for the bombs. You cannot imagine.

Calabrian: When I come to this country, what I remember most is the isolation. We are anti-fascisti, anarchici and the bigger Italian community, it does not accept us.

P. 4: *The illusion of belonging almost becomes real,
Though your doors do not welcome me.*

I wonder does my scarf immediately instill fear in you? Do you wonder if we are terrorists? Do you believe the rhetoric you are fed everyday by the media and politicians?

We *are* running from the same bombs you are. We are not so different. What colour is your blood? How do your tears taste? Like mine. Salty.

*I am weary,
Another Hazara life taken.*

P. 1: It is hard to explain what it is like to be so far from your country or family. To leave when every fiber of your being wants to stay. How does one clarify these complicated and opposing feelings?

P. 4: There is a war inside my heart, something akin to my knowledge of a loss, of what will never be again: To find acceptance; to just be; just trying to fit in is exhausting.

Rolling effect between Calabrian and P.3

Calabrian: Their worry beads are my rosary beads. Very similar.

P. 3: I could grow anything. I loved the feel of the earth between my fingers. I could tell if the soil was active or not...My garden was so beautiful.

Calabrian: I had a big garden. The flowers here, the vegetables there. I loved to dig in the soil, I like to feel its moistness, the wet caress my hands.

P. 3: I loved the feel of the earth between my fingers, under my fingernails.

Calabrian: I like to feel the soil under my feet ...sometimes I feel I am back in Calabria.

P. 3: When I do this, I feel myself taken back to my home.

Calabrian: Sometimes, I feel my ancestors call me back.

I was, I am the remembering. The keeper of stories. I passed this on to my children and grandchildren just like these women will do when they come from the shadows. Andare con Dio, Inshallah

End

Alternative Ending: This ending is slightly longer were the film made into a live performance. The piece continues to the point of the rolling effect about the important influence of the land (the garden). To make sense I will commence from the beginning of this section.

Rolling effect between Narrator and P.3 until last sentence, which P. 2 will finish.

Calabrian: Their worry beads are my rosary beads.

P. 3: I could grow anything. I loved the feel of the earth between my fingers. I could tell if the soil was active or not...My garden was so beautiful...

Calabrian: I had a big garden. The flowers here, the vegetables there..... I loved to dig in the soil, I like to feel its moistness, the wet caress my hands.

P. 3: I loved the feel of the earth between my fingers, under my finger nails.

Calabrian: I like to feel the soil under my feet ...sometimes I feel I am back in Calabria.

P. 3: When I do this, I feel myself being taken back to my home.

Calabrian: Sometimes, I feel my ancestors call me back.

P. 3: Sometimes I am carried back...You cannot imagine.

P. 2: When I touched the earth in Australia, I touch the earth in my country. Always a refugee.

A series of photographs flash accompanied the actor changing personas. In the film, the following piece will accompany the passport photos without characters and written as one section.

P. 1: I have citizenship. I have a house. I live with my community.

P. 2: My husband is dead.

P. 3: My children are scattered like dust across the world. I am here. I grieve for the loss of the family, of my land, of the bright sun as it sets in Bamiyan.

P. 4: The Buddhas were blown up and my heart no longer sings with hope. I speak with ghosts as they shimmer in the Australian sun. I am here, but a refugee always until I find my way home.

Silence. Up to one minute. Allow for a shift in tone.

P.1: I have been luckier than most. I have the language; I drive; my children are all doing well here. I return to my country when time and money permits. Last time I returned the Kabul protests killed 80 and injured thousands... This is part of the Enlightenment Movement by the Hazaras in Afghanistan. More than two hundred years of persecution, now, the youth of Afghanistan are taking to the streets. They are the hope for a new Afghanistan. We have been in mourning since the attacks by ISIS happened. Our country remains a perilous place... Why does Australia send so many back to danger...?

P. 4: "I live in black, my home is dark

I call a cave, my home in rocks

My feet bleed, It hurts sometimes, my feet when bleed

I walk to my home always bare feet

I fear at night when shadows talk

I wish I had a home with windows

Where light could push out all the shadows

I wish I had a home with windows" (Baig, 2016, 27th July)

Calabrian: One last journey back to a place you no longer belong...

The familiar voices, languages, lives well lived begin to fade into an echo of the past as it moves towards the future.

I was the remembering. The keeper of stories. I passed this on, as each of these women will do...as they choose to move from the shadows. I weep for them all

Te le libellule in giardino; una sorriso il vento and a million memories held in the palm of my hand. Andare con Dio;

Inshallah

End

The Films

The story of the Light between an Afghan Dress and a Heart-shaped Italian Glass Bowl

My approach to making the film was inspired by Guy Ben-Ner's unpretentious performance videos which capture a familiar setting and embrace an everyday aesthetic. Setting my film in unremarkable surroundings, in this case my house, makes it comfortable for me to perform, because this is a familiar environment, so I feel at ease. Moreover, this is also how I want the viewer to feel, at ease when they watch the film, like they are sitting opposite me as I tell the story, as a welcome guest in my home.

Thom Donavon (2010), from *Bomb Magazine*, speaks of Guy Ben-Ner as an accomplished storyteller and video artist who weaves metaphor with historic fiction into captivating works and applies DIY visuals to make socio-political commentary on contemporary issues. Additionally, he structures the actors in his works to move between dimensions. Ben-Ner's home movie, reality television and documentary style are well suited to this project, as its simple presentation in 'normal' environments becomes a strategy for me to reveal the poignant undercurrent of trauma of the women's lives.

The mise-en-scène or the placement of objects in the film enhances the domesticity of the home, of the desire to create a sense of home, or place of belonging. By using my home as a film set, my aim is to emphasize the qualities of home, such as warmth, familiarity and security. This imperative is juxtaposed against the abandoned and bombed homes that once belonged to refugees and asylum seekers. The rented houses many inhabit are temporary dwellings and are void of the belongings that make a house a home.

The lounge room's decor represents past and present, old and new as the some of the furniture is inherited from deceased and living family members. There are family photos

scattered around the room of births, baptisms, communions and weddings. There are also photographs of those who remained in Italy and together all these photographs tell the story of my family and the Calabrian culture. The Calabrian woman is always placed in the actual room with mementos from Italy and those collected since arriving in Australia. However, the Hazaras are differently positioned. I placed two Hazara characters on wooden chairs against a white blind or a dark red curtain *in between* the lounge and kitchen areas. The other two Hazara characters sat in large armchairs chairs with brightly coloured cushions in the lounge room. I wanted to create a sense that the women who came by boat and who brought very few mementos, while those who arrived by plane or not as asylum seekers brought more belongings.

By using my lounge room as a performance space, the room is designated as a place where people gather socially, display their favourite belongings and perform rituals relating to religion, culture and family. It is a space that represents the past, where photographs of loved ones, alive and dead are exhibited. It is also a reminder of what has transpired during the process of establishing a new life. From both a personal standpoint and the women's perspective, the lounge room with all its accessories symbolizes a sense of belonging and identity.

Philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005) maintains that "Identity is central to our existence. It is essential to our values" (p, 217) and he discusses the concept of understanding and coming to terms with a number of varying loyalties. That we do not have to side one way or the other, but rather, be more creative and open in our approach to difference. He argues that the world cannot continue to be divided into the West and the rest, locals and multiculturals, us and them. From this standpoint, identity and belonging is not a static phenomenon, but rather a continuous series of events that take place over time that impact on

the development and meaning of and within human relationship (Skrbiš, Baldassar, & Poynting, 2007). Iranian artist Shirin Neshat works from two opposing cultural backgrounds with a focus on the visual discourse of contemporary Islam or specific conditions of life in Iran. She gives an image of her country while raising awareness of western perceptions of Iranian Islam (Schmitz, 2005). Neshat explains this approach in the following way, “For me it is vital to portray a theme from within, in order to create something that is pure and not to succumb to the pressure of drawing parallels between two cultures” (Neshat in Schmitz, 2005, p. 2).

This resonates with my project from the perspective of raising awareness to the experiences of the Hazara women, as Muslims and as new Australians. While I do not draw parallels between cultures, I do find commonalities between cultures, hence the “dead” Calabrian woman offers the audience a glimpse into past experiences and how they resonate with new arrivals including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. In terms of Appiah’s identity theory, I am attempting to remain open to the differences of each culture and being creative with diversity by finding commonalities.

My lounge room was used as a set for both the Calabrian and the Hazara’s stories, so I simply re-staged the room to create different atmospheres. For example, the Calabrian performs, against a backdrop of a Day of the Dead Altar (Fig. 58) with photos of the dead family and friends, and pagan style Catholic artefacts. These are lit by candles on the *La Festa di Ognissanti* (All Saints Day) on November 1st to celebrate the ancient festival of all the saints in the Catholic calendar. *Il Giorno dei Morti* (Day of the Dead) is celebrated on November 2nd and believes or accepts that the dead will return to visit their loved ones. The figures of the skeleton, the black Madonna, photographs of deceased loved ones, crucifixes and rosary beads are all expressions of the other world being connected to this world (De

Filippo, 2015). Characteristics of Faris' (2004) *magic realism*, including different realms merging and implying that intricate elements of magic are at play; that the supernatural is unquestionably integrated into the 'real' world, are all expressed in the 'Day of the Dead' altar (Figure 58). On the 'Day of the Dead' this is particularly apparent and accepted as an uncontested truth in Southern Italian and Latin American cultures. When the Calabrian woman performs against this backdrop, she represents the return of the dead, the doorway between past and present. She moves fluidly between different realms and does not remain silent to the plight of the Hazara women. Very early in the script the Calabrian woman states in the beginning of the script, "I died in 1994, I returned in 2017. I listen to the Hazara women and they bring me back"



Figure 58. Day of the Dead Altar (Stellato Pledger 2015)

The Calabrian woman is representative of my family who were not religious but superstitious. However, the Calabrese in general are represented as well as the traditions brought from their birthplace. The film aims to imbue the scene with the intangible and the idea that the dead are with us and move between the worlds. Thus, the Calabrian woman illustrates liminality, as she moves between past and present, the dead to the living.

The Hazara set design is quite different, though I have retained Guy Ben-Ner's DIY approach, the lounge, with the large television, is the focal point with oversized leather chairs and colourful cushions are positioned around the table in keeping with the Middle Eastern tradition.



Figure 59. The Lounge Room (Stellato Pledger, 2016)

The Middle Eastern houses that I have visited generally have colourful rooms and combine eastern and western home furnishings including textiles and decor representing a bridge between the past and present, the new life and old, such as bringing aspects of their culture to Australia.

In respect to cultural superstitions, according to James B. Minahan's *Ethnic groups of north, east, and central Asia: An Encyclopaedia* (2014), the Hazaras' have superstitious beliefs despite centuries of Islamic teachings. These include the evil eye, darkness, specific

animals and a belief in ghosts. While they do not have ‘Day of the Dead’ celebrations, superstitions play some part in their culture. However, I suspect this is more prominent in tribal and rural areas, rather than in cities or where the population is more educated. In this way, they are like Italians, despite centuries of Catholicism.

Applying Ben-Ner’s DIY approach to the performance and constructing the performance ‘stage’ challenged me to find a comical element in at least one of the characters. While my work is meant to disturb and arouse feelings, humour can be just as effective to connect with an audience and produce affect. Therefore, I selected the character of my Calabrian grandmother to provide comic relief and give respite from the dramatic content. I remember her being quite funny, with an uncanny ability to hold the attention of an audience with her stories of Italy and anecdotes of family and friends. I wanted to capture that part of her personality to also give more depth to the character.

The Passport Photographs

You can only wear that scarf for religious reasons

As I took on various roles in the film, I wanted to get a sense of the women in different environments and get an understanding of what the women and other Muslim’s described as attitudes to “scarf wearers”. This work further developed the concept of becoming other.

Having developed the twelve characters through observations in several environments, I again replayed the videos which allowed me to refine each character. Finding subtle differences was a process of individuating each Hazara woman whom I had interviewed into distinct characters. This meant *feeling* subtle differences in each character. This was a different process from developing only four characters for the film as the differences between the four characters were more obvious which was easier to achieve. Creating twelve

characters was more challenging as the subtle differences had to be more refined and precise. I had to be more meticulous in my approach to develop a truthful and convincing interpretation of all twelve women. When I replayed the footage, I slowed down the films looking for small facial gestures that I could apply to each passport photo. I did this with each woman. I defined each woman using a different coloured headscarf. For example, the woman wearing the bright green scarf is quite pragmatic yet feisty (Fig. 67). The woman in the white scarf seems younger and less sure of herself (Fig. 62). Each photograph captured subtle differences in expression whilst conforming to Australian Passport regulations. I added one line under the series of passport photos that encapsulated her life. Once I was comfortable performing each woman, I took each character on an excursion to a suburban shopping centre to get my passport taken. I saw this performance as extending on Pink's theory "Walking with Video" as my body and the experiences it was recording, took the place of the video camera. I was the sensorial equipment.

In each suburb, I received different reactions and documented each experience. I wanted to experiment with the idea that theatre engages without a clear division of audience and performers. This was inspired by the exhibition *Actions and Interruptions* at the Tate Modern in 2007. This show applied invisible theatre techniques and executed a daylong performance that aimed to illustrate performance as an aspect of everyday behaviour. A number of performance artists went undercover to observe what happens when they undertook everyday activities such as queuing, following a tour guide or simply moving around the gallery on an escalator. The artists examined the way in which museum visitors behaved when an interruption of daily activities occurred, such as when a generally accepted code of conduct was changed. An example of this is the artwork *Good Feelings in Good Times* (2007) by Roman Ondák which used performers to queue in the most inappropriate places such as a fire exit or in front of a wall. Often museum visitors would join in and if the performers

(unknown to the public) were asked why they were queuing, their instructions were to say, “We’re just queuing”. Though *Actions and Interruptions* was performed in 2007, the concept of blurring boundaries between the public and artists or performers is not new.

While the social experiment of understanding attitudes towards the “scarf wearer” was motivated by Augusto Boal’s *Invisible Theatre*, where performances take place in unexpected sites, such as shopping centres, buses or restaurants. It is imperative that the audience are unaware that a performance is taking place. The aim of such performances is to promote dialogue around socio-political issues (Theatre of the Oppressed, 1979). Invisible theatre is performance that seeks not to be identified as theatre as it aims to create situations that compel spontaneous reactions. Therefore, attention needs to be drawn to the performance without being conspicuous. It also intends to eliminate obstacles between performers and audience and produce opportunities for the audience to address belief systems and sensitive issues not generally discussed openly.

As a performer, “becoming” a Hazara character, I wanted to raise my own awareness of attitudes towards the “scarf weaver” and in doing so, apply any new knowledge to the characters in the video. In relation to raising awareness of the Hazaras and their stories, I placed the characters into a variety of domestic style environments, outside of their community and in communities where Muslims are rarely seen. I did this by researching the cultural demographics of several suburbs. The objective was to challenge audience perceptions of Hazara/Muslim communities. I believe engaging in daily activities, applicable to all people, may be a means to connect individuals. Therefore, my aim was to create conditions where the public, unaccustomed to interacting with Muslims, would incidentally have a face-to-face experience, at the post office, pharmacy or walking around their neighbourhood.

When developing each character for the passport photos, the process was both enlightening and slightly frightening as I found myself using gestures or expressions that were not my own. I could feel my body changing in terms of walking style, how I held my head, clenched my mouth, or pursed my lips. I had moments of feeling tension in my body then experiencing a slackening of my muscles. I applied the tenets of *Invisible Theatre* and aimed to blur boundaries between the actor and audience. I also intended to interact with my audience silently as a member of the public. My main objective was to document attitudes from each interaction. I found the most effective way to record each interaction was to write down a brief synopsis of the interaction immediately after I had a passport photo taken. I noted how I felt, the suburb, whether it was a pharmacy or a post office and the general surroundings of the suburb.

The first persona, or character went to my local shopping strip. The area is predominately Hasidic Jewish, so I felt obvious walking down the street in my hijab and though I caught the attention of Anglo-Australians, the Hasidic Jews paid little to no attention to me. This was repeated eleven more times as eleven different personas. I was refused service at a pharmacy in Black Rock with the excuse that there were too many people to be processed before it closed. I was treated with ‘kid gloves’ at another; condescended to; spoken very loudly to as though I may not understand English. However, several people were surprised with my excellent English. In Armadale, one of Melbourne’s exclusive suburbs, I was treated very well, almost with sympathy, and one woman commented that I was the first “Muslim” she had met.

The day I had my photo taken in a busy central business district (CBD) post office in Melbourne, there were many Muslims from different cultural backgrounds waiting in line. I felt like a fraud, which I was, and hoped no one that looked like they came from “my

cultural” background would approach me. This would expose me, leaving me little choice but to reveal my experiment and interrupt the flow of the “performance”.

At the Elsternwick Post Office, another affluent Melbourne suburb, a very nervous young man took my photo. He was very nice, but kept saying, “You can only wear the scarf for religious reasons”. I asked, “Why else would I wear one”. Response: “I don’t know, but you can only wear one for religious reasons... and we have to see your face”. To which I replied. “You can see my face perfectly well and my hair is showing”. “Yes”, he said, “but under Australian law you can only use the passport if you are wearing the scarf for religious reason”. In fact, I met all the requirements under Australian [Passport] law as my face was clearly visible under the scarf. According to the Australian Government, Foreign Affairs and Trade website “Head coverings should be plain coloured and must be worn in such a way as to show the face from the bottom of the chin to the top of the forehead, and with the edges of the face visible” (ref website).

The last three passport photos were taken in pharmacies and a post office in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. The demographics were predominantly white, lower to middle-class Australians. I went into a post office in the suburb where I had grown up and experienced *otherness* on a regular basis. This memory moved into the foreground quite unexpectedly as I stood in line to have my passport photo taken. I waited to be treated as the *other*. My fears were not met. There was a polite ‘business as usual’ attitude.

This experience was interesting as the memory of being ‘othered’ resurfaced and echoed the women’s experience in Australia and Afghanistan. This also resonated with stories my grandmother told me about migrating to Australia and how difficult it was to assimilate. As the Calabrian woman in my film, she speaks about being isolated and the lack of acceptance

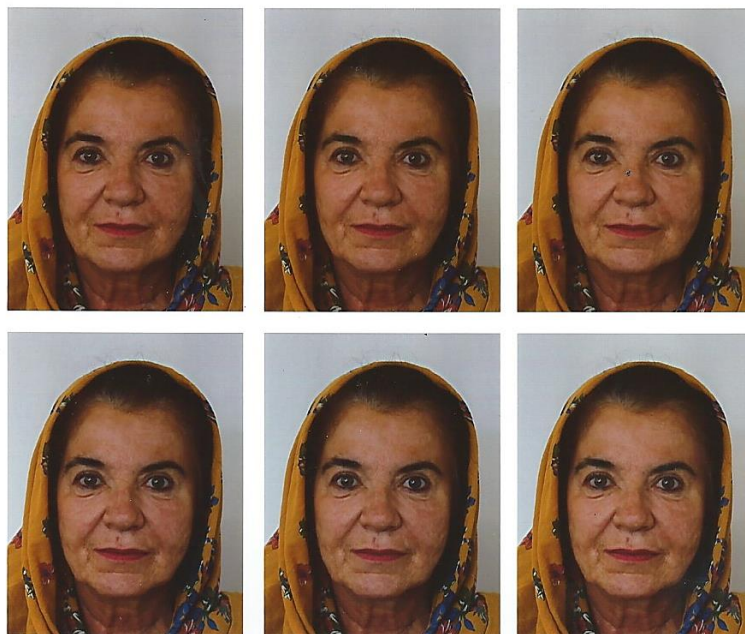
by the broader Italian community due to their political leanings. She too was *othered* in both the Australian community and the Italo-Australian community.

In the following passport photographs, I use one line to describe and give insight into each woman's life journey.

You can only wear that scarf for religious reasons (2016)



Figure 60. We lived in the Bamiyan valley. It was a beautiful place. Then we had to leave.



Your photos were taken on
17/01/2017
Not valid for identity purposes after
16/07/2017



Figure 61. I was an engineer working in Kabul University as a lecturer and researcher



Figure 62. My secondary schooling was in an underground school.



Figure 63. I was educated in Pakistan. I am a botanist and a teacher.



Figure 64. I did not finish school because the Taliban banned all girls from an education



Figure 65. I was a psychologist in my country.



Figure 66. I worked with my husband in our business.



Figure 67. I set up underground school for girls in Afghanistan and Quetta.



Figure 68. I had just finished my last year of nursing when the Taliban came. We had to flee.



Figure 69. I was 60 when I got on a boat to come to Australia.



Figure 70. I was a midwife, tended to all the new mothers, and babies.



Figure 71. The Taliban took four of my sons.

In terms of the current attitudes towards the Muslim community, this series of passport photos might be interpreted as “persons of interest”. Passport photos are meant to be neutral, the story of the person in the photo is somewhat blanked out. While the photos do adhere to Australian standards, there are obvious differences, such as the way a head is tilted, how open the eyes are, or a slightly upturned mouth. The lighting in the passport photos is also different and ranges from harsh to soft. I also applied theatre make-up to alter my appearance and age me, which worked well against the harsher lighting.

The photographs document slight differences in expression that reflected the women’s individual narratives - the pain of leaving; dead children; disappeared relatives; bombed homes; genocide and persecution; and new lives beginning. In hindsight the experience of being the other was not only exhilarating but frightening. Being the other meant that I encountered experiences described by the women in my study such as feeling intimidated,

invisible, or too visible, depending on where they were. This work achieved my objective, it aligned my memories of being othered, with the Hazara women's experience of otherness, as exemplified in the following statement from one of the women I interviewed: "In my community in Dandenong, no one really sees me. Sometimes I am in other parts of Melbourne, people look at me like I am strange. Maybe it isn't so, but it's what I feel sometimes" (H, personal communication, November 2015).

Their Worry Beads are my Rosary Beads - Film

This short film sees a poor struggling Italy in the grip of fascism. Throughout the film, *Mamma mia dammi cento lire*, an Old Italian folk song is sung which literally translates as 'Mum, give me one hundred dollars'. It tells of a daughter asking her mother for money to immigrate to Australia (in the original America). This song speaks of the mother's dread and anger. Nonetheless, she hands over a 'handful of fear' - the money. On the way to Australia, the ship sinks and the mother's fear comes to bear as her child drowns when the ship sinks and only memories of her daughter remain.

The film speaks to what we hope for and we fear most, happening simultaneously. This resonates with the drownings of asylum seekers off the coast of Australian islands as well the numerous deaths in the Mediterranean in recent years. There is also a sense of history repeating in later generations with the view that any risk is worth the price of freedom.

The melancholic singing, in conjunction with the women's narratives operate as the exhibition's soundtrack. The women's narratives are also heard as part of the soundscape and though their voices range in tone and volume they blend with the song. By using the Italian song as the dominant soundtrack, my aim was to produce a haunting quality, evoking

memories, ancestors and an otherworldliness. In the Split Faces, discussed below, I also aimed to create a sense of realms colliding or past and present merging.

Split Faces.

This set of works was in development from the early stages of my candidature. The first photograph (Fig. 72) was produced for the Piers Festival in Melbourne in 2014. It was further developed into a series of split face photographs inspired by Italian Brazilian artist Anna Maria Maiolino's work *Por um Fio (By a Thread, 1976)* (Fig. 49). The story of the split faces began when I sourced an old photograph of my grandmother and one of me at similar ages. I noticed an uncanny likeness and saw myself in my grandmother, in our expressions and features, particularly in the mouth and eyes. More photographs were found of my mother, my older daughter, my niece and youngest daughter. Again, I saw a clear link that bound the five of us illustrating the ties that bind us to our ancestors and our imagined futures. I found a 'foreverness' in these photographs: a lingering that settles deep within a full corporeal experience where words have no place. These photographs of four generations told the story of my family's journey to Australia and I drew on the matrilineal link of my grandmother, mother, my niece and two daughters and myself.

In the first photograph, *Nonna sono Io* (Nonna is me), I retained the original colours which highlighted the stark difference between the 1930's and the present (Fig. 72). However, the separation of past and present merged despite my attempts to highlight the generational changes in the photographs. The faces absorbed into each other and the two women merged forming an unbreakable connection.



Figure 72. Nonna sono io (Stellato Pledger, 2014)

In the second group, *Quattro Cinque Generazione* (Four, Five Generation), I showed the melding between generations, and applied sepia across all the photographs and recreated them as drawings (Fig. 73). Though the quality and texture of the older photographs of my grandmother and mother were very different from those of my daughters and myself, through merging the photographs I created a family link. I manipulated similar photos into split faces. Then changed the photo into a drawing and used different photographs (Fig. 74). I used original colour or black and white photographs and split the faces of my grandmother, mother and my girls into one photo (Fig. 75). These photographs prompted me to inquire about relationships between the Hazaras and their daughters. Many precious photos were lost on the journey to Australia and conversations about the concept of the mother, children and extended family aroused their sense of belonging. But for some, connecting with one's ancestral lineage presented as a deep loss. The women who had to leave their children behind described "an ache to the depths of their soul" (J, personal communication) . Though inconsolable grief was a common theme, it remained silent.



Figure 73. Quattro Cinque Generazione (Stellato Pledger, 2017)



Figure 74. Quattro Cinque Generazione (Stellato Pledger 2017)



Figure 75. Quattro, Cinque Generazione (Stellato Pledger, 2017)

Salcedo's *Plegaria Muda* (2008-2010) speaks to the grief the women's stories tell. Neshat's works of Iranian women lost in a world shaped by a patriarchal society also

attempts to demonstrate what repression does to one's inner being and in turn how that world creates the need to run or be separated from the ties that bind.

From conversations with the Hazara women, about links to ancestors and loss of connection, I began more work on the split faces. Though this part of the project is linked to the discussions with the women, they are autoethnographic. The split faces are both a separate yet connected story. Allende (2017) speaks to the concept of a collective story that is complete when other narratives or characters are included. The women's narrative informed my creation of the split faces (Tedlock, 1991) and studying the Hazara women revealed elements of my life in ways I had not anticipated. I finally chose to develop my photographs into four separate split photographs for the exhibition. I separated the photographs and highlighted and differentiated between generations that illustrate the journey of ancestral connection.



Figure 76. Elisabetta Stellato (*nee* Passarelli), Mother, grandmother, great grandmother.

My grandmother's photograph is the focus and my mother, my three girls and myself were created around her. The face in the above photograph (Fig. 76) affected me in terms of ancestral memory and belonging. I always felt I was looking at someone familiar. I had this

experience many times when she was alive, as did she. When I went to Italy soon after my grandmother's death, I met her first cousin who cried saying repeatedly (in Italian) "The face of Elisabeth. She is back, a miracle".



Figure 77. Granddaughter and grandmother (Nipote e Nonna)

I saw extraordinary similarities between my grandmother and two of my daughters and myself. Only the eldest child had met her great-grandmother. However, I merged the youngest daughter with the great grandmother whom she had never met.



Figure 78. Great granddaughter and Great grandmother (Pronipote e Bis Nonna)

While all three girls had excellent relationships with my mother (their grandmother), my niece had spent the most time with her. In the photograph below, she and my mother merge beautifully.



Figure 79. Granddaughter and grandmother (Nipote e Nonna)



Figure 80. Mother and daughter (mamma e figlia)

My eldest daughter is merged with me, our faces are quite similar, but our skin tones help to accentuate the join or line of the photographs. However, at the time this photo was taken, she was pregnant and another generation begins.

While working on these photographs, I was often reminded of Calabrian, Italian-Brazilian artist Anna Maria Maiolino's photograph *Por Um Fio* (By a Thread, 1976, Fig. 49). The way she connected her mother, daughter and self in the photograph by a thread or string also inspired my work with the split faces and the concept of ancestors (Figs. 73-75) to highlight the connection between generations. Maiolino's thread is reminiscent in the photograph of the line dividing the split faces. In both Maiolino's *Por Um Fio* and the split faces the thread or line of connection is strong.

The Poetry:

The prose and poems unite each section of the exhibition as well as collectively and individually connecting the experiences of the Calabrian and Hazaras. *Walking with my Ancestors* (Fig. 81) came from conversations with my grandmother Elisabetta Stellato which I documented over a number of years from 1989-1994. I also used poems, old films and photographs to create the prose. I then drew from the specific elements of my documentation that corresponded to the Hazara narratives. *No Title* is from a recorded impromptu poem by Zakia Baig, a spoken word poet and Founder of the Australian Hazara Women's Friendship Network (AHWFN) (Fig. 82). The prose was inspired after a vigil in Federation Square in Melbourne for dead and injured Hazaras after the Kabul bombing on July 23rd, 2016. *I am Here* was developed from discussions and conversations with the Hazara women. (Fig. 83).

Walking with my Ancestors

*A Lifetime of Memories will live on in the
Heart and minds of our children
Our children's children and their children
We cannot count the stars at night without
Being reminded of the thousands that have died
And will die in this war and the wars to come
Our children are not the end; they are the beginning.
It is for the future we must be strong
A thousand winds blow the stories I hold in my heart,
As I pass my greatest possession, inherited memory to the
Children's children and their children.*

Figure 81.

No Title

*I live in black, my home is dark
I call a cave, my home in rocks
My feet bleed
It hurts sometimes, my feet when bleed
I walk to my home always bare feet
I fear at night, when shadows talk,
I wish I had a home with windows
Where light could push out all the shadows
I wish I had a home with windows*

Figure 82. Zakia Baig (2016)

I am Here

*I have citizenship,
I have a house. I live with my community.
My husband is dead.
My children are scattered
Like dust across the world
I grieve for the loss of my family, of my land,
Of the bright sun,
As it sets in the Bamiyan Valley
The Buddhas blown up,
My heart no longer sings with hope
I speak with ghosts,
As they shimmer in the Australian sun
I am here,
But a refugee always until I find my way home*

Figure. 83

The Exhibition Space

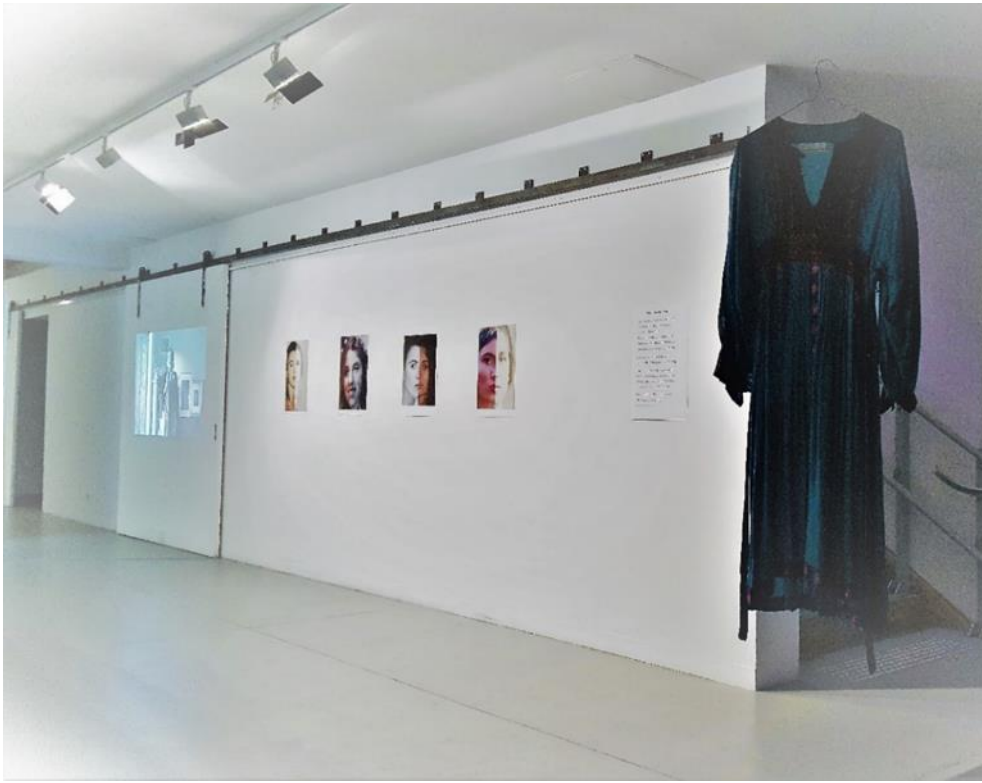


Figure 84. Right side and front of exhibiting space.



Figure 85. Right Wall

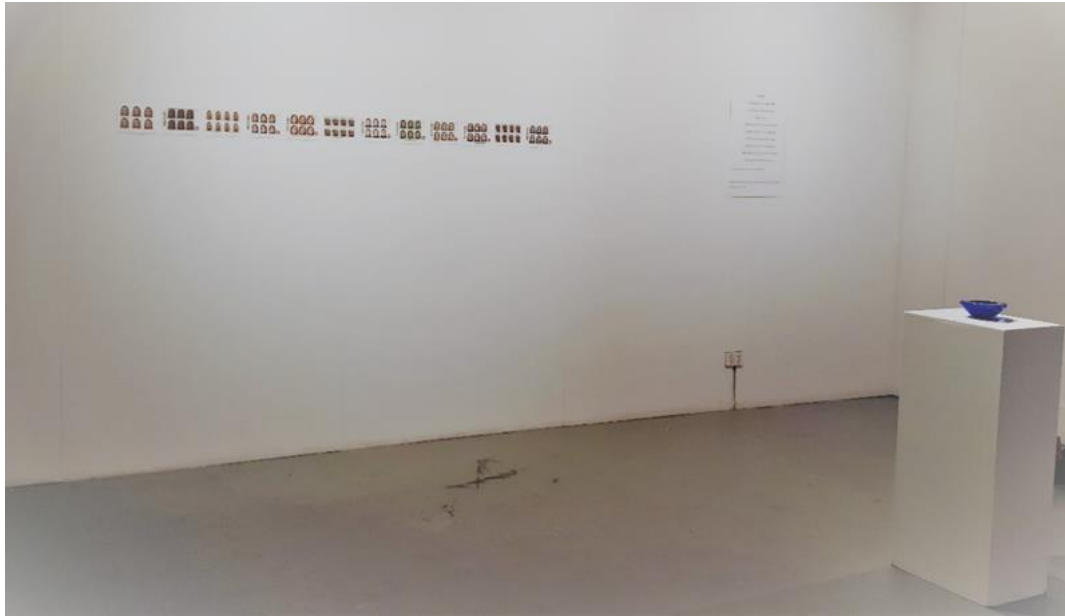


Figure 86. Back and left wall



Figure 87. Left wall

Conclusion

When I first commenced this PhD, the over-arching question was whether storytelling assisted the Hazara women's movement through the liminal space. As the project developed it became about the commonalities between two very diverse cultures. I have always felt that if one perceives a culture different from one's own and questions the possibility of similarities, it could create greater potential for acceptance. However, the concept of commonalities between these two cultures created an opportunity for me to explore the process of *becoming other* in performance.

While I adopted qualitative traditions located within a social science methodology, I also employed artistic research that involved creative responses to the conversations, observations and interviews with Hazara women. In short, this work developed into a hybrid thesis. Therefore, what I originally deemed as "findings" from Hazara data become observations. I realised there was not the unfolding narrative from the participants with supporting quotes and evidence from literature consistent with a social science thesis. Conversely, this creative led project is a transformation of the data using artistic means. I did draw on my interviews with the women and used their quotes as evidence to support and inform the artwork. But the conclusions I came to through observations were achieved via creative methods.

In effect I took myself on a long journey through methodologies located in qualitative traditions coupled with the application of creative research to reach my contribution to new knowledge. This knowledge speaks to the video and photographic work in the exhibition that summarises the social and political issues revealed through the interviews with the women whereby the artwork enacts a potent political demonstration of their experiences and to perceptively render that visible.

The process of becoming other by applying empathy, instinct, affect, interspersed with *magic realism*, brought into play a new or different performance approach. This in turn contributes to new knowledge in visual performance arts. Throughout the process I endeavoured to understand how the other copes with the chaotic experiences of coming to a new country. The aim of the artwork was to engender the capacity “to other” in the audience. Further, it asks the audience to step aside from their own experiences whilst viewing the work and experience or consider what it is to be another. Ultimately, I aim to affect the audience in order that they are transformed, like the quote by Vyasa in the beginning of the Mahabharata, “If you listen carefully, at the end you’ll be someone else” (Vedavyasa M, 1951).

The thesis addresses storytelling, liminality and the process of adapting to a new culture. It acknowledges a little known area in relation to cultural commonalties between Hazaras and Calabrians that sits in the liminal space. Furthermore, the thesis explores liminality through the lived experiences of both cultures.

The observations suggest that when the narratives of older refugee and migrant women have been heard, there may have been a shift in what many described in the study as ‘feeling invisible’. The years of working as an artist activist through a human rights lens meant I connected with women in ways that supported my sense of transnational feminism as well as a transnational identity. Working with the Hazara women, who by all accounts are perceived without agency, reiterated the importance of identifying and transcending differences and boundaries while simultaneously creating a camaraderie between women. Being born during the early feminist movement of the 60’s in Australia, I watched first-hand how my mother and grandmother dispelled myths of the southern Italian immigrant. My mother, as far as I know, was the first Italian-born woman to go to the University of Melbourne medical school, while my grandmother ran the family business as well as involved herself in political

activities. Notwithstanding she was knowledgeable across all English and Italian linguistic competencies. Being raised by such determined women, who also understood the way feminism intersected across race, ethnicity and gender was a privilege. However, my mother had an overwhelming desire to belong. To that end, she removed any trace of an accent when she went to university and married a non-Italian. The Hazara women echoed similar sentiments, particularly in terms of education, language and belonging. However, unlike my family, marrying outside of their culture was not acceptable to most of the women.

The PhD process taught me much about myself as the granddaughter and daughter of exiles. I came to appreciate more fully the situation of my grandmother and mother as they negotiated a new world. I understood the fear of repeated rejection and my mother's desire to belong. Being in Melbourne University's predominately white Anglo-Saxon world would have made her desire to be like "them" all encompassing. My mother's fears for me as someone who looked ethnic, saddened me at times. Yet despite her fears and contradictions, I was always encouraged to follow my passion, demonstrating the strong influence of both my mother and grandmother.

Incorporating my dead grandmother into the script is indicative of the affect she has had on my life. Creating her character was akin to bringing her back to life as the influence of the Calabrian ghost stories and superstitions assisted in the characters conception. She personified elements of life that cannot be explained, but linked the tangible world to mystical realms. By bringing the dead to life, poetic license enabled unrestricted reign in the script's growth. My grandmother's presence represented the power of women, the soothsayer, the physic or witch.

This has been a multi-layered project and one which has required me to understand connections, find commonalities and allow instinct and empathy to assist in the development

of the artwork. During this candidature, immigration policies have constantly changed and this has impacted on my research project with the women withdrawing from filming or being identifiable. Prior to the 2016 election, many of the women were happy to be in a publicly shown film. However, when anti-Islam and immigration rhetoric flooded newspapers (Kenny & Koziol, 2016), most of the women chose complete anonymity. I found that I had to reassess my approach to the artwork. This was reflected in the numerous shifts in ideas which meant the script was in consistent flux.

When I completed the artwork, I wanted input from the women in my study. This proved quite difficult as some of the women had moved and their whereabouts were unknown. It was not uncommon for women to “disappear” for periods of time. From this perspective the women were still very much in a transient space, and from experience with my family, the Hazara women and other communities in which I worked, this can prove to be a lengthy process. While the AHWFN provided excellent opportunities, such as every Friday assisting with skills to develop independence such as driving, citizenship and language classes, not all in my study participants attended regularly. From a researcher’s viewpoint this inconsistency did create impositions in terms of time constraints.

What I found quite distinctive about the relationships with some of the women was their strong sense of sisterhood. A connection the women respected as it denotes the connection between women regardless of blood ties. It also is indicative of a bond based on commitment to the women’s movement on some level. Ostensibly, their concept of sisterhood speaks to the collective struggle of women through their activism. The young Hazara and Afghan artists discussed in this project have all exercised their own brand of feminism. They fearlessly take to the streets, construct photo journals, and attend art classes to create works that challenge the patriarchy working in Afghanistan today. They are assisted through the

transfeminism movement, via the internet, through exhibitions across the Middle East and Europe and are involved with feminism on a global level through their art and activism.

Uncovering similarities between diverse groups is a focus that I would like to research further with communities across Australia, applying narrative inquiry in conjunction with becoming other approach. From the outside, the Hazaras and Calabrians could not appear more different, but just below the surface there is a wealth of shared experiences that speaks to the commonality of the human spirit. This is where narrative inquiry and indeed the process of becoming other has been most effective in this project

Though I have embraced the virtues of narrative inquiry in all its forms, including walking with video, I am aware, as with any methodology it is not without its critics. Sinclair Bell (2002) discusses its limitations in terms of time commitment, that it is unsuitable for larger groups and that the “constructed narrative and subsequent analysis illuminates the researcher as much as the participants” (p. 210). She also considers that the exchange of stories is understood within the larger frame of friendship and the researcher may find it difficult to disengage at the end of a project. Sheila Trahar (2000) raises three criticisms that need to be acknowledged, “if you are a story teller rather than a story analyst, then your goal becomes therapeutic rather than analytic” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 45). Narrative inquiry can run the risk of being therapeutic, however this study is not a mental health study with a psychologically therapeutic objective. It is an investigation through narratives, storytelling and walking with video that speaks to an in-between space that refugee women or indeed any migrant may find themselves. If there are therapeutic consequences to this study, it would be coincidental and I hope positive, as the stories in this study aim to give voice to a marginalised community of women.

Another allegation is that narration can be re-presented as if they were authentic when autobiographical accounts are no more “authentic than other modes of representation: a narrative of a personal experience is not a clear route into the truth', either about the reported events, or of the teller's private experience (...) 'experience' is constructed through the various forms of narrative” (Atkinson & Delmont, 2006, p. 166).

Fox (2008) stresses the need for the researcher to be mindful and resist what he defines as "a globalised, homogenised, impoverished system of meaning" (p. 341) and ensure that the individual as opposed to group lived experience are represented. Josselson (1996) further discusses issues surrounding people's stories and placing them into a larger narrative and that the imposed meanings and effects of re-storying can be very powerful. Additionally, the participant may never be free of a researcher's interpretation of their lived experiences.

Chataika (2005) gives an overall view of criticism of narrative inquiry. She discusses questions of 'truth' and validity; the difficulty for a single story to capture the range and richness of people's experiences the suppression of stories that may not fit with the researcher's outcomes or research agenda; and problems moving from lives to texts (Goodley, 2000). There is also the likelihood of misrepresentation of facts through translating speech to a variety of writing genres which would pollute the whole story. However, when combining walking with video, I believe there is less chance of this happening as the stories are filmed. On revisiting the film, the women's physicality and expressions are seen, their voices are heard thereby a more holistic view of the narrative is apparent.

One of the most common criticisms of narrative inquiry is that samples are small, thus limiting. However, the extended observation or extensive interviewing of the narrative approach necessitates small samples and is more likely to achieve a depth and richness which empirical research involving larger samples is unlikely to produce (Dhunpath, 2000).

Regardless of its pitfalls, narrative inquiry is considered a very useful model in social and indeed anthropological research. For this study, narrative inquiry, combined with walking with video, is most appropriate in terms of developing an understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Whether or not stories from narratives are facts, opinions or lies, the aim is “what a narrative story can tell us, as well as what it does not tell us [and this] can open up work for research” (Krog, 1999, p. 49). Krog continues, “what one believes to be true depends on who you believe yourself to be” (p. 49). What he is emphasizing is that a fact is already an interpretation. Generally, most factual statements are contextually evaluated by the human agents implicated in the open-ended events, or by researchers trying to read meaning into what people do and say. In terms of narrative research and relevant branches, its significance is to promote and provoke thoughts, commentary and further research as to what readers, activist and researchers may embark on next. According to Chataika (2005), the following is consistent with my research in that the goal of investigative narrative research can be “justified if it involves using stories that are worth telling; that have moral and political purpose to effect positive change in policy and practice, and that progress understanding” (p. 7).

From my experience of working in marginalised and refugee communities, I have found that older women are overlooked and that our policies do not enable these women to either work in their past profession or apply their vast skills and experiences to develop new sustainable proficiencies that will allow them to work in environments that gives them a sense of purpose and meaning.

While many of the women struggled with adapting to a new culture, I found that working with the women from an arts storytelling perspective, put them in a position of authority.

They were sharing their knowledge and educating me on life in Afghanistan, as asylum seekers and as “new” Australians. As the women told their personal stories and socio-political challenges in Afghanistan and Quetta, they were adamant I understood their narratives. When I related their stories back from the perspective of my mother and grandmother’s experiences, they were then clear I had understood. This suggests that sharing stories, information and life experiences with other ethnic groups with similar experiences would be mutually beneficial to the other ethnic groups.

In terms of recommendations, I find myself applying my knowledge as a researcher, artist, human rights advocate, and educator. I propose the inclusion of artists, arts organisations, community groups and health services as well as the education sector to work collaboratively in respect to the resettlement needs of older female refugees. While there are several programs available, I suggest that they must be specific to connecting newer arrivals to the broader community inclusive of Australians and other ethnic and faith communities.

To this end, further research using a multidisciplinary arts approach into commonalities between diverse cultures is recommended. For example, introducing different ethnic groups by collaborating on arts-based projects; using arts programs in language development to assist with work place readiness or further education; and more arts funding opportunities that attend to the needs of newer arrivals in collaboration with established ethnic communities are just a few suggestions.

What is most important is that those who settle in Australia have the best chance possible to find a peaceful existence. While the bombs may have stopped, the women in this project, including my grandmother revealed that there is a whistling inside their head - their own internal bomb ticking as they adapt to a new land so different from their own. Many remain haunted by memories of dead children, parents, friends and homes. These memories do not

go away when an environment changes. They are part of the women, and intrinsic to understanding refugee women in Australia.

Finally, while a number of approaches have been applied throughout this research, which in effect speaks to the open-endedness of my methodology, it is the artwork that has the dominant voice. The data collection, immersion into the Hazara community, the literature review, sifting through my family history, and working with empathy and otherness are methodologies that created the artwork. The artworks produced for the thesis bring to life the difficulties facing the Hazara women through the dramatization of socio-political issues revealed through interviews with a number of women. The artworks are a compelling social and political manifestation of their experiences.

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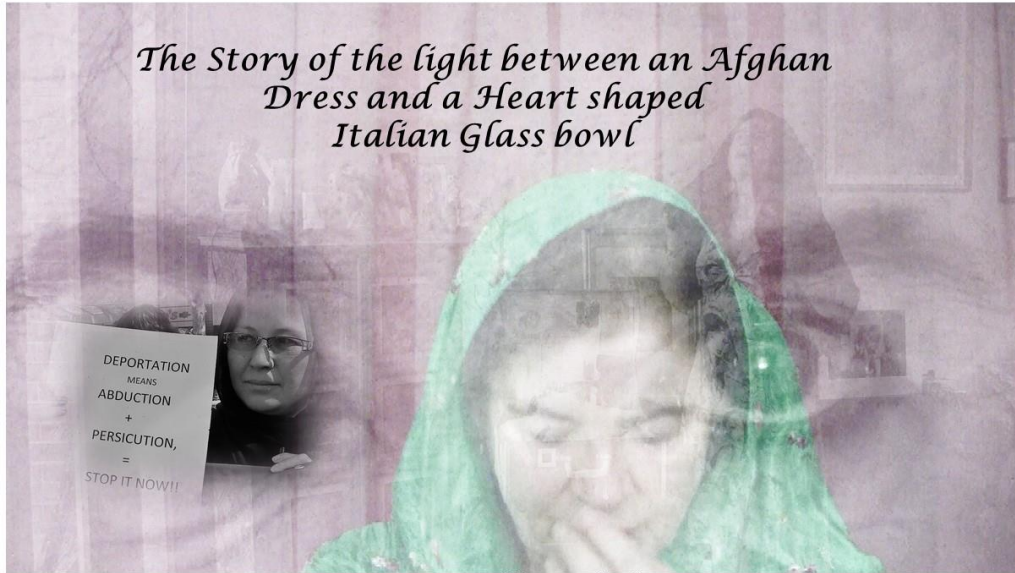
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Appendices

Appendix A: Script Covers

Front Cover



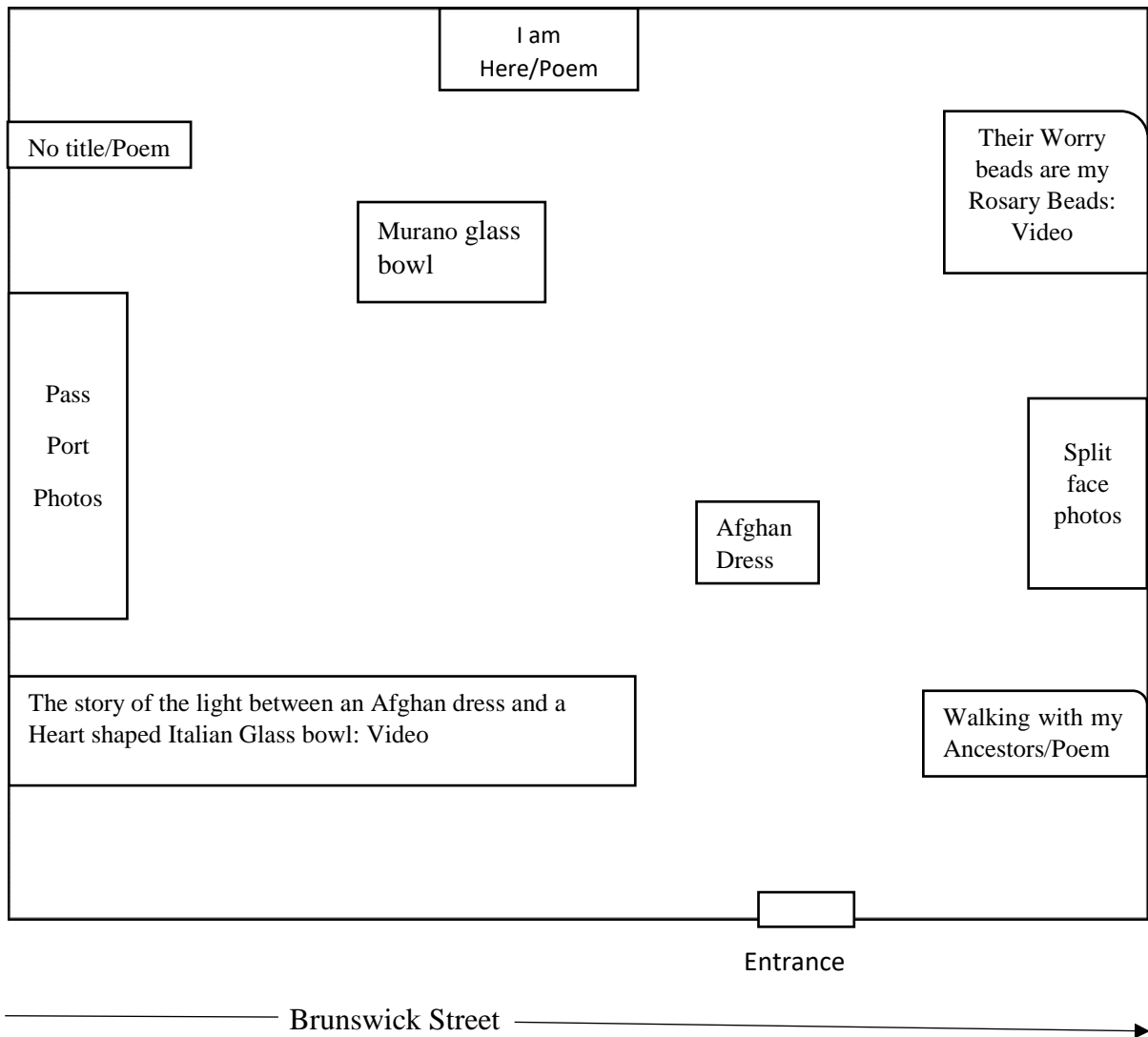
Jema Stellato Pledger

Back Cover



Jema Stellato Pledger

Appendix B: Exhibition Room Sheet



Exhibition Space

ACU Melbourne Gallery

26 Brunswick St, Fitzroy VIC , Australia

Jema Stellato Pledger PhD Candidate Exhibition

Appendix C: Program of Exhibition

Narratives from the liminal space: the commonalities of older Afghan Hazara women and Calabrian exiles through theories of storytelling and creative-led research

Listing:

1. Afghan Dress – Circa: 1970
2. Projection screen 1- Calabrian woman singing an old Italian folk song about her daughter's imminent death if she journey's to Australia
3. Spilt faces- these photographs speak to the ancestral memory
 - a. Grandmother and granddaughter – Artist and her grandmother
 - b. Great grandmother and great granddaughter – Artists daughter and artists grandmother
 - c. Mother and Daughter – Artist's and eldest daughter
 - d. Grandmother and granddaughter- Artist's niece and artist's mother.
4. Italian heart-shaped bowl from southern Italy circa: 1927.
5. Projection screen 2. Hazara and Italian interwoven narratives that speak to commonalities between the cultures. Past and present move simultaneously through the in between or liminal space.
6. Passport photos: A series of photos taken in diverse suburbs of Melbourne based on the 12 Hazara women in the study. Each photograph's short text narrates a particular period in each woman's life.
7. No title: Poem by Hazara poet and community leader Zakia Baig
8. Walking with my Ancestors: Poem from conversations with my grandmother.
9. I am Here: Poem from conversations with the Hazara women

Human Research Ethics Committee
Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr Catherine Bell

Co-Investigators:

Student Researcher: Jema Stellato Pledger

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:

Disturbing the Storm: Investigating older Afghan Hazara women: Finding a space within Australia to negotiate a sense of identity and belonging during the first decades of the 21st Century
for the period: 30/06/2016

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: 2015-8H

This is to certify that the above application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee (ACU HREC). The application has been approved for the period given above.

Researchers are responsible for ensuring that all conditions of approval are adhered to, that they seek prior approval for any modifications and that they notify the HREC of any incidents or unexpected issues impacting on participants that arise in the course of their research. Researchers are also responsible for ensuring that they adhere to the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*, the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* and the University's *Code of Conduct*.

Any queries relating to this application should be directed to the Research Ethics Manager (resethics.manager@acu.edu.au).

Kind regards



Date 13/12/2017

Research Ethics Manager

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