

School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts

Iraqi memory in performance:

**Life narratives, creativity and strategies of artist during and after
war. Historical memory, Refugees and performance**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature: N.J

Date: 14/9/2012

Dedication

I dedicate this project to Ali, to refugees' memories from all walks of life and to my friends the Aboriginal people of Australia. We are unfinished stories.

All our crises
are because of the lack of respect
for memory.

(Kantor "Text" 23)

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(Photo from Iraqi Nights performance 2012) by researcher

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Background

My position as a researcher in this project stems from my upbringing, education and training in arts (specifically in theatre) in Iraq, my subsequent lengthy and involved experiences in exile and my work with local and exiled multi-ethnic communities in Iraq, Pakistan and Australia.

I was a young child at the coming to power of the Ba'ath regime in 1968 and a late teenager at the inception of Saddam Hussein's leadership in 1979, during which time I was a university student. As an Iraqi artist, I lived through the sacking of libraries and destruction of books, memories and I have witnessed it all again with different targets, in more recent visits to Iraq since 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012.

Further details in the background:

I lived in countries that treat artists as dangerous people, not even as citizens in their own countries. I can say it as loud as I can; there is no such thing called human rights anywhere sometimes.

- 11/6/1985. I ran away from Iraq in student uniform, white shirt, black shoes, grey pants with \$5 in my pocket.

I walked for fourteen days in and between the mountains, villages, valleys in Kurdistan. The Kurdish people's generosity and hospitality will stay in my heart the rest of my life. They gave me their last loaf of bread and shared with me their last meal. This experience can be described as my first cultural experience into the world of learning a word in a new language. In Kurdistan, there were the entire Iraqi Political parties from left to right and between. I mixed and lived with them without having a political opinion about anything. As an artist, my artworks speak rather than having a political party such as left of right. Sometimes I am wondering why an artist or a poet needs to be in a political party!

In Kurdistan almost all the Iraqi opposition political parties were present. I couldn't stay for long and I wanted to leave but where to go this time?

The Turkish government signed a deal with the dictators in the region including Iraq; if a refugee is arrested crossing the border with Turkey, the Turkish government will

send the refugees back to Saddam Hussein. The Gulf Countries will never accept an Iraqi refugee crossing their borders and a refugee will be send back to Iraq and killed by Iraqi authorities if they arrested.

The remaining option is hard to choose, there are only two directions. Go to the Iran border, where Iran is at war with Iraq or go to Syria.

To cross the border to go to Syria I needed a support letter from a political party. If I wanted to have this letter, I must become a member of this/that political party!

What a mess, I thought let's try the enemy's ordeals. I love Iran and Iranian people and I have the most beautiful friends from Iran and we shared lots of our stories together.

- 1986. Welcome to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

There were about one million refugees and deported people from Iraq 1980, a million sad memories and experiences. One of those experiences was seeing a child less than nine month old deported from his country. The history of Iraq and Iran is full of shame and historical hate and wars of imperialism.

It wasn't a bad experience compared to others still living in Iran and those who went back to Iraq in 2003. Three years, nine months and nine days wasted in a detention centre "*Karaj Comp*" in Tehran, until November 1989 and four months and twenty-four days in "*Abbas Abad*" jail, in Tehran because I was trying to run way from Iran and I was arrested with an Iraqi fake passport, rather than an Iranian passport. Time to cross the border again but where to this time? I didn't have any belongings, and how could anyone who lives like me have belonging.

- 1990. Welcome, where to go now?

Welcome to Quetta City, welcome to Pakistan. I cross the border without legal papers because of the deal with our smuggler.

- Welcome to the first organisation called the United Nation High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Sub-Quetta, where I am given the number 424.

I didn't waste my time after the registration when I realised in less than a day that there is no such things as human rights or values in this organisation. I will never forgive the Production Officers in UNHCR for their treatment to me and all refugees in Quetta City, Pakistan 1989-2000. We were simply reduced to animals because of the wars in Iraq and the cultural background of those Protection Officers.

Welcome, where to go now?

- 1990-91. I crossed the border to India from Lahore but I couldn't make it, and I returned back to Pakistan.

I waited seven years, three months and twenty-two days for my application to process for the resettlement. I spent eleven years of my life running from one border to another.

- 1996. I was working as a mime teacher at the French Culture Centre and as a theatre director with the Pakistan Nation Council of Arts Islamabad, Pakistan.

I met lots of people from many walks of life there and I became a story among creative artists, poets, singers, musicians and mime artists. In my last performance titled "The Rain of Silent" at the American School of Art, Islamabad, Pakistan. The performance helped me to have the visa and enter Australia.

There will be a mirror, somewhere in our hearts and minds that can enable us to share our stories in arts, regardless of our nationalities, political view and historical conflicts.

Abstract:

The *Iraqi Memory Project* is practice-led research: How can an artistic inquiry further the exchanges between historical events and life narratives in performance?

This thesis comprises: 1) my autobiographical sketches about my experiences in and out of Iraq for the last 31 years of my life.

2) Data in interviews and questionnaires with refugees and exiled Iraqi artists.² The data transformed into transcripts and used in the creative process of Participatory Action Research (PAR) with Australian performers for presentation of the *Iraqi Nights* performance.

This thesis contains:

In the first chapter, my autobiographical sketches combine the stories of leaving and returning home with my reflections and analyses to these journeys. Second is the poetic form of these narratives entitled: Rooms

In the second chapter, I reflect on interviews with Iraqi exiled artists (aged 45-78) about their lived experiences and creative artworks. The data was gathered through semi-structured and narrative interviews. The ethnographic account is from the native Iraqi point of view and reflects on everyday life stories. It is all about our memories and how we precise our experiences, a live memory versus unfinished memories in time.

In the third chapter, I wrote about the process of making the performance *Iraqi Nights* as a cultural production that can play a significant role in communicating historical events as exposed to multiple influences through everyday life narratives and making in performing arts.

I have made an electronic version for the performance as documentation of the project online: www.vimeo.com/ommi/

Introduction

Robert Wilson in his conversation with Fred Newman, Newman asked him: “What does theatre mean to you, why you do theatre?” He replied “a place where Raymond Andrews, someone who was going to be locked up in an institution, could be heard” (Schechner & Friedman 118). Here I am narrating where theatre is a meeting place, even a room for a story to be told and to be heard.

I speak and work in varieties of cultures and sets of languages that create a multiple sense of realities, all of which interact in this writing. I wake up in the morning thinking in Arabic. I start thinking in Farsi or Kurdish or Urdu after a few moments and a little bit later I (re)start, thinking in English. I am living (in) a variety of languages and cultures.

The following writing is the translation of the researcher’s own voice into English and it is to support the practical development of making *Iraqi Nights* as a performance autoethnography. The Iraqi Memory project is an open project about Iraqi stories, an “open work” with no conclusion; open to new processes and meanings “it posits the work of art stripped of necessary and foreseeable conclusions” (Umberto Eco describes the *Open Work*, 15). The essence in this project relies on the practical development; method and process of bringing the lived experience in performance as a way of knowing. I am very interested in Laurel Richardson's notion of engagement “with how one ‘knows’ and how one ‘tells’ what one knows” (Pelias et al. 260). I have survived the experiences of a refugee crossing borders, from the detention centre environment, political imprisonment and have transformed them into poetry and other artistic creations. One of the purposes of this project is to re-discover how the people most affected by war have managed to find creative perspectives or strategies to deal with it. The research aimed at manifesting Iraqi refugee artist lived experiences, narratives and memories through theatrical activities in the field of performance studies. This is an original art project that interacts between historical events and life histories in performance. The description of refugees and exiled artists’ memories that seek no end; there is no need in art or for anything we create to be finished. Memory is ageless and it “has its own time” and since there is multiple temporality of memory, this is unfinished story, unfinished performance. The experience view is that our ideas

of time are side effects of our constructions to meaning as temporal structures of our attempts to make sense of our experiences.

In this project, I operate through poetry, photography, visual art, mime, song, documentary, light, sets and storytelling as codes of connection. My personal history applied to the notion of oneself in creative mode and that one self is too many selves encompassed in a story.

How to encompass in our mind the complexity of [some] lived moments in life? You don't do that with theories, you don't do that with a system of ideas. You do it with a story (Bochner, "It's about time" 425).

I use the perspective of performance autoethnography as a mode of performance inquiry, a creative action in the process and method to bring Iraqi memories into performance. We are the stories, on a small or big scale, and through our stories we hope to reach each one another. Ellis wrote: "Stories are the way humans make sense of their worlds. stories should (*can*) be both *a subject and a method* of social science research" (Heartful Auto ethnography 127). (Emphases Added) I turn to refugee and exile artist stories with creative and artistic (methods) of connecting my and others stories with the world. I am an "insider/outsider" with an understanding to the code and mode of thinking from an Iraqi native perspective while also having lived in other countries. (Ellis "Survivors" 711).

I was born in an Iraqi artistic and creative poetic environment. I am using in Chapter One of this thesis - poetry as a medium because of its ability to communicate aspects of the stories that are transitory, ephemeral, metaphorical and refracted through memories of events in Iraq. Metaphor is not a strange thing to know about in Arabic or any other languages but *In Memory: an Anthology* the poet Craig Raine wrote: "Memory is like metaphor in its operation" (29). I see almost every narrative, every performance as a form of metaphor in which I encounter the structure of "thematic designs through one's self" (qtd. Wood & Byatt 33). The metaphor and thematic segments are the styles that I dealt with in the creative processes of my performances for the last 23 years. This dramatic performance (not dramatic) and this is to distinguish between living personal state of being between real and unreal world. The real and unreal is change in itself and blends in our memories with our present, thus creating new versions for an experience. I sought to make a connection in real life and

in performance between people's memories of wars and the destruction of human memories, identities, history and cultures. We are nothing without our memories and the arts of our memories. In one of lived moments, I learnt not to give up hope. There is no hope without life and there is no life without hope. Hope is one of the greatest elements of resistance in life and arts.

It is important to distinguish between the two sets of participants in this project:

- The Iraqi artists I interviewed in the documentary film; their original stories (transcripts)
- The Australian participants/performers, who worked on aspects of the Iraqi narratives in the creation of *Iraqi Nights* performance.

The first chapter and transcripts in this thesis form the basis of and points of departure in making the performance autoethnography. The *Iraqi Nights* performance is not the outcome of this research but rather a tool to connect and communicate stories with known and unknown community.

The power of narrative

We narrate what we see and experience either in our inner reality or in our imagination. The power of narrative is the power of our voices to maintain memory in all forms and patterns. The re-telling of stories becomes an option for making human voices heard through forms of conversation and performance. Words form stories that can store history. Words have power, and this is why, under tyranny and in dictatorship, specific words and stories are officially banned and others suffer from self-censorship.

We participate in actions and we get involved in the outcome of events, whether we are or have been the oppressed or the oppressor, victim or witness, powerful or powerless. We engage in the processes that generate the re-telling of collective or individual memory. We reconstruct frameworks of events, memories and imagination, corresponding to historical and/or cultural frames in our memories. The re-consideration of history means it no longer remains a chronicle of the powerful but becomes an account of the voiceless (powerless), silent and dismissed voices of the people. Michel Foucault wrote of the subversive power of history as told by the people: “subjugated knowledges ... which were present but disguised ... and which criticism ... has been able to reveal” (82).

I am, however, interested in having artists: singers, painters, poets, mimes, actors, writers, directors, film-makers, musicians, dancers, composers, performers, stand as mediators between *memory and remembrance*. It is not how individual memory is constructed by collective memory but how remembering can bring forgotten memories that interests me. I use the term memory and remembrance to distinguish between involuntary and voluntary remembering:

involuntary remembering is [more] likely to involve the recall of specific episodes than voluntary remembering, which tends to demonstrate a higher proportion of summary (non-specific) memory recall (Mace et al 20).

I focused on the creative recall of artist into memory and its reflection on past, present and future. I focused on how to articulate the past and learn from it rather than looking at the past as frozen point. Furthermore, Mace et al suggest a number of theoretical conclusions:

involuntary and voluntary memories have the same underlying format and that they differ primarily in their retrieval processes. Second, because the appearance of the observer perspective has been used to argue for the view that autobiographical memories are reconstructions of the past, rather than retrieved copies of it (ibid 22).

In remembering and forgetting there are many attempts to promote one truth at the expense of another. Effective communication processes between the self and others rely on the complexities of re-remembering the forced changes in the social fabric during peace and war on the one hand and reflecting on forgotten personal memories on the other. Remembering the past “it becomes the struggle for the truth” (Brockmeier 15). Equally, turning a blind eye to the past becomes the struggle for truth and even the struggle to forget becomes a struggle for the truth. Every passing moment becomes the struggle for truth, a moment of truth. The ability to communicate with these live entities of memory is the ability to re-localise “ourselves in [...], time and history”. I in the moment of living time, life narrative and in performance where we can share understandings of the lived moment impacts on everyday life and the continuing interplay of meanings in historical events (Brockmeier 28). It is our associations with time and various social groups that meant continue mediate in every day live narratives and historical events. Performance is an open field that offers strategies to resist and expose, interpret the confinements of narratives in history, memory and conversation of everyday.

“What use now, or ever, to trawl through memory in search of the grounds of values?” (Kershaw 159) Under the subtitle “The End of Narrative History” Baz Kershaw writes: “At the end of the twentieth century, history is not what it was. Telling a true tale about the past, whether at micro-level of performance practice or the macro-level of global cultures has never been more difficult”. (160) Kershaw explains that this is because “new critical theory, and postmodern theory in particular, has eliminated all the familiar historiographic markers” (160) leading to the critical awareness that “history is profoundly volatile and a matter of acute contestation” and that “there is not much difference between the writing of history and fiction” (161). It also presupposes true tales. The crisis in narrative or “official” history leads Kershaw to inquire as to “how history might be authored through performance by *almost anyone at any time*” (162) (Emphasis added).

This is a key question for me since I am ‘*almost anyone*’ – a refugee artist from Iraq – attempting to author a version of historical events through the performance. The authority of this particular version of history will be highly suspect since I tell my own and other tales from the perspective of the victims of history. Once again Kershaw’s work offers useful and hopeful suggestions. He states that the act of asking how the past might be performed by almost anyone at anytime “requires a shift in focus of attention from history to memory and from historical research through *documents to process* for recalling past events” (162) (Emphasis added). My interests are a little different to Kershaw’s since I am not so directly concerned with the issue of how the past might be performed but how live narrative and refugee, exiled artists stories brought into performance, whereas Kershaw is concerned with the complexities of doubling of memory *in* performance.

Performance, Memory and Refugees

“A narrative ethnography is a story or *performance* that intends to open up conversation among diverse people about (diverse) dimensions of socially encompassing issues such as race, gender...,” (Ellis “Which way”⁴⁹⁵) (Emphases Added)

Performance, encompassing multiply moments of lived experience and interact with personal and socio-cultural narratives, with view of self, others and cultures. [M]any qualitative researchers have been putting an emphasis on “impressionist and artistic aspects in qualitative work [to show the] complexities of concrete moments of lived experience” (cut in Josselson & Lieblich 200). (Emphases Added). My concern is more how this emphasis took place in dealing with refugee stories, where “truth unveiled itself there only by veiling itself” (Bourdieu 438). The truth itself is veiling in creative and artistic reading to once own narratives and others to live moments.

Zangana notes:

Writing objectively or comprehensively about those thirty-five years of Ba’ath rule is not easy. It is well-known that the regime discouraged social and economic research ... Furthermore, in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion, in addition to the initial looting and burning of books, people were too scared to keep books that featured Saddam’s photograph or that dealt with his regime, despite the fact that every official publication under Saddam had to include his picture ... The De-Ba’athification Committee, set up under the occupation, has directed the last blow to anyone hoping to understand that period through independent research and historical documentation (56).

Furthermore, during the invasion of Iraq 2003, the USA took most of the historical documentation of Saddam Hussein era and no Iraqis have an access to it. In response to such facts, there is no access to historical memory left except through the narratives of people who witnessed the historical events. In meanwhile, the entire population were on move and under a constant threat and lost.

Zangana further notes that:

A total of 254 journalists and media assistants have been killed since the start of the invasion in 2003 and 51 have been kidnapped. By June 2007, 220 doctors had been killed and more than 10,000 had fled Iraq. Thousands of Iraq’s best-educated academics, doctors and other professionals have been forced to flee the country, taking with them the intellectual capital for building a stable, democratic and free nation (55).

The Iraqi intellectual has been punished across time and under a variety of regimes. The sufferings from religious groups and moderate political parties are endless.

Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, reports have emerged that about 4.5 million Iraqis are currently living as refugees or internally displaced people. This is the largest number of people affected since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 (BBC). Millions of Iraqis, then, are living daily with unending practical difficulties concerning drinking water, food, health, safety, housing and employment. Other millions are forced to live in almost impossible conditions in neighboring or remote countries.

There have been about twelve million people globally “trapped in a ghost life of detention centers and legal rigmarole” and “warehoused for ten years or more”. Lahr continues, the “narrative of their lives has been severed, a rupture whose loss includes their cultural idiom ... the encoded memory of heritage” (Lahr, n.p). I am here to register one of those lost story and is to find way into re-telling the story in performance.

It is not about “Who has a right to tell a story” (Salverson 246), or that the story must be told only by its owner but rather than that by sharing a story some meaning might be brought to it and that this meaning might bring some more related light of remembrance into people’s lives. The way we interpret ourselves within a story, we The sense of loss in refugees' experiences goes beyond what a theatrical presentation can reveal because their struggles for acceptance and recognition continue once the performance is complete. Refugees’ narratives have begun to spread all over the world and as a result a large number of researchers, co-researchers and artists are arguing about the abuse of human rights entailed in researchers using refugees as subjects not as co-subjects in participating in the activity being researched. Refugees have become the focus of “security” and “terror” at the political heart of our age” (Gilbert & Nield 133). The refugees have been accused of misleading officials and their stories have been received, as revised or invented stories. Other see this stories as “disregarded, ignored and obscured in that [their experience] is unrecovered” or unrecorded (Deal and Beal 150). In our modern world, the United Nations has a division for human rights, and so many reports are critical of many political regimes around the world, but the abuses of the human rights of Iraqi refugees by the United Nations Protection

Officers in Quetta, Pakistan from 1989 to 1997 didn't registered in the accounts. The Protection Officers paid lots of money to Pakistani police to hurt us, and yet they were supposed to protect us. There were rumors that if you became a Christian, you might be accepted in the program of re-settlement (there are curses in the *Quran* on those who abandon their faith for example). Many Iraqi refugees, Kurd and Arab, Shi'ah and Sunni changed their faith hoping that they would be accepted, but it didn't happen. More than that, the United Nation office (UNHCR) did pay or respects any values in refugee background ethic and cultures and they were viewed number without identities. For example, in some of refugee cultural history and social life that a man can get married twice and live with two wives. The UNHCR office force refugees to divorce their second wives in order to be accept for the resettlement. No one in UNHCR were interested to know what can this practice means to a family and impacts of this practices on their social and normal life. From here, I see.....,

“Most of our experience of the world and most of our desires, belong to our individual point of view: we see things from here...but we are also able to think about the world in abstraction” (Ricoeur 315).

An abstraction for forgotten refugees, subjected to the most degrading and de-humanising treatment of protection officers in UNHCR to refugees in Pakistan. One of those abstractions is an incident when Iraqi refugee women, older people, youths and children went on hunger strike, demanding to know the reason for their long stay and why their application was not processed. They were protesting against the way the Pakistani police treated us on the doorstep of the United Nations office in Islamabad, Pakistan, 1995-1996. It became worse when one of the refugees died during this hunger strike. The United Nation office in Quetta even put up notices advertising a Saddam amnesty for voluntarily repatriation. It was announced by the Iraqi embassy in Pakistan that one could return to Iraq and get paid \$500 - \$600 USD! Most of us were asking; who should forgive who? There were also many Kurdish refugees from Halabcha, the Kurdish village bombed by chemical gas in 1988 and we shared the same treatment by the UNHCR.

A return and reworking of those memories may stimulate a new cycle of debates. New and old meanings may interact in unexpected ways to transform personal and cultural

narratives and lead to the recognition of human rights abuses in dealing with refugees. This is my words, because refugees otherwise will always be despised and described as 'Queue Jumpers', 'Illegal Immigrants', 'Middle-Easterners', 'Boat People' and, at the extreme, 'Terrorists' or simply, 'Muslims'.

I, like many refugees, have attempted to jump on a ship and hide for weeks in order to leave Pakistan, because we had no choice if we were to survive. No one in Geneva is willing or interested to hear our voices. We wrote letters every day to the Protection Officers and we never heard an answer from UNHCR in Geneva. We are the victims of conflicts of interests around the world. Refugee's stories are the forgotten human being sufferings cross languages and nations.

In Australia, the UK and the USA, contemporary theatrical productions and interpretations make use of refugee issues and raise questions around the themes of: "passports, permits to travel, proofs of nationality, photographs, or verbal accounts of reasons for travel" (Nield 137), "illegal migrants" (Gluhovic 148), "asylum seekers" (Jestrovic 170) and as "absent voices" (Williams 204). The Australian and other governments demand to see an official document of refugees as if the dictator will issue me a passport before I escape! In 2006, the last thing someone would carry would be an identity card or any paper that could provide their name to someone standing at a check point, where just a name alone would be enough reason to be killed, because of the ethnic clashes during the recent war in Iraq. The amount of theatrical production Hazou wrote:

Over a period of three years, between January 2002 and October 2005, the Australian theatre saw the staging of some thirty-two separate plays and performances that engaged directly with the plight of asylum seekers arriving on Australian shores (n.p)

I was engaged with refugee's stories in Australia when I was working as the Artistic Director of Omni Theatre 2000-2009. The first production "No Answer Yet" performed at the Palais Royal Youth Centre, in Newcastle, NSW, April 2002. This project was funded by the Ministry of Arts, NSW in association with the Hunter Writers' Centre. This and other such theatrical presentations were political and artistic responses to the Australian Government's treatment of asylum seekers. All these presentations played a significant role in opening dialogues about the stories, emotions and cultural backgrounds of refugees who remained faceless and story-less in the media. Like the story of the refugees onboard the Norwegian freighter MV *Tampa*.

Multiple challenges faced the refugees internal and external in detention centers, imprisonment, crossing borders, deportation and the unknown events as well as the challenges during the resettlement in their new host countries make their life difficult.

Most of the theatrical presentations dealing with the question of refugees were designed by writers, directors who put together the productions and actors who either memorised lines or re-enacted those stories as in play-back theatre productions. Another example is “Through the Wire” (2005) written and directed by Ros Horinor. Organizations such as Actors for Refugees re-played the stories of refugees and helped to further understanding of the newly-arrived refugees in Australia.

For the production of “No Place Called Home” (2011) Kim Schultz interviewed dozens of Iraqi refugees living in limbo in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. From that experience, Schultz created a one-woman show, which she presented at various sites, nomad-style. It combines a personal love story as Schultz fell in love with an Iraqi artist in Syria with what is sometimes called verbatim theatre: in-character monologues based on interview transcripts.

In the review of the production “Aftermath” (2009), an interview-based theatre piece by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, Richard Patterson wrote:

No matter how well-written these documentary snippets are, however, chosen as they were from interviews conducted by the authors, there's still an inescapable sense of falsity to be found in this production. The play ends with the cast proclaiming, “I am an Iraqi”, but if this is the play's thesis statement there's a sense that several connective arguments are missing. What this claim to citizenship means may be clear to the characters on-stage, but we've never really been let into their world, because, in attempting to win us over, the authors have forgotten that it's argument - not oratory - that ultimately reaches hearts and minds. (n.p)

I myself saw this production on the 24th April, 2011, at the Octagon Theatre at the University of Western Australia in Perth, Australia. I was upset because I couldn't understand the actors' accents while they were acting like (Iraqi refugees) living in exile in Jordan; I left the theatre after 25 minutes. It was like a radio show in its style of narration, no visual images, songs, music or poems from Iraq were presented.

Schweitzer's model of Reminiscence Theatre, where the interviewers and the interviewees interact during the performance, is “to give voice to those who are not normally heard in a way which can be life-changing for them and is certainly life-

affirming for everyone” (Schweitzer 256). The unfinished show, *Voices from Iraq*, that I presented at the Hayman Theatre at Curtin University, 19 October 2009, had similar aspects to Reminiscence Theatre in that the performers told their own stories to relatives and members of the Iraqi community in the audience. The performance wasn’t based on interviews. I asked three members of the Iraqi community to bring their own lived memories of Iraq and exile and I worked with them on how to present their own stories.

Reminiscence Theatre differs from Playback Theatre in which a story is elicited live on stage and improvised on the spot. It is an open-ended process in which issues and questions are shared and discussed within the group.

In Iraqi Memory project, I focused on the creative process and method that interact between national and international aspects of a story and how a story brought in contact with human response to it.

Artistic and creative framework

- Process and method of collecting data,
- Process and method of making the *Iraqi Nights* performance.

1.1 Process of collecting data:

I conducted the interviews in conversational style, face-to-face, one-by-one, using video camera to record their stories. The interview style was an oral history that explored the multiple-layers within groups of people who had similar lives under similar circumstances in similar and different places. The process involved gathering answers and interpretations in response to historical events and life situations. I followed this model because it is possible to understand the responses to the questions and ways to gather data from the perspective of the people being interviewed. The focus was on the most well-known aspect of Iraqi history and events and how the Iraqis reflected on their personal and creative memories, locations, families, past, present and future.

I had lived similar experiences as those who I interviewed but in different places and location and I didn't disclose my experiences to distinguish between my experience and other Iraqi experiences. I translated the Iraqi artist's narrative from Arabic to English.

Methods of collecting data:

- Conducting and collecting the Iraqi narratives using film (video camera) and photos
- Translating the narratives, editing and moved from visual to textual narratives
- The transcripts were offered as access point to the Australian participant performers.

1.2 Process and methods of *Iraqi Nights* performance:

- I worked with Australian participants on my autobiographic story and the transcripts of Iraqi artists as a mode of performance inquiry using the process and methods of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in creative arts. The (PAR) process and methods are democratic process of making and selecting segments or making decision. It helps empower individuals and group to share their voices and concern about the question and matters of the research.

- Participants developed their own understanding in relation to Iraqi narratives, culture and arts. We were conducting daily conversations in an open environment that led each other to share their views and understanding and we freely choose the narratives we were interested in.

1.3 The process of preparing for the performances through open dialogue among participants using (PAR):

- Exploration of the collected and collective stories and symbols through conversations
- Analysis and reflection on what is found in the process of our development in action
- Selection of narratives, themes, segments and stories based on clear reasoning
- Restart (again) the process of analysis and reflections on the previous steps

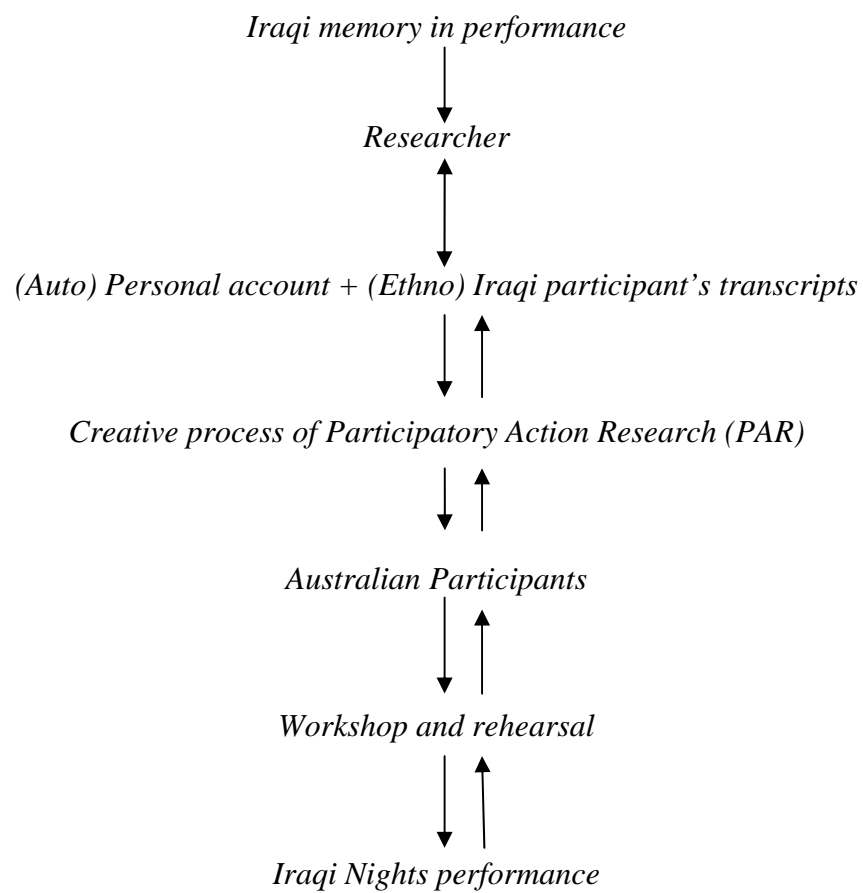
1.4 Creating the performance.

The process of creative developments towards the presentation:

- I set collaborations amongst the participants in ‘motion’ through creative processes such as rehearsals. The collaboration started when each participant shared their own way of exploring and visualizing their point of views, and helped each other build their segments in relation to each segment. The starting point was sharing views and reviews of the narratives because it can generate more dynamics and creative flow in the making. This option opened up ways of experimenting with the styles of linking, connecting each segment in correspondence to the group feedback. I didn’t tell the participants what to choice but I offered them the raw materials from the position of a facilitator and observer. I moved in and out, when necessarily, to provide more support from my point of views as a third eye/observer in theatrical terms to see and reflect on the artistic process. As a theatre director, I kept the idea of what audiences might think about the segments, narratives. The intention was to keep the process open and flowing: without end. No image of arts or in art is finished by the artist because of the viewer’s or reader’s input or interpretation.
- Workshops and training in the selected themes and their means of expression. I followed formal training for acting such as voice projection, body movement and interpretation of the performer. While everything was organic, the raw

materials and the participants input in the process of making, I worked on building the creative outlet from my experiences in performance making. There was no linear structure or continuation of the segments but they were presented as snapshot or slides of memory on their own.

- Further Artistic/Creative Development towards the Performances. I worked with the participants on the flow of their segment's development without paying attention to its meaning in relation to other segments but focusing instead on the style of it's was presentation.
- Documenting the performances. I recorded aspects of the workshops and rehearsals in video and photographs.



1.5 The following is the order of segments in the *Iraqi Nights* performance:

1. “Opening: Salam” (Niz and the group)
2. “Ashes” (Shallotte)
3. “*Yapoooh*”³ (Emily and the women)
4. “When the Light Comes” (Niz)
5. “Burning the Books” (Niz, Ronald and the group)
6. “Coming Home” (Marjolein)
7. “Check Points” (Sophie)
8. “The Grave Digger” (Niz)
9. “Bloody Day and Nights” (Kristy)
10. “Two Eyes” (Emily)
11. “Singing ‘You Taught me How to Love’” (Niz singing)
12. “Women of the Bridge” (Zoe)
13. “Sweeping up the Ashes” (Zoe)
14. “You Told me how to Love” (Niz singing)
15. “Citizenship” (Zoe) (No picture)
16. “Value” (Sophie)
17. “Joha and his Donkeys” (Niz)
18. “Death is Normal” (Kristy)
19. (Iraqi Women’s Room) (Zoe, Emily, Marjolein, Kristy & Sophie)
20. “Second Visit” (Marjolein)
21. “Can You See the Light?” (Madonna singing)
21. “Closing” (Niz moves the mirror to centre stage; he leaves the candle⁴, all exit.) (Niz and the cast)

Chapter One

Part One: The following writing provides my account and reflection in and out of Iraq. Each event presents a significant time as a snapshot in my memory: each moment is a living memory.

If there is a wall for impossible,
This wall must have a shed.
I want to live in the shed of impossible wall.

At home: Najaf, Iraq 27/4/04

I am at home now. I am at home, in a circle of unfinished thoughts and doubts about the future. It is just huge dust in Iraq all day and every time. Dust awaits and welcomes me, across the border, into the city and at home, like a monstrous salute for an absent return. It is enough to be alive. I have arrived in a country like a big prison, where concrete blocks prevent the eye from looking to the other side of the street, where the city is like a detention centre with Iraqis volunteering in police and army forces not for the love of their country but for the cash. Passing one check-point after another, when the road to home become a train of endless check-points, when the sentence “show me your identity certificate” is a common welcome, and where fear stands like faceless thoughts in the eyes of passengers from the Kuwaiti border to Najaf city, in the south of Iraq.

Here I am in a neglected land, in the suburb of Al-Ansar, where cholera is a friend of the poor, nesting silently in the drinking water. The news of my arrival is like fire eating dry leaves. “He is back!”... my sister shouts and it is like I never left, or it was a short while ago and not the twenty-one years of the exiled life of a refugee. I have arrived, but where to now? I meet with my brothers, sisters and the rest of the family one after another, and nothing has changed; the same houses, streets and shops with the same high levels of corruption among police, army and government officials. Huge wires connect all the houses and buildings to electric power generators like spider-houses, hanging on walls, fences, roofs.

Welcome home, with no drinking water, no electricity. These are the typical thoughts and conversations in every house. People are talking and saying that one of the reasons we do not have electricity and water is a part of the occupation policy. This answer is one of the most common answers you get here, even if you interviewed the entire population, whilst others believe that the vast driftnets of Iraq's government corruption are beyond description, and consider Iraq the most corrupted place on earth.

The first advice I always receive is "Do not talk about God and politics!", but every conversation is about the politics of religion. Some people believe that the invasion took place because the USA and its allies have come to liberate them; others think it is the invasion of their country and they have to fight. No one is interested in talking about the future because the future is like a black spot of confusion on a white page of the country's history and the life of Iraqi society. What can I do, and how and where to start?

Okra 2/5/04 - 10 pm

I spend some time with my family with lots of joking and food. The Iraqi lifestyle is of course very different from the Australian. The people's dreams here are about security, jobs and the desire to be able to express their opinions without political or social repercussions or a bullet in the head. In the midst of all kinds of pressures, people are (still) looking towards the future. Every little detail here is a special moment of peace and harmony in memory, which I have missed after, before and between times of departures and arrivals.

Baghdad 7/4/04

Walking around the streets is like reading a poem written by an unknown poet. People's stories are jumping from one corner to another and they have lots of thoughts to share when they come to sit and share my silence with me. People are thirsty to tell me about what happened to them in their daily life. Here, I do not ask anyone any questions. I just keep listening and they do the talking. Sometimes all it takes to make people talk is to say hello. "Hello", and a little bit of respect is what people need to speak without stopping.

Najaf 14/4/04

I am trying to sleep but I cannot, because of the social pressure from my family surrounding me now and the environmental issues such as water shortage, dirty or infected water or air dusty with depleted uranium. There are daily confrontations between people and government officials about meeting their needs, such as for water and food. Sometimes these confrontations lead to fearless or desperate acts and end in death, in prison or in a garbage bin. Life here is not a joke or a drama research project for Academic or Academic arts. Not even an objective in academic study. What I see and witness is related to the *dramatic* vision about one's own self-reality when real and unreal are very hard to separate.

Najaf 27/4/04

Sometimes, for sure, the experience of loss could and would make people forget who they are in space and time of life, and that is one of the reasons that I walked into arts and creative expression to find alternative life, possible life. I want to be able to mix those forms such as mime, song, rhythm, tunes, image, multimedia, poetry, film, and more, to express my opinion and ways of thinking about everything in the world.

Najaf 6/4/2010.

I sat at home waiting to hear the news about the explosion last night, but I saw more explosions in Baghdad. I sat at night listening to a few people talking about the news on TV.

I heard it many times that the Islamic political parties in Iraq pay a modern bribe "cash in Kind" called the "blanket" bribe. I didn't believe it till I saw it in my eyes. A man carrying a blanket with his little boy, he saluted me and responded to him and congratulated him for buying a new blanket and I asked him how much he paid for it. He replies; it free from the Islamic party called (Al-daawa, the current ruling political party in Iraq 2012). They gave each family a blanket in return to vote for them in the election!

Everyone in Iraq knew about it. The question here, is this the value of western democracy that they advertise for and teach new nation about its process of voting?

Some people get rice or sugar and even a \$10 card credits for phone recharge. I heard and saw it. Wait, the worse is coming.

1/4/2010

Night time, at my brother's home ...

My brother arranged a meeting with his friends aged between 34 and 40 years old.

Nine people were invited to dinner and after black-tea, we started to talk about their daily work, what happened today. The opening lines for the conversation were about the election and who is going to be the Iraqi prime minister after the election.

Some argued: what is the point of the election? When the entire process of voting is false and every political party had made up their mind and chosen [in response to pressures] from abroad without any concern for the Iraqi people's voices and needs. The Iraqi president visited Iran to negotiate creating a new Iraqi government: why Iran?

There has been conflict in the region since the formation of Iraqi borders 1921 around its mixed populations, religious and ethnic groups. The on-going struggle of those communities and their memories is complicated by the conflicting interests of local and international denominations.

No one knows when and where they will be arrested or killed and who is going to be the next refugee and what to take or leave behind you. The idea was to have Iraq as a democratic state washed in the oil pipe lines and the Iraqi people left to the mercy of totalitarian and corrupt Islamic political parties and Iraqi people sold as cheap as their oil.

The conversation turned in many directions, such as family members lost in security prisons, in war, civil war and in unknown circumstances.

Most of the people I met with tonight were talking about their lives during the war and how fear and events of war have destroyed their life, and they felt that they were cut off from life.

One of them talked about the disappearance of his brother as a young man during 1991, and no one knew anything about his disappearance till 2004, when he received a letter that informed him of the death of his brother, but nobody has been returned, up to today, 2010.

One of the guests from the group confirms the story, saying that he was in the same prison when the security guards called him, and they never saw him (his brother) again. He remembered the marks that torture had in his life and his friends' lives.

The conversation turned more and more towards silence, and sometimes they looked at one another before finishing sentences, and a deep silence emerged after a few tears. I thought it was wise to stop the conversation and changed the subject to the food we cooked and ate tonight.

The jokes began when my brothers talked about the old days when they used to play football together, and they were all laughing together. They decided to meet again to talk about the same issues another time and they were very happy that I had initiated this kind of dialogue about their past life.

Part Two: The Rooms

Kantor describes how an object (room) as “an object, which was void of any life function, (re) emerged for the first time in history.....empty” but “it reveals its own existence” (ibid 63). The room is an empty object that reveals itself to me as a whole world of fullness/emptiness. My rooms are exiled beings in a world of total chaos. Each room would reveal itself by what surrounds its existence. A room as internal and external object is destroyed and rebuilt, only to be re-destroyed. Kantor wrote in poetic narratives what it means to have a room in wartime, and he wrote “the war was [a] stage not in [the] theatre building but in the room that was destroyed” (“The writings” 169).

I thought about the metaphor of a house or a building that contain rooms of the complexities of war, refugees and exiled worlds. I am living (in) many rooms.

The room as a metaphor comes from a mystical structure contained in the collection of Arabic short stories in the *One Thousand and One Nights*. The room is a metaphor of and for story-content in life experiences. Remembering the *One Thousand and One Nights* brought back to me this story from when we were children and the oral Arabic tradition of telling a story narrated by a grandmother.

A person went to meet the king in Baghdad, seeking to find an answer for a question. The king listened to his request and said: “I will give you a key that opens fifty-one rooms in my palace and if you can't find the answer, we will talk.” The fellow took the key and went from one room to another: an empty room, a room with one chair, a room with dead people, princes holding flowers, swords and costumes and so on and on. (You can name anything to be found in these rooms!). The person searched from one room to other room but at the end, in the last door to open into the room, there was only a mirror as a door without a room behind it.

Here are accounts of the other/s within me, Iraqi artists' stories, memories and experiences. I heard a poem from the tears of a refugee's eyes: “*How come the boat sank tonight*”? I don't have to tell the reader what to read or how to enter these rooms. A story is enclosed in a room and I ask you: “What are you going to do”?

Room 1

“Bleeding in imprisonment”

I threw the door of mercy away
and kept a mirror in my pocket
for the dictators and those sleeping in the brothel of politics.
I threw the door of the house away,
I carried the prayer of ascetic fasting.
The Spirit is a key for a lost lock.
Throw the whole land and the people’s bleeding imprisonment on the threshold of
exile.
Naked I called those who were not in spirit.
Oh strange! It is a naked life!
Leave clothes and outdated land here,
The land and wasteland, and each question of justice and annihilation
I have thrown my limbs on the side of the road
And the way that led me to fast.
I’ve thrown everything
and calm, I depart.

Room 2

There is a beautiful pain, lying in the bottom of the self-burning of all affiliation.
There is a beautiful hope, placing seeds of light in every step of our life. Pain and
hope are the keys to presence. In the interval between them, I become a citizen.

Room 3

The rooms that dumped rain in the middle of the night, the rooms stuffed with silence
and tears, the rooms without doors, the rooms of dreams and waiting,
the room before the migration of sunset, empty mud rooms between the border,
rooms of isolation and terror in the prison, prison of self and meaning,
dim rooms full of wails in refugee camps, rooms of childhood in war-ravaged cities,
rooms that do not care about history or modernity, they are symbols of absent justice
and love.

Room 4

History is what I make not what the history makes of me.

I have been back to Baghdad four times since 1987 when I went into exile and on my refugee journey: the first time was 24 April 2004. There was no state and the streets were full of blood and shades of sorrows painted on the faces of people.

I went to find out about my family. How old are they? What do they look like after nineteen years of exile within and without? Is it valid or true to say that the memories of having being born here arose like burning fires moving in me, making me feel like a lost child? I saw the destruction of cities, houses, buildings and human bodies. Like a breath screaming alive in the air. The question I had was more than about my memories of my family and no longer exists; it is merely an illusionary mirror echoing the silence of the unknown.

When I arrived the first man to recognise me was my father. He was sitting as I left him, in the same spot. I stood and looked at five people sitting in front of our old house and my brothers were sitting there too, but they had never met me before because they were born while I was living in exile. My father shouted like a wounded soul and his tears told me how long he had been waiting for that moment to see me again.....

Where shall I start? The entire street wakes up, this young boy that departed from his home is coming back to his family, friends. Welcome home, welcome to the grave of memories under occupation, memories of lost and injustice and where I can see clearly the shadow of violence standing everywhere. Welcome home.

Room 5: Private Room

During the day, I frame my dreams

At night, I burn all the frames of me.

It's the coldness of death listening across all borders.

Like the child waking up to bring some water to the family,

early in the morning,

He didn't know that there was a bomb waiting for him, a nine year old child.

The father said: its night-time, the soldier is asleep.

When he wakes up, I will ask him if he really meant to kill my son or not?

Have a nice dream sir.

My mirror broke a long time ago and my voice is getting old.

But I could sing sometimes for myself and the shadows in my mirrors.

My fingers are not bleeding any more.

Room 6

The second visit to Baghdad was on 23 February 2006, when there was civil war and fighting in the streets of Najaf, where my memory was bleeding for answers. What can I do?

The entire society and culture collapsed and Iraqis were fighting among themselves and killing each one another. The unknown and re-discovered diseases began to be born in the bodies of families and children. It is unfinished stories and there is nowhere to go....

Room 7

On my third visit, 24 April 2008, I am in urgent need of finding peace within my soul, of finding what is life really about? Why are Iraqis doomed to such turmoil and unhappy memories? Born in and died in Iraq. Dictator makes war and get married in war time too. I am not a researcher, not an artist but a donkey living at war.

Thoughts grow like seeds in the soil of experiences.

A Question is a manifest of time: To what ends can creative artist resist the pain of loss and what is home?

Room 8

The conversation sleeps in the bed of silence,

No sound in or out

Just the eyes
In a room
Alone sick bird
Lying on the ground thirsty....

Room 9: Eyes

Two eyes, one eye on the door and the second one on the road, wait for absent returns.

Two eyes like road stones,
like twins slapping death,
and swinging swings for a stranger.

Two eyes cried until they became blind,
and white sand walked in them, into white windows,
as if the story and memory not the same again,
as if history is not repeated twice.

as if they are not the laughing wars

Or coffins hanging in the sunset.

Two eyes,
the wooden stick is the sight of a blind man
who reads pictures on the ground
and visions he has seen.

Two eyes

Like yours, Baghdad.

Whenever a blind man fails, the river dries up and the palm tree dies,
Baghdad

Stay like Tigris and Euphrates, two rivers like two eyes.

What to take with you to see drying rivers?

Room Nameless Refugee

You have a name, but they didn't know what to write on your grave.

I would be killed and died in my “country” home, crossing borders and escaping from country to another one. Like all refugees killed around the world and most of them were nameless. I am here to register one of the nameless people to become a refugee.

Room without number

It is a war time, war zone, war thorn.

The moon is a room for rent
and the sun is not my heater, nor have I a bag.

Room 10

On Wednesday 7/4/10

We have had bloody days and nights when explosions shook the heart of the nation again. More than eleven explosions danced in the mirror of hope, where greetings slaughtered the meanings of the time in my face and I became a bird.

A perineum's death,
that deletes innocence in old houses
and churns the cement with the blood of children,
while missiles destroy stones and homes.

Havoc in the cities, and the river runs to escape the desert.

Blood moves in the cracks of destroyed buildings
Aging and the spirit are melted on the gates of hell.

No gods or prophets,
I'm here, like roses burning in fire
crowning the house of nothingness

Room 16

One of the most beautiful moment in my life was when I walked at 3:00 pm in Baghdad streets alone Nov/2012. It was during the time of curfew from one o'clock at

night till 6: 00 am. No civilian was there, no car just the police and army forces occupying the city. No one was there except a soldier question.

Where are you going at this time of the night?

I dreamed to visit Baghdad when she is sleeping, quiet and in silent. There is no sound of guns, just hope hanging in the sky.

Room for time

To the moment you listen, to the moment you speak

To this and that moment, welcome and goodbye.

And to you, Gypsy stranger⁵,

Oh, Gypsy 'stranger', how come you sink before your empty ship,

How come you sink empty?

Room to de-fertilise Iraqi man and women

Women can't have children anymore; every time a women get pregnant, she will go to the doctor and the advice is "You can't have children" or if you want to have one it will kill you either it will die inside you before it born or you will die before you given birth. It is a huge social problem in Iraq and it has affected the mentality of women cross-location and age.

-O, just what the boy said to you; "His mother died given birth for her second child". - Don't worry, he will be fine! The death makes him strong person. The neoliberal lost its ethic in maintaining human rights during wars in modern time. That should be fine.

Room for her or his

Iraqi women in prison are sitting silent in circle and waiting for an answer. When they will be free? Is there anyone out there can help?

Room hello

A fool with his mirror walks jauntily in the harvest of laughter.

She said: "My husband was killed by Islamic militants while we were having breakfast with the kids; and here I am as you see, living with my seven children in this public terminal for cars (public car park). A blanket as a roof and a wooden stick with

three meters of rope as wall. We are refugees in our own homeland and refugees in our own cities. We don't know anyone who can help us, we wrote to the Mayor of the City of Najaf; to Sheikh and Mullah, but no one gives us any food. I am really trying hard to let my kids go to school. I don't want them to live in the streets because we have nowhere to go. The oldest kid is nine years old and no school wants him, they think he is mad. They killed his father in front of all of us while we have a breakfast. There you go..... what to do? I am marginalized, outside of history and without identity or any rights in my own country.”

Questions Raised by *The Rooms*

Iraqi people are living at the edge of a complete loss of social justice, culture and memory. The failure of hope is due to the absence of independent mediation and the people's lack of confidence in the dialogue between groups and sectors of society such as between Kurds and Arabs, Shia and Sunah, Christian and Muslim as well as other faith such as Zoroastrian and Yazidi⁶.

There are thousands of stories of widows and orphans, of people living in silence and fear of death. Those widows have been the heart of a single unresolved crisis in Iraq since 1948, since Great Britain's last ship of slaves smuggled from Africa to Iraq and of the memories of those communities of slaves is a life.

There are thousands of stories about the unknown diseases spreading among the population, of deformed children and risky pregnancies. It can be said that the Iraqi government is calling for women not to have children in (Al-Anbar province) and the Iraqi government is covering up the use of depleted uranium by (USA). The future of the country is unknown; the government is run by Iran and USA. The two countries have conflicts of interest and USA will never withdraw but their presence will be far less Noticeable.

The question is; will there be open conflicts between Israelis, Arabs and Americans against Iranians and a repeat of the story of the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988)? The daily explosions in Iraq cities will continue with Arab-Kurdish tensions could be escalating in 2013 while the ability to really refine institutions is absent in Iraq.

Iraqi people over centuries have been persecuted and their voices silenced by the dominant power. There has never been a time for the Iraqi people to establish their own state without Western or regional interference in the economic and political process of (re-)building of their country.

The Iraqi people have lived for a long, long time in the cycles of violence and wars. The fight was and will be about the dominant control of ethnicities, ideologies and religions over the two rivers Tigris and Euphrates, and of the oil wells.

The people of Iraq have lived for three decades through social chaos. First there was the period of Saddam Hussein (1979-2003), followed by multiple wars: the first Gulf War (1980-1988), the second Gulf War (1991), then the economic sanctions and

isolation (1991-2003), and now the occupation and on-going military strikes and actions led by the USA and its allies since 2003. On the grand historical scale, there are no differences between what happened in Iraq under Islamic imperialist rulers, totalitarian, national regimes and foreign military occupations. They all produced catastrophic experiences of violence and social destruction in civil society and in social memory. People are shocked by inexplicable events that have made their world an unspeakable place: hostile and death-ridden.

Chapter Two

In this chapter I describe my journey, interviewing exiled Iraqi artists aged between 45 and 78 years old, about their lived experiences of wars, dictatorship regimes, economic sanctions, colonialism stories and their artistic perspectives on everyday experiences.

Bochner asks: “What gives us the right to tell their stories? This brings a second question: Are there stories that come to our attention that need to be told but have not been inquired into or requested?” (qtd. in Pelias et al 271).

I started my research looking into Iraqi artists who were living inside and outside Iraq with relation to their personal, artistic and political views/struggle during war, dictatorship regimes, and economic section (1979-2003). I started to look through internet web pages and publication as well as through a network of friends and colleagues to find Iraqi refugee artists. The idea was to interview Iraqi refugees living in exile around the world but I narrowed the focus to recent refugees living in the middle-East. I found a large number of Iraqi artists forced to live in exile for many reasons such as wars Iraq-Iran (1980-1988), Gulf war (1990-mid 1991) and economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations (1991-2004) and including those who left Iraq because of their political opposition to Saddam Hussein, those with humanitarian cases, invasion of Iraq and fear of being killed by Shiaa Islamic militia or by Iranian intellegent services in Iraq or by USA.

There were specific criteria which was to work with a community (a group of artists) whose creative arts represent their facts of life and support their narration, and whose creative artworks reflect on historical events and their own everyday life narratives. I chose the particular community of artists that I did because their creative works can be evidence of the influence and reflections of historical events on their stories rather than their stories alone. I met with artists from all walks of life, those who supported and those who opposed the Iraqi regimes, up until 2003 in most instances. The data collection formed as ethnographic accounts undertaken in semi-structured and narrative interviews including my participant observation, reflective writing, interviews and gathered documents and artifacts.

Before I wrote my interview questions I first asked many of my Australian friends (academics, poets, musicians and artists):

What would you like to ask if you had the opportunity to interview an Iraqi artist who is living in exile as a refugee?

After reading the large number of responses, which covered different fields of enquiry, such as ‘What does it mean to be an Iraqi artist?’ I put them into categories such as personal, cultural, historical explorations of memory and of creative arts. I kept thinking about where each question could take me and I narrowed my enquiry to personal, historical and creative narratives. It is valid for me to acknowledge that I have never lived in an Arabic country (I don't consider Iraq an Arabic country – it is a multi-cultural fusion). It is very rare that I have mixed with Iraqis, Arab or people with Islamic background or spoken Arabic in Australia. It was a rare occasion to speak on the phone with my own family in Iraq and a few friends around the world.

After arranging the trip's details, tickets and camera and so on, finally, on the 28th of March 2010, I arrived at Amman Airport, Jordan. At the start of my research journey, in Jordan, the world was copies of the past that I lived before. I walked further to where I met Iraqi men waiting near the UNHCR office. I really couldn't help laughing. Am I living in a mirror world that copies and reflects past events? The conversations these men were having were the same conversation of despair, displacement, loss and confusion that I had listened to and joined in while I was waiting for the UNHCR to process my refugee application. In order to understand why someone becomes a refugee, it is necessary to know the entire history of his/her nation and the crises surrounding the human rights conflicts. The same questions and narratives arise in different locations. There are the stories of home and exile, sorrow and death, fear and violence.

The moment of arrival was the moment of a silent welling-up in my memory, a moment of repeated consequences in time and location. I felt deeply ill, not physically ill, but a kind of unwelcome suffering in my life. My health is crucial to me, especially while I am doing a research project. Morse and Field, in analysing the intensity of the interview process, wrote: “The stories that the qualitative researcher obtains in interviews will be stories of intense suffering, social injustices, or other things that will shock the researcher” (78). I wasn't shocked by what I had seen or

heard during the times of the interviews nor what I am looking at in the daily suffering of mankind but rather I was trying to understand how it continued happening in our modern days again and again.

It is very difficult to preserve a sense of my own humanity whilst seeing and feeling violence and sorrow in the faces of refugees and Iraqi's citizens. The pressure was huge, not only from trying to understand my own emotion, but trying to stay afloat in the rivers of emotion of others, to see myself in and through their eyes. I totally agree with Ellis that "honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and self-doubts—and emotional pain. Just when you think you can't stand the pain anymore..." ("Heartful autoethnography" 672).



The wondering soul by the researcher

The picture of this Iraqi woman sitting alone in a black costume has brought back to me similar images of Iraqi women in Tehran and Qom, Iran, Iraq and in exile. "Exile appears to have reinforced and made more explicit ideas and feelings around the connectedness between women and family" (Sayigh 46) between father, mother and their children. Exile can break the most beautiful relation between families and friends. Exile is like a rock that can destroy love in human spirit. Exile as I witnessed and lived through it can destroy the foundation and fundamental aspects of faith, love that someone has in his/her self.

Paul Thompson, discussing the methods of conducting interviews, suggests that there are different styles, ranging from:

[the] friendly, informal, conversational approach to more formal, controlled styles...[a] successful interviewer must possess: an interest and respect for people as individuals, and flexibility in response to them; an ability to show understanding and sympathy for their point of view and above all, a willingness to sit quietly and listen (166).

I conducted the interviews with questions related to personal and creative viewpoints to historical events, hoping to generate more information and open a dialogue with and among us. The people in the interviews are members of creative Iraqi communities. They are: a visual artist, a poet, a playwright, a theatre director, a photographer, musicians, performers and singers. Some of these artists are living at home in Iraq and they express their deep thoughts about the internal exile of life within Iraq, and others speak of living outside as exiles in Syria, Jordan and Australia.

Thompson concluded that “no oral historians to my knowledge have argued for the rigid inflexible questionnaire style of interviews” (186). I collected information expressed in a variety of styles and media, such as paintings, photos, songs as well as recorded interviews. Anyhow, “Historians work with documents and a document is already a rupture with memory, since it is written and since the voices have already turned silent” (Ricoeur & Antohi 11). The documentation of *The Iraqi Memory* project⁷ is a means to rediscover Iraqi voices in place and time. I have manifested a story through the historical context of the Iraqi participants’ memories in an artistic inquiry.

The recording of the interviews is a live testimony “True testimony is oral. It is therefore a living voice. Once it is written, and only then, it becomes a document” (ibid 12). The oral testimonies of Iraqis are my document and a living narrative. They are examples of how artists mirrored (retained and regained) their personal and collective narratives within the large scale of situated historical events. In this dimension, they have a larger truth, the truth of testimony and creative expression.

In the process of the interviews, I didn’t need a translator or interpreter to stand between me and the interviewees. Most of the artists I contacted were very happy to

participate because their understanding of certain historical events interwove their personal and historical memories and manifested in their art.

The interviews were free conversations in Arabic, using traditional ways of narrating such as when guests are invited “to produce material which transcends the individual respondent” (Thompson 186) such as photos or reading a poem and listening to the music during the conversation about everyday life stories. The questions were not simple, because of the complexity of the process that was engaged in explaining the images and thoughts in the events. The questions related to their age and their personal creative development as well as to their experiences of persecution, of living through survival situations, of lost family and friends. I used supplementary⁸ prompts such as a picture of the British troops marching in the streets of Baghdad 1917 and again in 1937, compared with the repeated images of 2003. I used these supplementary prompts to see how much of the past they remembered can help open up the conversation in a relaxed mode.

I agree with Thompson that discussion of the past can recall painful memories, but as Iraqis, we are able to filter our experiences by making jokes about the most painful memories in our life. The funny jokes provide compelling everyday evidence of how memories are reconstructed for a particular member of community in a particular time and context. These kinds of jokes are social tools among Iraqis and other cultures in Middle-East and somewhere else, even in the presence of death. Iraqis have daily social gatherings that play a major role in opening conversational about events during difficult times. For example, to describe the injustice and chaos in Iraq, one joke goes that a soldier at a checkpoint stops people passing by and asks everyone to show their ID. He looks at IDs and asks one of them: ‘At which farm are you working?’ The soldier cannot read or write [Arabic] and only sees the sign of the Scale of Justice on the ID card. He didn’t know nor understand that the holder of the ID was a judge in the court! Things like that go on and on. I remember how Iraqis used to joke secretly during the war of 1980-1988. One of the many jokes around that time was about a soldier driving a truck filled with the dead bodies of Iraqi soldiers and listening to the radio. He heard a news report saying that there were five people killed in the war that day. He stopped the car and re-counted the dead bodies and found out there were many more than were reported on the news. He unloaded the extra bodies and said:

‘We must have collected the dead of our enemies too!’ At each interview, whatever we had gone through always ended with a joke and laughter and most of the artists remembered the conversations as pleasant and expressed feelings of love and respect to one another.

In the process of collecting the data, I worked as both internal and external observer (inside-outside) participant. We (the interviewees and I) shared a light on our experiences in the exiled world within our own country, the oppressed political and social environment, and we were able openly to recognize our different experiences internally and externally. I ran away from the dictator and his political party and I lived in horror and fear in exile while others lived at home with some similar experiences. None of us denied the suffering of anyone whether living at home or in exile. As external research, I concentrated on my work as a camera person, questioner and continued filming and sought linkages between similar and different stories. I didn’t presume to speak about their feeling or neither emotions nor this research represent the complex of Iraqi memories but an example.

Crossing the border between Iraq and Syria

I travelled by car from Baghdad to Damascus with six passengers, all from Arabic Muslim backgrounds. They were surprised to know that I had come so far to do my research. They were chatting and listening during the nine hours’ travelling. Most of their stories were fresh in their memories and sometimes, when one of them stopped, another person would continue the story. There were stories of Al-Qaida killing civilians on the road from Iraq to Syria and one of them kept talking and re-telling the stories of family and friends who had been killed.

At one time, we stopped at a restaurant when we met with Iranians who regularly travelled between Iraq and Syria. I looked at the owner of the restaurant. He was gritting his teeth when he said: ‘Why we were fighting them for eight years? Because we know this is what they want, our land’.

Life in Iraq and any Arabic country is not worth anything and a human being could be arrested and killed by all means and without reasons.

The passengers' words represent a fragment of people's reactions to and interactions with the dilemma of living in war and occupation. At any time, over the nine hours it took to travel from Damascus in Syria to Baghdad in Iraq, either the driver or one of the passengers told a story about their everyday life in Iraq. There were thirteen check points, manned by the Iraqi army and police. At each point you would be asked to show your passport and everyone showed their Iraqi passports and it was fine, but different for me, when I gave them my Australian passport. The ordinary policeman or soldier became interested to know where Australia is and what people eat there. There is a common question: "Do you eat pork?" I do, but if I had said yes it would have been a big concern. In the *Quran*, the holy text of Islamic societies, Mohammed forbids Muslims to eat pork. I made a joke about this when they asked me what Australian people eat. I said their favorite meat is the meat of donkeys. Later they realised I was joking! The train of check-points continues everywhere, deep inside the cities and streets of Iraq, and you have to be patient and answer the officials' questions as fully as you can.

At some stages, I wished I could use the camera, but I didn't dare face arrest or humiliation if you don't pay bribe. I managed to pay some money when an Iraqi policeman demanded to see my bag in which I had my video cassettes and the camera with artwork recordings on it. The Syrian security and police are no different to Iraqi police; you must pay to pass. If not, it will go as it did with the Syrian policeman when he took the camera and a few empty cassettes. The policeman gave me back the camera but destroyed the VH8 cassette under his shoes without a given reason.

I think the problem of an uneducated army and police force plays a great role in de-humanising the entire population in Iraq, Syria and Iran. They have been used by the political parties to silence anyone at any time. Moreover, the army and police force have been used to protect the political parties, tribal men or anyone else who will pay. The uneducated Iraqi police and army have played a great role in supporting the rules of the powerful against their own people. Most of the Iraqi army and police force are illiterate – they cannot even write their own name in Arabic. In such an environment, how could they read anything or become educated about the abuses of human rights, political and social policy processes or the re-building of Iraq?

Interviews in Syria:

I chose to travel by car from Baghdad through Al-Anbar Province to the Syrian border; it was a long journey and very hot. I arrived in Damascus in an area called Al-Sayida Zinab and arranged to find a hotel. I went to the coffee houses and cultural places looking for my friends and we met at an Iraqi arts coffee shop. The lives and conditions of Iraqis living in Syria are not much different from that of those living in Jordan.

Some of the Iraqi artists left Iraq during the civil war, because of their ethnic background and because members of their family or their friends had been killed, or they had been threatened with death if they should stay at their home or in the country. Some of the artists are living in terrible conditions with no money or support and they do whatever it takes to survive. Some other artists are awaiting their application for refugee status in the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) office, because they were, and some still are, pro-Saddam and even have Saddam's photos in their rooms and the public places where they work. Some other artists are there because they ran away from civil war during street fighting in 2006, some are wanted by Islamic militia, and some are looking for work, or are working in TV to support their families either in Syria or in Iraq. We used to believe it was something of a disgrace to work in television rather than the theatre. Some of the other artists came from the West to work in theatre and films and they are refugees from around the world.

I met with one of my classmates from the theatre department of the 1980s at Baghdad Institute of Fine Arts and the Academy of Fine Arts. We hadn't seen each other for thirty-one years, and we first let our tears do the talking. Through this friend, who is a former refugee from Canada and is working as an actor in Iraqi TV stations, film and theatre, I found the rest of the people I was looking for to interview. Word-of-mouth travels faster than advertising in TV or newspapers, so I gave my address and phone number to everyone I met and after a few days, I started to arrange times and locations for the interviews. I again carried the camera and my gear in a plastic bag because I didn't want to be noticed or to bring attention to myself. I gave the one-page translation of my project and the questions to any one I met and shared a variety of creative and artistic conversations on many levels. I left the camera on and didn't stop

the recordings except to change cassettes. The first interview location was at the coffee house at 11am because that was the only time when hardly anyone was there and it was quiet. My first two guests were a singer and a composer. We began our informal conversation about the history of Iraqi music, poetry and songs. I know about Iraqi musical history too, because I was born there and I know most of the Iraqi tones, rhythms and how to project my voice as a singer. I was able to interweave ideas within our collective memory of arts-making and it helped a lot to have that flow in the conversation.

I met with Salah Abdul-Khafur and Talib Al-Qoraghuly, they are singers and composers. They spoke freely about their appreciation for Saddam's time and about how he used to reward them for their music and song. Both met with Saddam during their life in making arts over the last forty years. I noticed one thing that is very common among artists; their hands were shaking during the conversation, and sometimes they had difficulty speaking and sometimes there was a long pause, a silence. They had been living in Syria since 2003. Salah Abdul-Khafur wishes to sing again and to re-form a new group of musicians to work with him. Talib Al-Qoraghuly has lost his memory and couldn't even remember one of his own songs, one of the most well-known songs in Iraq during the 1970s. They spoke about music giving them peace of mind and of how they dealt with their feelings of exile and missing home. Salah Abdul-Khafur kept talking and at the end of answering a question, he would sing one of his old songs of the 70s and 80s, or a new one. There were lots of social and political jokes during our conversation. As I previously explained, these kinds of jokes are a social tradition, a response to sorrow and unchangeable circumstances. It is a kind of comedic way to express their opinions on life in general. Both artists gave me CDs of their music as a gesture of thanks for our mutual respect and understanding of each other.

We finished the conversations, but the conversations have no end and I have my footage, which still talks to me.

I moved later to meet with two sisters Salima and Amal Khidhir: singers and poets. During their time in Iraq, they were able to sing and act when not many women could or would dare to sing or act in the Islamic, Arabic and tribal cultures of Iraq. Women were considered as third-class citizens. It was worse if they spoke openly about it.

They were living happily in Iraq but left in 2003. They spoke about their life narratives in a male-dominated culture and of how they struggled to make art in Iraq and of how, when Saddam was in power, he had helped them in person, when he was the vice-president and later when he was president. They spoke about their lives and experiences, for which any women in their culture would be called either a gypsy or a prostitute. They spoke of how life was so difficult for both of them and of how difficult it was to maintain their integrity and live as women artists.

Conducting Interviews in Baghdad, Iraq

I arrived in Baghdad. I contacted artists through friends and visiting social network such as coffee and art spaces. I managed to have my first interview with (Dr. S) one of the founders of modern institution of theatre in Iraq, *Iraqi National Theatre* in Baghdad. I gave him a description copy of this project. He was very interested in what I was doing. He invited me to his home. This invitation to someone's home as a guest is a significant sign of welcome in traditional Iraqi culture. We agreed to have an informal interview in which he was free to answer questions in any way he liked. I carried a mini-DVD camera in a black plastic bag in order to avoid being seen as a photographer, because that could lead to either arrest or harassment.

In my conversation with Dr. S, he enlarged on the role he played in building Iraqi National Theatre in the context of the history and memory of Iraq over the last sixty years of his life. I have removed the recording of this interview from my research materials for fear of the consequences to this man.

Iraqi theatre workers (director, writer, actor and so on) were interacting with local and international social and political issues in their creative practices. Their performance builds on social and historical experiences with responses to specific events. (Dr.S) gave me an example one of the performances he directed, during and after the war, about the stories of prisoners of war returning home. It explores the impact of the POW's return on their families, their past and their future.

The open-ended interviews brought to life the new ways of viewing relationship among artists, through creative arts, between artists and events. I was in Baghdad during the election of 2010 and I asked (Dr. S) if he believed in the election as a

democratic process. He gave me an example of the election of 1948 when Iraq was ruled by Great Britain.



Picture Two: Britain troops marching in Baghdad streets 1917

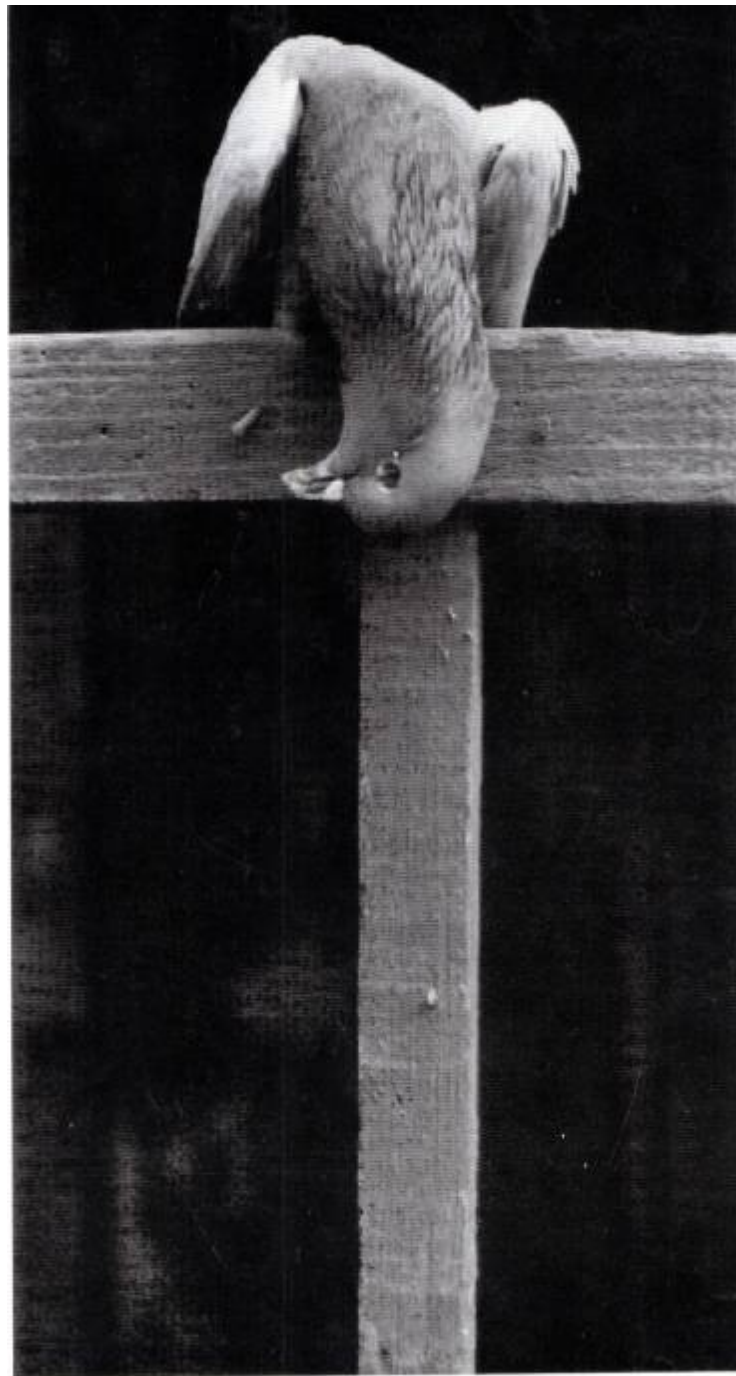
(From Iraqi bookshop)

Just as it was then, the 2010 election was a fake process. In addition, the people of Iraq did not know anything about the political parties or their leaders who had been absent abroad for a long time and most of them were working as secret agencies for Arabic and non-Arabic countries during the Saddam Hussein era.

My second guest was Fouad Shaker, an Iraqi photographer. He has held exhibitions in Iraq, Jordan, Japan and the USA and has documented the lives and archives of Baghdad over the last forty years of his life. I arranged to meet with him in Al-Hewar gallery and restaurant next to the Turkish embassy and near the Academy of Fine Arts in Baghdad. It is a space for Iraqi visual artists to meet and exchange conversations about their arts or the stories of the day.

He had been accepted as a refugee in USA but he couldn't stay there because of his feeling of displacement. He said: "I don't have roots there and what can a tree produce without roots? Here is my space of living, with my own environment and friends." He documented in photos a variety of subjects from the life of the Iraqi people, changes in

costume, styles of life old and new, facial expressions of the old and young people. One of his photos conveys a holy being; it is a complete story in an image.



The destiny of the peace

نذر السلام

Image Three: Photo by Fouad Shaker titled: “The Destiny of Peace”

I set the video camera up at Al-Hewar Gallery at around midday and visitors to the gallery started to pay attention to what I was doing. They wanted to know who I was recording for, was it for a TV channel or was I making a film? Many of my colleagues

from the old days were there to meet me. People started to move towards where I was sitting with Fouad. I explained to them the purpose of the interviews and why I was doing it.

During the live conversation with Fouad and while I was filming, I was afraid that an unexpected interruption might make it difficult to proceed with the interview. I didn't have a studio or a place to do the interviews in, nor did I have the money to rent a space. I had to rely on the circumstances and locations in coffee shops, private homes, offices or at places of work.

Fouad talked about what happened during the first week of the invasion, when the media across the globe showed Iraqis robbing and vandalising the Iraqi National Museum. When he gave that example, someone else interrupted our filming by repeatedly saying that the people who did that represent only ten percent of Iraqis. I thought that their aggressive interaction might create a bigger problem, so I called my friend to remove the person from the space for a short while. After I had finished the interview with Fouad, I invited that person to have a chat with me and I was glad to find that he didn't take my intervention personally.

After that, I continued the conversation with my colleagues and friends at Al-Hewar and while we were having tea and conversation, more and more people became interested in talking. After half an hour, I moved to another location, where another visual artist Muaid Muhssin was waiting for me to arrange the time and details for our interview. As always, I gave them a one-page translation of the topic of my research and the questions.

I met with the visual artist, surrealist Muaid Muhssin. He is well known among Iraqi visual artists and intellectuals. His style of interpretation of personal and historical events has been the same since we were students of creative arts. His visual arts, like those of many thousands of Iraqi visual artists, document moments, times, dreams, spaces, colours and characters. He has been painting for the last forty-five years of his professional life. He served as a soldier on two separate occasions, in the Iran-Iraq war in 1984-1988 and again in Kuwait in 1991.



Image Four: Photo by Muaid Muhssen titled: "Lost Memory"

Muaid spoke of how war and the economic sanctions have been reflected in his creative artwork. We spoke for six hours. It was the first time he had been able to speak with anyone about these experiences. That is one of the problems we face. Everyone has the similar lived experiences of violence, hunger, death and loss but few are willing or able to speak of them. As a practitioner, I found it very hard to separate myself from the daily experiences of war, the destruction of social harmony and loss of memory. These experiences have shaped my understanding of the essential part the arts have to play in our everyday existence. There are lots of these moments during the interviews, when a composed and shared enlightenment shone through the participant's expressions and dialogue. Many felt very happy after the interview and spoke freely about how they were moved by the light I had shone on their experiences in our conversations. One of the most important approaches I used was to encourage the interviewees to reveal their thoughts through conversation without fear of being wrong or right. They spoke with my friends, after I left them, of how I had shared with

them something very special, in Arabic: “*Al-Boo-ah*”, means the revealing of self in a trusting and peaceful environment.

I finished recording in Iraq and I went back to Australia to start the final stage of the interviews with Iraqi artists in Melbourne. I arrived in Melbourne from Dubai, and the next day I met with an Iraqi poet Sabah Khatab. As I was about to set up the camera, he asked me to take photos rather than filming him. He gave me his book of poetry and said: I have the answers to your questions in my poetry book because the poems I wrote capture most experiences of exile and of home. I left his poetry out of this writing because it was very difficult for me to translate it to English.

The process of editing the boxes of Iraqi memory

I admit that I found it physically and mentally difficult to watch the interviews, and I never looked at any of the footage until the process of editing started in Perth. I felt the wounds of each artist travelling through my body, soul and mind. I kept a distance between their narratives and my experience of their narratives, and that allowed time for some resolution. I played many roles in this process. I was a mediator, sharing in an open dialogue with interviewees about their personal experience and their creative reflection-narrative. I was also the film-maker and editor. The composition of these roles stems from my experiences in film-making with no budget. Watching the narratives on a small screen, forwards and backwards, I kept wondering whether I was impartial or not, because to be partial means to destroy the truth in objectivity.

Transcripts of Iraqi Artist's Narratives (My translations from Arabic to English)

The purpose of having this original transcript as a part of this writing is to provide snapshots of Iraqis real themes of everyday life experiences from their own perspective as “stories in, rather than, of the filed” (Gubrium & Holstein 563). I make some of my interviews as transcripts available here, to give the reader the opportunity to get to know and share the extreme and difficult times and situated memories of the interviewees.

An observer, I committed to transform a bag of knowledge (Iraqi Memories) to a new location and far-reaching audiences. Furthermore, I provided transcripts to the performers in the next phase of my action research. They were raw materials for further reflection and analysis in the process of cross-cultural narratives in performance.

Dr. Awatif Naaim: An Iraqi theatre director, actress, writer and director manager of Iraqi Regional Theatre 2010.

She said: “The West said they were targeting the Iraqi government, but they targeted the entire populations of this country. (During the economic sanction imposed by the United Nation 1991-2004)”

As a woman, I have carried the message of the importance of Iraq as a country. Iraq needs to be independent and it has its own integrity. As an Iraqi woman, I care for and maintain the Iraqi culture from a humanitarian perspective. As a woman, I became part of the resistance against suppression of the Iraqi memories. I had to protect my country, my people, through my theatrical presentations and through the theatre discourse, the performance discourse. I am very happy and proud to be an Iraqi woman, to be born in Iraq, and my duty is to fight and struggle with my intellectual weaponry; that is, the word and the peaceful meaning of the word and my theatrical space and to be able to say that Iraq is my inheritance. I have inherited that from generations and generations of Iraqis. And therefore I have to protect this inheritance, this archive of memories, and save it for the next generation. And I have to keep Iraq independent, with its own serenity, saved to be transformed by the next

generation. I am proud of the Iraqi culture, that it always opens itself to other cultures to learn and share histories and memories, peacefully.

Part of the responsibility of artists is to soften the suffering of people and to take those sufferings into aesthetic forms, to make the difficulties understandable and that they can be transform the sufferings of individuals through art. Artists need to remind their own society what the nature is of their being, the conditions of their being, through its past, present and future. Through that artists and people will be empowered to look with open eyes to the future and to build towards a bright future. As a woman, I have experienced catastrophic experiences such as the Iraq- Iran war, the Gulf War, Desert Storm, with its violence and total aggression against the populations, and the last one is the one we have had since 2003, the American invasion of Iraq. We have been through 11 years of economic sanctions that have destroyed the main essence of social fabric. During the economic sanctions not only have Western rulers and governments sought to control Iraqi people and their oil revenue, but also the United Nations has destroyed the dreams and the wills of Iraqi people and we have paid a high price for our resistance to the Western interdiction in our sovereignty. The economic sanctions have led to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. And here we are now after seven years of occupation; we witness the destruction of infrastructure, and the occupiers of our land. Despite all those difficulties, pain and sorrow, we are still able to use art as a form of action and resistance. Our actions are to resist the occupation of our memory. We are the Iraqis. We have inherited a civilisation and culture that is determined to save its sovereignty and to integrate its citizens. Our heritage is a civilisation which first started the alphabet and writing on clay tablets. Our ancestors were able to write names, letters and history on clay. You can imagine how old memories of Iraq spur us to fight and resist, with continuous action, to preserve and strengthen the identity of the land and the people. To keep our faith and belief in our identities and our land and sovereignty that kept us fighting and making arts.

We were able to stand firm and fight against the economic sanctions, against the wars that have been trying to steal our humanity from our hearts, from our

bodies, from our minds. We have witnessed what it means to live under occupations. As a woman, I have witnessed the rape of our women in the cities and we witnessed the treatment of Iraqi women in prisons such as Abu Ghraib. We witnessed the rape of Mesopotamia. We witnessed the rape of a nation. But we still as artists stand firm on the ground and speak from our roots that, as Iraqi people, we have been through that before, during the British colonisation of Iraq (1917-1957). Part of my responsibility and duty as a female artist is to protect Iraqi culture and sovereignty and that means to protect women's lives in this country, because women are always an easy target to attack and destroy. As women, we are the prophets and the peaceful passengers and the carriers of inherited memories. By protecting Iraq we are protecting women, children, old people and young people, because we face ongoing death and destruction in every aspect of our lives.

I had my mother living with me during the economic sanctions of 1991-2003 and at that time she was suffering with a heart problem. We tried, me and my husband and our collective family, to find medicine, because during the economic sanction it was impossible to allow medicine into Iraq. When I found the appropriate medicine, which I paid a lot of money for on the black market, I found the medicine was out of date. That medicine hastened her death. I am part of society and I am one of those who suffer the sickness and loss of family members and I lost my mother when she died in my arms. I wasn't able to find the treatment, the medicine, she needed. This happened because of the economic sanctions, when we faced the complete humiliation and execution of our rights as people to live in our own sovereignty. This was the time when we were hungry, the time we shared tears. I remember a lot of Iraqi families started to sell furniture and whatever saleable things they had in their home, in order to buy food and medicine. Our biggest problems to find drinking water. And even the bread we used to eat, we called it the black bread, because this was the only food we could offer to ourselves and for our children. During the days of the economic sanctions we had shameful days, shameful nights and a shameful time. As a people we have paid the price. The West said they were targeting the Iraqi government, but they targeted the entire population of this country. The highest price for the economic sanctions was

paid by the children, then the women. Women lost all their dreams of a peaceful life and secure living. I believe this not because I am a woman, but because the Iraqi women have suffered enough. They were unable to support their families. They lost their children from sickness and disease. They lost their brothers and husbands in the war. The hands of women were not tender and soft because of the work and the effort that women had to make in order to have food and medicine for their children. Their hands became like rocks, always full of cuts and wounds, because they were working everywhere so life could continue and so they could provide food for the family during cold and hot seasons.

As a female artist I took my questions and concerns onto the street. Through my theatrical performances, I was able to alert the people about what is going to happen next and why. Most of our works were under surveillance and monitored by the secret police. During one of my performances I was called to the police station and asked what I meant by something in the performance. What protected me was that I responded to the police questioning by redirecting my answers toward aesthetic and heartfelt questions rather than the factual details in my performance. This method helped me to avoid spending time in jail and avoid prosecution. I have presented a play called "*The Birds*", a play which asks: What is the value of oil and the precious resources we have if an individual cannot find enough food to eat, cannot find medicine and when the entire population is victimised and humiliated and when humans become the ashes of war? I presented another play called "*above*". It was about my questions to the authoritarian regimes and dictatorships, political parties, which have silenced the voices of artists, intellectuals and anyone who criticised them. I presented a third play called *The House of sorrow*. I wrote and directed it. The play was about the taboos, the social and political structures that are forbidden and prevent women from having their right to speak. In our society (Iraqis) women are not allowed to declare that she has love for a man. And how the balance of life changes, the balance of love changes, when the man goes to war and the woman stays home and she becomes a prisoner inside her home. She becomes a prisoner of her dreams and unwilling to communicate with anyone outside her jail, the house. I have always presented performances

for the children about what their dreams are and how they see the world through their eyes, the hunger in their eyes, and the lost generation in their eyes. I was trying to open a gateway, as a platform for the children, to tell their stories.

One of my performances was about a prisoner of war returning home to discover that he had lost all his family and how his life in a detention centre had affected his mentality. When he came home to find he had no family, no-one there and there was still war in the city, seclusion, violence, his entire mental health and social life fragmented. He was unable to face reality. He started drinking alcohol and he lost any interest in social codes of behaviour. One day he woke up in a strange place, naked – they had taken even his clothes. He thought that he had been stripped of his identity and personality. He didn't have any money or valuables at the time, but that's what happened. At that moment when he was naked, lost, in his own homeland, among his people, at that moment he felt he was dead. He moved towards thinking about the end of his life, the end of the universe, and started to question himself about how anyone could be responsible and accountable in this life. This question changed his perspective of life. He shifted from being a victim towards judging people. Because of his losses through imprisonment, war and fighting, he didn't have a normal life. He asked people if they could give him back his life, happiness, love and family that he missed. Just as God asked people to be responsible towards God, he started questioning the idea of God. We are people like any others on earth, dreaming of being able to wake up in the morning with no fear of yourself or any of your family or friends being killed. We are dreaming about opening the doors of our homes, to be able to go outside and find a peaceful life. We are in fear, we live in fear and fear surrounds us wherever we go.

Wherever you go there is daily terror and futile death. We don't know when and who is going to be killed, now or next. I want to say through the daily fear and terror we are still trying to make life possible and to go on with our daily lives and to be able to go to the theatre, go to work. And to be able to laugh and be happy, to eat, to meet friends we miss all the time. The war stinks.

Condemn the war because we suffer for it. Condemn war because we are paying the price of war. Condemn the war because it is the mother of all sorrows, because we lost the beauty of life, the beauty of dreams and the war magnified our loss, made it bigger and bigger. Condemn the war whatever the reason, whatever the ideology and moral reason behind it. Condemn the war. Freedom, peace and justice, they don't come with guns or missiles or helicopters. They don't come from the Marines. They come from the Marines' hearts and not from their anger and disrespect. Nothing will come out of violence. Everything is possible through dialogue and conversation, with love and respect for one another; all matters related to the questions of peace among people and between nations need to be discussed, so I can believe what Western people are talking about, and understand. Respect my right as a woman to say what I want to say and believe what I want to believe.

Aziz Khayun: A theatre director, actor and playwright, second generation of Contemporary Iraqi theatre.

“A woman standing on the bridge selling her children”

Yes, it's true; the war is over in reality. But it still exists in our hearts. It is inside me. You ask me how I survive, how I live, how I dealt with those catastrophic experiences. In life, humans are determined to stay alive. We are determined because we have a dream, we have a project. I still exist till this moment and I see myself as a self-project. I am still alive, not because my body survived all those memories, nor because of my self-reconciliation. The only thing that kept me alive is the project I had in my mind. This is the purpose of my life. This aspect of life, living as an artist, helped me to see the war differently and it made me survive. Death lives with us. When it becomes a wall between me and my wife, and my son, I am not scared of death any more. Death was sleeping with me in the same bed. I see death in the street, at the universities, in any corner of Baghdad. I remember, I was driving my wife to the Academy of Art, when I saw an Iraqi woman from the southern cities sitting at the back of a ute and it seemed to me she was sitting with the coffin

of her loved one in the back. She wasn't saying anything, but she was moving her hands up and down – the only part of the mourning dance she had room to do. I stopped the car and I started crying. Death was living with us. Death became part of our life, familiar to us. We become accustomed to death. No-one wants death. You don't have any options or solutions but you have to continue to be. It is a kind of gambling process between you and the other and the other is death.

I drank from the cup of life and what I drank made me absent until this moment. Because when I look back to see how I was able to produce and direct and to make performances, I have questions to ask myself. How was it possible or logical that during the war, with the economic sanctions and death travelling from one house to another, I was still able to work in creative art? How and from where did this energy come? Maybe there is something very special about Iraqis and being an Iraqi. Maybe, it is the special nature of this person that he can get used to death and sorrow. And even though it is so hard it doesn't stop me or him continuing on with our lives. When you go into the history of this area of civilisation, Iraq, there is a saying: All the conditions for making civilisations and cultures are not here. Maybe the Iraqi is determined to resist, fighting. Maybe he deliberates on the questions of love and how love pushes us to fight. Maybe from the ways we trust our self in life, maybe he is searching for immortality, like Gilgamesh. He might be thinking that he can walk side by side with death, and defeat death. Maybe the quest of Gilgamesh is for eternal life and its roots of our memory. Sometimes Iraqis challenge death and they do not worry about death, they welcome its coming. In the midst of missiles and explosions in the streets of Baghdad and when the temperature was 53 degrees Centigrade, when it was so hot that birds can't fly, we were sitting and drinking “Arak”⁹ without ice and we were laughing at the missiles, we were laughing at the explosions.

We talk about war but the economic sanctions are worse than a war. The economic sanctions are worse because there are no missiles, no armies or live fire. When it comes to the stage when a mother has to sell her children to survive, a woman stands on the bridge selling her children, or a doctor poisons

all the food, cooks it for herself and her children and all of them, her entire family, die, because she was afraid of losing her children and her dignity and afraid of becoming a prostitute. It is like inviting your own children to a death party.

These are simple pictures or images of how humans suffer during economic sanctions. There are millions and millions of these stories in Iraq. I am just giving you a glimpse of those circumstances and situations. If you want me to talk about it in detail, it is going to take us a long time, days and nights, because it is beyond myth and logic, unbelievable. Therefore we need to find a new language out of all that remains. There is a need to find a language that can express how economic sanctions have affected the social fabric. There is one thing I will never forget, that is the scene of palm trees burning on the horizon. All the tops of the trees were cut off, only the trunks were left. A scene no book, no novel, no poem, no song would be able to express.

Faroque Mohammad: An Iraqi writer, novelist and playwright

“Death became normal in our lives”

Death in our life means nothing can be delayed. We were living near the military camp when the Americans came. When the missiles came, we didn't know whether they would hit the camp or our home, either in daytime or night time. The question of death was constantly in our minds. It became normal, part of us, and if someone died or was killed, we used to say to ourselves: we are next or who is next? We taught ourselves that we could be killed at any moment, at any time. It might be when we went to work, when we were sleeping, maybe when we were rehearsing. I don't know what to call it, but it is a kind of very strange bravery. Is it the bravery of hopelessness, or is it true and real courage? It's true we continue our lives because we must live. Life is not just about eating and drinking and sleeping. We need to produce knowledge. We need to produce information, art, performance, novels. We are the generations that have experienced genocide, civil war, external wars and catastrophic events. This is Iraq and this is its history. Maybe it is a genetic

inherited behaviour which occupies our heart and mind, which is to be able to see and to experience all of that and to be alive. From our inherited ancestors until today, Iraq has been an open border for invaders, for colonisers both Western and non-Western. From the days of our ancestors until today we have had floods, diseases, sorrow and death, until the current occupation. Death became normal in our lives.

It is as if a human body is injected with a virus to resist death. That virus is the creative arts, creative thinking. We always hear from other people, non-Iraqis, they say to us, how come despite all the difficulties in life you are still laughing, still writing? We all reply, we don't know, maybe nature made us from different clay. There were a lot of people who wanted to get rid of Saddam Hussein, but they didn't know what would happen next. The invasion of Iraq - when you go back through the history of Iraq, since when has any occupying power in any country around the world come to help the people?

Abbas Al-harbbi: An Iraqi poet, scenario writer, actor, theatre director and playwright.

“I need to document myself because there is no dream left”

In the history of mankind it has always been an honour to fight for and to defend your country. But I remember when I was a soldier; I talked with my friends and my students about this fact and its phenomenology which is visible during wartime. In Yugoslavian history, for example when Tito and the Marxists started to fight to defend their country. He addressed all the people and he told them that Communists were the only people who had the right to fight, but the people refused because they believed that land and sovereignty belonged to everyone to fight for. It was different from our world. At that time there were reverse movements of migration and people, instead of running away, walked to the battle field, when the Yugoslav people moved to the first line of the battlefield to defend their country. People were motivated and encouraged within their historical memory and culture to fight. People with horses would sell their horses to buy weapons to fight. But our world is totally different. When an officer in the army is in a bad mood, he will threaten the

soldier to be sent to the front lines of the battlefield. As if the battlefield is a punishment. The Iraqi soldiers have been fighting but they don't have the desire to go to the battlefield. They don't have the feeling that they own the issues being fought for and must try to defend this country, this land, its sovereignty. Even when the soldier dies, he dies upset. And the ones who survive the war are not happy. They are unhappy about those killed in front of them, or the loss of friends and what they have lost in the war. We have lost the most important years of our youth.

I spent eleven years as a soldier; I was lost between the boots and the military costumes and the beret. When I was in the army, my friends asked me: "why at night time or at any time, don't you take your boots and your clothes off? And I used to say to them, "the war will end tomorrow, and tomorrow I will go home." And I remained there tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow for eleven years.

There are many friends that lost their dreams, their hope in life. I remember a young boy in the army; one of his dreams was to be a national soccer player, and I said to him, "one day the war will be over and you will be able to go and play soccer in the national team." But one day he and other soldiers went for a walk checking on the enemy and suddenly a bomb exploded. He got out of the war but without his leg. He left all his dreams behind in the battlefield and went back home dreamless. I write about these things; truly I feel that my time has been stolen from me, my youth has been stolen from me. I didn't feel that I would go home tomorrow, and I thought that I needed to document myself, because there were no dreams left.

You must continue your life as an artist. It wasn't as important for me to go home and see my wife and children, as it was to go to the theatre and make art. It is sad to know and to see and feel the world inside of us is shattered. We are still capable of dreaming but when you get older you miss a lot of the good things in your life.

I wrote a play when I was in the battlefield about my father when he was dying. The play is about my childhood and my memory of my father. I

remember when I was a young child and the first time my father took me to the big market. I got lost. My father was trying to find me and I was trying to find my father. At that time we didn't have bags to carry but I was carrying a knapsack on my shoulder. I was horrified and scared, not only worrying about finding my way back home, but also about being punished by my father.

It is amazing how the experiences of war have made us familiar with the loss of time. I wrote another play called *Annhadha*¹⁰ about a woman selling cream and tea in the market near the car terminal where all the soldiers were coming and going from the battlefield. She was a very honest woman, and one day a soldier came to her and said “This is medicine for headache”. She believed him and she started taking the tablets. After a short while she became addicted to the medicine. Then the soldiers and some non-soldiers started to come and buy the medicine from her. She didn't know that the medicine was a drug to make people hallucinate and relax. One day she lost her reason, and was not happy with her life and with the continuation of the war. She started singing and dancing and talking about the current political situation in Iraq. The police came and arrested her and when they discovered she had been using this drug, they sent her to a psychiatric hospital and no one heard anything about her any more.

At that time death became something very simple. If you said something you would be killed. If you didn't say anything you would be killed too. You developed a careless feeling and attitude, not only towards your family, but towards yourself.

There are internal and external sanctions against the entire population. The external sanctions come from the United Nations and the internal sanctions come from the Iraqi government against its people. No-one is allowed to travel abroad; no-one is allowed to travel inside their selves. You are not allowed to be in social gatherings with your friends. The history of those wars has been summarised and collected in our individual memories. And now by means of the war happening now, the impact of the war starts to saturate our memories. Now, with the greying of the population, the new generations coming up are totally different to us. They are the generation that carry the seeds of violence,

the seeds of neglect and loss. It is very difficult to continue our struggle to maintain and sustain a cultural memory with the new generation who has no interest in their cultural memories. Some of these younger people are not paying attention to what is happening in their homeland.

They are more or less tired and hopeless, and many of them consider that running away from the country is the only solution. Iraqi culture and memory is not about oil, it is about the people and the intellectual culture kept alive by artists, scientists, doctors. We are thirsty for knowledge, trying to read as much as we can and to find out what other artists are doing.

The economic sanctions became a joke. If the international communities intended them to keep the Iraqi government under control, they have had the opposite effect, for the Iraqi people have been at the mercy of the government. During economic sanctions, people think in survival mode; they will do anything to survive. I remember I went out with a friend of mine, a theatre director and I was selling lava lamps. I met a Palestinian journalist and when she saw me selling lava lamps she was very surprised and said “How is it that Othello is sitting in the market selling lamps?”

Sami Nassim: Oud player, singer and composer in Iraq and one of the best Oud players in the Arabic world.

“The Iraqi artist is creating from his disasters, sorrows and pain, a form of art”

The truth is that Iraq is the backbone of the Middle East. There is no-one who wants to argue about whether the Iraqi civilisation is old or not, because the first human in this region was Iraqi. Iraqis have been through a lot of difficulties, crises and political problems. Some of those crises have been inherited through the Iraqi memory and history. The antiquity of Iraqi culture has brought a sense of power, of the ability to survive and the ability to face these difficult issues and problems. I find that Iraqi individuals think of many ways to solve or resolve a crisis or problem. You find the Iraqi individual riding upon his own catastrophic experiences and using them as a way to engage creatively. The Iraqi artist creates, from his disasters, sorrows and pain, creative works and epics of poetry. If there is a competition for music, poetry,

novels, visual art, films, in the world, you will find the Iraqi artist, the Iraqi individual despite all the crises, all the problems they face, you will find him or her creating more poetry, music, art, and their problems make it the best, most creative work. My question is why the Iraqi, despite all these difficulties, is still able to create and work in the creative arts? You will find that most of the Iraqi theatrical groups and companies, musicians, film makers and artists, all those people created such forms while they were at war or under economic sanctions. This is the beauty of the Iraqi individual. They make something out of their misery or the experience in event. Iraq has been under enormous pressure such as the pressure of the wars, political regimes and economic sanctions. There are wars, war inside war. It all happens at the same time in Iraq. There is the first war in 1980, the second war in 1991 and there is the last one started by the occupation of Iraq 2003. Within all these wars, you find that the Iraqis survive the wars and are still able to produce art. You can still hear the Iraqi talking about poetry, about experimentation in art, musical art and about making his/her own theory. This cannot happen in a country or a nation where they are having a relaxed time and when their country has economic prosperity.

Iraqi individual was able to do that because he is the father of all knowledge, able to create new knowledge. At the moment the guns were first heard, and amid the heat of the cities being bombed, I entered the Institute of Fine Arts; my uncle was with me and he was illiterate. He had no understanding whatsoever about music. At that time I felt that our city was being bombed by missiles but we were able to study music, we were able to study art. I don't think that could happen in any other culture, in any other country.

Imagine how it was for my uncle, an ordinary man, a country man; imagine how it was for a person like me, from a village culture, to find myself entering the music world.

Khudom Shabith: An Iraqi artist and theatre director.

“It is an open wound”

It is not a story which has been planted in the memory but an open, bleeding wound. The first war between Iraq and Iran is not a story; it is an open wound, with memories of a difficult time. The mechanism of war and the use of weapons and modern technology and the violence: All of that has put enormous pressure on society and individuals. All those weapons and missiles have hit our cities and towns and left behind an open wound. We are paying the price for every little detail of the war, paying the price in our emotions, in our bodies, in our families. This war has destroyed a generation. One of those painful tragedies is still alive in my memory. In 1980, two months after the start of the war, when we realised that the political game was beyond our control, beyond our interest as a nation, we knew that the war wasn't going to represent the interests of our people, the Iraqis but rather USA interest in oil revenues.

Muaid Muhssin: A visual artist Surrealist who has participated in many exhibitions in Iraq, Japan and USA. He is famous for his style of Photo-Realism

“I spent five years, six months and fifteen days in the army”

During the war with Iran I was the only student who was able to manipulate the authorities so I didn't get involved in the war. At that time, as a student of art, I was able to create objects in my visual art and those objects could be interpreted in a variety of ways. When people ask me about the style of my artwork, I always reply with references to my personal experience. I am sorry, when I talk about my experience and how I view art, I do not consider myself special or superior. But this is my experience.

Anyhow, in all my artwork, I always create multiple meanings. Those meanings exist in the colours, the line and the light, with of course the story of my painting. There are few people who understand the depth of visual interpretation in relation to certain aspects of our lives. One of my visual artworks called *The Picnic*, represented Donald Rumsfeld, the American

Defence Minister, sitting on a chair with his feet towards the audience and his back to the statue of the Babylon lion. The Babylon lion statue is old and crumbling, and there is a huge library of books lying beside and underneath the shoes of Donald Rumsfeld. The piece of white paper is meant to represent the knowledge and experiences of other people, but those white pages turn into an airplane which kills the Iraqi people. When people asked me what I meant by showing Rumsfeld sitting on the chair, I replied that this is my opinion about the invasion of my homeland. There is also a true story here in my painting, for there are lots of people, destroyed people, poor people, being liberated from underneath the statue. This two-sided representation of invasion and liberation has made a lot of people reinterpret my artwork. It carries my truth about invasion, and what the Americans came for. But the other truth is that people started to eat well and earn money during the occupation, and those people consider it to have brought liberation. It not only speaks of truth and untruth. At the end of the day it's about invasion. At that time we were students of art. The war needed soldiers, needed wood to make fire and we were the wood of that war. One day when I was in the army they had transferred me and other soldiers to approach the Iranian border and we were taken to an area called Ahwaz (in Arabic and Khuzistan in Persian). One of the army officers treated us soldiers as if we were his personal slaves. It was hard to believe such a person would be given any authority in the army because he was not educated and had no knowledge of or respect for others. He was writing reports informing the intelligence service in the army about soldiers' behaviour and he was working as an informant for the Iraqi intelligence service in Baghdad. If he wrote a report to the secret police about someone, this person would disappear or would be shot dead in the battlefield by the Iraqi government. I spent five years, six months and fifteen days in the army. At that time I was accompanied by a few Arabian soldiers from Ahwaz and one of the soldiers was wounded and lay bleeding on the floor. I begged the doctor to do something and he laughed at me, saying, he's dead, there is no way you could save his life. At the same time as the informant saw the soldier lying with his blood on the floor, he was giving orders to the chef in the military camp to cook him a nice meal as soon as possible.

Saddam Hussein at that time was authorising his commanders in the field to kill as many people as they wanted to, with the promise that he would support them, they would not go to jail. At that time there was very heavy fire across borders, and during the battle one of the soldiers forgot his launcher and left it behind on the battlefield. This launcher was not worth anything, but the informant and his colleague ordered the soldier to take a small boat and to retrieve the launcher. The soldier took two others with him, one driving the boat, the other one as protection, so that he could bring back the launcher. There was amazingly heavy fire and violent action; you didn't know where the fire would come from, where the missiles would come from, the executions. In less than two hours the boat came back, but the soldier hadn't found the launcher and he was lying down on the seat of the boat. It was very hot and humid and I said to them, why you don't ask him to get out of the boat for some food or drink. They said, don't worry about him, he'll be alright. But when I walked towards him I found his head had been smashed in pieces and his brain was coming out of his head. I shouted to the doctors again, "this is an Iraqi soldier, why aren't any of you trying to help him?" They replied, "Can't you see his brains coming out of his head? He will not survive." At that moment, this incident changed most aspects of my life, my beliefs about death, faith and humanity.



Image five: Title: Babylon Lion artwork by Muaid Muhssen

Faud Shaker: An Iraqi Photographer, well known for his documentary photography, exhibited around the world, including in Japan, Jordan and USA.

“The bullet doesn’t damage and destruct the walls [of our cities and towns] but my body, my heart”

I recall many events in my memory as a photographer, by bringing those events from the past into my art, in particular the period of economic sanctions that were imposed by the United Nations against Iraq. It was a difficult, bitter time. I was at that time working as the head of the photography department at an Iraqi newspaper, and around the middle of every day I carried my bag and my cameras and I went out to meet the people who were living in the square. I met and mixed with these people – the labourers, the workers, the battlers in our economy. I documented their faces, their stories, in photographs. The area called Al-Medan is where most artists, poets and intellectuals meet at the café. The area is a mix of people from every walk of life in Iraq. I spent some time with those people who were oppressed people, and through my conversations with them I was empowered and enabled to release my emotions when I took photos of their faces, the way they saw things, the way they talked.

After that I would take my camera and walk to Al-Rashed Street and keep walking until I reached another area. I would sit there for a while looking around the buildings and the arcade, and when my eyes settled I would take the camera and start to take photos. The mix of traditional and modern buildings reminded me of my childhood and when I was growing up.



Doors at that always

أبواب في ذلك الزمان

Image six: Doors at that alley in 1970s, photo by Fouad Shaker

I am very attached to the places of my childhood, my upbringing, and the history of these places. Those places have been embodied in my memory. Al-Rashed Street is the last remaining street built during the Al-Abassin period. The street also reminds me of the Turkish Empire in Iraq, and of the stories of those places, including Baghdad, and how Baghdad looks now, and how the streets, the buildings, the places have all been destroyed. The bullet damage and destruction of the walls is not only marked on the walls, it is marked on my body, in my heart. I remember when I was a child playing with clay near the river and I used to see the bubbles in the water. I used to have small crystal balls in which I could see amazing images of another world. Those crystal balls inspired me to carry a camera with me and to see the people through that

lens. At that time in Baghdad no-one considered whether a person was a Christian, or Muslim, or not. People lived together very happily and peacefully, sharing life. The entire community lived together in harmony. When we used to cook, we always remembered our neighbour, so we shared our food with the fourth and fifth neighbours too. And they would do the same with us. There were people from everywhere in Iraq living in Baghdad. I was creating my own archive by documenting the everyday life stories of the people, the costumes, the traditions and the space.

I took a lot of documentary photos about most of the important places and locations in Iraq. I continue to document all those historical events and the impact on people and places. I documented the American invasion of Iraq and I took a lot of photos of the American soldiers when their tanks exploded, or their cars, in the streets of Baghdad.

The stories of my photographs continue with the ethnic cleansing, the civil war inside Iraq and the war between political parties. We were able, through my photography and other creative means, to let things pass in our life and to continue living for better times. When the war started, when the Americans invaded Iraq, I thought, "I need fear, I need something to be afraid of, something to encourage me to ask questions." I became unafraid of anything and now I don't worry about when I am going to die or who is going to kill me. I wish to die in Iraq. I don't want to die outside Iraq. That's why I came back from America.

When I was in America I started to take photos of the buildings and I found that the look of places, of buildings, was totally different from my memory of Iraq. I didn't like it in America. I felt I was like a tree without roots, and what fruit could this tree give you? Across other periods of time in our history there has always been the memory of our wounded country and it is still wounded right now. No period of time has passed in our memory without us witnessing the destruction of our home towns and cities. Since 1917 until today, it has been the same problem – fighting for oil and Iraqi resources. Iraq has always been changed either by local revolution or by the invasion of external powers. Therefore this country was and still is vulnerable to the greed of outside forces.

At the same time it is a place for political humiliation. But on the other hand Iraqi people are able to heal their wounds and go on with their lives.

Sometimes Iraq is devoid of intellectual thinkers, the people who could rebuild Iraq, because they cannot survive inside Iraq, because of the violence and war. During the economic sanctions, intellectuals, artists, free thinkers, either died because there was no food, no medicine, no drinking water, or they were killed by the Iraqi authorities, or they left the country and became refugees.

Thousands and thousands of Iraqi intellectuals have departed Iraq because there is nothing left in the country. They are scattered across different lands and exiled. They went to Australia, the U.K., New Zealand, America, Canada, the Netherlands – they scattered everywhere across the globe. They melted away over there because they couldn't survive and understand those cultures. Some of those people found it very difficult to be assimilated or integrated into those societies and I am one of those people. I found it very difficult to integrate into American culture, with the American way of life. I couldn't live in America because I had nothing in common with their artists, with their way of life. I didn't have common childhood memories with them, nor a common interest in finding artists who could understand my artwork, its time and location. Over there in America, when you are a refugee or migrant, they are not going to give you the job you are looking for, the job you could do. I talked with some friends over there about work and they said, “yeah, you could work as a cleaner” and I thought, “What should I do there?” I packed my bag and I came back home. And here I am talking to you about it. Because I was working for an electricity company and they gave me \$8 an hour, but for an American it's a different story.

Kadum Al-Nassar: A poet, playwright and theatre director and member of Iraqi National Theatre.

“You could see 4 million people walking in one direction to find work”

I feel that I am an unnecessary person, not needed. The culture of our society, its construction and social fabric and its needs, all those things make me

hesitate many times to tell people who I am as an artist. Mostly when people ask me what I am doing, I say I am working in an office; I don't tell people I am an artist, or a writer, or theatre director. They think it's a luxury to work as an artist during the economic sanctions and some people have already said to me, "What are you doing? Haven't you had enough of doing art?"

Most artists and intellectuals, when they wake up in the morning, they start walking towards the site where labourers collect. The difficult times and the suffering under the economic sanctions make people wonder what the role of the artist is in society in difficult times. You could see 4 million people walking in one direction to find work and to bring food to their families at night, and in the opposite direction you could see two or three artists walking toward the theatre. For those people going to find work it is shocking for them to know that you still believe in art and you work in art. At that time there was a huge change in the art industry and how to survive became the centre of attention for the artist, how to live. The productions and performances were totally for commercial purposes. For further artistic development, communities were looking for comedy. At that time, theatre producers trying to do anything that would make people laugh and at any cost. They brought the gypsies into the performance and gypsies used their skill and their experiences to produce a celebratory performance. Theatre activities lost people attention because of the lack of understanding their questions, crises and issues. This problem has made the people withdraw from their customary respect for artists and artworks.

Salah Abdul-Khafur: An Iraqi Singer of *Maqam* (an old style of singing, related to the early exploration of song during the Ottoman Empire); performs folklore songs with Iraqi and Arabic lyrics touring nearly everywhere in the Arabic countries

“When I am singing I feel someone is about to hang me”

The governments leading these nations and in particular the Arabic nations, treat the Iraqi artist worse than migrant labour. What saddens me is that I could have access to a visa to go to Europe but I can't enter Arabic countries. The Arabic countries used to give us visas to do our recording and meet with other

musicians and artists in the Arabic world, but since the economic sanctions of 1991 until today things have changed. What is the result of war? It's always the civilians who suffer. For example when Saddam invaded Kuwait, what was the result? We are living in a war inside a war. There are people who supported the invasion of Kuwait because they were pro Saddam Hussein and those who rejected the war and the invasion of Kuwait were slaughtered by the government and considered non-Iraqis by the Iraqi government. In one of the stories I witnessed, they kidnapped a child and were asking for ransom in exchange for the boy to be returned safely to his family. He was six years old. The father sold everything the family had, including their house and whatever money they had saved. Through a mediator they managed to organise the money to be exchanged for the child. The mediator between the father and the kidnappers took the money and came back with the answer that they would find the boy under the bridge. The father and mother went to the location to collect their son and the father couldn't find the child there so he contacted the mediator and told him the story. After a few minutes the mediator rang back and said to him, look behind you. The father walked a bit further and found a big tray full of cooked food and rice. When he moved the rice he discovered his son had been cooked with the rice. This is a very simple example of what is happening in Iraq. That's why we are staying in Syria, because it's much safer. What is the crime of a child? What has the child done to anyone? Let's say his father was a supporter of Saddam Hussein. Whatever he was doing, why did they kill the child? When the father and the mother saw their son, in no time the mother became crazy and the father followed suit.

This is one of the stories that when you live it, when you witness it, how can you sing? How can you feel you want to write music? What to say as a singer, as an artist? I could say love has been killed inside the human. Now I am 45 years old but I still remember when we were looking for new songs, new albums, and new poetry. It's different now. I feel someone is about to hang me when I am trying to sing. What to sing? What to say? To whom can I say well done? All I can say is "God save Iraq." Last month I managed to get inside Iraq and I stayed there one month. I felt I couldn't bear to listen to the people's stories and what's happening to our society. Baghdad is full of check-points

and they have created prisons inside prisons, suburbs have been divided by concrete. Truly I felt pain in my heart, to see my beautiful city turned into a refugee camp for its population. During the Iraq-Iran war and the Kuwaiti war my daughter suffered an illness. The American use of depleted uranium has affected the entire population. My daughter is an example. Most Iraqi children have leukaemia. There is blood cancer. You know in Iraq there were economic sanctions, so there were no doctors, no medicine to treat these cases. I tried my best to save my child and we were willing, me and her mum, to do anything we could. I took her to Jordan hospital. After a few weeks in the hospital she passed away.

Salema Khidair: One of the last remaining artists who started her life as an actress and singer; she has worked in most Iraqi theatre productions since 1956, and is a national TV performer poet and writer

“What has happened in Iraq since 1980 until today needs to have libraries full of books and films and photos to document that period of time”

I am very happy to die from hunger, to die in the street, anywhere in my homeland, but I will never accept or allow the right of colonisers and colonial powers to enter and occupy my homeland. I will never accept Americans in my homeland even if they create a paradise for me. As a refugee artist I was invited to apply for the resettlement program in the United States, and was accepted, but I refused three times. Most of the people I know have asked me why I refused to go to America and I said then, and I will say now, I refuse to enter a country that has destroyed my country, because I know what I will feel if I go to America. Invasion is different from destroying a country. Some colonial powers tried to minimise destruction of a country, but others meant to destroy it, not only to invade it. This is what happened in Iraq. What has happened in Iraq from 1980 until today needs to have libraries full of books, films and photos to document that period of time. All aspects of life were very difficult when individuals struggled to find a crust of bread to eat.

This happened during the economic sanctions, when the sanctions affected every community and individual, including the creative communities in Iraq. During the economic sanctions artists were not able to maintain their living and continue to do their art at the same time. It was very difficult for thousands and thousands of artists to pay the rent for their houses. During that time many artists started to think about the financial aspects of their artwork, rather than the creative aspects. This created commercialism and artefacts that could generate money for the artist. When commercial art emerges, the essence of true art dies, that is, art connected to community issues and concerns. I went once to Baghdad and it's not the same. Baghdad used to be one of the most cosmopolitan cities, full of life, culture, art and theatrical performances. That was in the 1970s. It was a kind of paradise, everyone was happy, no war, no conflict. My house used to be near Baghdad University and it was not far from my home; you could just walk outside and you would find yourself at the university. Just in front of my house there was a huge, beautiful garden full of the smell and colours of roses.

The streets were very clean and the trees well organised, green and bearing fruit. Baghdad was a paradise. I went to participate in an international theatre festival in Cairo and I stayed there for only 20 days and I felt homesick. I said to my husband, Baghdad is paradise, what are we doing here? That was in 1989, during the war with Iran, but still there was a life. But now what to say? Baghdad looks like an empty town, a town of ghosts, chaos and dust, where fear flies above the heads of everyone. Fear of kidnap, fear of being killed or imprisoned, for no obvious reason. I don't know how to express to you what I felt when I went to Baghdad recently. I found it very difficult to believe that this city is Baghdad. The pain and the sorrow of all those years of building and making ended up with seeing my own city as a rubble town. It affected me, my body, my memory, and made me feel I am lost between those images of paradise and rubble. I have a lot of diseases now. I have diabetes, high blood pressure; I am unable to sleep most of the night. Iraq is lost, is gone. It is impossible to bring harmony to the life of people in Iraq. When the Americans entered Iraq we weren't able to go outside our houses. We stayed inside because of the severe fighting in the streets and explosions of bombs and

missiles. How many times were all the windows broken in my home! One day an American missile landed just in front of our home; we are glad none of us were killed at that moment, just a few injuries to our bodies, and my son's body. We have experienced and witnessed what not many people have seen and witnessed in their life. It's bitter and sad to say that but it's the truth. What else could you do? During the economic sanctions we didn't have access to drinking water, so I dug a well inside my house and started to take the water out. This happened because the Americans destroyed the power stations and the pipes for drinking water. There was no way the government could repair them because of the economic sanctions. Our house used to be very crowded. All my family and extended family used to live with me in my home because of the lack of support and the financial circumstances. Many Iraqi families couldn't find anything to eat and they were not able to work or to find money, so people started to sell whatever they could put their hands on, and it ended up with people taking the doors of their rooms to sell on the black market. That was the only way you could bring food to your family and especially to the children who needed it. The people who came to power after the invasion were claiming that the President is a dictator and they were speaking from the point of view of an opposition political party. We were expecting them to be good to the Iraqi people and help them to heal their wounds of the wars and the economic sanctions but nothing like that happened. (End)

Chapter Three:

Part One: The methodological processes

The methodology of Participatory Action Research (PAR) conceptualised as practice-based research in performance, applies to the entire research project and to the documentary film interviews and performance processes.

In “Performance as Research: Research by Means of Performance”, a discussion paper by Alison Richards, the focus is on the processes:

a) by rigorous reflection and investigation, b) by the clarity and specificity of ...[the] research questions, and c) by the openness of ...[the] processes to question and evaluation by others.
(n.p)

The central hypothesis of my research emerged from the collaboration of participants, through their input, continuous analysis and discussion. I transcribed what we discovered through creative thinking during the study of the data. In this project, the data wasn't interpreted by me as researcher only by the Australian participants.

Ethnodrama and ethnotheatre:

employs the traditional craft and artistic technique of a theatre productionthe researcher's interpretation of the data...[and] the goal is to investigate a particular facet of the human condition for purposes of adapting those observations and insights into a performance medium. Simply put, this is preparatory fieldwork for theatrical production work (195).

I provided an ethnographical account of the transcripts but not as readymade plays or scripts for acting but as raw materials for making a performance. Saldana describes the relationship between the written script and the data as:

written script consists of dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected thought interviews, participant observation field notes, journal entries, and/or print and media artifacts such as diaries, television broadcasts, newspaper articles and court proceedings. Simply put, this is *dramatizing the data*” (196) (Emphasis added).

I collected the data but I didn't dramatize it. I didn't turn it into a writing script but kept it as a box of stories. I played multiple roles such as participant, participant's observer, facilitator, co-creative with analytical input to the historical background of the narratives and finally directorial assistant to the participants.

The Australian performers were the key elements to close the distance between me and the audience as they were English speaking within their own communities, in their own voices, with their concern about the narratives. They were the key players in an

artistic response to history, stories and events in performance and I didn't reduce their voices to my reflection and analysis.

The ethnodrama is "a written, artistically composed arrangement of qualitative data" (Saldana 196). I neither arranged nor thought about the presentation of a drama but presented transcripts as raw material to the participants to engage thoroughly and collectively on how to respond to the stories and engage with them in social and creative manners. I agreed with Saldana "you [must] find a new way of telling established story by transforming it from one medium to another while maintaining the integrity and the spirit of the piece" (197). The transcripts of interviews with the Iraqi artists weren't established stories but oral narrations: their stories in their own words. The transcript wasn't "turns notes from the field into texts that are performed" (Denzin "Performance Ethnography" 23) but rather the experiences of Iraqi memories and stories brought as they spoke about their life. The transcripts exemplify hidden and unheard voices of people situated in place and time, Iraq (1979-2012).

I collected data in the format of video footage instead of audiotape as a way of recording people's own voices, presence, vocal and facial expressions while they narrated their stories. Performing data is an immensely powerful way of presenting research.

Richards emphasises the importance of performance as research for local knowledge and the position of the researcher, which:

... include[s] the position of 'outside' observer ... as one valid perspective from which research into performance might be undertaken. I would also argue that a background in at least one discipline of performance practice is of enormous benefit, in conveying some of the crucial detail of 'local knowledge' to anyone wishing to undertake performance research. (n.p)

The local Knowledge comes from a refugee artist's life and artistic experiences into performance autoethnography.

This practice-based research project utilises the methods of Action Research (AR) in the first investigation, the filming of the Iraqi narratives, and PAR in creative process of the performance. Australian social science researcher Bob Dick provides a basic but useful definition of AR, which I reproduce here in full. He describes it as:

... action using a cyclic process, repeated cycles with continuously refining methods, data and interpretation in the light of understanding developed in earlier cycles.

It is thus an emergent process which takes shape as understanding increases; it is an iterative process which converges towards a better understanding of what happens. In most of its forms it is also participative (among other reasons, change is usually *easier to achieve when those affected by the change are involved*) and qualitative. (Dick n.d) (Emphasis added)

The *Iraqi Nights* performance experiment that follow cycle of PAR methods in the plan/action/reflect/re-plan. Wadsworth has represented the differences between conventional research and PAR in the following diagrams (n.d):

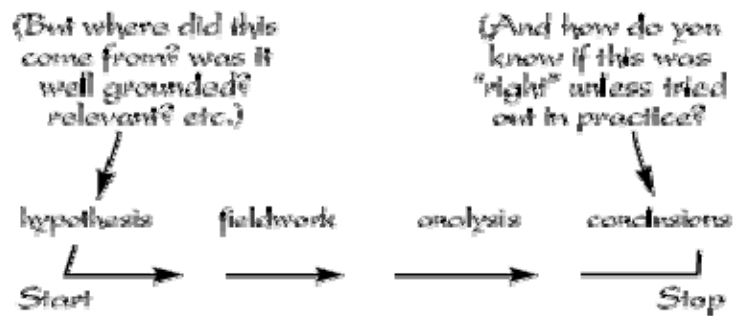


Fig. B Conventional Research Process



Fig C. Cyclical Research Process

My project uses this cyclical research process to develop the creative responses of Australian performers. Through a dialogue we were sharing the present of our lived experiences in performance-making. A dialogue created by Australian participants through processes of reflection and engagement with the diverse Iraqi memories.

In my research, I explain the process by giving an example of this process and an example applied to the entire process of making the performance. I focused with the

participants on finding the meanings in relation with each one others' views from an artistic point of view about the impact of historical events on artists' narratives rather than engaging in the social and political conflicts. The process begin with what I have provided the participants with: a selection of external research materials such as books of poetry, music and artworks. The process was collaborative and open ended inasmuch as it invited the participants' own understandings rather than imposing my own perspectives upon participants.

It is based on individuals understanding their own options, or lack of options, and their views of the controlling dramatic structure. The main concern was to find ways of communicating and connecting Iraqis' stories to Australian audiences through working with Australian participants. The cycle of action, found and refined and re-started again and again was based on exploring creative ways of maintaining the quality, content and stylization of the narratives. It was a creative process with an analytical approach to data collection. Each individual brings their own understanding to the notion of what might constitute a true story.

Ming-Fang He writes:

Understandings of our cross-cultural lives and cross-cultural identities are not easily obtained through conventional ways of thinking. Rather, understandings are achieved by thinking about cross-cultural lives and cross-cultural identities narratively and making meaning ... in relation to people, time and history, changing.... (He 515).

Such understanding of history and time is the central key in the process of exchanging knowledge and the experiences of those involved directly and indirectly. He explains: there are two kinds of inquiries: *stable inquiry* and *liquid inquiry*:

- Stable inquiry lends itself to fixed research phenomena, questions, purposes, objectives, methodologies and outcomes. The knowledge obtained in one inquiry is sustained without any change in subsequent inquiries.
- In liquid inquiry, knowledge produced in one inquiry is changed in subsequent inquiries. This change involves revision of the meanings of the terms of inquiry and their relationships. (516)

The process of flow in my project has increased understanding and opportunities to reflect on findings, change direction and refine the performance with the new knowledge discovered early in the process. A Liquid inquiry is an open process of flow of information and changes of direction which continued for ever, an open end.

There is dialectic between continuity and change in the process of cross-cultural narratives in performance. The dynamics and the fundamental of the groups using PAR is “the commitment that all participants actually do research for *themselves*” (McTaggart 170) to improve their own vision, individually or collectively.

I worked with PAR in the creative process in the following ways:

1. As a facilitator, I provided the participants with documentary film including the transcripts and Chapter One of the thesis as a starting point for discussion before and during the rehearsal times
2. I opened conversations about the narratives, history and personal experiences
3. I worked on aspects of creative interaction and reflection on what we learned about the issues and the narrative
4. Created an environment for sharing personal and engaged in a dialogue about found materials
5. As a dramaturge, I worked with the performers on the meaning and links between each selected segments or story
6. I worked with the group on additional relevant external materials such as Iraqi writers, poets and artist webpages. We engaged with what we found in the first step and built upon it for the next step. (Plan-action-find and re-define)
7. Individually and collectively, We worked on our own understanding of the sequences
8. We agreed on the dramatic order of segments/narratives.
9. As a director, I worked on workshops, training and rehearsals in conventional manners including lights and sets...etc.
10. I directed the performance for public as final step of the research project.

Using McTaggart Participatory Action Research (PAR) model that the participants “can learn from their own experiences and make this experience accessible to others” (McTaggart 170) in the way that participants connect their voices to the Iraqi’s narratives. The participants were free from the first meeting to make their own minds up about Iraqis memories.

These examples illustrate the process of working with participants, using a room as a constructed site in the Iraqi Nights.

I engaged with participants in the process of performing Iraqi stories in ways that allow the participants to be themselves and see their own memory in relation to other people with similar remembered experiences. I began the process with photographs, video footage, music, visual arts and books of poetry with real people involved in everyday life in Iraq.

1. I shared the photographs and video recording of Iraqi people at work, in the street, gathering around food, sitting together at nights, women and youths gathering in the markets.
2. I presented to the participants a holistic and complex picture of reality as a way of generating access to the distinctively cultural ways of living and behaving.
3. Throughout this process, I integrated Iraqi culture with my own personal life experiences in and during my life in and outside Iraq.
4. I created a conversational style of answering and responding to questions arising from my prolonged and/or intermittent contact with the project's participants.
5. The stories and creative illustrations became the tool to communicate and connect with participants and to cross the various cultural and intentional bridges between us. The aim was to reflect one universe, with people living in different locations but with the same primary concerns to live in peace and with love; to aspire to our own shared humanity where there are no genuine barriers between us.
6. I created an atmosphere for a safe and respectful environment that generated an open gate towards our feeling, thoughts and emotions. What we see and how that can be related to us collectively and individually was something that the 'Iraqi Nights' performance sought to explore and express.
7. It followed subsequently that the personal emotions and empathetic responses arose during our conversation around what it might mean to be in someone's position during a difficult time, and where difficulty is a central part of everyday life. Again, theatre's ability to deal with the concrete reality of live bodies onstage and the metaphorical presence of acted 'others' was central to this.
8. The images and music, video footage and daily life stories of Iraqis alongside artist's works guided us to live in a similar but innately *creative* environment,

which always resonated in our present. The key question¹¹ is where we stand in the stories we tell and depict and what, if anything, we can do about it. As in traditional term of acting, to tell other stories is to become the other within a performer with one's own voice and concern to what s/he understands and how in some ways to *become* the person rather than to function as a character only . Other people's stories are our stories , we can feel it even if we have not experienced it yet. What (if) it was some one you knew, your friend or me, the one you were talking with during the rehearsal to make a performance for your friend and families?

9. We moved towards lived experience in depth in order to try and understand our selves in similar situations. This process opened the gate to one's own feelings and interpretation to a story and to the ways in which those stories occupy our/their mind.

I became the owner of the story from a creative and humanitarian perspective.

This process led us to resolve the location and space between nation, culture and personality. I witness a story, I carried in my memory, I become the carrier of the story; I am a story, not an actor *telling* a story.

In the "*Iraqi Nights*" performance, the elements of participatory cultural aspects were focused on the collaboration in terms of communication, coordination, community (grass-roots artist), social and artistic interaction among participants.

We have made decisions based on feelings, hunches, or "gut" instinct. Our discussions in this instance generated more artistic and expressive ideas.

Additionally, we made decisions that were not necessarily based solely on data, but rather on opinions, speculation and personal observation that lead us to create and circulate new self-made meaning to personally related stories in the performance.

This collaborative and interactive movement started, as performer began to use the data information and collaborative understanding with their own families and community members' comments and reflection. During the process and period of rehearsal and afterwards we were able to embrace the need to work, interact, and contribute together in new ways to provide information along with community support for the project as an example of community cultural action.



Image seven: The poster of The Iraqi Nights Performance

Part two: the creative process of *Iraqi Nights*

In respond Robert Wilson's question as he put it in a conversation with Umberto Eco: "An artist recreates history, not like a historian, but as a poet" ("Conversation" 89. The poetic point views can encompass personal history without having a direct description to a story. A world without official records, labels and names created both linguistic and artistic stylizations of a story. What can a refugee poet do!? Here is my departure to the last remaining step in answering this question.

I was invited to produce *Iraqi Nights* at Full Throttle Theatre Company in Townsville by the manager/director of the company, Madonna Davies, so I moved from Perth to Townsville in Queensland on the opposite side of Western Australia.

I worked with a cast of seven performers, five young women, one at mid-forty and a man in his 80s and myself. We were working together as a small family, eating together and sharing our personal stories.

The Sets of the *Iraqi Nights* performance is an empty space with nine white frames, the size of a door, representing the Iraqis that I have interviewed. Two data projector, one projected on the ground with the film footage of Iraqi exiled artists and the second projector were projected on white screen showing multi-layers of images. One mirror is placed on the stage as title for the last room. The mirror simplifies what you want to see, how you want to see yourself, image of the self rather than whom you are. I used the mirror in the production of the *Iraqi Nights* mark as title to extend the process to audience as they looked into the mirror while characters revealed their narratives.

The *Iraqi Nights* collaborative process built on re-constructed Iraqi memories by Australian participants. Their engagement and shared views constitute the practice of building a historiographical narrative in performance. The creative hypotheses emerge in collaboration with the participants at the various stages of workshop and rehearsals. The performers shared with each one another about what they know about Iraqi memory, culture, faith and arts, and where all aspects are resolved and shared in a beautiful and peaceful manner with them as the actors become the first audience.¹² We started solely and collectively searching for further details about the stories through libraries, internet. Each participant has the right to choose what meanings they see in the Iraqi narratives, poetry and artwork. There wasn't any clash between my

suggestions and other participants input and we were acting like a family supporting each one another. How can we make sense of ourselves and our experience of others?

The participants' understandings emerged in shared conversations about their relationship with, and the reactions and the responses of their memories to the Iraqi memories. How does Australian participants' understanding or thinking about war differ from that of Iraqis at war? Reflecting on this issue brought knowledge of their Australian history at war, history of first generation arrived in Australia. The participants become themselves, voicing their own concerns, and they become their voices. Telling and retelling is the essence of engaging in dialogue about our memories of cross-cultural narratives and events. It is a dynamic process of negotiation between participants' views of memory.

Iraqi Nights is an event presented, not in a series of logical plot, conventional dramas or continual narratives, but as a rug of dreamatic sequences in memory. The narratives in *Iraqi Nights* are poetic and open-ended, situated within open process and nameless characters. The Iraqi narratives and performances were my vehicle in the process of cross-cultural narratives and dialogues towards a passage of hope, love to communicate once own experiences with others. My dreamatic interpretation comes alongside Kantor, who "accept[s] reality that was wrenched out and separated from the everyday as the first element of creative process" (Kantor "Reality" 118), extracting the event from internal and external memory in a space/room. The rooms may be filled with a gesture, a light, a frame, a picture, poetic verses, body movement or stillness, mime or dance, sound or vocal, rhythm or breathing sounds, it can be anything "to discover, as in a mirror, the secrets of biography" (Barba, "The third" 3).

The performance of *Iraqi Nights* is a "room of imagination, room of memory", as Kantor recalled his childhood room ("Happening" 62). The rooms of memory are the rooms in all human cultures and the stories. The rooms are rooted in space and time, the past, present and future of our memories in micro-realities and arts.

An Iraqi night is a room of memory in the minds and lives of Iraqi artists and people, on the one hand, and a room of imagination in the minds of Australian participants in another hand. To me as an artist, the Iraqi memories, historical events are lived experience and the concept of performance differs from a performer attempting to

narrate a story. The tension between imagination and memory is neither about the effects of the room nor the aesthetic means of presentation, but rather, rises from the revisiting/tracing of events in the perception of history and in the lost and hidden memories.

In the *Iraqi Nights* performance, I developed with participants the segment titled “the books” (based on my experience of returning to find my books had been used as cooking fuel). I further explored the reality of starvation, not only as experienced by Iraqis inside Iraq, but also as my experience of not having food outside Iraq.

The workshop, rehearsal and the concept of making a performance with community were the tool towards further conversation about refugees and exiled artists experiences.

Journal of the start of meetings, workshops, rehearsals for the performance

The following excerpts from my journal represent key moments in creative practice of the *Iraqi Nights* to reflect on my roles and as knower experiences.

In the process, the participants are accountable and responsible for what they in their own turn carry for their audiences.

The participants begin to understand that what was happening to others can easily happen to all of us, and it is at this point of understanding that other stories become our stories. It is a process that actually began to enhance one’s own faith in their sense of self . In engaging with the reality of other lives, the participants’ own lives became understood and valued on a new level.

I focused on the final moments of human life, what you want to say to save someone’s life. We moved far away from traditional notions of acting in order to become the personal carriers of a story and from here, we were able to voice our own voices and develop the conveyance of genuine concern in our telling.

This is not about seeking to become the owner of the story only but to have the honour to tell a story that impacted in terrible ways on the well-being of a

community. This in part is one of the main essences of collaboration that helped to connect us with each other through our stories in the open space and time of rehearsals. This collaboration helped empower participants to not only think critically about events happening in our lifetime and our lives but also to have a direct response to the event in our heart and mind towards others.

Friday 20th of May, at the Full Throttle Theatre

In order to find participants, we (I and Madonna Davies, Director and Manager of the theatre) started to send emails to people involved in community and professional theatre workers. On Friday, we invited the public to see the film (footages about Iraqi narratives) for the first time in Australia, and I was interested to find out how the people would see it and what questions they would ask.

Two Australian women (aged 40-59) spoke to me. One said: “Australian people are numb, and this work needs to be exhibited outside Australia because it would receive great respect.” The second one said: “I think this footage needs more editing; it’s too long to see someone talk face-to-face on camera for 15 minutes.” The young people in the audience saw things differently; they said, “You brought us something about the life of Iraqi people which we don’t know much about,” and they thanked me for sharing with them the footages and the information.

I used the footage to find more participants and as a way to meet people. The night of the first film exhibition, I found four interested students from James Cook University who said they would like to be part of the project.

The first night of showing the footage was my first experience of interacting with public views about events that took place in memory. I respect all public and artistic opinions and the more I know, the more I learn about their immediate perception and in the same way that memory is immediate

Madonna and I decided to put the footage on for one more night and to see what other new people coming to the film would say, and at the same time I might find more participants interested in the project.

27th May 2011, showing the footage for the second night at the Full Throttle Theatre

I invited the public to see the footage for a second time, and there was a lot of interest and conversation about the footages. Some people hadn't seen or heard about the Iraqi stories, and had no idea what it was about. Some people in the audience were appreciated the simplicity of face-to-face conversation of artists narrating their stories with one close-up shot. It reminded them of talking on the internet with one of their friends or member of families. Others saw opportunities to learn more about Iraqi history and memory, and they were not concerned about the quality or the format of the footages.

A lady in her mid-60s came to me and said: "the women and children are paying the price of war and political conflicts, and I felt that in my heart when I heard the first narrator speak about her experiences in time of war." A few students of the arts were sad to hear about it, and they wondered what light the performance could bring to the Iraqi memory.

30th May 2011, at the Full Throttle Theatre

First of the workshops , I gave Madonna's mother a picture of my grandmother, who is deceased, and asked her if she could see (within the room of imagination) what relationship she could establish with this person? I asked her to go on the internet and search for the Iraqi women's profiles, and see if she could find a close relationship with someone, just by looking at the pictures from different cultures, and find out whether we would find a way to understand the stories behind the facial expressions, and what that could bring to her knowledge as a person, before becoming a performer?

I made similar approaches to other performers when I shared the footage with them, and then I gave them a book about Iraqi authors, a collection of modern Iraqi fiction, poetry and storytelling, as well as interviews with Iraqi writers about their work and the conditions surrounding their lives.

I shared with Sophie (drama student), one of the performers few poems written by Iraqi poets and how that can stimulate connection to what she reading. She was free to read it and make her own comments about what she read, reflecting and interpreting what she selected for her segment in the project. The process is about seeing the

dynamic exchanges between text and the slow-motion movement of film, and tracking them in precise prose, position and picture.

Madonna, as a singer, had the opportunity to read and choose a verse or more from the poetry and work on it as a collage poem, to develop a song that expressed a segment of Iraqi memory. The images become words, the words become movement and the poem becomes a song. This song is the *Iraqi Nights* performance called (Can you see the light coming from a distance, can you see). I experimented with the stylisation of narratives, transforming spoken words into song with chanting and humming in Arabic rhythms and tunes. I called these chants 'refugee's blues'.

Sunday 4th Sep, 2011, at the Full Throttle Theatre

I discuss the performers' responses to the poetry and the rooms; each of them brought their own attention to the stories. Sophie kept asking when she would have the chance to read the written transcript of Iraqi artists' narratives. Her concern encouraged other performers, and so I made copies of all the transcripts in Chapter Two for them to read and talk about collectively around the table. They chose what they wanted the Australian audience and their families and their friends to know.

First example, The Act (Coming home by **Marjolein**).

Australian communities come from cross-communities of migrants and refugees from around the world, during times of peace and war. Some generations pass their narratives of difficult times and stories of leaving their home land to their relatives and beloved ones; some write about it in all forms of literacy and creative arts. The stories coming to Australia, and how and why they got here is alive in the memory of most generations. The Iraqi narratives and stories are similar to those stories but in their own particular time and location.

Each individual has their own ways of processing information in relation to their history, memory and living time.

Marjolein chose this story of coming home because it has a personal connection with her life, she felt it, lived it and sought to liberate her own emotion during the act. We were sitting around the table when she came to the rehearsal space with

mixed emotions. She asked to talk first about what she chose to express and why. Marjolein came from the Netherlands as a refugee with a particular background and family history of war and social destruction. Her personal history and memories connected with my own story of coming home and meeting with my father for the first time after 21 years of exile. I did not interfere in anyone's options and what they chose to bring to the production but I asked if they were able to explain to each other why they chose this story rather than another. Some times I left the rehearsal space for the purpose of giving the project participants time and free emotional space to discuss and explain things among themselves.

Second example: (train of check points) By **Sophie**.

The segment chosen by Sophie was based on her imaginative wondering of what it might look like to go home when your journey brings you face to face with a train of check points about what you carrying with you, your identity and belonging.

Sophie discussed her surprised feelings of loss and confusion about why people have to face this social situation just by going to the market and coming back home. She chose this segment and she discussed it not only with the participants of the project but also with her sister and friends. As we choose between our options regarding what to do and what not do, the participants were selecting their segments based on their personal reflection and in relation to the surrounding world that they lived within.

Sunday 11th Sep, 2011

The processes of choosing narratives stopped, and we moved towards rehearsal¹³. I helped putting the performance segments in order, that is, the order in which the stories and segments linked to the whole meaning of the dramatic action in the performances. During one of our rehearsal workshops, one of the performers suggested doing or saying something about the historical event that took place in Abu Ghraib Prison, Iraq in 2004. The performer wanted to bring attention to the violation of human rights, where prisoners, male and female, were sexually abused, tortured and raped by military police in the United States Army along with other US governmental agencies.

I asked her how she wanted to present the segment; she suggested showing pictures of three prisoners to the audience. A second female performer rejected the idea; she felt uncomfortable with it because it would cause outrage; I suggested having just one photo of the prisoner. We agreed to try and to see if it was going to offend anyone of us first.

At the next rehearsal, I printed three photos and I asked the performer to choose one of them; when the others saw the photos, one of them was offended, and said she didn't feel comfortable with it at all. To solve the problem, I agreed to put it on a white chair and show from distance while data projector process showing the footage. We targets aspects of everyday life narrative that allow ideas to develop through language and framing which is not just about words but also ideas that can be expressed reframed simply. The construction of a segment can subtly and overtly influence the plot and development of performance.

The process of making was always democratic; everyone was treated equally and their opinion, views and understanding of a story respected. There were difficult moments, and some narratives aroused feelings of discomfort and sadness. We repeated the processes in theatrical terms, as we do in theatre training, workshop and rehearsal, several times, to remind ourselves about time and movement and space. I moved away from authorial control of text and its metaphors and turning of a figure that necessarily insists on original unaccountable voices in narratives.

Friday 23, Sep, 2011 at 10:00am

Moving towards the dates of the performance, I-we talk about the design choices of inside the space of the performance. I suggested the use of data projector on the floor to uncover the identities of Iraqi artists while using a second data projector on the screen facing audiences. I used Muaid Muhssin creative visual arts, Fouad Shaker Photography and my collections of photos during several times of visiting Iraq on the screen as means to present what was inside the box of Iraqi memory. I use my story of the lost books to reflect on impact of historical events in Iraqi daily life. I wasn't performing at the Iraqi Nights as much as playing a supportive role. I was trying to make sure whether there is something need to be done before the show start that I couldn't do.

Performers were engaged in a dialogue about the narratives and segment that they chose. The *Iraqi Nights* performance presents ethnographic and personal views of self and other in historical events to engage and arrest the audience's attention.

Finale:

The Iraqi Memory Project formulates a practical development (process and product) of performance autoethnography of making the *Iraqi Nights* performance. On artistic and personal level, it was and it remains an essentially open-ended project. However, I wrote it from the beginning to the end; that is to say that this project is not finished yet because there is nothing finished in human's memories.

It remains as dramatic view to historical events and everyday life narrative in performance. The desired result is to integrate the fields of autoethnography as a means to cross-cultural narrative in performance.

Since there is no conclusion but a story, I will leave the rest to you: "*the reader* must move back and forth across multiple levels of reflections, drawings, and reactions, *becoming an active participant in the dialogue*, experiencing, feeling, and associating with the work rather than standing apart from it" (Bochner and Ellis, "An introduction" 511) (Emphasis added).

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Endnotes:

¹ The *Iraqi Nights* performance has been nominated for the Townsville Arts Award 2012.

² Please, see the examples of the questions in Appendix one.

³ *Yaboooh* is the vocalisation of mourning expressed by Iraqi women when they have lost a member of their family. I can't translate it because it is sound.

⁴ The candle used as symbol of hope in the performance.

⁵ This part is dedicated to the memory of refugees who came by their boats didn't make it to Australia. I love you and I am sorry.

⁶ Yazidis (also Yezidi, Azidi, Zedi, or Izdi) are a syncretistic religious group (or a set of several groups), with ancient origins and comprising Gnostic core belief structure with other elements of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Manicheism, and Islam. For more details see: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/religion-yazidi.htm>

⁷ In addition to the records in the Pentagon and the CIA's holdings, the entire archives of Saddam's Ba'ath Party were seized and shipped to the United States in 2006 to be kept with the Iraq Memory Foundation, a private group set up by Kanan Makiya, an Iraq-born American who teaches at Brandeis University. On its website the group gives its address as a suite in a Washington DC area with staff in Baghdad. A posting says the Foundation is engaged in an effort to safeguard these collections as a national patrimony. Press reports, however, suggested that some seven million pages of personnel and membership records of the party seized by Makiya documenting the atrocities committed by Saddam's regime have been consolidated at Stanford University. The foundation has long restricted full and free access to the documents that account for the Baath regime's victims, frustrating scholars who complained they were being deprived of access to vital historical records. For further details see the bibliography under Nasrawi.

⁸ It is very hard to interview someone in this difficult time by asking question and waiting for an answer. Sometime, I have to start with a story about a book, a poem, a play, or a story about friend or family hoping that that will generate a flow or start a conversation and then I go back to my questions. Sometime, it is impossible to have a conversation about anything because of the intense complexity of the events.

⁹ It is alcohol made from rice, dates and sultana and it is very strong.

¹⁰ It is a well-known terminal for buses in Baghdad.

¹¹ Please, see appendix three for participant's feedback.

¹² On the nights of the performances, I invited all the performers of *Iraqi Nights* on stage and I opened a direct conversation with the audience about the performance. People in the audience described the impact the performance had on them. I opened the dialogue as part of the process of the cross-cultural narrative in which the audience become participants and have their say about the stories and history, culture and creative arts of Iraq in the project.

Appendix One: Questions for the interviews

Here are the questions that I asked during the:

1. Who are you? What was your position in/during the historical events that took place in your home country?
2. What kind of future do memories project and create in your life and arts?
3. Has the nature of your artistic interpretation changed after all these years of wars and sanctions?

Here are the secondary questions:

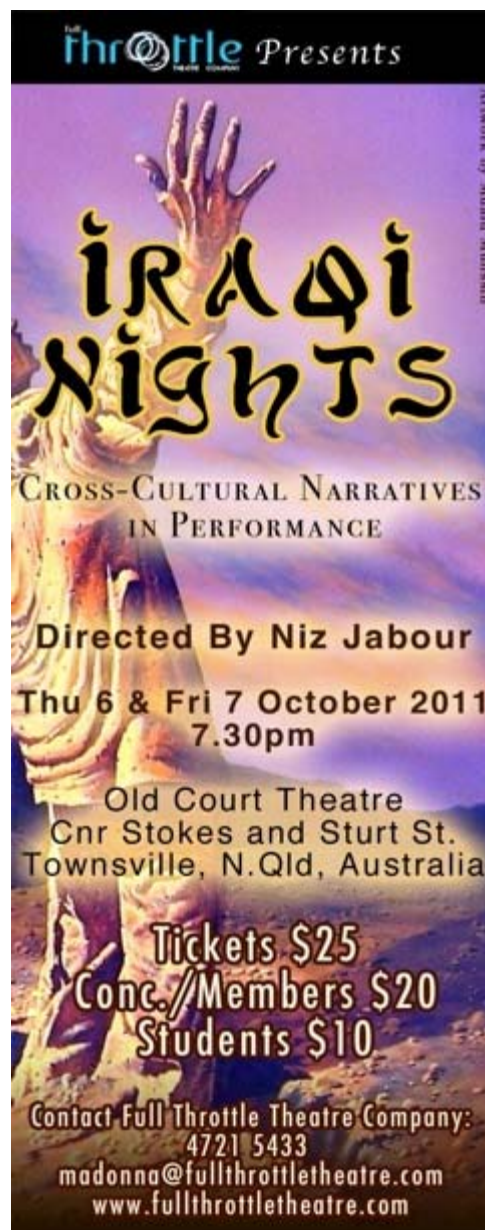
1. Where were you working and what kind of work did you do during the following events?
 - 1979, when Saddam Hussein become the president of Iraq
 - 1980-1988, during the Iraq-Iran war
 - 1990, during the invasion of Kuwait
 - 1991, during the war to liberate Kuwait
 - 1991, during the economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations.
2. Have the economic sanction effected you, your family, your community?
3. Where were you in 2003 when the USA and its alliance invaded Iraq?
4. Have you being in the army?
5. Have you being subject to police investigation and why?
6. Finally, as a refugee's artist what is your future and how do you see the future of your country, artwork and practices?

Appendix Two: Review of the performance *Iraqi Nights*

The Personal is Political

By Christina Houen

“Iraqi Nights, like the Arabian Nights, is one of these tales travelled in memory, history, time and space to share and trade with you as a basket of thoughts, unfinished thoughts in contemporary performance.” Niz Jabour.



“The personal is political” is a feminist catch-cry, which came home to me with full force on Thursday night, when I sat in the Old Court Theatre in Townsville, and watched the [Full Throttle Theatre company](#) perform **Iraqi Nights**, created and directed by Niz Jabour. Niz is an Iraqi man who has been in exile from his homeland for 30 years. He is an artist, actor and director, and is in the final year of a Doctor of Creative Arts degree at Curtin University. This performance, sub-titled **Cross-Cultural Narratives in Performance**, is created from his research into the memories of Iraqi artists in exile: their experience of war, of occupation, of the destruction of their country, their culture, and their families. He has returned twice to Iraq to interview some of these artists, and has compiled film footage and transcripts. From this raw material he has fashioned a performance, which, if I have to describe it in one word, is **shattering**.

Shattering because it cuts across the political debates about just and unjust wars, occupation, economic sanctions, invasion, genocide, democracy, terrorism, Al-Q’aida, weapons of mass destruction, the axis of evil, and all those other catch-cries we have heard so much of in these last few years. It also cuts across the complacency and comfort and conservatism of our Australian (aka American, British, European, Western, Asian, you name any country which is not torn by war, occupied, terrorised) way of life.

The word political is never uttered in this performance, nor any of its synonyms. Once, the narrator mentioned the racial groups — Shia, Sunni, Kurds — and that was all. Only the personal matters here. **Iraqi Nights** is personal, powerful, painful, poetic, but not political. And yet, paradoxically, it is political, because, by passing by the politics of how Iraq came to be this shattered nation, with little hope for rebuilding a peaceful, stable and prosperous state, it cuts through all the divisive politics. It speaks directly to your heart, and changes you.

Argument does not matter. What we are confronted with in **Iraqi Nights** is the pain, the loss and the grief of the people who have suffered and continue to suffer. As Niz says in his program notes,

“Sometimes, we travel in our memory searching for meaningful stories to tell or to remind ourselves and others about something. Sometimes we replace ourselves by others to make sure that what we tell is not going to hurt anyone or us, and sometimes, truth can’t stand still.”

The truth is in the voices of the artists and their memories. Their words are spoken by the small cast, 9 adults, accompanied by 3 children. The performance opens to a bare stage, with a number of tall rectangular frames on wheels, pushed together, and behind them, sits a man, hunched forward, chin on hand, gazing at the floor. There is a pedestal mirror in front of him. As the lights come up, he steps out and begins to narrate. The female chorus emerges, and one by one, they speak, breaking into a chanted lament sometimes. The women wear dark colours and head scarves.

Emily Richardson



There is one other man, an old man, who does not speak. The children move with the adults, but do not speak. The leader of the female chorus, (**Maddona Davies**, dramaturge and theatre manager) occasionally bursts into a solo lament, with a voice that can split rocks and make the earth tremble.

There is a screen behind, with artistic representations of the shattered landscape and people, created by Iraqi artists. There is also a projection onto the floor, of the artists who were interviewed. This is not very obvious to the audience, but it is done this way to protect the identities of the artists and to ground the cast, to connect them to the people whose words they are narrating, whose hearts are breaking.

The frames on wheels and the mirror are the only props. The frames are doorways into rooms — the many rooms of memory. The last frame, the last room, is the mirror, which confronts us with ourselves, our brothers and sisters who are framed by these memories. We look into the mirror and see others who are also ourselves, how our lives would be if we had to suffer what they are suffering.

I was privileged and honoured to be at this performance as a guest of Niz and the theatre company. I hope that Iraqi Nights will have a long life; that it will tour regional Australia and other cities, other countries, and that the film Niz and his assistants are creating of the performance will be shown to an even wider audience. This is a performance everyone should see. It will move your hearts and change the way you think about citizenship, exile, nationhood, refugees, war.

Appendix Three – Feedback from Performers of *Iraqi Nights*

Madonna Davies: Iraqi Nights – Cross Cultural Narratives – Memory in performance.

- The journey of this process is something that I reflect on often. As a performer and arts worker for over 20 years this production is the one that resonates with me the most.

Creating a show with such a sensitive topic driven by the creative and emotional force of Niz Jabour guided all of us along the creative method that was required of us to make this show.

The text and songs, poetry and narratives were a means to give ourselves a better understanding of the plight of the refugee, of Niz Jabour's journey and that of his countrymen and women. A lot of improvisation was the key I believe as it allowed the actor/performer to feel and react honestly, not as a structured and rehearsed response. Memory in performance is how I like to think of it best. Memory is now, it is happening now and even though the stories and memories were not ours the telling was memorized, the images projected on the floor and the screen were real, alive and worth a thousand words.

I have done a lot of improvisation in my career, I have taught it and performed using it as a method to create and develop character and plot. Niz allowed the actors who were mostly volunteers without training, to explore the possibilities of the theme, the moments and the emotions in the structure of the play.

Each actor could choose a piece from the materials and develop, in our own time and return to rehearsals to share this with the group. Eventually each piece was sewn together to create the structure of the performance.

The most important element of the creative process was the freedom to explore different ways of expressing and delivering the text. The openness of the researcher Niz guided us step by step with our collective findings and reflection on the outcome. The action was eventually mapped out but there was room to improvise within the structure. This was encouraged by Niz and allowed the actor to be in the moment each night without having to think about where to be on stage and where to focus. "Be who

you are in life not an actor” Niz Jabour (2012) was focus on this term of becoming the person not the character.

My experience with the song that finished the production was purely experimental and improvised each night. Some elements were the same, the basic melody, but the rhythm, delivery, the extension of notes, the alto to soprano was different each night. It was very important that the actors chose the pieces they wanted to do. The text, story, memory had to mean something to them not to Niz. Why? So that we can see how western culture sees the conflict? Are we emotionally affected by the words of the poets, writer citizen of the Iraqi culture? What touches our Western mind and emotions and how?

It is privilege and great honor to invite Niz to come to our town and share his experience with us and I feel luck that I have the opportunity to work with him.
madonna@fullthrottletheatre.com

Sophie Kesteven: Iraqi Nights

- *Iraqi Nights* was a unique and cultural performance that I was very proud to be a part of it. Once a week our group collaborated together and read through first chapter, transcripts, music, artworks and poems Niz Jabour had given us. These transcripts included a DVD interviews that Niz had taken with the Iraqi people when he was in Iraq. From these materials, we were able to choose a piece that compelled us to perform it on stage. We were working together as a team sharing and talking about our life, the performance and what we discovered. We were in a daily conversation with friends and families about the performance. In the end we were able to create a performance filled with poems, songs and the words of the Iraqi people.

Niz Jabour was a pleasure to work with; he has a remarkable background and has seen a lot in his lifetime. I believe *Iraqi Nights* is a story that needs to be told to Australian audiences. It is an original performance that shows the full extent of what war and economic sanctions have on a community.

It is sad to see the performance ended but on personal level the content and the concept of the performance will with me for a long time to come. It was an opportunity to learn and know more about making performance and experiment with

our thoughts in doing arts. Thanks Niz for the way you worked with us and helping understand other's people life in another cultures, language and arts.

(sophie_kesteven@hotmail.com)

Curriculum Vitae

Academic Qualifications:

2009-2012: PhD (DCA) School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts (MCCA) Curtin University, Perth, WA, Australia.

2001-2004: Master of Creative Arts (MCA) - Newcastle University (*The Efficacy of Performance in Cross - Cultural Dialogue*).

1999-2012: Artistic Director of Omni Theatre Company.

Employment History:

Nov 2011: Guest Director at Courthouse Theatre, Townsville, Qld. Directed *Iraqi Nights*.

June 2011: Lecturer at James Cook University, Townsville, Qld. Directed *My Bag* with Drama Department students.

Oct 2010: Directed *The Unfinished Show*, Hayman Theatre, Curtin University, Perth, WA.

June-Nov 2008: Lecturer at Griffith University MT campus, Qld. Directed *The Clowns* with Drama and Education students.

Aug 2007: Created and directed *Smoking Shadows* at Metro Arts Theatre, Brisbane. Community project in association with Brisbane Multicultural Arts Centre.

Oct 2007: Created and directed *Rain of Ashes* at Metro Arts theatre, Brisbane in association with Access Arts. Community project: "Exploration of personal stories in our communities."

2006: Artistic Director "Newcastle Theatre Festival".

2007: Adapted *A Little Bird* from *The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter, Newcastle.

2005: *Greetings from Iraq* Film writer, director and editor with ACMI "Australian Centre of Moving Images "Proof exhibition".

2004: *Hello from Iraq*, Granny Lane Theatre, Ballarat, La mama Theatre and Trades hall, Melbourne. One man Show. Writer, Director, performer.

2003: *The Fools*, University of Newcastle. Writer, Director.

2002: *The Unfinished Show* Culture Lab International. Script development and Direction. Workshops and Performances at Various Schools around the Hunter Region including Broadmeadow Performing Arts High School and Newcastle High.

2001-02: Artist-in-Residency: Palais Royal Youth Venue:

- *No Answer Yet*, Facilitated workshops leading to a performance.
- *Beggar's Kingdom*, Writer, Director.

2001: Mime Teacher: Hunter School of Performing Arts; Theatre of the Deaf and NSW Deaf Institution, Newcastle: *The Raining Silence*, Directed workshop leading to mime performance.

1999: Directed a series of Community Theatre Productions including *Krapp's Last Tape* by Samuel Beckett.

Directed 1st Australian Annual Newcastle Mime Festival: Co-ordinator. Taught and directed workshops and performances.

My Aching Back and *The Immigrant*: BHP Ribbons of Steel Performance for Closing Ceremony, Newcastle Community Arts Centre: *Act Number Zero*.

Culture Lab, Sydney: *Women's Songs*.

1998: Taught "Acting for Film and Television" workshops, Charles Stuart University, Bathurst. Albury School of Arts, Canberra Open Learning Institute; Acting and Performing Workshop in Orange; Acting Workshop and Street Performance at the Blaney Festival; Mime Workshops leading to Performance at Arts Out West, Bathurst, Youth Art Collective, French Culture Centre, Perth.

1996: Freelance Director, Writer Actor: Mime and theatre performances: *Face Behind the Door*: German Embassy, Pakistan; *Woman with Bird*: French Organization for Women, Pakistan; *Dancing with Lights*, Mime performance: French Culture Centre, Pakistan; *The Death*, actor with FCC, at International American School, Pakistan; *The Exception and the Rule* by Bertolt Brecht, Director; Brechtian workshop leading to performance for Pakistan National Council of Art.

Other Overseas experiences:

I worked with French Culture Centre as mime teacher and director for 1 year and 2 months and the presented a solo Mime show funded by French Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan in 1996.

I worked with the Pakistan National Council of Arts as a theatre director and workshop leader for 6 months towards a project funded by the German Embassy and the Pakistan National Council of Arts from 1995-1996.

Awards and commendations:

2012: *Iraqi Nights* rewarded for Townsville Arts *Rewords*

2004: Shootout Short Film Festival: Best of Ten for *Hello* (Writer and Director)

2003: Shootout Short Film Festival: Highly Commended Film and Direction and awarded Best Sound and Cinematography for *The Happy King*

2003: CONDA Awards, Newcastle: Awarded Best Professional Product for *The Unfinished Show*; Awarded Best Light and Set Design for *Gypsies*;

Nominated: Best Director, *No Answer Yet*, *The Unfinished Show* and *Gypsies*

2001: Shootout Short Film Festival: Best of Ten for *The Lost Child*; Awarded Best Sound and Cinematography, Highly Recommended for script.

Appendix Four: Photos from the *Iraqi Nights* Performance



Opening of the show By Niz Jabour



Opening of the show by Niz Jabour moving towards center stage



All cast singing: Salam, Salam, Salam



Niz narrating the story of the rooms



Niz reading a poem



The Books Act: Niz Jabour with the group



Coming Home: by Marjolein Paul



Check Points: by Sophie Kesteven, Niz Jabour and the Group



Roses Digger: by Niz Jabour



Bloody day and Nights: by Kristy Cowen



A poem by Emily's Richardson



Niz Jabour Singing in Arabic



Women of the bridge: by Zoe Carrier



A Poem called Value: by Sophie Kesteven



Iraqi women's room (five women reading poetry)



Second Visit: by Marjolein Pual



Can you see the light coming from a distance: A Song By Madonna Davies



"During the last song the mirror is moved to centre stage. Niz Jabour places a candle on the stage and leaves."



No Picture, just a mirror