

**School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry
Faculty of Humanities**

**Singing the Women Back Up:
Art for Social Change and the Empowerment of Women**

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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:

Date: 30 October 2020

Abstract

This thesis examines art for social change as a decolonising methodology for women of colour and Indigenous women. Through four case studies set in the southern hemisphere, the thesis explores both the successes and limitations of art for social change in the empowerment of women in these two categories, who are, in both different and similar ways, seriously affected by systemic inequality, poverty and violence globally. While international policy attempts are being made to achieve gender equality and empower women, these efforts often stem from colonial systems which perpetuate entrenched disadvantage. One response to nurturing women's empowerment has been the 'art for social change' movement—a creative and participatory methodology that uses different modalities of art for working with, and in, communities. Paradoxically, art for social change has been inspired by concepts from the global South yet has been mainstreamed by policy frameworks and funding in the global North.

The thesis begins by foregrounding my own experiences as a woman of colour involved in art for social change and by engaging briefly with the practice's contested evolution in parts of the global South and North. It goes on to examine feminist critiques of the concept of empowerment, drawing on the decolonial thinking of feminist scholars from the global South. At the heart of the thesis are four case studies that focus on the voices and experiences of women who have been involved in art for social change as participants, artists, and in art leadership roles. Through conversational interviews, participant observation, and archival sources, the participants' experiences in art for social change are contextualised against their daily struggles, as well as centred in their ongoing resistance and defiance of oppression. Two of the case studies are based in the settler-colonial state of Australia, my current home, and two cases in Chile, my birthplace and the training ground for global neoliberal policies. In the chapters on Chile I

discuss the practice of a popular theatre festival, *Entepola*, and two historically linked instances; the *arpillera* movement of the post-Allende era and *LasTesis*'s feminist response to the social uprising in 2019. In both of these instances, I argue that art for social change can powerfully propel women towards different forms of social emancipation, and I identify the factors that led to their success. In the Australian case studies, I first discuss the participation of Noongar women in art for social change facilitated by the Community Arts Network of Western Australia and explore how, despite experiencing structural and everyday racisms, the women find ways to act and mobilise their own power. The second case study explores the critical contributions of three women of colour who are leaders in art for social change. This chapter links one of the projects developed with Afghan Women in Western Sydney to a US-led project with women in Afghanistan in the global context of the war on terror. These four case studies across the global South provide a window into how and why Indigenous women and women of colour are using art for social change as a platform for activism and highlight unique and localised epistemologies of creative resistance that are connecting across the global South.

The chapters discuss how, through a variety of modalities of art-making, women use narrative to communicate and affirm their stories and their lived experiences in creative ways. That is, using stories mediated through art for social change creates an opportunity not just to *tell* the story but also to reimagine those stories, affirm authorship, claim power over one's own experiences, and uphold agency over how these stories are communicated. The thesis's original contribution to knowledge lies in theorising art for social change from the perspective and experiences of women from the global South, including my own reflections from a practitioner's standpoint. Further, it illuminates art for social change as a decolonising methodology that helps both to dismantle hegemonic constructs, and to create alternative ways of thinking and being in the world. Finally, the thesis highlights the potency that is embedded in women's collective creative

power and emphasises the elements that contribute to genuinely emancipatory projects involving racialised women.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate my work to the warrior women in my family, and to all First Nations women and women of colour who use their gifts and creativity to fight for social justice.

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge and pay my respects to the ancestors, Elders and families of the Whadjuk people of the greater Walyalup of the Noongar Nation who are the Traditional Owners of the land on which I live and work. I acknowledge that Indigenous sovereignty was never ceded.

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Note on translation

All translations from Spanish to English have been done by the author. Some phrases are included in the original Spanish; these words are italicised. When citing directly from authors whose work is in Spanish, I provide a translation and the page number, as recommended by APA 6th Style.

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Preface

As the world grapples with complex and intractable problems that affect all dimensions of human existence—climate change, inequality, poverty and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic—women and girls continue to be disproportionately impacted (UN Women, 2020). On 25 September 2015, the United Nations announced *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Notwithstanding the volatility of international negotiations and the threat that the pandemic will nullify the modest gains already made, the *Agenda 2030* has been promoted as an ambitious and unprecedented mandate to eliminate world poverty, tackle climate change and foster equality for all. The rhetoric of the *Agenda 2030* was cautiously welcomed by some feminist scholars as a step up from previous global attempts to foster women’s equality (Bidegain Ponte & Enríquez, 2016; Esquivel, 2016; Rosche, 2016). However, others have questioned whether the political will to implement and finance these changes exists (Ford, 2015; Stewart, 2015).

As a woman of colour, I find it almost impossible to remain optimistic that any of these aspirational global goals, in particular Goal Five, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” will be achieved by 2030. I find it especially difficult to believe that this could be the case for Indigenous and other minoritised women across the globe (Curiel, 2016). As the world falls into a pandemic-led economic recession, creating further uncertainty (“Pandemic will cause worst recession,” 2020), it is even harder to imagine that the will to implement such an ambitious agenda could ever be found. From where I stand—in the settler-colonial society of Australia—I decide to direct my gaze to better understand a grass-roots community and cultural practice I have been involved in for most of my working life: the ‘art for social change’ movement. Over many years of ‘doing’ art for social change, I witnessed the

potency of collective and creative spaces where women shared stories. When those spaces were 'right' and enabling, the women were able to reclaim personal and collective power through voicing their personal narratives.

Paradoxically, although a significant proportion of participants in art for social change projects are women, there are few first-hand critical accounts that illuminate the relationship between the empowerment of women of colour and Indigenous women, or which describe art for social change practices from the perspective of these women. There are several reports outlining the benefits of the arts in promoting community wellbeing (Lewis & Doyle, 2008; McQueen-Thomson & Ziguras, 2002; Mills & Brown, 2004; VicHealth, 2013); however, few of these are critical analyses or theoretically informed accounts of the practice (Bishop, 2012; G. Hawkins, 1993; Kelly, 1984). Furthermore, art for social change is rarely examined against the backdrop of a settler-colonial society. It is my aim to centre the experiences and ways of knowing of women of colour and Indigenous women who have participated in art for social change projects. Through this, a theoretical framework may begin to emerge that contributes to, and recognises, the potential of art for social change as a decolonising practice. I start this exploration by bringing to the present study fragments of my personal journey in an attempt to decolonise my own subjectivity (Anzaldúa, 2012).

I endeavour to critically examine the connection between my experiences of growing up under a totalitarian regime and the experiences of state violence of other racialised women, as well as to better understand the impact of colonisation and its ongoing legacies on minoritised women (Allas et al., 2018). Making women's stories visible is key to feminist decolonial practice (Curiel, 2016; Hill Collins, 1991; Smith, 2012; M. Walter, 2015). It is a way to share a position from which women of colour and Indigenous women can collectively challenge the systems of oppression that have continued to silence and suppress them.

Art for social change, global South and empowerment are core terms in this thesis, and I begin by defining each of them in turn. The forerunner of the term art for social change in the global North, 'community arts', emerged as a distinctive arts practice in the 1960s and 1970s. It has been linked to historical events characterised by political transition, turmoil and the work of social movements (Bishop, 2012; Nardone, 2010; Palacios Garrido, 2009). Its theoretical roots are attributed to libertarian and emancipatory ideals of which the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is one of the most frequently cited sources (Adams & Goldbard, 2001; Adams & Goldbard, 2002; Palacios Garrido, 2009). Since then, its evolution and trajectory has been contested and, at times, plagued by changes of terminology and a lack of consistency regarding its purposes and value (Matarasso, 2013; Mulligan & Smith, 2006). Community arts, art for social change, socially engaged arts, community cultural development or CCD, participatory arts and social practice are some of the most common terms used to refer to these community-based arts and cultural practices (Badham, 2010; Haviland, 2017; ICASC, 2019). Amongst this multiplicity of terms there are important common characteristics attributed to these practices. That is, they are multidisciplinary and collaborative (Haviland, 2017), and they are associated in varying degrees with social justice, community activism and empowerment, particularly for those who have experienced dispossession and marginalisation (Adams & Goldbard, 2001; Adams & Goldbard, 2002; Green & Sonn, 2008; Kasat, 2013; Nardone, 2010; Palmer & Sonn, 2010; Quayle, Sonn, & Kasat, 2016; Scher, 2007; Sonn, Murray, & Kasat, 2002).

I use the terms *global South* and *global North* in this thesis to emphasise the ongoing power inequalities that exist between and within countries around the globe. They do not mark geographical locations, although the vast majority of wealthy populations live in the northern hemisphere whilst poorer communities live in the southern hemisphere (Connell, 2007; English, 2005; Félix de Souza, 2018). Specifically, I adopt the use of the term *South* as defined by Boaventura de Sousa Santos:

The South is rather a metaphor for the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance to overcoming or minimising such suffering. It is, therefore, an anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal, and anti-imperialist South (2016, p. 18).

As part of the global North, I include references to art for social change in the rich nations of (white) Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, however my main focus is on the policies developed in the former three countries, as they share similar political and cultural systems. From the global South, I consider art for social change with an emphasis on Chile, and I briefly cover some aspects of this practice in ‘Abya Yala’, or the ‘Continent of Life.’ Abya Yala is the term used in the Kuna language to refer to the Americas. In the past decade, it has been increasingly adopted by activist movements to refer to the collective struggles of *South America* (Becker, 2008).

Australia and Chile are the geographical locations of my four case studies that examine community arts practice and the empowerment of women. I chose these locations partly because of a personal connection to these two geographies, as I grew up in Chile and now live in Australia. However, these two countries have much more in common: a violent colonial past which continues to oppress their First Nations (Álvarez & Painemal, 2016; McGlade, 2012b), and a colonial occupation that has endured (Speed, 2020). That is, the occupation of Indigenous territories continues to be maintained and protected by the state (Speed, 2017, 2020), which means the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous people both in Australia and in Chile.

In search of different forms of resistance, feminists from the global South suggest that personal narratives and storytelling, which are at the core of art for social change practice, are effective mechanisms that can propel women and others towards social emancipation (Anzaldúa, 2012; Buker, 1987; Hill Collins, 1991; Jabbour, & Bazlamit, 2020; Puleng, Einat, & Fine, 2015;

Segalo, 2016). This, combined with the articulation of art for social change as an empowering practice, led me to the examination of the concept of women's empowerment in the context of international development. Contemporary writings on women's empowerment are generally attributed to feminists from the global South (Sen & Mukherjee, 2014). However, the concept of empowerment has a long history that can be traced to different parts of the world, including India in the 12th and 13th centuries and Europe in the 16th century (Batliwala, 2007). Empowerment, like community arts, gained currency in the late 1960s and 1970s when social movements and feminist ideas were cross-pollinating with postcolonial theories and pedagogies of popular education (Batliwala, 2007; Parpart, 2002).

Andrea Cornwall suggests that by the 1980s, the empowerment of women was conceptualised as a radical and transformative approach to bring about change in power relations between men and women, and to achieving equality (Cornwall, 2016). However, Jinn Winn Chong (2012) argues that during the 1990s the term lost its radical edge, as it became co-opted by neoliberal development policies. Interestingly, advocates report that community arts experienced a similar fate, as a depoliticisation of the practice and a departure from its radical roots also occurred in the 1990s (Matarasso, 2013). The parallel histories of community arts and women's empowerment are not surprising, given that both movements are grounded in the liberation paradigm. What it is worth considering, at a time when women's inequality is recognised to be one of our most significant global challenges (Akhter & Ward, 2009), is how art for social change can help women 'push back' against racism, inequality and state violence. This is the focus of this thesis.

Introduction

The transformative politics of culture to which we commit as feminists is incomplete if we fail to acknowledge the creative potential of those women who have existed in our societies behind a veil of silence, whether because of poverty, ethnicity, sexual harassment or humiliation, or all factors combined.

—Ofelia Schutte, 2011, p. 800

i. When memories become stories: My road to art for social change

Telling my own story is a way to decolonise my subjectivity, which is necessary for my scholarly work and for my ‘soul’ (Smith, 2012; Walter, 2015). Revisiting old memories may seem indulgent to some, but when those memories, particularly from childhood, are understood against a web of deliberate systemic oppressions, they transform into a powerful tool; they become stories. As a woman of colour, a political refugee and a community cultural development practitioner, my stories carry vivid experiences and emotions that have helped me to affirm a political position from which to speak (Baker, 1987; Ledwith, 2005). Stories hold personal and collective power and have the capacity to cut through and subvert the establishment (Ibrahim Ali, 2014). As Veronica Pardo, one of my interlocutors, says, “These are my stories. This is my life. This is what happened to me. Nobody gets to rewrite these things.” In making this declaration, Veronica validates and affirms her own experiences, more importantly, she asserts the principle of self-determination. In this spirit, I present fragments of my story and the stories of other women throughout this thesis.

ii. My early years

At the age of eight, my life was marked by two experiences that fundamentally shaped who I am today. The first was racism; the other, a military coup d'état.

I was born in Chile, the long, thin country that lies on the south-eastern edge of the South American continent, between the Andean mountains and the Pacific Ocean. Both Chile, my birthplace, and Australia, my current home, are societies founded by colonisation. Australia is widely recognised as a settler-colonial society (Perera, 2006b; Watson, 2010; Wolfe, 2005); however, Chile, like other countries in Latin America, has not been theorised as settler-colonial state until recently, and there are increased reasons to do so (Freedman, 2018; Speed, 2017).

Based on the central tenet of settler-colonialism outlined by historian Patrick Wolfe—"The colonizers come to stay, invasion is a structure, not an event" (Speed, 2019, p. 17)—Chickasaw scholar Sharon Speed argues that Latin America ought to be analysed through the prism of theories of settler colonialism. In Chile, like in other colonised territories of Abya Yala, the colonisers indeed arrived, invaded and stayed. Centuries later, the occupation of Australia occurred in the same way. In contemporary Chile and Australia there is an ongoing state of territorial occupation, in which structural violence and inequalities embedded in neoliberal economies are disproportionately impacting Indigenous women and women of colour (Allas et al., 2018; Speed, 2019).

Capitalism's current iteration—neoliberalism—continues to be shaped by the settler colonial imperative of dispossession /extraction /elimination justified by racialized and gendered logics that while shifting continue to emerge from that imperative (Speed, 2017, p. 788).

It is not surprising that the 'modern' states of Chile and Australia share: a deep and entrenched racist attitude towards their Indigenous past, systemic and structural violence and inequalities, and a wilful ignorance of the day-to-day

manifestations of that legacy (Demuro, 2012). These conditions were created and are maintained as a result of the settler-colonial process (Speed, 2019).

As a result of these dominant values, which systemically influence and impact its culture and politics, Chilean society reveres and celebrates its European ancestry while at the same time denying its *mestizaje* (the generations that emerged as a result of sexual violence against Indigenous women) and excluding its Indigenous heritage (Carrasco Jiménez, 2010). Chileans' collective identity and their narrative of belonging was founded on, and has been sustained by, a white mythology in which whiteness dominates over non-whiteness and which manifests in a ubiquitous racism at all levels of Chilean society (Garabano, 2009; Waldman-Mitnick, 2004). Waldman-Mitnick (2004) explains that *el mestizaje* evolved differently in Chile than in other Latin American countries. While *el mestizaje* was central to the cultural identity of countries such as Mexico, Ecuador, Perú and Guatemala, in Chile, because of the Mapuche's fierce resistance to colonial rule (unique on the continent), *el mestizaje* became synonymous with Indigeneity and thus was marked by widespread denial of the latter. Before colonisation of Abya Yala, the Mapuche people occupied most of what it is now Chile and Argentina (Vásquez Ríos, 2012). After more than three centuries of defiance against colonial rule, the colonisers entered into a treaty with the Mapuche people. This lasted until the end of the 19th century, when the emergent Chilean Republic claimed the remainder of the Mapuche territory and waged a war known as the 'Pacification of the Araucanía'. Justifying the State's violent incursion was accompanied by the construction of the Mapuche as 'the other'; hostile and savage. Thus, the emergent Chilean society distanced itself, both literally and figuratively, from anything Indigenous (Waldman-Mitnick, 2004).

Very few Chileans know that the origins of the name *Chile* come from Indigenous language: the Andean language Quechua has '*Chili*', meaning cold or snow; the Aymara word '*Chilli*' means the end of the world (Huanca-Yucra, 2011; Pizarro, 2014). But all Chileans know about their European ancestors who

fought for independence. In fact, the name of one of those ‘patriots’, Bernardo O’Higgins, ‘graces’ the main avenues of almost every town in the country. As a group of people, Chileans go to great lengths to see themselves and their cultural traits as the product of ‘civilised’ Europe (Magill, 2010). Although I never met my paternal grandfather (he died before I was born), I feel as if I did; his memory has loomed large in my family. His German ancestry has been a source of pride and identity among the younger generation. One of my nieces undertook extensive and expensive research to acquire German citizenship that was made possible due to my grandfather’s legacy. On the other hand, my maternal lineage, born in Chile, has never been celebrated or acknowledged.

While growing up, I, like everyone around me, was completely oblivious to the legacies of colonialism and patriarchy, as well as to the ongoing racist policies of migration that privilege European settlers. We were also ignorant of the multiple Indigenous genocides and the ongoing racialised structural violence that have affected all Indigenous cultures, especially women and the Mapuche in Chile (Atallah, Contreras Painemal, Albornoz, Salgado, & Pilquil Lizama, 2018). According to Chilean writer and poet Jaime Valdivieso (cited in Magill, 2010, para. 2), 90 percent of Chileans have Indigenous heritage. My great grandmother (pictured below left) and grandmother (middle, with me as a baby) never admitted to having Indigenous heritage. When I came across the photograph below (right) of an unknown Mapuche woman while travelling in the south of Chile in 2018, I could not help but place it side by side with those of my two grandmothers. A memory came rushing—a few years ago I suggested to my mother that our family had Mapuche heritage and her response was: *Si tu abuela te escuchara, se muere!* My grandmother would have felt angry and embarrassed if I had insinuated that she had Mapuche heritage.

Clara Luz, my grandmother, only claimed her Spanish ancestry. She was a stern and robust woman who knew about the healing properties of herbs, and she refused till her death to see a doctor. She cured her family of colds and

flu with a thick concoction of mashed garlic, onions and copious amount of lemon juice and honey, while the vapour of freshly picked eucalyptus leaves burnt inside her house. I do not have enough certainty about my grandmother's ancestry to claim Mapuche heritage, but I definitely feel robbed of the possibility to do so, and how this knowledge could have shaped me and the formation of my subjectivity.



Figure 1: Left: My great-grandmother Rosa Munizaga (my grandfather's mother). Middle: My grandmother Clara Luz Sepúlveda (my mother's mother) and I. Right: Unknown Mapuche woman (photographed at the Volcanoes Museum, Huilo-Huilo, Chile).

Interestingly, despite my German ancestry, I didn't escape racism. Having white skin in Chile is a sign of beauty and status. The best compliment you can give the parent of a newborn, especially a girl, is to say *Que linda tan blanquita parece de porcelana*—"How beautiful, her white skin seems like porcelain." In short, being white is equated with being good. I was in Year Four and my primary school began preparing for the end-of-year nativity play. I decided I wanted to be the Virgin Mary. When the drama teacher called for the roles—Joseph? Angels? Wise men?—I waited till he called Mary, then I leapt from my seat. I was so enthusiastic; he had no option but to give me the part. A couple of days later, I was in line to get into the classroom when I overheard the teachers talking: "It's great we are having a nativity play this year, isn't?" "Oh yes, and you know Pilar will playing be the Virgin Mary." "I

know, what a pity. I thought Valeria would be much better. She is so pretty and so white.” Valeria was my best friend and the daughter of a northern Italian. My heart sank. What happened next was defining. Valeria’s mum stood up for me and told the teachers that Valeria was very happy to be an angel, and so they should keep me in the role. Thus, I made my debut as the Virgin Mary while at the same time having my first conscious brush with racism.

iii. A bloody coup d’état

On 11 September 1973 a bloody military coup deposed the democratically elected socialist president Salvador Allende.

The Pinochet dictatorship was remarkable. During Pinochet’s seventeen-year rule, the Chilean state was militarized, the judicial system was marginalized, power was vested in Pinochet as both armed forces commander-in-chief and chief of state, the secret police acted above and outside the law, and the most fundamental rights of thousands of Chileans were systematically violated (Ensalaco, 2000, p. x).

That day, the democratic course of my country collapsed, affecting the lives of thousands of Chileans. Some were brutally murdered, tortured and disappeared. Others were persecuted and faced a life in exile (Ensalaco, 2000). The ripples have continued to deeply impact at least three generations: those who were adults at the time, the generation of children like me who have vivid memories of the coup, and those who were born during the dictatorship years (Castillo-Gallardo, Peña, Becker, & Briones, 2018). I vividly remember that day. My family lived in a poor working-class suburb on the outskirts of the capital, Santiago. Our house was near an industrial corridor where there was strong support for Salvador Allende. In the days before the coup, amidst rumours of an impending military intervention, the workers had been gathering at their workplaces to defend what they considered their hard-won socialist gains.

On the morning of the 11th of September there was panic everywhere on the streets. We could hear machine guns and single shots being fired. My parents, together with two other families, decided to gather everyone in what it seemed to be the safest house. They brought in enough mattresses to cover all the windows and walls; all the kids, seven of us, were put in one room with the stern instruction that under no circumstances were we allowed to come out. I don't really remember how long we were in that room, but I do remember the fear. The sound of gun shots, coupled with the incessant military tunes playing on the radio, stayed with me.

Immediately after the coup things changed. All the intense political activities that had characterised the socialist government, including marches and rallies, ceased. The long queues to get basic provisions such as bread, milk or toilet paper stopped. The supermarkets and shops 'miraculously' appeared full of goods and groceries after months of shortages. The chaos subsided. It appeared on the surface that Chile had gained some form of civic order. However, the military presence on the streets was not ordinary; there were daily curfews, and they became a fact of life. The media was completely controlled, and instead of balanced news, we were anaesthetised with a combination of patriotic rhetoric, soap operas, and variety shows on the television. From my child's perspective, the coup had come and gone, and life went on. I learnt the lesson well—never talk about politics. Marjorie Agosín, Chilean academic and writer, when discussing Chilean women's artistic response to the dictator (the focus of one of my case studies outlined in Chapter Six), reflected in an interview:

Pinochet violently ended 130 years of imperfect but democratic tradition and replaced it with 17 years of military dictatorship. During the Pinochet reign, tens of thousands of people were abducted, interrogated, and tortured. Over 3,000 people vanished without a trace. Thus, began the long and painful search of thousands of wives, sisters, and mothers for Chile's disappeared sons.

It was a time of silence, of fear, of empty streets, of curfews, of bombs in the middle of the night ... People were detained. Men that had long hair were immediately shaven in a public place. But the fear then transformed to something that I consider more danger [sic], was the invisible fear.

Those that you trusted were no longer trustworthy. The books you always believe you could read and could give you some answers were forbidden. Doors were closed. Nothing was safe. And I think those are the horrors of dictatorship. The uncertainty is so profound that you lose this great concept that we had, which was to be a citizen with rights. I think we became a society of vigilantes, informers, instead of a society of good neighbours (Agosín, 2012).

I was 17 years old when I entered my first year at university. By then, the dictator had been in power for almost a decade and universities had become a hub for political activism, both against and for General Augusto Pinochet. I was the second girl of our entire family to secure a place at a university. Amongst our first cousins, 18 of them, my sister and I were the only ones who completed tertiary education. I was admitted to the prestigious *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile* to study education. The campus was located in the upper-class suburb of Providencia in Santiago. That was the first time in my life that I ventured past La Plaza Italia (recently renamed by protesters as *Plaza Dignidad* or Dignity Square), an invisible boundary that still divides Santiago into what are known as *Barrios Altos* and *Barrios Bajos*, the affluent and poor suburbs which, sadly, are some of the most unequal in the world (BBC Reality Check, 2019).

My first few days on campus were difficult. I had never experienced such vicious class discrimination. That is probably because, up until then, I had never been in the company of rich Chileans, and for the second time I deeply understood that the colour of my skin, where I went to school and where I lived, were strong indicators of my perceived worth. On the third day

of this ordeal, I was ready to give up, and I took a walk to a solitary part of the campus where I burst into tears. A little time had passed when a young woman approached me. She looked like me; she had dark hair and dark skin. She was not like the upper-class young women who were, in the main, light skinned and blonde (natural or bleached). She was studying Spanish literature. That fleeting encounter with this stranger turned a page in my life. This young woman told me that I had the right to be at this university and I needed to claim it as mine. Her presence was a testimony that there were others like me in that space, and I needed to find them. She invited me to join her and her friends. This gesture of solidarity was the inspiration behind my political involvement.

The repressive regime had it made its mission to extirpate any vestiges of Marxist ideology, and it had done so brutally and relentlessly. The people had learnt to self-censor, and fear had reigned as one of their most powerful repressive tools. However, this collective silence was about to end. The political situation in Chile was becoming untenable. There were ongoing blackouts, massive street protests and student and worker strikes—the country was once again in chaos. In 1983 Pinochet was forced by the mounting political pressure from the centre and left-wing parties, factions of the Catholic Church, and the international community to appoint a long-term career politician to negotiate with the opposition (Ensalaco, 2000). This was an indicator that the Chilean population was not prepared to back down. After years of silence and fear, the people were regrouping and fighting back in vast numbers. By 1985, international bank lending to Chile had declined, despite the United States administration's efforts to prop up the regime, and there was a mounting pressure within its own ranks to stop the dictator's human right abuses (Ensalaco, 2000). Pinochet was becoming isolated.

During the dictatorship I experienced some of the best and the worst expressions of human nature. Amongst the best expressions of human endurance and creativity, I witnessed how the arts were used as an important

vehicle for communication, an expression of resistance, and as a mechanism to engender hope. Beautiful murals appeared overnight on street walls, expressing dissent and calling for civil disobedience. However, as quickly as they appeared, the military would erase them, only for them to be painted again and again. Exiled musicians' records were reproduced countless times and shared amongst friends. Their music became anthems for freedom, and their songs were sung as a way of defiance. It was forbidden to have certain books, and iconic authors, like Nobel prize winning poet Pablo Neruda, could get you arrested. That time in the history of the country and in my personal memory is intrinsically linked to many Latin American artists: Víctor Jara, Violeta Parra, Silvio Rodríguez and many others whose names became synonymous with the people's struggle for justice.

Amongst the worst expressions of human cruelty was one of the most publicised cases during this time, which occurred on 2 July 1986, when two young people, a young man of 18 and a woman of 19, were apprehended, doused in petrol and set alight by the military. The young man, Rodrigo Rojas De Negri, died four days later, and the young woman, Carmen Gloria Quintana, astonishingly survived but suffered extensive burns and was horribly disfigured (Franklin, 2015). The official story at the time reported that they were carrying Molotov cocktails and so they were the victims of their own doing. More than 30 years later, in March 2019, 11 retired members of the military were charged and faced jail terms for Rodrigo Rojas's homicide and Carmen Gloria Quintana's attempted homicide (Salazar Salvo, 2019).

After this horrific crime the political turmoil escalated, and on 7 September 1986 an urban armed guerrilla group called MIR (Revolutionary Left Movement) attempted to kill Pinochet by ambushing him and his entourage. Incredibly, Pinochet survived, but five of his bodyguards were killed in the attempt. The regime took vengeance, "and the security forces' reaction to the attack on Pinochet was as deadly as the attack itself" (Ensalaco, 2000, p. 153).

iv. Exile and displacement

Five months later, I fled Chile. On 21 February 1987, a few weeks after my 22nd birthday, I landed in Perth. I had never been outside Chile, so arriving in Australia felt like landing on the moon. I experienced highly contradictory emotions; on the one hand I was safe from institutional violence, and on the other hand, I was displaced and lonely. All my basic needs were being met; however, there was a deep sense of cultural uprooting, which made me feel *como un pollo en corral ajeno*—like a chicken in a foreign coop—disempowered and disconnected. A few months later, when my English-language teacher wrote on the board, ‘White Australia has a Black History’, something profound changed for me and altered completely the notion I had of the country which gave me refuge. Until then, I had never seen or met an Aboriginal person or encountered any representation that, in any way, exposed the history of colonisation or acknowledged the continuous occupation and ownership of this land. Suvendrini Perera gives words to my experience when she writes about her own history of migration and reflects on Indigenous sovereignty in Australia while confronting her own processes of acquiring citizenship: “And I didn’t understand that as someone who migrated here what I was doing was consenting to, and literally *signing on to*, a system of colonisation ... I had to educate myself, and allow myself to be educated” (Perera, 2005, p. 33).

v. A moment of reckoning

Reflecting on and evoking these memories is important, as “they hold for me the variegated threads”—of state violence, class, gender, of educational practice, of economies of space, distribution and lack—from which the fabric of Chilean identity was woven during and after Pinochet (Perera, 2006a, para. 3). The legacies of patriarchy, neoliberal politics, and the privileging of European ancestry had a decisive influence on my life trajectory. My mother was not allowed to finish high school; my grandfather pulled her out of school

when she started dating my father—*What was the point of educating a daughter?* She was married at 17, lost her first-born at 19, when her baby was two, and was a stay-at-home mum. My father was a bus driver and a volunteer firefighter. They struggled.

Under Pinochet, Chile became the cradle for neoliberal politics that later would spread around the world (Chomsky, 2003). Those were the years when the Chicago Boys, wealthy Chileans who had become enamoured and obsessed by the free-market ideology of Milton Friedman, finally had the chance to put into practice their program for a capitalist utopia (Klein, 2007). In the early 1970s Chile had become politically and economically unstable, a process aided by Richard Nixon's administration (Klein, 2007). There were severe shortages of food and household supplies, and unemployment reached high proportions (Agosin, 1996). My father lost his job after many public buses were burnt during the ongoing protests for-and-against Salvador Allende. Desperate, he decided that he had no option but to leave and find work elsewhere. He went to the United States on a tourist visa and worked illegally for over a year. He worked 16-hour days doing two jobs: a welder in a shipyard during the day, and at night he worked at a petrol station.

After my father left in 1971, the situation continued to escalate, and instability was the order of the day. Unbeknownst to us at the time, the very country that was benefitting from my father's cheap labour was colluding with the Chilean oligarchy and the political right, who were busy doing everything in their power to crash the Chilean economy in order to eliminate the socialist elected government (Baradit, 2015). Recently I experienced an indescribable feeling of sadness and anger about this. Perhaps this was an old resentment that never found expression in that six-year-old girl, who didn't really understand why she felt robbed of her father during such frightening times. Or maybe, after all, this time marked the foundation of why I became a feminist. "Feminism, at its best, is a movement that works to liberate all people who

have been economically, socially and culturally marginalised by an ideological system that has been designed for them to fail” (Eddo-Lodge, 2017, p. 181).

My connection to community arts, as described above, emerged from the need to find a voice and sense of purpose after migrating to Australia as a political refugee. What emerged from this internal turmoil was a raw desire to explore my roots. In the early 1990s I immersed myself in video-making, performance and the visual arts, as I yearned for something familiar; for a ‘space’ I knew. I threw myself with gusto into any Latin American cultural activity of which I could be a part: painting murals at community centres, performing folkloric dances at several local festivals. I even plucked up the courage to perform as *The Death* in an adapted theatre work by the Mexican writer Juan Rulfo at the Fly by Night Musicians Club in Fremantle. All of these were surprisingly grounding and meaningful activities, particularly at a time when many people in Perth were unaware of Chile and its political unrest.

As I found comfort in these activities, I also realised that these cultural performances were primarily realised through the eyes of Latin American men and did very little to problematise the issues I was experiencing as a young Chilean woman in exile. So, with the support of two women working for the City of Fremantle, I organised a Latin American Women’s Forum to create a space for women to connect and talk in our own language about the lived experiences we shared as refugees. As Trinh T. Minh-ha beautifully writes, “She who works at un-learning the dominant language of ‘civilized’ missionaries also has to learn how to un-write and write anew. And she often does so by re-establishing the contact with her foremothers” (Trinh, 1989, p. 148).

Following on from the forum in 1992, the year that Latin America commemorated 500 years of colonisation, five of us formed *Coya Raymi* Women’s Theatre and Dance Group. The group had the impetus to learn and research about our colonial history, as well as developing our artistic skills to

choreograph a dance piece and create our own costumes. So, inspired by the Quechua words *Coya* (associated with the feminine and festivities of the moon) and *Raymi* (the time of the year when women would pray for rain and for a healthy crop) (Zuidema, Caillavet, & Ramírez, 2008), we embarked on an artistic development that evoked the rituals of Indigenous women and the brutal interruption of colonisation. Guided by a Mapuche friend, Eri Lonconao, a Chilean musician and two local female artists, we made three giant puppets: one representing *Coya Raymi*, the Indigenous Woman, and two in the form of horses' heads, representing the Coloniser.

vi. *We still remember*

*When the Earth was still sacred
they arrived.
Half horses, half men.
White like ghosts, throwing fire—they came.
In the middle of our rituals—they came.
They did not speak to us.
They did not understand us.
Without asking, they took everything:
Our symbols,
Our treasures,
Our lives,
They raped our mother and they raped us.
Their white faces brought sickness, plagues and pain.
They contaminated our bodies and our souls.
We don't forget, we don't want to forget.
We stand up and denounce.
The struggle is not finished.
Our past and our present—a history of Imperialisms have
swallowed our rights.*

me. Connecting to my cultural heritage gave me a renewed sense of who I was and the confidence to realise that during the course of migration I had not lost my values or my internal capacities. The creative process also helped break the isolation I was experiencing, and it revealed to me that I was capable of navigating the local system and making valuable personal and professional connections. Most importantly, it helped me gain a sharper political awareness that my displacement issues weren't just mine. There was a plethora of issues affecting people here who were also experiencing oppression and dispossession. Community arts ultimately helped me to understand that I was living in a colonial settler-society and gave me a methodology for working in such contested terrain.

The experience was very formative, and it was the beginning of a career that has spanned 25 years. It allowed me to pursue the belief in the transformative power of the arts and creativity that had developed in Chile, and it strengthened my commitment to social justice. A milestone in this career was becoming the managing director of the Community Arts Network of Western Australia (CAN WA), in 2004, where I had the opportunity to mobilise people and resources, ultimately making visible many Noongar stories previously untold outside their own communities (Diss, 2014b; Van, 2019). 'Noongar' means 'people' in what is now acknowledged as the "Noongar group of languages of South-West Western Australia" (Wooltorton, Collard, & Horwitz, 2017, p. 66). For more than 10 years CAN WA has been a platform for contemporary expressions of Noongar culture which have been described by participants and researchers and as important opportunities for cultural affirmation and strengthening (Diss, 2014a; Palmer & Sonn, 2010; Quartermaine, 2014; Quayle & Sonn, 2019; Sonn & Quayle, 2014).

I came to understand that one way of combatting my unknowing collusion with the racist Australian State (Perera, 2005) was to direct resources towards, and create collaborative opportunities for self-determining art and culture with, Noongar communities on their country: Noongar Boodja. I was

propelled, in Gloria Anzaldúa's terms, by having lived on the border; in the interstices between being a refugee, a migrant, a woman of colour and a survivor of state violence (Anzaldúa, 2012). This was instinctively how I navigated my privileged position as the managing director of an arts organisation that could leverage resources, both human and financial, into exploring a creative space with the Noongar people whose stories, in the main, had been completely invisible to the public eye. The case study in Chapter Three illuminates CAN WA's art for social change practice.

vii. Thesis structure

Throughout this thesis I examine art for social change through the lens of Indigenous women and women of colour who have been involved in this practice as participants, artists, and in art leadership roles. Using theoretical frameworks from feminists of the global South I identify a number of key components of art for social change practice, each of which I explore in different detail across four case studies. These components are: the context in which the art takes place, the infrastructure that supports or impedes the practice, and the community of participants. These elements are interconnected, and each case study focuses in detail on the ways in which these constituent elements play out in different combinations.

Chapter One, *A Complex, Unstable and Contested Practice: The Emergence of Art for Social Change*, begins with the history and origins of art for social change, leading to a discussion of the policy context that marked its evolution in parts of the global North and South. Rather than a comprehensive global overview, this chapter provides a series of snapshots that suggest both the differences and the commonalities of its emergence and development across various geographical and social contexts.

Chapter Two, *Delinking Women's Empowerment from Development: Relinking it to Community and Creativity*, examines the concept of women's

empowerment. It highlights the activist role that feminists of the global South had in claiming the term 'empowerment' to critique the top-down approach to development as well as the narrow standpoint of Western feminism, which failed to account for the intersecting nature of gender and development issues faced by women of colour and Indigenous women. The chapter also lays out the methodology and methods that inform this thesis.

Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six consist of case studies where the participants' experiences of art for social change are contextualised against their daily struggles, as well as centred in their ongoing resistance and defiance of oppression. Each of these chapters deals with a particular political context and a particular type of organisation or collective. Only one of these, *LasTesis*, explicitly defines itself as feminist. Chapter Three, *I Let the Art do the Talking Now: Self-Determined Art-Making on Noongar Boodja*, examines the practice of CAN WA (focusing on women only) and explores how, despite experiencing structural and everyday racism, the Noongar women who participated in CAN WA projects find ways to act and mobilise their power in different ways. This chapter focusses on Indigenous healing and self-determination and brings feminist theories by women of colour into conversation with Noongar women through a Western Australian state-sponsored organisation.

Chapter Four, *Exploding Together: We are all Protagonists!* discusses the practice of a Latin American community-theatre festival, *Entepola*. Emerging in the last few years of the dictatorship in Chile, *Entepola* has been operating continually for more than 30 years as an independent cultural organisation. Embedded in grass-roots popular theatre, this post-dictatorship community event presents itself as an autonomous and liberating platform where its decentralised model engages in theatre and critical conversations with communities from poor neighbourhoods across the capital, Santiago.

Chapter Five, *Singing the Women Back Up: Epistemologies of Women of Colour in Art for Social Change*, explores the critical contribution of three women of colour who are leaders in art for social change in Australia. This chapter links Australia and the US in the context of the global war on terror through two projects developed with Afghan women, one in Western Sydney, and the other a US-led project with women in Afghanistan. Through this chapter I tease out the distinction between community-initiated projects and those developed to further broader political objectives, and I highlight how neoliberal state funding is directed in particular ways to manage multicultural communities.

Chapter Six, *Rehearsing for Change: Women and Counterhegemonic Globalisations*, provides a window into how and why Chilean women in the 1970s and in 2020s are using art for social change as a platform for denouncing State violence, for activism and for bringing international attention to the gross inequalities experienced in the country. This chapter underscores a new period of resistance in Chile wherein the feminist collective of *LasTesis* is actively bringing together feminist academic theories and activism. In doing so, I explore the way in which Chilean women find ‘places’ and ‘spaces’ to transgress authoritarian rule and exercise collective power and agency.

Each of the above four chapters deals with questions of leadership, self-determination and autonomy, decolonial thinking and collaboration against the backdrop of different art for social change practices and geographies.

In the concluding section I outline how women’s unique and localised epistemologies of creative resistance are connecting across the global South. Further, the findings reported in this section demonstrate the decolonising potential of art for social change for Indigenous women and women of colour, not only to make visible their untold stories but also to reclaim their knowledges as part of their resistance. Finally, this thesis provides a deeper insight into the ongoing agency, the reflexive capacities and the collective

power that have emerged and continue to rise from the day-to-day struggles of women from the global South. Theorising art for social change from the collective perspective of Indigenous women and women of colour provides a more nuanced way to understand the empowering and emancipatory capacities for collective action that emerge from engaging in this art form.

CHAPTER ONE

A Complex, Unstable and Contested Practice: The Emergence of Art for Social Change

*Siglos oscuros me desgarran la voz
destruyeron nuestra cultura e impusieron su dios
sus descendientes lavan sus conciencias con caridad y avalan un
sistema lleno de desigualdad*

—Evelyn Cornejo, *América Sí*, 2011

Dark centuries tear my voice apart
they destroyed our culture and imposed their god
their descendants wash their conscience with charity work
and validate a system full of inequalities

1. Introduction

Community arts emerged as a distinctive arts practice in the global North during the 1960s and 1970s. Since then, it has had a contested history and evolution (Binns, 1991; G. Hawkins, 1993; Kirby, 1991). Many authors agree that the emergence of community arts has been linked to historical events characterised by political transition, turmoil and the work of social movements (Bishop, 2012; Nardone, 2010; Palacios Garrido, 2009). Others believe that, regardless of its origins, the capacity to express collective voice and identity is what makes community arts an inherently empowering practice, especially for those who experience marginalisation and oppression (Adams & Goldbard, 2001; Adams & Goldbard, 2002; Goldbard, 2006; Green & Sonn, 2008; Sonn et al., 2002; Sonn & Palmer, 2010). This is congruent with scholars who argue that its theoretical roots stem from libertarian ideals that emerged from the global South and were most closely associated with the

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (Adams & Goldbard, 2001; Adams & Goldbard, 2002; Palacios Garrido, 2009).

This chapter explores the emergence of community arts in the global North and considers its trajectory in the global South in order to contextualise the case studies that follow. The chapter begins by outlining various contemporary definitions of community arts practice. It then provides a brief historical account of the origins of community arts in the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, and contextualises community arts in the global South in the years that followed. The chapter outlines the policy settings in which art for social change emerges in the global North, helping to highlight some of the reasons why its evolution is different from its trajectory in the global South. The chapter aims to provide a series of snapshots of the origins of community arts, rather than an exhaustive historical chronology of its evolution around the world. It does this across different geographical and social contexts, suggesting both the differences and the commonalities of its emergence and development.

1.1 Art for social change: Origins and roots

Art for social change has its roots in community arts, which developed alongside significant other oppositional social movements such as the civil-rights movement in the US, Indigenous land rights, and second-wave feminist movements, all of which challenged the hegemonic epistemologies embedded in colonisation and white privilege (Binns, 1991; Hawkins, 1993). Some scholars lament that by the 1980s and 1990s community arts had been co-opted into state policy, losing its political edge as a progressive practice (Matarasso, 2013). The tension between its radical roots, the social value it generates, and the question of its artistic merit have spawned an ongoing debate amongst artists, practitioners, communities and funders. The outcome has been a continual argument to prove the sector's value, caught between the binaries of 'artistic excellence' versus 'access and equity' (Hawkins, 1993). Community arts

struggled to break out of a framework that, on the one hand, dictates a particular Eurocentric notion of aesthetics and, on the other, embraces the notion of democratising culture by providing universal access to and participation in arts production. Community arts has continued to occupy a precarious position in both the arts world and the community development and allied sectors. (I return to this discussion in 1.2.1 below.)

While some scholars suggest that the discussion about community-based participatory art practices and claims of social gain is still in its infancy (Finkelpearl, 2014), across other disciplines researchers affirm that community arts' strength lies in its intrinsic capacity to intersect with other sectors, such as health (McQueen-Thomson & Ziguras, 2002; Mills & Brown, 2004), education (Hunter-Doniger & Berlinsky, 2016), community development or critical social work (Abood, Bayeh, & Amer, 2017; Ife & Tascon, 2016), ethnography (Haviland, 2017) and academia (Finley, 2005). However, in recent years, and with the marked interest in participatory art-based practices within contemporary art (Bishop, 2012; Bruyne & Gielen, 2011), some scholars argue that in order to reclaim the value of art for social change, new lenses are needed to better understand not just its instrumental value but also the artistic merits of this field of practice (Badham, 2010).

1.1.1 Definitions

After six years of research, from 2012 to 2018, the International Centre of Art for Social Change (ICASC), based in Canada, offers the following definition:

Community-engaged art for social change involves the creation of art collectively made by groups of people (who may not self-identify as artists) about what matters to them. This process is facilitated by a specially trained artist or group of artists.

Designed to engage heads, hearts and hands to nurture insight, exchange and action, ASC is a form of cultural democracy, using the

arts to create dialogue and new solutions to often-complex problems (ICASC, 2018, p. 3).

Whilst the above definition is useful for a practice that has been notoriously hard to define (Badham, 2010; Kelly, 1984), art for social change needs to be understood as a contested, evolving, and changing practice which has manifested in particular societal contexts in different parts of the world. While some locate the origins in Great Britain and the USA in the 1960s and 1970s (Palacios Garrido, 2009), others believe the practice stems from Australia during the same period (Nardone, 2010). There is little doubt that, across settler-colonial countries, community arts emerged as a vehicle for engaging in creative ways with the ideals of empowerment and emancipation, becoming a tool used by activists and artists to take the arts out of traditional cultural institutions and into the streets (Fensham, 1990; Kelly, 1984).

Francois Matarasso, a recognised UK practitioner, recounts that in the 1970s:

Community art was used to describe a complex, unstable and contested practice developed by young artists and theatre makers seeking to reinvigorate an art world they saw as bourgeois at best, and oppressive at worst (Matarasso, 2013, p. 215).

Arlene Golbard, a USA advocate (2006) who prefers to use the label Community Cultural Development (CCD), argues that CCD:

describes the work of artists-organizers and other community members collaborating to express identity, concerns and aspirations through the arts and communications media. It is a process that simultaneously builds individual mastery and collective cultural capacity while contributing to positive social change (Goldbard, 2006, p. 20).

In Australia, Sonn et al. similarly explain community cultural development as a context-dependant and collaborative cultural practice where diverse

modalities of arts are used by communities to “work together, express identity and for social change purposes” (Sonn, Quayle, & Kasat, 2015, p. 89).

Nonetheless, argues Badham, despite four decades of recognised community arts practice: “There is no definitive understanding or comprehensive theory” of this practice (Badham, 2010, p. 86).

Community arts has been described, from one end of the spectrum, as an activist practice seeking liberation and social change (Abood et al., 2017; Don Adams & Goldbard, 2002; Kasat, 2013; Kirby, 1991; Mills, 1991; Sonn, Kasat, & Quayle, 2017); a participatory form of combatting social exclusion and promoting wellbeing (Lewis & Doyle, 2008; Mills & Brown, 2004; Nabulime & McEwan, 2010; Ruane, 2007); a positive mechanism to foster the formation of collective and individual identity (Kester, 2011); and as an effective form to engage communities and address social disadvantage (Creative Victoria, 2016). On the other side of the spectrum, community arts continue to be critiqued for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it is perceived as an amateur practice, with limited consideration of aesthetic and artistic value, and with a focus on the creative process rather than the artistic product (Badham, 2010; Bishop, 2012). Secondly, it is seen as tending to diminish the role of the artist, who is often asked to surrender their artistic authorship to the groups with whom they work. This process of relinquishing authorship is perceived to be a naive and uncritical ideal about the social unity that arises from community collaborations (Bishop, 2012). Finally, community arts has been challenged as having limited capacity in its ambition to challenge the cultural elitism it fights against or to grant the emancipation it promises, because of its lack of critical engagement with the social structures that create oppression (Bishop, 2012; Khan, 2015a).

The limited definition and theorising of this practice have made it difficult to grapple with its intricacies and, consequently, with the diverse ways in which it has been practiced, explained and understood (Bishop, 2012; Kasat,

2014; Kelly, 1984). In order to understand the interest in community art in the past decade, we may turn to its evolution.

1.1.2 Core aspects of art for social change and guiding questions

For the purpose of this thesis, I identify the core aspects of the process of art for social change as: (a) deliberate and intentional artistic practice where a group of people manifest a purpose for their creative process; (b) one that is collaborative and responsive—that is, all participants bring different skills and knowledge, stories and standpoints, which are negotiated, respected and valued; (c) one in which the artistic processes and outcomes challenge the notion of single authorship; and (d) one that must engender trust and be guided by the principles of self-determination and social justice.

The questions I set out to explore through the case studies are: How can art for social change be understood as a decolonising practice for women? What are its potentials and limitations? What are some of the characteristics of art for social change practice in Australia and in Latin America? How are they similar and how are they different? And, finally, could understanding art for social change through southern epistemologies help to theorise this practice more effectively?

1.1.3 An inaugural moment in the history of art for social change:

The early 1900s

Claire Bishop asserts that the development of participatory arts should be understood “as a return to the social, part of an ongoing history of attempts to rethink art collectively”, which has been seen in contemporary arts at two other points in history (2012, p. 3). She suggests that the first point in history where we see the emergence of what would later become identified as participatory arts in Europe was during the avant-garde movement around 1917 (Bishop, 2012). De Bruyne and Gielen locate its roots a decade later in the 1920s

and 1930s among the Marxist aesthetic of Proletariat Art and New Deal Art (2011, p. 2). The highly volatile political times between the First and Second World Wars, then, marked its emergence. These were the decades of the anti-fascist struggles in Germany and Spain; the suffragette movement in England, understood as a fight for women's equality and not just the vote (Purvis, 2013); the emergence of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia; the public rejection of the rise of nationalism in France; and, in Australia, the Great Depression of the 1930s (Kirby, 1991). All these gave rise to different ways in which both citizens and the state used the arts to manifest political engagement. In countries such as France and Italy, on the one hand, participation in art-making served the purpose of engaging and questioning established cultural values from outside the establishment. In post-revolutionary Russia, on the other hand, the arts were used to construct cultural production within the state's parameters of collectivist ideals (Bishop, 2012).

The level of political turmoil impacting the arts was not just circumscribed to the global North in this period. In the global South, the Mexican Revolution (1910–1918) marked the emergence of arts movements of which the 1922 *Manifiesto de Sindicato de Pintores y Escultores*—the Painters and Sculptors Union's Manifesto—signed by the internationally renowned artists David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera, was amongst the most influential. The *Manifiesto* contained the ideas that art should be committed to social change, Indigenous expression and to the ideals of *tercermundismo*, a largely political term used to create solidarity among post-colonial countries. Diego Rivera described this as a formative period wherein the politics and the struggles of the time “made me the painter I am now” (Díaz de Cossío, 1986, p. 17). Below is a photograph of a segment of one of the many murals painted by Rivera between 1929 and 1935. It depicts his commitment to showcasing a decolonialising view of Mexico on the walls of the National Palace. This site is hugely significant; a symbol of political power and authority. It was the centre of the precolonial city of Tenochtitlán, home of the emperor Moctezuma II, and where Hernan Cortés, in a calculated political move, destroyed the

building and subsequently built his own residency and ruled on behalf of the Castillian Empire. Rivera's murals depict the brutality of the colonial period, the subjugation of the Aztec Empire and the appropriation of their wealth (Palacio Nacional de México, 2018).



Figure 3: Mural by Diego Rivera located in *El Palacio Nacional de México*.
Photograph: the author.

Further south, in Chile, these times were also marked by political chaos. Several workers' and peasants' strikes were repressed by the military. Amongst these, the 1907 massacre at the Escuela Santa María in the northern city of Iquique was unprecedented. Eight thousand workers and their families marched into the town demanding basic improvements to their working conditions in the saltpetre mines. Their demands were not heard; not by the English investors in the mines, nor by the Chilean government. On the night of 21 December, the military moved into Saint Mary's School, killing more than 2,200 men, women and children (Baradit, 2015). This massacre became a symbol that characterised Chilean popular-culture protests during the 20th century, especially during the military dictatorship of General Pinochet. It has been an important reference for intellectual pursuit and aesthetic expression

that has contributed to preserving peasant and worker history in the collective memory of the country (Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, 2017).



Figure 4: Mural on a street in Santiago for CUPEMCHI, the National Association of Pensioners and Retired Workers of Chile. Artist(s) unknown. Text reads: *To stop the struggle is to begin to die*. Photograph: the author.

Meanwhile, in the settler societies of Canada, Australia and the USA, the end of the First World War marked the emergence of arts movements with a distinct desire to explore and express local cultural identities. In Canada, progressive arts groups emerged at this time, including the Beaver Hall Group, one of the first artist collectives that included women in their membership (Canada History Project). In Australia, the impact of the international modernist movement was felt around the 1930s, resulting in several public institutions showcasing uniquely (white) Australian works. During this decade the Australian Communist Party attracted a membership who subscribed to grass-roots cultural expression and, using the provocative slogan ‘Art is a Weapon’, attempted to promote the development of local cultural content and to foster working-class audiences (Kirby, 1991). In the United States in the mid 1930s, the political left called for artists to become involved in the struggle

against fascism and urged people to take a more active role in every aspect of society (Adams & Goldbard, 2001).

1.1.4 The emergence of community arts: The 1960s and 1970s

Owen Kelly argues that the specific term of ‘community arts’ began in the UK as “one strand of activism, among many in the late 1960s”, and that the ideological motivations of community arts explicitly evolved around the empowerment of marginal communities and the opposition to elitist cultural hierarchies (1984, p. 1). Similarly, Pat Hoffie (1991) and Alfredo Palacios Garrido (2009) suggest that we can firmly locate the beginning of community arts in Australia, the UK and the USA, at this time, as there was a marked shift towards social and political activism using art.

As the emergence of the community arts movement in the global North was influenced by the historical and political context of the previous decades, the idea that everyday culture should be accessible to all challenged and disrupted the authority of Western values and demanded a renewed examination of national identities (Bishop, 2012; Hoffie, 1991; Kasat, 2013; McLeod, 2011). Further, Rimi Khan proposes that the community arts movement’s purpose was “to democratise the arts” (Khan, 2015a, p. 17). Collaborative and collective traditions were revitalised, and the arts turned towards the social (Bishop, 2012). Situationist, activist and feminist groups emerged to challenge the role of the arts and artist in society (Kester, 2011). Womanhouse, a collaborative feminist art installation, challenged women’s traditional roles in 1972 in the US (The Art Story, .n.d.), and La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse in Canada emerged in 1973 (and is still operating today) with the mandate to showcase women’s work informed by feminist and gender theory (Shapones, 2017).

In Abya Yala, the 1960s and 1970s were also characterised by the escalation and polarisation of social movements, but unlike in the North, these

were brutally repressed by military juntas, often backed politically and financially by the USA (Chomsky, 2003). In Mexico and Argentina the *Guerras Sucias* (dirty wars), brutal internal conflicts, sometimes armed, between the government and several social and political groups, resulted in the torture, massacre and disappearance of thousands of peasants, students, workers, and Indigenous men and women (Mendoza García, 2015). Military regimes spread across several countries, including Brazil (1964–1985), Chile (1973–1989), Uruguay (1973–1985) and Argentina (1966–1973 and 1976–1983) (P.Lewis, 2006).

As a result of the increased oppression, resistance movements also spread across these countries. *Tucumán Arde* ('Tucuman is Burning') in Argentina was a controversial series of art installations. Under the banner of the First Biennale of Avant-Garde in 1968, a group of artists and activists denounced the censorship and repression of factory workers and farmers at the hands of a brutal military regime (Marchesi, 1999).

Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, also in Argentina, is one of the most significant and enduring examples of these movements. The group's activism, framed strategically by human-rights language, made them one of the most effective and internationally known human-rights groups in Latin America (Bosco, 2001; Tascón, 2015). Using theatrical elements of public performance and embodying the symbolism of the ultimate mother, the Virgin Mary, the women began to march in 1977 demanding answers to the disappearance of their sons and daughters in the highly visible Plaza de Mayo. Wearing white headscarfs and modest dresses, the women presented themselves in powerful contrast to, and in total defiance of, the male brutality of the military regime, ensuring their message was heard within and outside Argentina (Taylor, 2001).

1.2 Co-option, infiltration, or both? Cultural policies and art for social change: Snapshots from the global North and South

Examining the trajectory of community arts through state policies reveals that, despite its activist origins, the evolution of community arts in the global North has been intrinsically linked to government policy and funding (Hawkins, 1993). On the one hand, government support encouraged its visibility and spread across different jurisdictions. On the other hand, it contributed to the assumption that “art is intrinsically ‘good’ for the community, with little critical interrogation of the uneven benefits such art may bring, and the hierarchies of value it may be implicated in” (Khan, 2015b, p. 4). This idea is further explored in Chapter Five through the examination of two creative-writing projects with Afghan women during the war on terror, situated in different geographical locations, with different methodologies and funding structures.

During the 1970s and 1980s community arts was adopted into arts funding policies across the global North. In the global South, community arts, and especially popular theatre, which has been closely linked to activism and social justice, operated predominantly outside the state funding system (J. Adams, 2002; Baca, 2002; Balán, 2014; Carothers, 1991; Oropeza, 2002; Santos, 2002). It is only more recently, since the early 2000s, that art for social change has been considered within the realm of public policy in a few Latin American countries. (This point is discussed in section 1.2.7).

Below I examine the evolution of art for social change within the cultural policy context in the global North, and this follows a brief outline of the development of cultural policies more broadly. I am particularly interested in unravelling how the ideological foundations of community arts, based on empowerment, self-determination and liberation, have changed in the global North, and in considering the implications of these changes for practitioners who are committed to its original values.

1.2.1 How has art for social change evolved within the cultural policy narrative in the global North?

The question of access and participation in arts and culture has been a core concern for policy-makers and continues to be contentious (Eltham, 2013). In Australia, the UK and Canada, community arts has been linked to these policy aims since its inclusion in government agendas in the 1970s. However, given the institutional path cultural policies have travelled, it is not surprising that “such a vigorous and oppositional practice” (Mills, 1991, p. 7) as community arts has had a precarious existence within cultural systems and institutions that protect and support, by and large, elitist forms of cultural expression (Eltham, 2015).

According to Gay Hawkins, community arts in Australia was an “official invention” and had no real currency until it emerged as a distinct funding program in Commonwealth policy documents in 1973 (Hawkins, 1993, p. 45). However, there is evidence of grass-roots arts movements, such as the Papunya Tula Artists cooperative which was formed in Australia’s Western Desert by Aboriginal artists in 1972. This cooperative was Australia’s first Aboriginal arts company. Through the self-determination and agency of its artists, the group foreshadowed a shift away from the assimilationist policies of the Australian government and sparked the critically acclaimed Western Desert art movement (National Museum Australia, n.d.; Scholes & Tjangala, 2017).

What is true, however, is that institutional support for community arts within government has always been modest and precarious. “It remains high on the federal Liberal Party’s hit list for either abolition or devolution” (Hawkins, 1993, p. xxiii), wrote Hawkins more than 20 years ago. This assertion explains the many policy shifts and departmental rearrangements that have threatened the existence of community arts funding within the Australia Council, the Australian government’s arts funding and advisory body. In fact,

on more than one occasion, the abolition of community arts funding was only averted by successful campaigns mounted by sector activists, who pressured governments to continue the public subsidy for this grass-roots arts practice (Kasat, 2013).

In the United Kingdom, with the rise and consolidation of the ultra-conservative government of Margaret Thatcher, community arts went out of favour in policy circles in the 1980s and was replaced by the “seemingly innocuous alternative, ‘participatory-arts’” (Matarasso, 2013, p. 215). By the 1990s community arts was relegated to the periphery of the arts world (Bishop, 2012), a situation that became particularly evident between 1997 and 2010, when the UK government focused on justifying arts funding for the purpose of tackling social problems and fostering social inclusion (Belfiore, 2002; Bishop, 2012; Kester, 2011). Since the first social-impact study published in the UK in 1997 (Matarasso, 1997), there have been myriad reports and evaluations outlining the diverse and positive outcomes from participating in community arts activities, ranging from community development and capacity-building outcomes to increased participation, rural and regional revitalisation, and mental health and wellbeing (Kasat, 2014; Lewis & Doyle, 2008). As the positive language of the social impact of participatory arts increased, together with the promotion of public and private partnerships, and incentives from government to increase business support for the arts, there was a decline in the emancipatory language that once was common amongst community arts practitioners (Kester, 2011). For instance, according to Matarasso:

The path from ‘community art’ to ‘participatory art’, whilst seen as merely pragmatic by those who made it, marked and allowed a transition from the politicised and collectivist action of the seventies towards the depoliticised, individual-focused arts programmes supported by public funds in Britain today (Matarasso, 2013).

During the same time in Australia, practitioners were warned that, after 20 years of adoption into government policy, community arts had become co-opted and institutionalised (Fensham, 1990; Hawkins, 1993; Kirby, 1991).

This concern was foretold by Australian art historian Sandra Kirby in 1991, when she observed that the bureaucratisation of the practice, whilst it was opening up opportunities for artists and communities to increase their knowledge and experience in community arts, could also risk losing “the sense of purpose and direction that historically manifested itself in radical political and cultural initiatives” (Kirby, 1991, p. 29). In retrospect, it can be argued that the loss of community art’s radical edge in the global North was the trade-off for legitimisation and government funding (Matarasso, 2013).

The obstinate presence of community arts, however, has continued to mutate in different ways by adopting a framework of access and equity. Currently, Arts Council England supports community-based arts and cultural activity under the umbrella of Creative Places and People (CPP). The CCP aims:

to enable more people to experience and be inspired by the arts, with investment focused in parts of the country where arts engagement is significantly below the national average (Bunting & Gleming, 2015, p. 3).

In Canada, like in Australia, there are numerous organisations dedicated to community arts that have been operating for over 20 years, and since 2010 there has been growth in the establishment of organisations dedicated to working under the umbrella of art for social change (ICASC, 2016). Despite the increased interest in this practice, funding received by the sector in Canada is eight percent of overall arts funding. This follows a 2016 review of Canada Arts Council funding programs in which the specific category that recognises community arts as a distinctive practice was axed (Marcuse, 2016). This points once again to the fragile relationship between art for social change and government policy.

It is noteworthy that, while the position of community arts within policy has been unstable across the global North, there has been renewed interest in the boundary between contemporary art and community (Bishop, 2012; Bruyne & Gielen, 2011; Kester, 2011). Why is this the case? Would the increased interest in art-making through participatory process be in any way connected to the more aggressive global capitalist economy and neoliberal policies of the past two decades? (Bruyne & Gielen, 2011). The trajectory of art for social change through cultural policies in the global North makes more sense when understood against the backdrop of the broader context of arts and cultural policy, as I examine below.

1.2.2 The milieu of cultural policies in the global North

Culture is not created by government but enabled by it.

Culture is created by community.

—Commonwealth of Australia, 2013, p. 9

Culture may be created by community, but the state has more influence than it admits on whose stories, cultures and histories are kept and represented within their institutions. Since the 19th century, governments in the global North have influenced the cultural development of their countries by establishing certain kinds of national institutions and programs that in many cases remain today (R. Fisher & Ormston, 2011; Foote, 2011; Sears, 2013). These cultural institutions, known as the GLAM sector (galleries, libraries and museums), was mainly developed in an ad hoc manner, without a legislative policy framework (R. Fisher & Ormston, 2011). Nonetheless, these institutions have greatly influenced the trajectory of contemporary arts and cultural policy, which explains why these institutions have “largely reflected a discourse of state subsidy” (Eltham, 2013, p. 43) and have been the beneficiaries of funding models that privilege their existence (Eltham, 2013; R. Fisher & Ormston, 2011; Foote, 2011).

Similarly, the tension concerning the level of government intervention in art decision-making has been a central part of arts policies in the global North. The Arts Council of England is considered the first arts agency in the world to develop a system of grants distribution that is at ‘arm’s-length’ from government; it was established during the Second World War (R. Fisher & Ormston, 2011). Although this system was predicated as a way of distancing the arts from political interference, the creation of this system was political. The British wanted to make a statement to differentiate their arts and cultural system from those of Russia and Germany prior to 1945 (Chartrand & McCaughey, 1989).

The legacy of the arm’s-length approach, with its imperfections and fallacies, has been embraced as the best safeguard to protect artists from political meddling. It has been adopted in various countries around the world, including Australia and Canada (Chartrand & McCaughey, 1989; R. Fisher & Ormston, 2011; Sears, 2013). Notwithstanding the rhetoric of arm’s-length arts funding, through resource allocation, governments have enormous influence on the cultural development of their states. In Australia, for example, 28 major performing arts-companies, with very few exceptions (one of these is an Indigenous dance company), reproduce the Western canon of cultural expression and include symphony orchestras, ballet, opera and theatre. These companies received a total of \$110 million in the 2017–2018 federal budget, whereas 128 small-to-medium arts companies, combined, received \$29.5 million during the same period (Australia Council for the Arts, 2018). Not only do the major performing-arts companies receive a disproportionate amount of government funding, but they do so outside the competitive funding structure. Their funding is recurrent. In contrast, companies in the small-to-medium sector have to compete, every four years, under a peer-assessment review process that is at arm’s-length from government.

The privileging of the Western canonical art forms within the cultural infrastructure of settler-colonial societies is historically entrenched. It is

perpetuated by those whose stories and narratives are reinforced in galleries and books, on radio, stage or our screens; stories and narratives which are overwhelmingly white (Diversity Arts Australia, 2018; Nwonka, 2019). In the wake of international movements for equality, the end of racism and state violence, this has further exposed the ingrained nature of exclusion and the inadequate responses of government policies over time. Whilst governments are expected to develop policies in response to societal changes, when it comes to the arts and culture sector these efforts have been wanting. Despite the rhetorical position of most ‘developed’ nations that the arts are worthy of support, it is fascinating to note that national cultural policies are a relatively new and rare phenomenon. Perhaps it is because the development of a national cultural policy demands an existential exploration of ‘who we are’ which, against the backdrop of the continuation of the colonial project, seems incompatible with truth-telling, reckoning and atonement with the past.

In the following section I briefly explore the development of national cultural policies in Australia, Canada and the UK.

1.2.3 National cultural policies: Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom

Australia launched its first Commonwealth cultural policy document, *Creative Nation*, in 1994 (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994). This policy, produced by a Labor government, is regarded as having had a significant influence on Australia’s cultural identity (R. Hawkins, 2014). “Creative Nation forever changed the way Australians saw themselves. Culture was now an economic concern, the arts were for all Australians, and the nation could no longer so rigidly define its national identity through its British colonial past” (R. Hawkins, 2014, para.21). A second national cultural policy, *Creative Australia*, was launched almost 20 years later, in March 2013, after six years of consultation (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). Despite a promising beginning, with the announcement of increased resources to implement it, the

policy was abandoned a few months later in July 2013, when a right-wing Coalition government won the federal election (Meyrick & Barnett, 2017).

Creative Canada was launched in September 2017. This policy was adopted almost seven decades after the Massey Commission of 1949, which is widely recognised as the foundation of state cultural policies in Canada. Creative Canada has been promoted as a revolution in cultural policy for its potential to shape the Canada of the future (Finn, 2017). For this very reason, this policy has also been met with concerns and some unsympathetic editorials decrying its neoliberal approach. One commentator claimed, “Creative Canada won’t protect the distinctiveness of Canadian art but will shackle it to the homogenising logic of corporate analytics” (Wells, 2017, para. 10), and another highlighted that the centrepiece of the policy is a 500-million-dollar deal with United States entertainment giant Netflix (Leblanc, 2017). The policy is unapologetic in making the connection between culture and economic development (Government of Canada, 2017, p. 5), which is in stark contrast to the Massey Commission Report, in which culture was considered the bedrock of the Canadian national identity (Wells, 2017).

Similarly, in the UK, the development of a national cultural policy has been uneven (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2016, p. 1 para. 7). The first policy was published in 1965 under a Labour government, and its focus was on art access, particularly for the young. The second was published in 2016 and claimed that in previous decades there had been a progressive public access to art and culture (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2016). However, this statement seems to be at odds with the Warwick Commission Report on the future of culture and creative industries published in 2015, where the foreword reads:

The key message from the report is that the government and the Cultural and Creative Industries need to take a coherent approach that guarantees equal access for everybody to a rich cultural education and

the opportunity to live a creative life. There are barriers and inequalities in Britain today that prevent this from being a universal human right. This is bad for business and bad for society (Heywood, 2015, p. 8).

The above conundrums and contradictions have made, and will continue to make, the development of arts and cultural policy a very difficult task, and most likely it will continue to polarise the arts sector and its advocates (Devereaux, 2006).

It is perhaps for this reason that an alternative stream of the arts and culture sector has gained prominence, one that more closely aligns with a capitalist system. While cultural policies demand the investigation of who we are as a nation, cultural industries fit in with the market discourse of supply and demand.

1.2.4 The rise of creative industries

Many forms of creative-economy investment and growth can amplify existing divisions between rich and poor both across and within countries.

—United Nations, 2013, p.30

The concept of the ‘culture industry’ was coined by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt School of critical theory in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published in Amsterdam in 1947 (Adorno & Rabinbach, 1975). Horkheimer and Adorno used the term to refer to the commodification of art and culture when produced for the main purpose of making profits, arguing that a culture industry would result in escapist and formula entertainment where “conformity has replaced consciousness” (Theodor & Anson, 1975 p. 17).

The culture industry grew at a rapid rate during the second half of the 20th century, fuelled by the increased financial prosperity of the global North.

By the early 1980s the term shifted to ‘cultural industries’, which began to appear in the 2000s in conjunction with another term: the ‘creative industries’. It became evident that these industries had turned into a powerful force and needed to be considered by cultural policy makers (UNESCO, 2017). The first concerted effort to address the advance of the cultural industries was driven by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), based on “concerns about the unequal cultural resources of North and South” (Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005, p. 3).

The work undertaken by UNESCO carried a distinctive articulation of the economic dimensions of culture and its impact on development (Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005), which has led to a re-thinking of cultural policy (Pratt, 2004, p. 20). While defining cultural industries is a complex task, due to their diversity and the changing nature of these industries, it can be said that they are statistically under-reported and not accurately monitored (Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005). However, there is broad consensus that the cultural industries are mostly associated with “forms of cultural production and consumption that have at their core a symbolic or expressive element” such as music, writing, fashion, design and media, including radio, film and television (United Nations, 2013, p. 20).

The rise and evolution of cultural industries has challenged the notion of cultural policies (Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005). As a result, up until recently, policy relating to cultural and creative industries have mostly developed separately from the more traditional view of the subsidised arts and culture sector.

The UK appears to exemplify this separation. On October 2016 the Arts Council England announced its art and culture budget for 2018–2022, which continues to support a range of subsidised arts and cultural activities with a strong rhetoric of public engagement (Arts Council England, 2018). This was followed by an announcement in March 2018, when the Creative Industries

Council (CIC) (which represents government and industry) and the UK government jointly announced a £150 million deal aimed at accelerating the growth and exporting capacities of the creative industry in the UK (Gov.UK, 2018). Although the Arts Council England rhetoric aspires to engage the public with arts and culture, the CIC aims at commercialising the UK cultural product and exporting it to the world.

Meanwhile, Canada seems to have taken a different approach by attempting to bring both, the subsidised arts and the commercial sector under the umbrella of Creative Canada—a vision for Canada’s Creative Industries Policy Framework, with the announcement of a \$1.9 billion investment in the creative sector in 2016 (Government of Canada, 2018). This framework brings traditionally funded Canadian arts and cultural sectors together with large-scale commercial partners such as the foreign entertainment company Netflix (Government of Canada, 2017).

Australia, under the Keating Labor Government (1991–1996), was seen as an innovator in this area following the release of Creative Nation in 1994, which attempted to integrate the arts and the creative industries, and which contained a vision of a culture-led economic future (R. Hawkins, 2014, para. 18). The 2013 Creative Australia policy, which was largely unimplemented, was meant to further its predecessor and help by ‘joining the dots’ (as the then-Culture Minister Simon Crean referred to the policy’s purpose) across the social and economic spectrums to deliver “a productive nation” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013, p. 3). The abandonment of Creative Australia left a cultural policy vacuum which resulted in political meddling. This caused a great deal of funding uncertainty, particularly for independent artists and the small-to-medium arts sector, and it generated calls to rethink cultural policy in Australia (Anatolitis, 2018). In August 2020 the independent think-tank, A New Approach, released a report calling for a more collaborative and effective framework to support arts and culture between governments, creative industry and the philanthropic sector. This report argues that cultural

policy in Australia has been largely inconsistent, because the ‘policy drivers’ (or perhaps, more accurately, the political motivations for their development) have often been contradictory, expecting arts and culture to “deliver everything from aesthetic excellence to social cohesion, better health, education, and international diplomacy and economic growth” (Trembath & Fielding, 2020). A response to this report is yet to emerge, from either government or the arts and culture sector, but it may prove a useful document that elevates the policy conversation to the values and motivations that need to underpin the development of future arts and culture policy, including for the cultural industries.

It is evident that the tension between aesthetic, social, and commercial aims have been, and probably will continue to be, a core challenge in the development of national cultural policies. Highlighting the economic aspects of the cultural sector has provoked a sharp contrast between “traditional conceptualizations of cultural policy as either heritage management or as a humanist ideal” (Pratt, 2004, p. 20). Undoubtedly, what is known as the creative economy accounts for substantial shares of income and employment, as it is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy (Power & Scott, 2004; United Nations, 2013). In May 2013, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) reported that the world trade on creative goods totalled “US \$624 billion in 2011”, a figure which more than doubled from 2002 to 2011 (United Nations, 2013, p. 10).

As I complete this thesis, this growth has come to an abrupt halt. COVID-19’s impact on arts and culture, including the creative industries, has been unprecedented, and it is uncertain whether parts of these sectors will recover (Artsy Editorial, 2020). In Australia, the Australia Council offered some relief for artists and creatives (who were left out from the government assistance options immediately after the pandemic was declared); however, anecdotally I have learnt that the majority who are benefiting from these support grants are those who have always enjoyed the subsidy of governments:

that is, artists who reproduce the Western canon. Further, when a package was belatedly announced in June 2020, it was justified in terms of the flow-on benefits to other industries, rather than in terms of the benefits for artists and communities (Macmillan, 2020).

These facts continue to reflect the point that the global creative economy is unequal (United Nations, 2013; Vachet, 2017, p. 13). “While ideas are globally sourced, the dominant transnational corporations, usually those that control distribution, are still concentrated in the global North” (United Nations, 2013, p. 30). Thus, given that art for social change is intrinsically linked to social justice principles, and inherently localised, it is important to raise questions such as: How does art for social change fare within this globalised landscape? And how do cultural policies need to respond, to ensure that the inequalities of neoliberal systems do not perpetuate within the culture and creative sectors?

Brazilian musician Gilberto Gil held the position of Minister of Culture under the socialist government of Lula da Silva (2003–2008). Gil offered a perspective on this conundrum by stating that cultural policies must be seen as “an instrument of social emancipation, global articulation and human freedom in the twenty-first century,” describing the creative economy as “a welcome politicization of economic debate for the contemporary world” (cited in United Nations, 2013, p. 32). At best, Gil’s cultural framework suggested that culture is a driver and an enabler of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2012) and hence the development of creative and cultural industries, harnessed in the right way, “can work not only to promote economic growth and prosperity but also enrich people’s everyday lives and experiences” (Power & Scott, 2004, p. 13). Nonetheless, the history of sustainable development across the world, and the mechanisms used to implement development strategies in poor countries, have ranged from highly paternalistic plans during the 1950s to ‘structural adjustment’ policies informed by a neoliberal ideology in the 1990s that have resulted in “an assault on all forms of collectively or solidarity that

challenge the imperatives of capital” (Kester, 2011, p. 118). I now turn to turn to the South and examine how art for social change has evolved within state institutions and reflect on whether there is value in reimagining art for social change through the lens of its original emancipatory intent.

1.2.5 Cultural policies and art for social change in the global South: A window into Latin America

There is an emergence of a new type of State when we hear those who have never been heard before.

—Celio Turino, 2011, p. 1

As mentioned in the Preface, art for social change has been inspired worldwide by the emancipatory ideas of Paulo Freire, but it has also been influenced by activists, philosophers and writers such as Franz Fanon and theatre practitioner Augusto Boal, all of whom originated from the global South (Goldbard, 2006). Thus, it is intriguing that these cultural practices have been more readily accepted as part of the arts and cultural policies of the global North. Perhaps it is fair to conclude that while art for social change was gaining traction in progressive sectors within and outside the governments of the global North, Latin American countries were taken over by brutal military regimes. What followed from these bloody military coups was a systematic dismantling of the democratic, social, economic and cultural infrastructure of these countries (Chomsky, 2003). The institutional violence and repression of these regimes played a huge part in silencing social movements (Segalo, 2011), and therefore much of the art for social change activities were relegated to the fringes, where it developed outside state control (Adams, 2002).

This bloody period in Latin American history started to change in the 1980s, when many of these countries returned to democracy—or, as Chomsky suggests, when the “generals were happy to transfer the wreckage to civilian hands” (Chomsky, 2003, p. 93). In the post-military dictatorships in Latin

America there was a noticeable emergence of state ministries dedicated to arts and culture (Palominos Mandiola, 2014), as well as the resurgence of civic engagement in community-based arts activities and cross-cultural exchanges across the continent (Taylor, 2001).

Along this renewed public engagement in arts and culture, ideals of collaboration and solidarity amongst Latin American nations resurfaced. This is not new; the collective identity of brotherhood and sisterhood is entrenched in many social movements throughout the region (Balán, 2013). For instance, the figure of the Venezuelan Simón Bolívar looms large throughout the continent as a symbol of liberation and freedom from oppression (Kingsbury, 2015). Bolívar led the independence movement from Spain in the early 19th century and his contemporary appeal, according to Donald Kingsbury, is because “The myth of Bolívar reminds protagonists of the process that political orders can be dismantled and constructed through collective action; it also serves to remind them of previous successes and failures that both inspire and offer lessons for new challenges” (2015, p. 255). It is perhaps not so surprising that the grass-roots arts and cultural movements, which are growing across Latin America now, articulate some of the principles of collective action, solidarity and self-determination. I describe an example of this contemporary movement in Chapter Six.

In the following section I provide two examples of how two contemporary Latin American countries are embedding a different kind of rhetoric in their cultural policies that seems more akin to the ideas and principle of art for social change.

1.2.6 Chile and Ecuador

The trajectory of cultural policy in Chile was not dissimilar to that of the UK until the early 20th century. There was an ad hoc expansion of cultural infrastructure with the foundation of the *Biblioteca Nacional* (National

Library) in 1813 and the state university, *La Universidad de Chile*, in 1842. The first Chilean Centenary celebration in 1910 spurred the foundation of several other cultural institutions, a trend which intensified in the 1940s when, throughout Latin America, the processes of democratisation of governments and public policies began to play a key role in the development of social structures such as welfare, health and education (Palominos Mandiola, 2014). The emphasis of cultural policies, however, changed after the election of the Popular Front in 1938 (a coalition of centre-left parties). Subsequently, the promotion of a national and popular identity intensified, and programs were developed for the democratisation of the arts, moving toward a redistribution of symbolic and cultural infrastructure (Palominos Mandiola, 2014). In the years leading up to the coup d'état, there was also a rise of political cultural activity culminating in the democratic election of Salvador Allende in 1970 when the State proclaimed the right of the people to education and to culture. The use of murals influenced by Siqueiros and Rivera proliferated to communicate the values and the policies of the left-wing president (Bragassi, 2010).

After the military coup d'état in 1973, Allende's cultural programs were violently interrupted. The military appropriated many cultural symbols, including the national dance, *La Cueca*, as a bastion in the promulgation of a nationalist, patriotic and anti-communist 'fatherland', and the dance remained tightly controlled during its 17-year rule. Since the transition to democracy in the 1990s, however, there has been a gradual emergence of new cultural and political agents who have challenged the legacy of impunity left by the dictator. Such challenges include assertions that the state cannot simply ignore human-rights abuses, discrimination and gender inequality; that these issues cannot be negated or silenced in the public domain, because they are "fundamental in defining what a country is, or wishes to be" (Garretón, 2013, p. 23). This thinking began to permeate the development of public policy and influenced its latest national cultural policy, *Política Nacional de Cultura 2017—2022* launched in January 2018. The language of this document revealed

a kind of thinking that would be more sympathetic to the ideals of art for social change.

Manuel Antonio Garretón, an influential Chilean sociologist, is behind some of the ideas that underpinned this new policy. He pinpoints two aspects of culture that influence the way in which cultural policies are developed (Palominos Mandiola, 2014). One aspect is what he calls the ‘culture of institutions’, which is concerned with systems of cultural content and distribution, codes of interpretation, and major cultural public institutions. The other, more anthropological, is the symbolic aspect of culture: the way of being within a community or society; the meaning we give to our lives individually and collectively, to our past and future and our sense of identity (Garretón, 2013). Garretón calls this, *cultura como sustrato* or ‘culture of the substrate’. He suggests that the state can influence both dimensions of culture through cultural policies, however he proposes that in Chile at least, the cultural policies of the ‘substrate’ have been deficient (Garretón, 2013).

The 2018 policy was developed under the socialist government of Michelle Bachelet, and it is the third national cultural policy launched post-dictatorship. It was announced within the framework of new legislation passed in November 2017 which aimed at strengthening the position of the policy within the institution of government by creating the Ministry of Cultures, the Arts and Patrimony. This means an elevation of arts and culture within the structures of government, and a legal framework which cannot be so easily dismantled when there is a change of government (Gobierno de Chile, 2018). If and how this national cultural policy has the capacity to influence a cultural shift in Chile, and whether it promotes a more fertile ground for the development of art for social change, is yet to be revealed.

Ecuador is an interesting example of how social movements have influenced the direction of a national cultural policy and how the policy has translated into a framework for action. The Ecuadorian policy is framed by

acknowledging the ethno-popular and social movements of the 1990s (República del Ecuador, 2011). The Indigenous movements in Ecuador are recognised as an important political power and the most influential First Nations movement in Latin America since the 1980s (Netsch Lopez, 2016). In *Políticas para una Revolución Cultural*, ('Policies for a Cultural Revolution'), the government proposes four intrinsically linked programming pillars to fulfil their cultural aspirations: decolonisation, cultural rights, cultural entrepreneurship and new Ecuadorian Identity. These four goals intersect with four principles, which are: *interculturalidad* (acting/being intercultural), equality, strengthening cultural institutions and the internationalisation of the diversity of Ecuadorian cultures (República del Ecuador, 2011).

Some of the strategies outlined in the policy to combat the colonial legacy and facilitate the decolonisation of knowledge are: anti-racism campaigns; support for 'recovery of memory' programs; a widespread education program covering Indigenous ancestral knowledge systems; promotion of the liberation philosophy and practices of the cultures of *indio-afro latinoamerican* descent; support for identity projects for urban Indigenous people; and a strengthening of ties with other regional countries to recover regional identities (República del Ecuador, 2011, p. 20). All of the above-mentioned strategies are consistent with the kind of projects that are developed through art for social change initiatives. Examples of these themes are included in the case study examined in Chapter Three.

The incorporation of Indigenous cosmologies in the Ecuadorian national cultural policy stemmed from a deeper political change that took place in the country in 2008. The Ecuadorian Constitution enshrined the Indigenous principle of *sumak kawsay*, which calls for a different model of citizenship based on diversity and harmony with nature (Walsh, 2010). Under Indigenous leadership, this Constitution is historically significant and marked a radical and alternative to the social contract of the neoliberal development project (Walsh, 2010). This unprecedented institutional change engendered

hope for the dismantling of neoliberal policies across Andean countries and communities. However, as time passes, it is also clear that there are multiple challenges around the implementation of these profound Constitutional principles. Walsh argues that those plans have also been heavily influenced by particular notions of human development derived from a Western modernist framework (Walsh, 2010), which ultimately raises the question of the extent to which the Ecuadorian Constitution and every plan that stems from it has been able to disentangle from the “colonial matrix of power” (Walsh, 2010, p. 20). Notwithstanding these challenges, it is encouraging to understand that across Abya Yala there are a growing number of social movements that continue to resist inequity and demand change through creative grass-roots platforms.

1.2.7 Art for social change: From the grass-roots to policy

It is estimated that there are more than 120,000 community-based arts and cultural organisations operating in Latin America for the purpose of social transformation, political and civic participation, empowerment and enjoyment (IberCultura Viva, 2018). Through these cultural practices and forms of social organising, a new political culture is emerging that promotes *protagonismo* (the centrality of the people) and the unity of the Latin American *pueblos* (ordinary people/villages) (Balán, 2013, p. 9). These organisations are said to involve around 200 million people annually through popular cultural activities, including festivals, circus, theatre, music, photography and dance, most of which happens in public spaces, squares and on the streets (Balán, 2013).

These-grass roots activities are known across Latin America as CVC, which stands for *Cultura* (Culture) *Viva* (Alive or Living) *Comunitaria* (Community or Communal), which is best translated as Living Culture Communally. The concept is connected to *sumak kawsay* and *el buen vivir* (living well), which I explain further in Chapter Two, and has been described as akin to an ‘ecosystem’ where cultural interactions, production and distribution occur in a determined community; a place and a space (Turino,

2013). Given its roots and meaning in Spanish, I will refer to the term from now on as CVC, which is expressed as follows:

La Cultura Viva Comunitaria es un hecho político del nuevo tiempo que vivimos en Latinoamérica. Experiencias autoconscientes que, desde el Arte, la Educación, la Comunicación o la Cultura en general, intervienen activamente en la democratización y el desarrollo de distintas territorialidades.

CVC is a political act of our times, which aims to respond to the context and reality we are experiencing in Latin America. The experiences and consciousness gained from culture, education and the arts are capable of actively intervening in the development and democratisation of our diverse territorialities (Balán, 2013, p. 12).

Many arts and cultural groups are now part of *La Red de Cultura Viva Comunitaria*—a network of independent organisations that are affiliated with the network of CVC organisations. There are CVC networks in Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Panamá, Paraguay, Perú, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Balán, 2013). All of these networks are unique and decentralised. They began coming together in 2009 to advocate for a cultural public policy to support grass-roots arts and cultural activities inspired by the Brazilian *Puntos de Cultura*, or Culture Points (IberCultura Viva, 2018).

Puntos de Cultura is the most significant contemporary public program relating to grass-roots cultural policy. It emerged in 2004 in Brazil as a program under the socialist government of President Lula da Silva, and it became public policy in 2014 (IberCultura Viva, 2018). *Puntos de Cultura* is a public policy concept that aims at establishing new democratic parameters between the state and society (Turino, 2011). The state's role in this model is to support and acknowledge the decision-making power of local communities with regard to the cultural production that emerges from their *territorio*

(Turino, 2011). Central to this concept is the recognition of culture as a process that emerges from the grass-roots, not as a commodity or a product (Turino, 2011).

The *Puntos de Cultura* is a model that has inspired the CVC movement across Latin America to formalise and advocate collectively to their respective governments for a state policy that commits 0.1 percent of each country's annual budget to grass-roots cultural activities. According to Nikanor Molinares, a cultural activist from Chile, in the past five years the CVC network has grown exponentially across the continent, and it is demanding recognition for diverse and localised grass-roots cultural expression, and for its role in the development of the social fabric of communities. Molinares makes the point that mainstream arts policy makes invisible the expression of local popular culture, "the majority's culture", because state systems privilege the high arts (Molinares, 2017). Hence CVC's key demands are based on the rights of citizens to exercise community cultural expression that is local and situated. This is argued as fundamental to democratic processes, strengthening diversity and the social fabric of communities (Red Cultura Viva Comunitaria Chile, 2016).

Given the growth of this rhetoric and sentiment across Latin American grass-roots cultural and arts groups, it is not surprising that I encountered a strong sentiment of popular culture and the importance of collectivism during my field trip to Chile (see Chapter Four). This is demonstrated through the interviews I conducted with Latin American women as part of this research, and it is also articulated by the writings of other Latin Americans involved in the cultural movements of *Puntos de Cultura* and *Red Cultura Viva*, as will be further explored in Chapter Four.

These practitioners now have the difficult challenge of negotiating with a conglomerate of public officials who have entered the CVC 'space', and it will be interesting to witness what happens as a result. Will the rhetoric of the

CVC popular movement and its political stance diminish as it becomes a part of the establishment? Do CVCs run the risk of becoming part of the establishment as experienced by the community arts movement that emerged in the global North in the 1960s and 1970s?

Through personal communications with women both in Chile and Argentina, I understand that there are multiple opportunities, as well as complexities and tensions, within each of the local movements; these are compounded by having to navigate and engage in dialogue with each of their state governments. However, what is heartening is the depth and breadth of the creative process and engagement with local issues articulated by practitioners which is what this thesis intends to highlight in further chapters.

1.3 Summary

This chapter examines the origins and history of art for social change across the global North and contextualises the practice in parts of the global South, over a corresponding historical period. It argues that, while community arts emerged as a distinctive practice in the 1960s and 1970s in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia, its development is linked to progressive social movements inspired in the global South. The chapter explains that whilst art for social change challenged the centrality and authority of the Western cultural canon in the global North, in the South similar social movements were crushed by bloody military regimes, sending activism underground. It then contends that, as the global North continued to embrace the notion of community-based and participatory arts practices into the 1990s, it progressively began to lose the emancipatory discourse that had characterised its beginnings. The chapter traces the development of art for social change through the evolution of state arts and cultural policies which illustrate how state ideologies intersect with art for social change practice. This analysis demonstrates that art for social change, despite its inclusion in state policy, has not sat comfortably within the parameters of state control. Finally, the

chapter examines cultural policies that have emerged from what Boaventura de Sousa Santos describes as “a set of inquiries into the construction and validation of knowledge born in struggle” (Santos, 2016b, p. x); that is, policies that were adopted by states as a result of the resistance and activism of social groups against systemic injustices. Despite the limitations that come from institutional adoption of potentially transformative practices, it is encouraging to witness the wave of cultural movements that have been emerging across Abya Yala that are rooted in First Nations’ epistemologies. This, perhaps, is an indication that the Southern theoretical underpinnings that led to the emergence of art for social change in the global North may need to be revisited. It is timely to look for inspiration from art for social change that is anchored in the South. This may assist us to reconnect with its empowering foundational ideals.

CHAPTER TWO

Delinking Women's Empowerment from Development: Relinking it to Community and Creativity

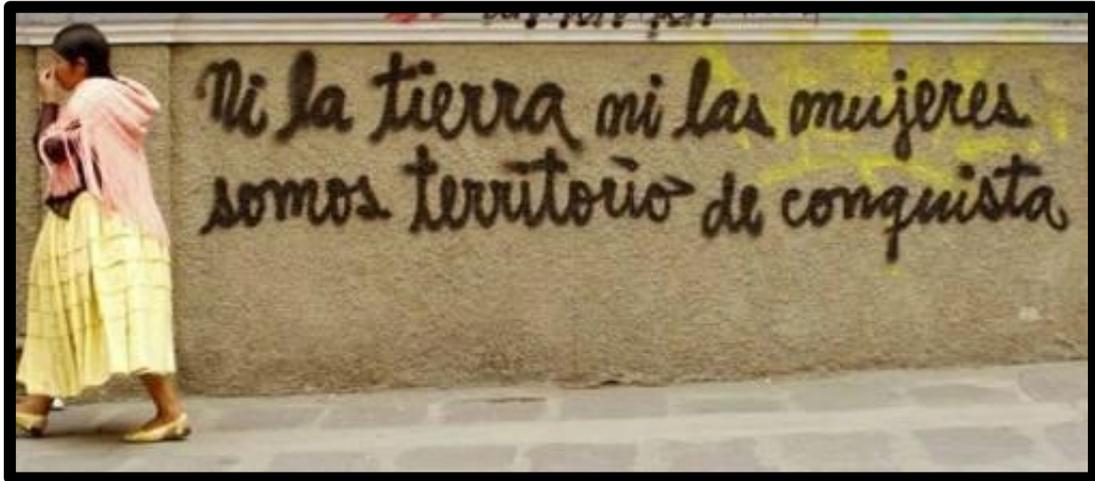


Figure 5: Image of a graffiti intervention by the Bolivian Feminist Collective *Mujeres Creando*. Source: <https://almavc81.wordpress.com/>

Neither the land nor the women are territory of conquest.

—Mujeres Creando, n.d.

2. Introduction

The empowerment of women has been a fundamental discursive practice of international development, heralded as both a process and an outcome for achieving women's equality and lifting communities out of poverty (Chong, 2012; Saunders, 2002). Post-development feminists (Saunders, 2002), however, have been critical of the hegemonic development practices that have typically been directed at, and implemented in, poor countries, and they have progressively challenged the construct of the 'Third-World Woman' as a hopeless victim in need of salvation and empowerment (Cronin-Furman, Gowrinathan, & Zakaria, 2017; Saunders, 2002). This chapter traces the evolution of empowerment in the discourse of development, followed by an examination of the term from the perspective of feminist scholars from the

global South and decolonial thinkers from Latin America who, for the past three decades, have challenged monolithic and Eurocentric views of women and power relations (Alfaro, 2011; Connell, 2007; Paredes, 2015; Richard, 1996; Santos, 2016b; Schiwy, 2007). The chapter then outlines the theoretical and methodological approach of the thesis to allow for the exploration of art for social change in the case studies that follow. This exploration reveals art for social change as a mechanism for extending women's empowerment beyond current discourses of development and linking it to creative forms of critical autonomy and emancipation.

2.1 Empowerment of women and international development discourse

Despite decades of international policy development and investment aimed at achieving gender parity, inequality continues to be real and widespread across the globalised world (Akhter & Ward, 2009; United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2010). The empowerment of women, poor women in particular, has been the focus of countless international development projects since the 1950s, when poverty in the 'underdeveloped' world was assumed to be the weakest link in achieving peace and security for the 'developed' world (Saunders, 2002). These empowering initiatives, and the managerial apparatus created to support them, were from the start embedded in a Eurocentric colonial ideology of superiority. Thus, these programs have almost always been espoused as a 'good' thing for women and their effectiveness rarely questioned (Chong, 2012; Pease, 2002).

Currently, empowerment is associated with many disciplines, including gender studies, international development, education, social work, psychology, community and cultural development, management, leadership and economic development. During the 1970s, empowerment was claimed by southern feminists as liberating and progressive, however, in some cases it has been diluted to the point that it is referred to as a way of improving productivity and economic gains, rather than for achieving any kind of transformative

social agenda (Chong, 2012; Cronin-Furman et al., 2017). This shift is further explored in the sections below.

2.1.1 A brief chronology of empowerment

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights set out the essential pillars for universal freedoms, equity and rights (United Nations, 2014). Since then, the Declaration has been used as the normative global framework that serves to enshrine the protection and promotion of human rights, even though it has not been adopted by many states (Chong, 2012; United Nations, 2014). For over 50 years, international organisations such as the United Nations—United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UN Women, and other global agencies such as the World Bank Group—have denounced and lamented gender disparity. The result has been the development of numerous policies, and international agreements and the implementation of strategies to combat inequality (United Nations, 2014; United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2010; World Bank Group, 2015), with limited and contested results (Bidegain Ponte & Enríquez, 2016; Kabeer, 2015; Rosche, 2016; Samie, Johnson, Huffman, & Hillyer, 2015).

During the 1970s and the 1990s international discussions steered by activists and civil society shone the spotlight on the lack of progress in the advancement of women's equity and social justice. This push led to four global conferences on women: Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995 (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Prior to these international events, the dominant discourse on women and development was informed predominately by two different ideological approaches: the mainstream, liberal Women in Development view, (WID) which focused on providing women with opportunities to participate in the normative male-dominated, social, political and economic processes; and the Women and Development (WAD) approach, largely inspired by Marxists theories, which pointed to

structural inequalities, capitalism and the gender division of labour as major reasons for women's inequality (Nikkhah, Redzuan, & Abu-Samah, 2012).

Kriemild Saunders, editor of *Feminist Post-Development Thought* (2002), argues that the unrelenting lobbying and activism from civil society and diverse feminists' positions managed to shift policy from a welfare approach to women's development, to a rights-based approach to gender and development. This culminated in the 1980s, when the concept of the empowerment of women was adopted and revitalised by feminists from the global South.

From these changes in development discourse emerged yet another approach: Gender and Development (GAD), which differs from WAD and WID, as it focuses on gender and class relations. It argues that gender is an ideological and cultural construct, and seeks to understand and explain the construction and reproduction of unequal power relations between men and women (Saunders, 2002). The GAD approach also encourages women to actively organise and work towards changing and transforming the structures that have contributed to their oppression (Nikkhah et al., 2012).

The rights-based approach to women's development was cemented globally in 1995 by what was considered a landmark international agreement for advancing gender inequality, the Beijing Platform of Action. Interestingly, Indigenous scholars point to Beijing as a watershed moment for First Nations women (Álvares & Painemal, 2016). Indigenous women, from across the world, dissatisfied with the Beijing Platform of Action and its limited inclusion of their standpoints, raised a tent in defiance, from which they formulated a Declaration of Indigenous Women. This contained an articulation of the particularities of their lived experiences as First Nations women, and a powerful critique of the global North and its neocolonial structures for their collusion in the perpetuation of ongoing inequalities (Álvares & Painemal, 2016).

The First Nations women's proclamation in Beijing undoubtedly contributed to challenging paternalistic attitudes towards Indigenous women and women of colour as well as asserting the transversality of race, class and ethnicity (Álvarez & Painemal, 2016). Indigenous scholars have since crafted opportunities to challenge unexamined cultural and epistemological assumptions of the colonial construction of gender (Álvarez & Painemal, 2016) and the female body (Apffel-Marglin & Sanchez, 2004). And have continued their scholarly work of documenting feminist antecedents that account for an ancestral construction of gender, reciprocal relationships and the inter-existence with others human and non-humans (Álvarez & Painemal, 2016)—a whole episteme which has been rendered invisible by mainstream white feminism (Ware, 2015).

Ironically, whilst empowerment become hugely popular amongst Western feminists after the agenda for women's empowerment was adopted in Beijing (Cronin-Furman et al., 2017), it also marked the beginning of the weakening of the term and its political and radical roots. The reality is that 'gender mainstreaming' largely failed as a strategy to achieve equality amongst men and women (Chong, 2012). Despite carefully crafted international policies, inequality for women remains unabated. The gap between rich and poor women continues to be compounded by other forms of disadvantage, such as race, class, disability, sexuality and geographic location (Chong, 2012; Parpart, 2010; UN Women, 2015; United Nations Development Programme, 2015).

2.1.2 Conceptualising empowerment in development discourse

Feminist scholars suggest that early writing on women's empowerment can be attributed to feminists from the global South (Sen & Mukherjee, 2014). Similarly to the community arts movement, empowerment gained currency in the late 1960s and 1970s. This was a time when feminist ideas were cross-pollinating with postcolonial theories and popular education (Batliwala, 2007;

Parpart, 2002). Andrea Cornwall (2007) and Althea-María Rivas (2015) suggest that empowerment is essentially about shifting power relations, and that change involves the development of critical consciousness “via the acquisition of a collective self-confidence that results in a feeling of ‘we can’” (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 405). They also argue that empowerment is relational, and that “empowerment is a process, not an end-point” (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 405). It is complex and hard to measure; in fact, most current ways to measure empowerment have failed, as they do not incorporate its relational nature, and there is no ‘one size fits all’ way to empowerment (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Eade, 2015). These insights are important and help to debunk the persistent myth that economic development alone can deliver women’s empowerment.

Cornwall adds that women’s empowerment in the 1980s and 1990s was conceptualised by Southern feminists as “a radical approach concerned with transforming power relations in favour of women’s rights and greater equality between women and men” (Cornwall, 2016, p. 343). Similarly, Batliwala reflects that empowerment was conceptualised in terms of:

A socio-political process, that the critical operating concept within empowerment was power, and empowerment was about shifts in political, social, and economic power between and across both individuals and social groups (Batliwala, 2007, p. 559).

Nira Yuval-Davis (1994) cautions against simplistic notions of ‘community’ and ‘empowerment’ as well as the naive assumption that all oppressed and disadvantaged people share the same progressive agendas. Equally, she suggests it should not be assumed that the process of gaining power in itself is without complexities and potential conflict. Further, it may not be possible for some people to take more control over their lives without their new freedoms or power impacting negatively on others without power. That is, there is no guarantee that gaining empowerment does not corrupt those who benefit from the process (Yuval-Davis, 1994, p. 182). Yuval-Davis adds:

I am far from believing, and especially far from hoping, that solidarity among different people, as individuals and as grouping, in struggles against racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination and disadvantage, are impossible ... However, I do not believe such struggles can be taken forward successfully by simplistic notions of empowerment of the oppressed (Yuval-Davis, 1994, p. 182).

It is evident that empowerment has diverse and interrelated aspects, and it is interpreted differently in different parts of the world (Cornwall 2007).

Empowerment is sometimes described as being about the ability to make choices (Nikkhah et al., 2012). But it must also involve the ability to shape what choices are on offer and should include the sense of power and entitlement to be making those decisions. Empowerment encourages women to challenge existing power structures that subordinate women; as such, what is seen as empowering in one context may not be so in another (Oxaal & Baden, 1997, p. 3).

“A narrative of empowerment emerged [during the 1980s and 1990s] that was bound up with both collective action (‘power with’) and the development of ‘power within’ and ‘power to’ at the level of consciousness” (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 405). These different perspectives became noticeable during the rise of second-wave feminism in the West as the fractures between the standpoints of women from the ‘First’ and ‘Third’ world become evident (Yuval-Davis, 1998). Saunders (2002) explains:

The Western feminist anxiety over the privileging of the name Third World Woman, and resistance to the new potential sovereign, ironically arose when feminism began to face the epistemological crisis of its inability to account for the Other, who took the appellation ‘Woman of Colour’ (Saunders, 2002, p. 13).

Furthermore, the rhetoric of empowerment of women that gained popularity in the 1990s ran parallel to the critique of the role of the state as the best model to deliver women's equality. As more NGOs partnered in establishing initiatives for women, the focus of development, at least in theory, began to centre on the idea of human rights, good governance and participation. This approach was embraced by the international development sector because it emerged from the South, and therefore appealed to institutions from the North which didn't want to be associated with imperialist notions of top-down development (Oxaal & Baden, 1997).

2.2 Southern perspectives on empowerment

The empowerment approach in development theory has been attributed predominantly to Gita Sen, Srilatha Batliwala, Naila Kabeer, and to the feminist transnational network Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) (Tambe & Trotz, 2010). DAWN was established in 1984 by feminist scholars, activists and policy advocates to provide perspectives on development from the global South (Oxaal & Baden, 1997). Located in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, DAWN was able to harness Southern women's critical perspectives, which rebutted the assumptions that the main problem with development initiatives was insufficient participation of women in an otherwise 'benign' and 'desirable' process of growth and development (Oxaal & Baden, 1997).

DAWN's critical contributions to the discourse of women's empowerment was the articulation that, beyond patriarchy and gender inequality, there were multiple other mediating forms of oppression experienced by women of the South, such as class, race and ethnicity. DAWN also emphasised the collective (power with) dimensions of empowerment (Oxaal & Baden, 1997, p. 4) and argued that support of women's organisations was one of the most effective ways for women to gain empowerment. These critiques were not only fundamental in dismantling the dominant "gynocentric

foundation of Western feminism” (Saunders, 2002, p. 13) but also they articulated a new vision of development—one that needed to be grounded in the lived experiences and perspectives of women and, in particular, of poor women living in the developing world (Tambe & Trotz, 2010).

Moreover, Southern feminists argued that empowerment has not always been associated with development issues (Batliwala, 2007; Parpart & Kabeer, 2010), noting that empowerment has a long history, and its origins could be traced to many other struggles for social justice around the world—for example, against caste and gender oppression in India in the 12th and 13th centuries (Batliwala, 2007), or in opposition to the 16th century colonial incursion of the Americas (Ikeotuonye, 2016, p. 294).

Batliwala and Yuval-Davis explain that the contemporary concept of empowerment gained currency in the 1970s, when there was a cross-pollination between the practice of popular education (inspired by Paulo Freire’s teaching, which linked ‘knowledge and power’) with feminist activism and scholarship (Yuval-Davis, 1994, p. 179). Gramsci’s ideas of subalternity and post-colonial theory also became an important nexus in which empowerment was seen as a tool for the liberation of the poor and marginalised. However, gender had not been explicitly argued or discussed in post-colonial theories until Southern feminists began introducing the previously invisible dimension of gender subordination and the social construction of gender to Freire’s and Gramsci’s ideas as integral to the practice of social change (Batliwala, 2007). This meant that:

Feminist movements in the Third World, but particularly in Latin America and South Asia, evolved their own distinctive approach, pushing consciousness-raising into the realm of radical organising and movement building for gender equality (Batliwala, 2007, p. 559).

However, as noted by Calvès (2009), it was not until 1976, when *Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Communities* by Black feminist

Barbara Solomon was published in the USA, that the term ‘empowerment’ began to be used in academic research. The concept of empowerment in the global South then became strongly associated with social justice, liberation theology, black power and other movements that fought for social change, until more recently, when scholars argue that the term lost its Southern meaning (Batliwala, 2007).

2.3 Empowerment is hijacked: Empowerment and individualism

The tensions in how empowerment was conceptualised in the global South and North become pronounced in the following years. Sumaya Samie et al. suggest that many of the gender programs that were developed ‘for’ the global South were dominated by the global North and were based on two ideological constructs: firstly, that women in the developing world exist as marginalised and oppressed beings; and, secondly, that empowerment is the only way these women can overcome their internalised oppression (Samie et al., 2015, p. 924).

Despite the fact that women’s empowerment was conceived and articulated by feminists in response to multifaceted inequalities and oppressions, the term was hijacked in the 1990s by a neoliberal agenda (Batliwala, 2007; Schutte, 2011). And as feminists attempted to build international alliances around a women’s rights framework, the fractures among global feminists also increased, particularly fuelled by the increasingly “corrosive neoliberal policies” imposed on the growth agendas of development programs which were first imposed in the 1970s (Quataert, 2014, p. 210). Ironically, it was the successes of the feminist empowerment approach of the 1980s that led to its instrumentalisation and, some claim, to its subsequent death (Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall, 2007).

Batliwala (2007) argues that the term empowerment lost its activist based meaning as it entered mainstream discourse on development when it was co-opted by multilateral, bilateral and private development agencies.

These organisations began using empowerment to mean that communities had to be resilient, and take care of their own affairs, thus constructing empowerment as the individual pursuit of self-reliance rather than a co-operative process aimed at challenging structural inequalities (Batliwala, 2007). While feminist interventions such as livelihood programming can produce some benefits, the funding structure that sustains them and the agendas that drive these structures keep these programs isolated from any possibility of collective political action (Cronin-Furman et al., 2017, p. 10). Empowerment has become a part of an individualist rhetoric that tends to stifle the possibility of collective action and human rights; it has reduced “from a complex process of self-realisation, self-actualisation and mobilisation to demand change, to a simple act of transformations bestowed by the transfer of money” (Cornwall et al. 2007, 7). That is, the process and desired outcomes for women’s empowerment are now shaped by neoliberal development agendas that equate the empowerment of women with economic growth (Porter, 2013). Furthermore, there is a tendency to believe that if women increase power in certain areas, such as obtaining resources or power over decision-making, this in itself will translate into other areas of their lives. However, it is not access to credit, *per se*, that gives women access to power or decision-making; the context in which the credit is extended may or may not deliver empowerment outcomes for women (Oxaal & Baden, 1997). Cornwall (2007) goes further asserting that the new empowerment narrative has become a simulacrum: “Empower women, the story goes, and they become the motor of development”(Cornwall, 2007, para. 1). These initiatives may appear to be real as they have co-opted the language of ‘choices’ and ‘agency’ for women; however, they do nothing to combat the underlying structural inequalities and pervasive discriminations that propel feminists to act, denounce and advocate for change in the first place. Empowering women in this context turns the idea of ‘power’ into a commodity that can be transacted and does little to answer any calls for justice.

Similarly, South African feminist Puleg Segalo (2011) suggests that empowerment, especially when it is embedded in repressive systems, has failed to be problematised. Empowerment, she argues, cannot be realised unless unequal power relations are acknowledged and addressed, and history and issues of class are taken into consideration when defining the word (Segalo, 2016). Ikeotuonye (2016) goes further, arguing that women's empowerment needs to be understood against a backdrop of colonial domination, because race and Eurocentrism continue to exercise a "geocultural structure of domination" across the globe (Ikeotuonye, 2016, p. 305).

2.4 Empowerment, neoliberalism and violence against women

The above feminist critiques not only suggest that empowerment discourse has been hijacked but also highlight that the depoliticisation of empowerment has strongly impacted the lives of women who have been recipients of development initiatives around the world. The disempowering effect of development programs can be seen in many parts of the world. May Jeong, in her diary essay 'Femicide from Kandahar' in the *London Review of Books*, reflects on the horrific and presumably unintended consequences of millions of dollars spent on gender initiatives after the invasion of Afghanistan (Jeong, 2017): "The money encouraged some women, mostly daughters of already enlightened families to go into the world ... Meanwhile, less powerful women were being assassinated" (Jeong, 2017, pp. 1-2). Giving testimony to the violence, one of Jeong's interviewee reflects:

This whole fiasco around women's rights, it's more an international effort than an Afghan born one ... It didn't spring from the bottom up. It is something that was imposed from the outside ... Back then there were checks and balances to control potential abuse of power. But the foreign funds that flooded into Afghanistan after the war distorted this

relationship, creating an elite class divorced from the rest of the people (Jeong, 2017, p. 2).

The changes the country experienced resulted in a backlash against modernisation and foreign influence, increasing the risk of violence against the very women these programs and investment were trying to support through ‘empowerment’ (Jeong, 2017).

Many programs that have been supposed to address women’s empowerment in the global South continue to be top-down and embedded in Eurocentric ideas of what empowering of women means (Samie et al., 2015). *Mujeres Creando* (best translated as Women Creating) is an Indigenous feminist collective that emerged in Bolivia in 1992. *Mujeres Creando* uses street art as interventions to denounce what they argue to be the collusion between neoliberalism and Western feminist strategies emerging from international development agencies. Julieta Paredes (one of its founders) argues that gender strategies, particularly around micro-enterprises for women, keep them divided and focused on gender issues whilst drowning the complex effects of neoliberal policies on women’s daily lives (Paredes, 2015).

Back in Australia, during the interviews, one of my interlocutors, Dumbaart, described the frustration and impotence she and other members of the Noongar community in Narrogin felt at the inadequate response from government and NGOs to the community crisis that ensued after multiple youth suicides during 2008 and 2009 (Kasat, 2014).

There was so much money put into Narrogin, and what made me angry at the same time was how much money was put into government agencies for Aboriginal people—because they applied for those funds, under the suicide prevention—but it went over the top of the Aboriginal community. So, they weren’t actually working with the community ... with the Noongar community (Dumbaart).

Increasingly, neoliberal development models not only do not advance women's empowerment across the global South but in fact tend to reinforce women's and communities' oppression (Parpart, 2002). In the case above, the community felt further disenfranchised, as the models of support did not consult them and were top-down. The families of those who committed suicide did not receive adequate or culturally appropriate forms of psychological support, which has been documented as further contributing to a sense of powerlessness (Dudgeon, Milroy, & Walker, 2010). There is evidence to suggest that global top-down development programs further disadvantage women by consolidating existing power hierarchies (Cornwall 2007), increasing indebtedness, supporting new forms of gender violence and doubling women's workloads (Batliwala, 2007).

Sámi scholar Rauna Kuokkanen further highlights the impact of the totalising forces of patriarchy and globalisation and how they act as disempowering forces for women, and in particular for Indigenous women (Kuokkanen, 2008). Economic globalisation goes beyond the marginalisation of Indigenous people, as the extractivist practices used in most large-scale 'development' projects, such as mining, hydroelectric, fossil fuel and logging, erode the inherent right of self-determination. These projects deny, more often than not, access to ancestral lands, interfere with the practice of culture, and are incompatible with traditional ways of community sustenance. In addition, these kinds of large-scale development projects are also often associated with environmental destruction and therefore with militarised responses to maintain and protect capitalist interests (Kuokkanen, 2008).

An example of the violence inflicted on Indigenous women for defending their ancestral lands is the 2016 assassination of Berta Caceres—Lenca activist and leader from Honduras—for her vocal opposition to the Agua Zarca Dam, a hydroelectric project that threatened her community's livelihoods and the health of the sacred Gualcarque River. Paradoxically, the year before her assassination she was awarded the prestigious Goldman

Environmental Prize for her grass-roots campaign to stop the dam (Watts, 2016). Mohawk theorist Audra Simpson (2016) explains the continual level of violence against Indigenous women as part of the ongoing project of dispossession of Indigenous land across the globe: “This dispossession is raced and is gendered, and its violence is still borne by the living, the dead, and the disappeared corporealities of Native women” (Audra Simpson, 2016, p. 7). Early in 2018, two years after the assassination of Berta Cáceres, the President of DESA (the company developing the Agua Zarca project) Roberto David Castillo, was detained and accused of being the intellectual culprit behind her killing. Nine other men are serving sentences for her death, including an ex-military official of the government of Honduras and other senior executives of the company (Vera, 2018).

2.5 Empowerment: Is it still relevant today?

Given the above, it is not surprising that many feminists (including one of my interlocutors for this research, Veronica Pardo) use the word empowerment reluctantly:

I don't use the word empowerment that much. I don't know why.

Maybe it's because I feel like it's become very clichéd, but I like it. I like any word that has power in it (Verónica).

Empowerment is, without a doubt, a contested term. Its co-option makes its use more complex and problematic. However, I continue to use this term because it emerged from the South as an aspirational goal for feminist political practice and was specifically intended to challenge the perception that the process of gaining power for women was acquired through individual practice. Feminists from the global South have advocated for decades for the development of political alliances of solidarity and collective action. It is in acting together that power is harnessed and attained by the individual. Empowerment, from a Southern standpoint, means a commitment to engage

in collective action to challenge deep-rooted structural inequalities, while at the same time guaranteeing that the process is also about transforming the lives of individuals (Bradley, 2019). Perhaps it is time to reclaim its use by reversing our gaze, focusing our attention back on women's own experiences, and listening carefully to what we/they have learnt across their many paths towards gaining empowerment. While the world faces a complex crisis with the emergence the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more urgent to revisit such concepts as the empowerment of women, as it intersects with creative collective practices like art for social change. This may illuminate empowerment in present-day processes of social justice and social change from the vantage point of Indigenous women and women of colour. In the following section I outline the methodological approach that informed and guided my research.

2.6 Methodology and methods: From researching and reflecting on art for social change to empowerment and decolonisation

Inspired by feminist theories from the global South (Mohanty, 2003; Schutte, 2011), decolonising and anti-racist agendas (Santos, 2016b; Smith, 2012), and the emergent Latin American concepts of *sentipensar and buen vivir* (Escobar, 2016; Walsh, 2010), the methodology used in the thesis brings critical theoretical scholarship on the empowerment of women (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Kabeer, 2005) together with art for social change practices in settler-colonial societies (ICASC, 2016; Sonn, Kasat, et al., 2017; Sonn & Quayle, 2013) and repressive states (Agosín, 1996).

2.6.1 Re-connecting with Southern feminist epistemologies

I began this research knowing that I wanted to critically analyse community cultural development (CCD) work while I was at the helm of the Community Arts Network of Western Australia (CAN WA). My position required showcasing the positive community benefits of this practice; however, in a

competitive funding environment, CCD does not allow adequate space for critical reflection or the articulation of feminist theory or cross-cultural nuanced models of CCD. Despite this, I engaged in collaborative research and writing about CAN WA's practice, principally with my long-term academic colleague, Christopher Sonn, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three. However, there were areas I wanted to explore further. A key compelling gap in the literature was the application of Southern feminist epistemologies to CCD, which could facilitate the interrogation of how women of colour and Indigenous women 'use' CCD to make sense of their realities as racialised women. Further, I was particularly interested in understanding how, through community arts practice, women challenge ubiquitous unequal power relations and structures, and in examining the elements that facilitate agency for women; that is, what are the strategies that help make visible everyday forms of resistance. Thus, the idea of using case studies as a principal method in the thesis was seeded.

In the Introduction to the thesis on page 19 I quote Cuban feminist scholar and philosopher Ofelia Schutte. I chose this text because it compels the reader to reflect that a feminist social-change agenda is unachievable without a commitment to the creative potential of women who have been structurally and politically silenced. The idea that the creative potential of minoritised women must be expressed and heard is, in essence, what drives the practice of art for social change. However, how to connect art for social change and its potential as a decolonising practice was not clear to me until I began to understand that, in the Southern feminist movement and theory, decolonisation is an invitation and a permission to unleash the testimonies and perspectives of women of colour and anyone else whose political beliefs or socio-cultural standing has been silenced and suppressed by patriarchal consortiums of power (Schutte, 2011). Thus, articulating art for social change as a decolonising method become an appealing proposition. By decolonising, in the thesis, I mean self-determined, collective practices that deliberately make the stories and narratives of racialised women visible in creative ways.

Framing this research through the approach of Southern feminists means understanding that most of the knowledges I have access to in the English language continue to be largely dominated by patriarchal, Anglocentric and Eurocentric ways. To combat this, I have intentionally sought Indigenous women, women of colour, and Black scholars whose work is framed in an emancipatory paradigm. As much as possible I have tried to seek material from Latin American feminists, written in Spanish. This presents its own challenges in relation to processes of decolonisation, because Spanish is also the language of a colonial power. Nevertheless, having access to articles and research material in two languages expanded my realm of inquiry. In addition, feminist texts—combined with progressive sources, such as activist magazines and websites as well as personal interviews with artists, activists and minoritised women—have provided a rich source of alternative views from which to draw.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in her seminal book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (first published in 1999), asks Indigenous and non-white researchers to look for and find ‘our’ histories and stories: “*Coming to know* the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges” (Smith, 2012, p. 36). That is, for those whose histories and stories have been appropriated, made invisible and misrepresented, engaging in self-reflexive practices and methods to reclaim them becomes a way to decolonise our existence. This articulation provides a clear pathway to affirm my lived experiences, as well as my experiences as a professional community arts practitioner, which form the departure point for this research.

Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa in her influential book *Borderlands, La Frontera, The New Mestiza* (first published in 1987) communicates the importance of gaining consciousness and awareness of one’s own subjective position(s) in order to decolonise the inner self.

The dark-skinned woman has been silenced, gagged, caged, bound into servitude ... she has been a slave, a force of cheap labor, colonized by the Spaniard, the Anglo, by her own people.

The spirit of the fire spurs her to fight for her own skin and a piece of ground to stand on, a ground from which to view the world – a perspective, a homeground where she can plumb the rich ancestral roots into her own ample *mestiza* heart. She waits...

Aquí en la soledad prospera su rebeldía (Anzaldúa, 2012, pp. 44–45).

The invitation to delve into and explore one's own histories, and to cultivate a standpoint from where, not only to see the world but also to act in the world anew, is a profound and powerful offer which echoes Chandra Talpade Mohanty's proposition in *Feminism Without Borders* (2003). In this text Mohanty refers to "particular formulations", such as autonomy and self-determination, as fundamental to decolonisation practices that can only be achieved through "self-reflexive collective practice" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 8). In addition, in her first ground-breaking essay, *Under Western Eyes* (published in 1986), Mohanty asserts that decolonising feminist work must pay attention to the specificities of each context in order to understand how these singularities connect to global systems of oppression. This points to the importance of making visible and learning from instances of resistance that are anchored in the everyday lives of women (Mohanty, 2003).

Cross-cultural feminist work must be attentive to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes (2003b, p. 223).

2.6.2 Decolonial thinking and other Southern epistemologies

Boaventura de Sousa Santos developed a theoretical framework that he names 'epistemologies of the South' to refer to the multiple knowledges and ways of

knowing that derive from those who have been deliberately ignored by “constellations of oppressions” and who are also actively engaged in different forms of resistance (2016a, p. 2; 2016b). De Sousa’s key premise is that in an increasingly unequal world, new epistemologies are required to reinvent social emancipation. Epistemologies of the South are diverse ways of knowing and making sense of the world beyond the monolithic idea of Western ways of thinking about our existence, and this diversity of knowing, argues Santos, is infinite (2016a). This expansive sense of the existence of plurality and simultaneous worldviews is an exciting proposition that contrasts with the pervasive monolithic view of the world. This is notoriously widespread in international development, as discussed in the section above.

It is not surprising that de Sousa’s articulation has found favour amongst scholars from the global South, many of whom suggest that the knowledges offered by the epistemologies of the South are not intended as a general theory but as a bridge. That is, they comprise ways of thinking that fundamentally recommit to the diversity of knowledges that exists in the world, and they are a tool for those who no longer wish to be complicit with the silencing of popular cultures and knowledges (Escobar, 2016, p. 12). Escobar also suggests that this framework is useful for those who have been on the receiving end of the colonial project, particularly if adopted in its ontological dimension (2016). That is, understanding that many of the contemporary social struggles for land, cultural rights and diversity, particularly forged by Indigenous people around the world, are ontological fights *por un mundo en que quepan muchos mundos*, for a world where many worlds fit, as found in the Zapatista cosmology of the pluriverse (Escobar, 2016; Reiter, 2018). Thus, inspired by the epistemologies of the South, the four case studies in the thesis centre the experiences of contemporary women from the global South, while at the same time making visible the mechanisms and contributions of their struggles. In doing so, the four case studies bring together the different kinds of knowledges and experiences of the women involved.

According to Aníbal Quijano (2000), the ‘colonial matrix of power’—the “structure of management that controls and touches all aspects and trajectories of our lives” (Mignolo, 2017, p. 40)—emerged as a result of the assault on these territories, which began in the 15th century and spread across the globe for the next five centuries. The Americas become the new model of a global power, and one of the intrinsic pillars of this model is the social classification of the globe’s population around the idea of ‘race’ (Quijano & Ennis, 2000). When the Europeans invaded the continent, says Quijano, they didn’t ask, “How are these people different from us?” they asked, “Are these humans?” “Do they have a soul?” This fundamental construction of a supposedly biologically determined structure which placed some as superior than others marked the beginnings of the pervasive construct of race that has continued to dominate until today (Quijano, 2007; Quijano & Ennis, 2000).

Contemporary Latin American decolonial thinking emerges from the foundation established by the Peruvian intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui in the 1920s and by the dependency theory and philosophy of liberation which spread throughout the continent during the 1970s (Mignolo, 2007). More recently, Maria Lugones, (Quijano & Ennis, 2000) Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh offer some helpful concepts which illuminate how, in the present, the processes of colonisation continue to be perpetrated through the modern colonial world. Most importantly, decolonial thinking provides an invitation for “civil and epistemic disobedience” that actively reclaims and brings to the fore those “local histories which have been disavowed, diminished and demonised in the narratives of Western modernity” (Mignolo, 2017, p. 41).

As part of the attempts to enact decolonial thinking amongst feminists, there has been an emphasis on the importance of looking for a new language. In 2007 Batliwala reflected on the need to build a new language and to listen to the lived experiences of women from the global South:

Clearly, we need to build a new language in which to frame our vision and strategies for social transformation at the local, national, or global level. I for one intend to do so not by re-reading Foucault or Gramsci or other great political philosophers, but by listening to poor women and their movements, listening to their values, principles, articulations, and actions, and by trying to hear how they frame their search for justice. From this, I suspect, will emerge not only a new discourse, but also new concepts and strategies that have not yet entered our political or philosophical imaginations (Batliwala, 2007, p. 564).

One of these new languages is what Walter D. Mignolo calls the “de-colonial projects,” the idea of *doing* decolonisation in the borders. He invokes the borders as understood by Gloria Anzaldúa, full of contradictions and complexity, and which make comprise the entire social experience (Anzaldúa, 2012):

De-colonial projects dwell in the borders, are anchored in double consciousness, in mestiza consciousness (racial and sexual). It is a colonial subaltern epistemology in and of the global and the variegated faces of the colonial wound inflicted by five hundred years of the historical foundation of modernity as a weapon of imperial/colonial global expansion of Western capitalism (Mignolo, 2007, p. 165).

Decolonial thinking is a particular kind of critical theory (Quijano & Ennis, 2000) that connects with the global South in its diversity of colonial experiences, including with the theoretical and political intellectual production that emerges from the Afro-American thinking, South America (coloniality of power) and South Asia (subaltern Studies). Mignolo argues that decolonial thinking is a pluriversal epistemology for the future; an epistemology that de-links from the tyranny of abstract universals we have inherited from Christians, liberals or Marxists (Mignolo, 2007, p. 159).

2.6.3 *Sentipensar* and *buen vivir*: Concepts that emerge from Abya Yala

A concept that complements the epistemologies of the South and which emerged from Indigenous people of Colombia is *sentipensar*, or to ‘feel-think’, which is both to think with feeling and to feel with thinking. *Sentipensar* was introduced to academia by the sociologist Fals Borda (Cepeda, 2017) and recently reclaimed by Indigenous scholars as part of their ontology (Intzín, 2018).

*The ontological sentipensar,
as a research method,
requires the non-pretentious facticity
of the encounters with others,
listening
next to the fire,
learning with humility
from the indigenous, the farmer,
the taita, the grandfather,
the popular wisdom,
paying attention respectfully to their saying
just as respectfully as we read a scientific paper ...
(Cepeda, 2017, p. 17).*

Notwithstanding the gender bias of Cepeda’s writing above (not at all uncommon in Spanish speaking traditions), I find the approach of *sentipensar* familiar and comfortable. The idea of the interconnectedness between feelings and thoughts, as well as its methodological application, is a concept I readily warm to, one that was well suited to interviewing Indigenous and Latin American women in informal settings. In my interviews, this approach complemented the use of open-ended questions as prompts to facilitate storytelling, memory recall and the sharing of personal stories and experiences. I listened carefully to the reflections of each woman as I

endeavoured to elucidate the components that contribute to ‘feeling empowered’ and the ways in which the empowering process is acquired or generated.

Buen vivir, which can be roughly understood as ‘living well’ (Walsh, 2010), is another concept that has emerged from Latin America and is a valuable idea for understanding art for social change through the lenses of the global South. Eduardo Gudynas (2011) offers an insight into the main trends of the discourse around *buen vivir*. As the term gained currency amongst social movements across the continent, it found its way—as a result of lobbying by Indigenous movements (Walsh, 2010)—into the new Constitutions of Ecuador in 2008 and of Bolivia in 2009. *Buen vivir* has its roots in the Indigenous Andean traditions of the Aymara, Quechua and Kichwa’s words, *sumak kawsay*, meaning “for a fullness life in a community, together with other persons and Nature”. It is similar to the Aymara *suma qamaña* and the *küme mongen* of the Mapuche’s concept of harmonious living (Gudynas, 2011, p. 442).

Gudynas also contends that *buen vivir* has been influenced by the emergence of feminist and environmentalist anti-capitalism critiques (Balch, 2013). So, as this concept finds resonance with social, cultural and political movements in various parts of the America of the South, *buen vivir* is offering alternatives to the preoccupation with the Western notion of ‘development.’ Walsh contends that this notion of development has been entangled with hierarchical classifications of the superiority and inferiority of people and their knowledges according to a Eurocentric standard. “In this sense, ‘development’ has always signalled more than material progress and economic growth; it has marked a western model of judgment and control over life itself” (Walsh, 2010, p. 15). In contrast, *buen vivir* is “a radical deconstruction of the cultural base of development, its legitimating discourses, its applications and institutional frameworks” (Gudynas, 2011, p. 442). The most critical aspects of the approaches of *buen vivir*, which can be useful to bring a new way to

conceptualise art for social change, is that the methods to gain *buen vivir* are being revitalised and deployed as decolonising efforts to strengthen plurality, and manifestation of diverse cultural identities (Gudynas, 2011).

The key here is that *buen vivir* is not possible without community, nor can art for social change be realised individually. The idea of collective wellbeing central to *buen vivir* guides the way in which I frame the purpose of art for social change. The section below details the approach I took to connecting with the women at the centre of my thesis. I detail the nuanced ways in which my communication with my interlocutors occurred, because these details reveal the quality of the conversations, and experiences and insights of the women involved. This approach is intrinsically linked to the methodology used in this thesis.

2.6.4 The approach: Multiple case studies

The research adopts a qualitative multiple-case-study approach, framed by decolonising methodologies and reflexive practice, with a focus on conversational interviews (Cruz, 2008; Sandoval, 2000; Smith, 2012; Stake, 2005). According to Flyvbjerg (2001), the case study provides optimum opportunities to learn from a context-dependent situation, which is thought to enhance the depth of awareness associated with intuition and holistic knowledge, and with the acquisition of expertise (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Madhura Dutta goes further asserting that:

A case study approach is ideally suited to examine women's empowerment, which is a qualitative and subjective process best captured through women's own narratives of their life stories and their self-analyses of changes in their lives (Dutta, 2015, p. 60).

Four case studies are at the heart of this thesis, and they constitute four separate chapters, as explained in the Introduction. In total, 21 women were interviewed across the cases: 10 women were interviewed in the two Chilean-

based case studies, and 11 women in the context of the two Australian-based case studies. Audio from the interviews was recorded with permission from the participants and was transcribed verbatim. I use pseudonyms (first names only) for my interlocutors, except when the women explicitly asked me to use their own names. Most of the pseudonyms I used were chosen by the women themselves at that point of the interview or when they signed the consent forms. In some cases, where the women expressed concerns at being identified, I have deliberately changed the names of places and individuals referred to during the interview, and have also made minor adjustments to the quotations I used to ensure that the risk of speakers being identified is kept to a minimum.

In Chapter Five, the three women who participated explicitly asked to be identified by their full names. In the other case studies, I use a combination of birth names and pseudonyms.

2.6.5 Conversational interviews

An important common denominator to all interviews was the personal relationships I had with most of my interlocutors, which extended over a long period of time. With those I did not know, I was able to establish rapport and enjoy vicarious trust based on deep and long-standing relationships they had with people I knew well (Green & Sonn, 2008). This human element, together with the political positioning of deliberately centring non-white voices and positions, generated a sense of solidarity with my interlocutors; a space from which art for social change feminist practice from the global South could begin to emerge.

2.6.6 The approach to reconnecting with Aboriginal women

Early on my research, while I was thinking about collecting the data for the Community Arts Network of Western Australia (CAN WA) case study detailed

in Chapter Three, I knew I needed to reconnect with the Aboriginal women I was planning to interview before I conducted the ‘formal’ interviews. To me this was about demonstrating cultural respect (Walker & Sonn, 2010). During my time at CAN WA I got to know the women I intended to interview personally, and we developed trust and respect over many years of working together (Morgan & Drew, 2010); however, I was also their *burdiya*, or boss, as they often called me. Now I had a very different role, and I hoped to meet them and reminisce on the basis of the personal relationships we had developed, leaving behind the hierarchical power relationship we had in the workplace. I wanted to reconnect and be myself (Dudgeon & Ugle, 2010). Of course, I could not guarantee that the hierarchal relationship we had in the past would not influence the conversation, but I could draw on the resources of the quality of our personal exchanges, what we knew about one another and our families, and the shared experiences of the projects on which we had worked (Herring, Spangaro, Lauw, & McNamara, 2013).

For example, my son and the youngest son of Dumbaart, one of my interlocutors, are the same age. We often compared notes and shared the worries of bringing up teenage boys in a racialised society. In March 2012, a young Brazilian student was tasered to death by police in the early hours of the morning in Sydney. Roberto Luadisio Curti was 21 years old. My son has black hair, a beard, and often dresses in hooded dark clothes. He was born in Australia, yet sometimes I imagined he could have been that Brazilian young man. Three of the four police officers involved were acquitted of wrongdoing, and any racial element that may have played a part in the outcome—Roberto Luadisio’s death and the policemen’s acquittal—was not considered or even mentioned in mainstream media (McNally, 2014). I often thought-felt about this young man and his family during that time, and I commented on this case with others at work. The Aboriginal women I worked with knew too well what my concerns were, and they empathised with my worries. In fact, the fear that my son could encounter the juvenile justice system mirrored their constant reality. The statistics on juvenile Aboriginal incarceration in Australia reveal

this disastrous fact: 53 percent of all young people in detention in 2019 (on an average night) were Indigenous (Australian Government, 2020).

Dumbaart and I developed a respectful and warm relationship during the five years we worked together, and I learnt about the obligations and responsibilities she had with her family and extended community (Dudgeon & Ugle, 2010). Dumbaart was the one I looked to for advice and counsel when working with the Noongar community in Narrogin. As a consequence, the person I contacted first to talk about my research was Dumbaart. I called her and asked her if she would be up for a visit and a chat. A few weeks later, on a Friday morning during the 2016 spring, I drove 200 kilometres to the Wheatbelt to visit her. Dumbaart suggested we should meet at the Dryandra Woodland Reserve. This is a significant place for the local Noongar people for its unique flora and fauna and the existence of an ochre pit (Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions, n.d.). She gave me instructions on where to turn to get to Dryandra via a dirt road; I had only landmark directions (not the ones you find on Google Maps), and while I was wondering whether I had the right spot, I saw her car waiting for me. Dumbaart was very happy; she'd seen a little *wagyl*, (snake) down the road. That, she told me, was 'a good sign'.

I had brought a picnic and thermos, so we sat under a tree to have the essential cup of tea. She showed me some of the new developments that had occurred at the Dryandra site, where she had some involvement with her new workplace. We had a long chat about life and family; it was a friendly and relaxed exchange. Reconnecting with Dumbaart on her Country was really important to me and my research. She was central to the work that happened in Narrogin.

A month after this visit, I went back to Narrogin to interview Dumbaart. This time we met at her workplace. The interview lasted for over 2.5 hours. Dumbaart answered my questions but also wove many other stories

in between. This interview was the first I conducted. It was critical for me to interview her first. She is the most senior woman I intended to interview, and she would give me a sense of whether my questions were pitched correctly. I loved talking with Dumbaart. It was very rewarding to hear her reflections and have the opportunity to reminisce about the work we did together. This was precious. This interview was a conversation but also an exchange; she told me a story that had special cultural significance for her and offered to take me to the place where this had occurred. This was hugely meaningful for me.

After the interview with Dumbaart, we kept in contact for a while. This helped me to set up and arrange another trip to Narrogin, where I conducted my second interview, this time with Margaret (pseudonym). This interview took about 1.5 hours. I first met Margaret when she was working for a suicide-prevention organisation in Narrogin. However, I knew she had expressed an interest in the arts, so when a position became available with CAN WA, we employed her to work in the community alongside Dumbaart. During my time at CAN WA, my relationship with Margaret was very friendly, but not as close as it was with Dumbaart, who was her manager. However, I felt that through my long-term relationship with Dumbaart I enjoyed some vicarious trust from Margaret. During the interview, Margaret took her time in answering my questions, especially at the beginning. I felt I was probing a little until she began telling me about her shyness and how she was more comfortable speaking through her art. As the interview continued, she became more relaxed and shared her reflections and thoughts.

The interviews with three other Aboriginal women happened in different locations, including workplaces, home and in a public venue. All interviews were characterised by long conversations that touched on many personal aspects of life and family.

2.6.7 Interviewing women of colour

Two of the case studies centre the experiences of women of colour, one in Australia and two in Chile. I use the political term ‘women of colour’ to refer to the three feminist community arts leaders who identified as Arab Australian, Lebanese Australian and Latin American, as well as to the Chilean and Argentinian women whom I refer to in Chapter Four, Chapter Five, and Chapter Six. I have had a long-term personal and professional connection to the three art leaders I interviewed in Sydney and Melbourne, where they reside. During these interviews we reflected on our personal and professional experiences as racialised women living and working (in leading roles) in the community arts sector in Australia. I interviewed these three leaders face-to-face during November 2017. The interviews were lengthy, averaging 1.5 hours each, and were characterised by deep reflections of their practice, awareness and critical thought in relation to their racialised upbringing, and by a critical stance towards systemic inequalities. I expand on this on Chapter Five.

In contrast, the interviews with the Latin American women were, ironically, facilitated by an Australian woman. Penelope Glass is a theatre artist I met in Sydney during my early career in the early 1990s. Penelope moved to Santiago, where she has continued her popular theatre work. She invited me to present at the 2017 Entepola Festival: the Latin American Popular Theatre Exchange or *Encuentro de Teatro Popular Lationamericano*, which become the backdrop for the interviews I conducted with the Latin American women.

I travelled to Chile in February 2017 to be part of the Entepola Festival. At this time, I had no plans to conduct interviews, but hoped to meet and connect with a few women I could interview at a later date. I didn’t think that I would have enough time to develop sufficient trust to allow me to have meaningful conversations with the women. However, after a few days of staying together, participating in theatre workshops and watching theatre in

the community, a closeness began to develop. The live-in format of this *encuentro*, or gathering, which was similar to the one in Marrickville in Sydney where I met Penelope, created a level of intimacy that knitted different groups together in unexpected ways. Furthermore, my acceptance and inclusion were helped by the fact that I had been invited by Penelope, a well loved and respected member of the Entepola team. Thus, I decided to ask a few women if they would like to participate in my research. I believed that this was going to be a pre-interview exploration. I interviewed three Argentinian women and three Chilean women during the course of the 10-day Entepola Festival. All of them are actively involved in popular theatre, dance and community arts in the communities in which they live, which are mostly relatively poor and disenfranchised communities, both in Chile and in regional parts of Argentina. Most of the interviews were relatively short, (approximately 20 minutes), except that I interviewed one of them twice, as I recognised her significant role in the festival. The conversations centred on exploring the idea of ‘empowerment’ and the practice of community arts: their understandings and uses of the term, and the role of the arts in their lives and in the lives of the people who participate with them in arts activities.

Prior to the interviews, I felt I understood little of the context of their realities, apart from having grown up in a similar poor working-class suburb in Santiago. However, over the course of the conversations, I was amazed to realise that I had vast layers of connection, intellectual and emotional, to these women and their lived experiences, though I had not lived in Chile for 30 years. Their warmth and solidarity, political articulations and understandings of the intersectional nature of gender issues, and their awareness of the dictatorship (though some of them had been born in the post-Pinochet era) were all exciting and refreshing. This invigorated my experience of the festival and of our exchanges.

The two interviews I conducted for the last case study explored in Chapter Six were undertaken via Skype in March 2020. These interviews were

not planned initially but were inspired by the unexpected social uprising that occurred in Chile in October 2019. The role of women within this movement and their visibility became a compelling case for further investigation.

The two women I interviewed were introduced to me by a close friend who lives in Perth. I didn't know the women personally, but I knew some of their relatives (whom I had met before migrating to Australia). As in the case above, such close contacts created the openness necessary to talk and reflect. Both women reported their appreciation of being able to discuss their experiences with me, someone who was removed from the intensity of the political situation they were experiencing at the time. In fact, these interviews took place a few days after the largest International Women's Day March in the world, where two million women in Chile took part. Together we reflected on the significance of this social movement.

2.6.8 Interviews with white women

I conducted four interviews with white Australian women across the four case studies. Three of them were directly involved in the CAN WA case study detailed in Chapter Three, and one with the Entepola case, which is outlined in Chapter Four. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face and two via skype. Two of these women were CAN WA employees, and the other two were independent artists. What surprised me the most during the course of the conversational interviews was the level of positive personal impact my interlocutors attributed to the community cultural development work they had done at CAN WA. A particularly moving account came from the youngest of my interviewees as she described how the experience of working for CAN WA shaped her:

[It was] very enlightening and eye-opening and soul-enriching to be able to be a part of something as amazing as that with an amazing group of people and have the support from CAN WA.

The level of personal and collective growth was attributed to the unique cross-cultural and creative community-development work CAN WA engaged in at the time. Bringing people together where they can imagine new possibilities and envision a better future, as well as engendering trust and agency as core elements of the relationships forged, were voiced by Ava (pseudonym) as being very important (Schubert & Gray, 2015). This and similar sentiments were echoed by the others; however, only very small segments of these testimonies are included in the thesis. During the course of the research it became clear that my purpose was to privilege the voices of Indigenous women and women of colour. Thus, segments of the stories spoken by white women are included in the thesis only as they relate directly to the experiences of my key interlocutors.

2.7 Summary

This chapter reveals that the concept of ‘women’s empowerment’ emerged from feminist movements in the global South and was used to signal an alternative position to gender issues than those proposed by Western feminism. This chapter also exposes the parallel histories between art for social change (described in Chapter One) and empowerment, both in terms of their emergence and also their co-option, which is not surprising, as it is evident that both movements are grounded in the liberation paradigm. Despite the concept being watered down over time, particularly by the neoliberal agenda of international development promulgated in the 1990s, this chapter argues that the term is still relevant and worthy of use. This is because the origins of empowerment are deeply connected to the struggle and the lived experiences of Indigenous women and women of colour who conceptualised the term as a process and an outcome of resistance, a way to collectively pursue a shift in power relations and an end to the multitude oppressions experienced by these women and their communities. This chapter also outlines the methods and methodology that informed the research, and the

key concepts and theoretical underpinnings that are used to illuminate the four case studies and analysis that follow.

In the subsequent chapters I consider art for social change as a “locus of enunciation” (Mignolo, 2009) for the decolonisation of the global South. Community art-making can be studied and understood as part of this delinking process. Delinking implies working at the borders and fringes between hegemonic and dominant forms of knowledge, using the system, but enacting alternatives; that is, using resources and putting them to the services of a community in ways that are consistent and in tune with the ways of knowing of that particular community.

In the next four chapters, I explore how Aboriginal women and women of colour in Australia and in Latin American make sense of their experiences and involvement in art for social change activities in their local communities. My interlocutors reflect on the power of coming together in a creative environment and illustrate how, through a variety of modalities of art-making.

CHAPTER THREE

I Let the Art do the Talking Now:

Self-Determining Art-Making on Noongar Boodja

3. Introduction

This chapter introduces the art for social change practices of the Community Arts Network (CAN WA) across several rural towns in the Wheatbelt region of Western Australia. These towns are home to significant populations of Noongar people; families and communities who, like most other Aboriginal people in Australia, have been directly impacted by multiple and intersectional layers of colonisation—that is, ongoing racism and dispossession (Haebich, 1992; Stratton, 2011), cultural and historical erasure (Watson, 2010), poor health, youth suicide (Dudgeon et al., 2014), sexual violence (McGlade, 2012b), family feuding (Davies, 2010) and high levels of incarceration (Wahlquist, 2017).

The following case study is founded upon more than 15 years of ongoing community arts and cultural development practice with Aboriginal people on Noongar Boodja (Noongar Land)—the south-west region of Western Australia. However, the case study more specifically includes, and refers to, a number of community arts projects that were developed during the last five years of my tenure as the managing director of CAN WA—the period of 2010 to 2015, time when CAN WA had a consolidated presence in what the late Noongar Elder Auntie Janet Hayden called the Gnulla Boodja, or the Wheatbelt region (CAN WA, 2011, p. 2). These projects privileged Noongar people and culture. They were developed in close consultation with Noongar families and with the approval and endorsement of respected local Noongar Elders (Sonn, Kasat, et al., 2017).

This case study aims to provide a distinct perspective on the processes of art for social change in the context of a settler-colonial society. Furthermore, it aims to examine how art for social change emerged and evolved at the intersection of complex racial relations, where art-making, storytelling and the recovery of Noongar culture shaped different possibilities for interaction, connection and the empowerment of the women who participated in these projects. Although the work of CAN WA did not solely focus on women, this chapter gives voice to the reflections of several women who were key participants in CAN WA's projects. The case study draws from several interconnected CAN WA projects in Gnulla Boodja. It examines how the women make sense of their experiences and the praxis of art for social change. It includes their thoughts and reflections on the impact these practices had on their lives and on the lives of others in their communities. The voices include eight women: five Aboriginal women (four identified as Noongar women, and one as a Yamatji woman), and three others who identified as white women. All the women had different roles in the projects: artists, facilitators, project coordinators, managers and participants.

My own role in this case study is that of both a participant in these events, in my role as the managing director of CAN WA during this period, and a scholar, critically reflecting on the process a few years later. As explained in Chapter Two, I conducted in-depth one-to-one interviews with each of the women cited in the chapter. The chapter also draws on a body of research conducted by and with ally academics who worked alongside the organisation for several years, most notably Associate Professor Christopher Sonn, to analyse and theorise CAN WA's work in community cultural development. From this point on, throughout this case study, I use the term art for social change and the acronym CCD, which stands for community cultural development, interchangeably. CCD is the term used by CAN WA to refer to its practice, and it is also the most common term used to refer to this practice in Australia. For all intents and purposes, art for social change and CCD are understood as identical practices by many, although I have become

increasingly uncomfortable with the hegemonic notion of ‘development’ as explained in Chapter Two.

As indicated in Chapter One, art for social change has been inspired by concepts from the global South, but paradoxically has been mainstreamed by arts and community development policy frameworks and funding in the global North. Notwithstanding its recognition in policy, it has continued to be relegated to the periphery of the arts in Australia because of limited funding and shifting policy priorities (Eltham, 2015). In fact, CAN WA is the only surviving network out of seven community arts networks that were funded by the Australia Council in the 1980s (Kasat, 2013)².

3.1 The Community Arts Network Western Australia (CAN WA)

CAN WA is a leading exponent of CCD in Western Australia. CAN WA is a not-for profit organisation that was incorporated in Perth, Australia in 1985 at a time where ideas of empowerment had been gaining momentum across progressive feminist and liberation movements throughout the globe, as discussed in Chapter Two. From its inception, the organisation set out to strengthen the fabric of communities, using art for social change (Kasat, 2014). This sentiment is reflected by the words of the organisation’s first chairperson:

[We] shared a vivid sense of the revolutionary nature of empowering communities to reflect on their history, celebrate their present and take an active role in designing their futures (Sumner, 2002, p. 3).

Throughout its history, CAN WA has articulated a consistent message: “to inspire and mobilise communities to explore and express their unique culture through community arts” (CAN WA, 2014d). Underpinning the agency are the values of respect for all people, cultures and the environment, social

² Since the original community arts networks were defunded, other art organisations have emerged across the country, and some of them are funded to develop CCD practice across Australia.

justice and resilience (CAN WA, 2014c, p. 2), and its approach to CCD practice has been shaped by extensive community consultation, intergenerational participation and building connections across communities (Palmer & Sonn, 2010).

3.1.1 CAN WA's approach to art for social change or Community Cultural Development (CCD)

The Noongar peoples' best voice is their own voice.

—The late Auntie Janet Hayden, Noongar Elder, 2014

There is a significant body of work produced by CAN WA that documents, evaluates and critically examines the organisation's approach to CCD. An emerging contribution to articulating CCD was published by CAN WA in 2002. The report, titled *Conceptualising Community Cultural Development: The Role of Cultural Planning in Community Change*, found that: "CCD is quintessentially an enabling practice"; that CAN WA's engagement with the community was a political process aimed at fostering and promoting the community's voice; and that CAN WA facilitated "a deep and different understanding of culture", which included an awareness of self as a cultural agent (Sonn, Drew, Kasat, 2002, p. 3).

This research was followed by a second report published in 2008: *Drawing Out Community Empowerment through Arts and Cultural Practice*. This report provided important insights into the practice of CAN WA, as it began to illuminate the relationship between CCD and the meaning and processes of community empowerment in the context of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partnerships. The research highlighted how "CAN WA's support for Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing" (Green & Sonn, 2008, p. 60) was demonstrated in myriad ways, including the employment of local Noongar people, fostering Noongar self-determined cultural activities, and flexibility and responsiveness to the community's decision-making processes.

Furthermore, the study reported members of the local Noongar community stating that there was value in the CCD activities:

In terms of honouring and celebrating their identities, offering resources and expertise and providing opportunities for the them to have fun and participate in the broader community... (Green & Sonn, 2008, p. 61).

The report also found that CAN WA was “willing to examine the dominance of power it may hold in comparison with the Indigenous community” (Green & Sonn, 2008, p. 61) and suggested that the agency needed to continue its intercultural practice and commitment to anti-racism to counter the possibilities that “we can be complicit in reproducing inequality and not contest the systems and practices that exclude” (Green & Sonn, 2008, p. 61).

Amongst the limitations and challenges of CCD, the report identified the ongoing resistance to Indigenous-led governance and economic development, as well as the lack of access to land and its resources, as major barriers for Indigenous self-determination and empowerment. In addition, the research found that supporting Indigenous empowerment requires an ongoing cultural critique and engagement in intercultural practice to challenge “racism and other processes of social exclusion” (Green & Sonn, 2008, p. 9).

This report laid the foundations for further research into the praxis of CAN WA with Noongar people, and it formed the basis of the long-term study and evaluation of CAN WA’s practices and programs, which deepen the understanding of its CCD theory and practice (Green & Sonn, 2008; Kasat, 2014; Amy F. Quayle, 2017; Amy F. Quayle & Sonn, 2013; Sonn & Baker, 2016; Sonn, Drew, Kasat, 2002; Sonn & Palmer, 2010; Sonn & Quayle, 2012; C. C. Sonn & Quayle, 2013; C. C. Sonn et al., 2015).

This kind of longitudinal research between a community arts organisation and academia is rare within the CCD sector in Australia. An

exception is Big hART, a Tasmanian arts company that works across Australia. It has contributed to a body of work through partnerships with academics in the fields of health and arts for social change in particular (Wright, 2011; Wright et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2016; Wright & Palmer, 2009). However, what is notably different in the research produced by CAN WA is the critical engagement that evolved to understand CCD with Aboriginal communities in the context of a settler-colonial society:

CAN WA has sought to support Aboriginal individuals and communities through participatory methodologies, but the agency has also recognised the need to transform the broader social structures, ideologies and discourse, which perpetuate inequalities and thus contribute to the continuity of coloniality (Sonn & Quayle, 2014, p. 31).

The agency's work became more political as it sharpened its commitment "to challenging the continuing social exclusion of Aboriginal people in post-colonising Australia" (Sonn & Quayle, 2014, p. 16). This was aided over time by the ongoing dialogue of various individuals who collaborated in making this shift. A key contributor describes this as follows:

We began to theorise and conceptualise community cultural development drawing on postcolonial, critical race and Indigenous scholarship and to advance this goal with greater attention to power and knowledge and considerations about the dynamics of coloniality in the practice of CCD (Sonn, 2018a).

The question of why this organisation began to anchor their practice and its articulation in the dynamics of coloniality is explored in the section below.

3.1.2 CAN WA's intersection with the global South

Since the early 1970s the Australia Council for the Arts has funded CCD practice, as mentioned in Chapter One, as a way of encouraging greater access

to and participation in the arts (Hawkins, 1993). More recently, it has been funded as a way of providing underrepresented communities with opportunities to participate in art- and culture-making.

Below are the Council's 2019 CCD policy priorities:

Our support is focused on priority areas including regional Australia, disability, young people, cultural diversity, emerging communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and remote communities, as well as specific critical social and cultural issues requiring focused attention ("Community Arts and Cultural Development | Australia Council," 2019).

Notwithstanding these priorities, very little scholarly work on government-funded CCD has been directly conceptualised or articulated through the lenses of the demographic groups identified in the above policies, with a few exceptions. The work of academic and independent Arab Australian community-arts worker Paula Abood in NSW centres on migrant and refugee communities, particularly women (see Abood, 2011; Abood et al., 2017). More recently Maya Haviland's work *Side by Side? Community Arts and the Challenge of Co-Creativity* (2017) problematises the complexity of operating across "differentials of power and cultural position" (Haviland, 2017, p. 20).

However, what makes CAN WA's art for social change practice particularly interesting, when compared to other funded organisations in Australia, is the unique long-term confluences through which the work of the agency has been conceptualised, shaped and instigated from the consciousness and lived experience of those who, as Gloria Anzaldúa points out, have resided in the "borderlands"—a contradictory place found "wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory" (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 19).

Throughout CAN WA's history there have been distinctive influences that have shaped the organisation's culture, challenged the authority of the "individualising and fragmentary" nature of the Western canon, and validated "other ways of being in the world" (Sonn, 2018c). This is demonstrated in the history and trajectory of the organisation, its focus and alliances. I argue that there are three central influences that account for CAN WA's distinctive trajectory: first, the relationships it forged with Indigenous people; second, the leadership exercised by two women of colour CEOs whose combined tenure ranged from 1996 to 2015; and third, the ongoing academic reflections provided by ally researchers and theorists of the global South. Below, I illustrate each of these points.

Soon after its incorporation, CAN WA made a clear alliance with Indigenous people. In 1987 CAN WA hosted an Aboriginal Artists sub-committee and employed David Milroy, a descendant of the Injibarndi and Palku people of the Pilbara (Australian Plays.Org, 2018). This sub-committee was facilitated by CAN WA while their members worked towards their own incorporation under the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976. Soon after, the Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation Western Australia was launched, and Milroy become its first coordinator. Subsequently Milroy art's career flourished, and he became a well-respected musician, director and writer (McAtee, 2002).

Years later, between 2005 and 2015, CAN WA made a deliberate shift to anchor their art for social change work on Noongar Boodjar, and they employed several Aboriginal cultural workers, including managers, project officers and artists. At the height of these activities, 40 percent of CAN WA's staff members were Aboriginal and worked across three locations: Perth metropolitan, Narrogin and Kellerberrin (Kasat, 2013). The influence of these Aboriginal cultural workers was a powerful changing force across the organisation as they exercised cultural leadership. This is evident in my

interview with Dumbaart (pseudonym) who at that time was the most senior Noongar woman working at CAN WA:

while you were there ... I advised you on matters and everything related to our Noongar people and our community, which was really good (Dumbaart).

The role and influence of this particular manager in the work of CAN WA was immeasurable. Dumbaart's authority, knowledge and her community connections made her a powerful figure in the organisation. On many occasions, her actions and reflections facilitated what Boaventura de Sousa Santos describes as intercultural translation, which "is the alternative both to the abstract universalism that grounds Western-centric general theories and to the idea of incommensurability between cultures" (Santos, 2016b, p. 212).

This is how Mia (pseudonym), a white Australian senior manager in the organisation, reflected on Dumbaart's influence on her and her outlook on the complex issue of family violence:

We were talking about a difficulty that I was having ... around a conflict between an Aboriginal man and an Aboriginal woman ... and then I had a profound moment in realising that Dumbaart in her power, her power as a woman, as a Noongar woman, and as a community leader has no choice but to get over these things, because otherwise she will stay in an oppressive state forever by her own people, as well, so she would be immobilised if she allowed [the conflict] to not move her community forward ... I could look up to and go, "You always have this bigger picture that I would never have" ... as a white woman ... I don't have it in the same way, even if I think I do. I don't (Mia).

The second influence from the global South is that two of the longest-serving CEOs of the organisation have been women of colour. Sandra Krempf was born in Singapore to a Dayak mother (the Indigenous people of Borneo)

and an Austrian Hungarian father. After living and working for over a decade in Papua New Guinea, she served as the executive director of CAN WA from 1996 to 2004 (Krempl, 2010). I, a political refugee from Chile (as outlined in the Introduction), served as managing director from 2004 to 2015. This means that for almost 20 years, or two-thirds of the organisation's existence, CAN WA's leadership has come from women whose subjectivities, upbringing and worldviews emerged from the global South. A tangible demonstration of this leadership model has been the culturally diverse make-up of the organisation and its programs, including its staff members, board members and the communities targeted during their tenure. This is relevant, as the lack of cultural diversity at all levels in the arts continues to be a barrier that determines whose stories the Australian public gets to access, as recently documented in *Voice, Agency and Integrity*, a report by Diversity Arts Australia (2018).

Dumbaart highlights the disruptive nature of having a non-white CEO:

I was very proud of you when you got up and you spoke to them sisters at Rollins Mission ... I think they got the shock of their lives, when you explained where you came from and the type of life there was there. I was expecting them to come back at you, but they didn't. I know for a fact they said, "We didn't know, we thought she was Australian," and I said, "No, that goes to show, if it wasn't for Pilar, half of us Noongars wouldn't even be there. There would be no Noongars working in this place" (Dumbaart).

The Aboriginal sisters referred to in this quote had made the assumption I was Anglo-Australian, and their hostility towards me and the organisation seemed to abate when they understood my racialised position and my upbringing. In addition, Dumbaart reflected that there was a direct link between my racialised position, my background and my lived experiences, and the way I approached and led the organisation, which meant privileging the

employment of Noongar people. The segment above also reveals a close relationship between Dumbaart and I, which I attribute, in part, to the culture of the organisation and also to the personal bond we developed over time (Dudgeon & Ugle, 2010). The statement that she was proud of *me* reflects mutual care and loyalty; perhaps a sign of more fluid boundaries than the standards for ‘professionals’ and the detached relationships most commonly advocated for in community work (Cahill, Quijada Cerecer, & Bradley, 2010).

The importance of human connection in the “contact zone”—“places where different groups cross borders and different identities come into interactions, requiring the negotiation of identities and practices” (Green & Sonn, 2008, p. 7)—was alluded to briefly by Green and Sonn as they reflected on the complexities of working in building Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships mediated by art for social change.

The third influence on the directions taken by CAN WA were the critical reflections and conversations consistently provided by Christopher Sonn, a Black South African academic and long-time collaborator of the organisation, who was first introduced to CAN WA by Sandra Kreml in 1997. Christopher became an organisational board member and, later, during my tenure, he described his role as someone who “accompanied CAN WA in their broad and systematic efforts to bring about social change through community cultural development, including community arts” (Sonn & Quayle, 2014, p. 17). Sonn’s academic work has focused on “displacement, community, and resistance” on “understanding the meanings of migration ... and examining whiteness in the context of indigenous empowerment” (C. C. Sonn, Arcidiacono, et al., 2017, p. 449). The relationship between CAN WA, Sonn, and the allied researchers he brought to the organisation was critical and collaborative, and it endured for almost two decades, resulting in the production of academic research, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

In a phone interview, Christopher offered some reflections on the kind of questions and conversations we were grappling with at that time:

If we're going to work in the space, what does it mean? ... It's a matter of actually understanding our own situatedness in the relation to Indigenous people. How are we also complicit and part of the problem? ... What does it actually mean to use this word; this language of empowerment in this context? What gives me the power to say, or what is the discipline that gives you the power to say or think that people are empowered or disempowered or disadvantaged or oppressed?

Those are the sorts of questions we had, because Indigenous people were asking... "Why do these people come here? They always think they can help us." There was something really problematic with the set of relationships that resulted from non-Indigenous people and Indigenous people working with each other. I think, from CAN WA's perspective, these were the questions that were really important, because CAN WA was also looking at working with Indigenous people in the service of their projects.

I think it needed to ask critical questions about what are the ethics of this? What are the types of relationships? What language do we use? Who are we to support? Who are we accountable to, in terms of indigenous empowerment? I think that was some of the sorts of questions that we had asked, because we were asking those questions of ourselves, as people who were on the other side of whiteness (Sonn, 2018c).

Further, and perhaps because of the questions we were asking of ourselves, the key tenets of the relationships formed within CAN WA's racialised identities practice were deep respect and reciprocity. Both of these are recognised as central to Indigenous cosmology (Álvarez & Painemal, 2016) and essential to building meaningful and long-lasting relationships with Indigenous people (Smith, 2012); however, these values are not the norm in

community practice. As Margie Walter et al. state, social work in Australia is “very white” (Walter, Taylor, & Habibis, 2013, p. 230), and this comes from the absence of a critical gaze in understanding how whiteness has shaped the relationships between Aboriginal people and institutions. There is a need to:

refocus the racial lens away from aspects of Indigeneity, which is the usual starting point for most discussion of Indigenous-related social work practice, to the race of the majority of social work practices and educators, white Euro-Australians (M. Walter, Taylor, & Habibis, 2013, p. 231).

Moving beyond the dichotomy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships is of particular interest in this case study, because this dichotomy was so prevalent in the way CAN WA, as a funded organisation, was perceived by both government and communities alike. Within the parameters of its funding policies, the government considered CAN WA a non-Indigenous organisation working with ‘disadvantaged’ Aboriginal people, while from Indigenous community perspectives, CAN WA was a *wadjela* organisation (Noongar word for white person) working with Noongars. Both of these positions were inadequate, because they ignored the place and the role of other racialised entities, such as non-white migrants (Perera, 2005), as argued throughout 3.1.2.

I have discussed the role of these differential subjectivities in some detail, as the intersection of these relationships and perspectives has not previously been made explicit as part of CAN WA’s art for social change practice. I argue that shining a light on some of the specifics of these confluences may contribute to a better understanding of art for social change as a decolonising practice. In the next section, I present the voices of the women who worked with CAN WA to demonstrate how those women are “doing” decolonial thinking, as Walter D. Mignolo suggests, by bringing to the

fore their histories and stories that have been disavowed and demonised by racist narratives (Mignolo, 2017).

3.2 Art for social change and women's intersectionality:

Towards decolonial thinking

Critical scholars have advocated the need for the retrieval, reclamation, and renewal of subjugated knowledges and practices, and argued that these are central to processes and practices of self-determination and emancipation of oppressed groups.

—Sonn, 2018b, p. 10

Between 2010 and 2015 CAN WA facilitated a series of art for social change projects with Noongar people across the south-west region of Western Australia, all of which involved the retrieval and reclamation of local cultural knowledges. The most significant of these were: *Narrogin Stories*, *Bush Babies*, *Healing Songs*, *Yarns of the Heart*, *Noongar Pop Culture*, *Noongar Pop Fashion*, *Gnaala Booroong Wangkiny Wongi Nidja Nyiny* (Our Spirits Stories Are Still Here) and *Karla Kurliny* (Coming Back Home).

Most of these projects were interlinked; they began as one project, then morphed into another in response to the local processes and the communities' wishes and aspirations. That is, the boundaries between each of the projects are blurry, and so are the testimonies of the women who reflected on and referred to several of these projects in their statements.

As flexibility and responsiveness are part of the art for social change methods, the art forms used in each of these projects were diverse, and included oral history recordings, film-making and photography, visual arts (textiles, painting, costume-making, doll-making and quilting), music (hip-hop, country and western, ballads), song-writing and poetry, and dance and

theatre workshops. Each project was unique and included deep listening, throughout each phase of the projects, to the local community, Noongar Elders and many other individuals and organisations that had or could have a stake in each project. For clarity, I will briefly describe three of the above-mentioned projects in which most of the participants were women and girls: *Yarns of the Heart*, *Noongar Pop Fashion* and *Bush Babies*.³

3.2.1 The Yarns of the Heart (Noongar dolls project)

Each doll tells a story—a story from my people and country.

—The late Auntie Janet Hayden, Noongar Elder, 2013

The Yarns of the Heart project has its origins in 1994, when the Narrogin Aboriginal Corporation, together with the Town of Narrogin, hosted two artists in residency as part of the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) (CAN WA, 2013). “Women in Narrogin recalled watching their mothers, grandmothers and aunties create cloth dolls almost twenty years ago, during a community development program run by the Town of Narrogin” (CAN WA, 2013, p. 6). Nalda Searles, a prominent Anglo-Australian visual artist with extensive experience working with Aboriginal communities across Western Australia, and Pantjiti Mary McLean, a Ngaatjatjarra artist from the Western Desert, spent some time in the town facilitating textiles workshops (CAN WA, 2011). In a video documentary, Nalda reflects on that time:

I was amazed to see these kit of pink, lilac type of fabric. And that was their intention, to make these pink Victoriana porcelain dolls ... I thought, we can't do that! These are Aboriginal women. Why don't they make Aboriginal dolls?

³ Throughout the chapter there are footnotes containing weblinks with images, videos and further information about the projects mentioned above. These sites provide a rich backdrop to the case study.

It was wonderful. It took that much [she clicks her fingers] for the women to realise, “Hey. It’s ok for us to make Aboriginal dolls!” Suddenly, there was this switch on for everybody (Meredith, 2011, 01:14 min).

A new style of Noongar dolls was created. Inspired by the black figures of Pantjiti Mary McLean’s paintings, the Noongar women went on to create beautiful black dolls that travelled as part of a Pacific and Aboriginal Women’s craft to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and since have been acquired by galleries and private collections across Australia (Palmer, 2013).



Figure 6: Geri Hayden with her doll the *Charrnock Woman*, a story from the ‘Dreamtime’,⁴ at *Yarns of the Heart: First Noongar Dolls Exhibition* at the WA Museum in 2011. Photograph: Courtesy of CAN WA.

In 2009, and as a part of the establishment of a Noongar cultural hub in Narrogin, CAN WA conducted a series of community consultations with

⁴ Dreaming or Dreamtime is the English translation of an Australian Aboriginal concept (for some known as *Jukurrpa*, a multifaceted and complex term: “as being or belonging to a separate temporal dimension: a time outside time” (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2015, p. 53).

different Noongar families over a period of a few months. The backdrop of these conversations was a community in distress as a result of multiple youth suicides and very public family feuding (Davies, 2010; Palmer, 2013; Quayle & Sonn, 2013). All this made the dialogue and the possibility of gaining trust a complex affair. However, and despite the initial reluctance to engage expressed by some members of the community, it became evident that the Noongar dolls were still vivid in the memory of the women who took part in the project over a decade before. And it was the daughters and nieces of the original doll-makers who expressed a keen interest in seeing this craft practice revived (CAN WA, 2011, 2013).

Encouraged by the commitment and willingness to participate of several Elders, CAN WA was able to mobilise human and material resources to recommence these workshops. In 2010, Nalda Searles was invited back to Narrogin, this time with Cecile Williams (as Pantjiti Mary McLean was in poor health) to share their skills with a new generation of Noongar women. The Yarns of the Heart project found its anchor in the Aboriginal women of Narrogin—the project’s idea, purpose and concept were conceived and endorsed by the women themselves. This form of collaborative decision-making and respect—not only for the individuals who participate but also for the local traditions, histories and stories—are intrinsically linked to art for social change methodology (Adams & Goldbard, 2002). The specific nature of the context, the participants themselves and the organisation were all taken into consideration as the creative collaboration with the local community was taking shape (Haviland, 2017).

The use of textiles, fibres and other bush materials are not new to Aboriginal women, nor are the practices of doll-making (Palmer, 2013). As Noongar Elder Janet Hayden reminded us: “The art of making Noongar dolls may have been revived through the workshops in the 1990s and recent years, but creating dolls is a tradition that goes way back” (CAN WA, 2011, p. 2). Nonetheless, creating the conditions for revitalising these old community

practices struck a chord with the women, who began to remember untold stories, express personal and collective memories, and to generate new ones. Margaret (pseudonym), one of my interlocutors recalls:

There was a lot of sadness in it too ... really sad stories behind this beautiful doll. I remember one lady, she'd never shared her story, she kept it bottled up, but she could tell me from the moment she was taken from her parent's arms, and her parents running behind the car, right to today: "We were just happy. We thought we were just going for a ride, you know. We were jumping up and down, happy, smiling." And when the parents were running behind, screaming, they were waving at them. They had no idea that'd be the last moment they would see them.

She never, ever got to tell her kids. She had children of her own. She feared that much for her life, she ran away with them over East. She never ever hugged them, and never told them she loved them, because she was never hugged and was never told she was loved ... She made this big huge doll, humanlike doll, it was sitting in the house; it was her mum ...

One day the kids told her the doll scared them. She looked at the doll and cried, and she grab her kids, and that was the only time she told them she loved them. That was through Community Arts Network's project ... Especially when it came to the Stolen Generation, for a lot of them—to find that connection; they found it with their dolls, and they always went back to that *place*, it doesn't matter they were separated from family, *that* become their home, the only home they knew (Margaret).

The above testimony reveals the deep and intimate connections between the doll-making project and the women's lives. Memories were evoked and shared through the practice and process of 'stitching', revealing the impact of violent and racist government policies. The forceful removal of Aboriginal children from their families, which was widely practiced across

Australia from 1910 to 1970, was finally exposed and publicly acknowledged in the late 1990s through the landmark Inquiry Report *Bringing Them Home* (Haebich, 2000).

Margaret's conversation with the member of the Stolen Generations above shows that, through her acts of doll-making, she was recreating possibilities of a different reality and a way to communicate her untold stories, including her feelings of love and loss. This is consistent with Segalo's findings after working with women who experienced trauma and violence in South African's apartheid era: "The use of the visual image has been reported by many as a useful tool to tell people's stories of oppression, liberation and survival" (Segalo, 2011, p. 230). By making dolls of their families and loved ones, sisters, mothers, grandmothers and themselves, the women not only revisited the past but also projected themselves into the future; telling stories, both new and imagined, in a way that allowed for multiple interpretations of their lived experiences and their desires (Flicker et al., 2014). This is significant, because each doll acts as a counter-narrative, and as a vehicle for re-imagining and rearticulating personal and group identities (Perry, 2012; Boal, 1998; Freire, 2011).

The Noongar women, through their dolls, transgress the single narrative of what it means to be an Aboriginal woman; each doll tells a unique story of their diversity of experiences and contexts. In the example below, Nikki Littlecott's doll represents for her what she has been denied: her identity as an Aboriginal woman with fair hair and fair skin.

When I was a little girl, I used to always have white little baby dolls. So, when I found the black material, I used it. I loved it. I love this little black doll. It is my first black doll. When I was making it, it was a dark-coloured doll, because Aboriginals *always* have a stereotype—you always gotta be dark-coloured skin, and dark-coloured eyes, and dark

hair. And I got fair hair, fair skin, so this doll is about how you can be dark and be represented as a blondie, with white, fair hair (Nikki).



Figure 7: Photograph of the doll *Mia* by Nikki Littlecott (CAN WA, 2011, p. 23).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in her book *Decolonising Methodologies*, stresses the significance of recovering past histories, which she articulates as follows:

Coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative stories is to hold alternative knowledges. Telling our stories from the past, reclaiming the past, giving testimony to the injustices of the past are all strategies which are commonly employed by indigenous people struggling for justice (Smith, 2012, p. 36).

The importance of this recovery is not just for the purpose of remembering the past; the memories become a solid basis for the retrieval of Indigenous epistemological foundations. This is intrinsically linked to language recovery and the ability to prioritise what is important about the present and determine the direction of an Indigenous-led agenda (Smith, 2012). This sentiment is

expressed by Margaret, who, after finding out more details about her past, dedicated her time in the project to searching for family connections.

Another thing through my healing process was going back to find who I am, and where I come from, so I journeyed backwards, so I can move forward. I found out where my old people came from ... (Margaret).

The Noongar women who consistently attended the doll-making workshops engaged in multiple, multilayered emancipatory practices. Freire proposes that “liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2011, p. 79). Some of the women spoke about their pain at losing loved ones to suicide, and about drug and alcohol addiction; equally, they spoke about how they were rethinking their place in the world. Noelene Olman called her doll her *Freedom doll*; she reflected on her grandparent’s restriction of movement and the humiliation they experienced when coming into town. Her *Freedom doll*, on the contrary,

Just goes and does her own thing, wears what she wants, because not many Noongar girls wear dresses and pretty colours ... So, I put her in bright blue, and yellow. So, it’s sort of like letting her freedom out (CAN WA, 2011, p. 17).

Another woman, Nola Williams, created a doll called *Jandamarra*, representing the strength of Noongar people:

I feel like it’s something strong—what our Noongar people carry with them, some strongness in them. A lot of people think they’re weak, but I thought that maybe this little doll would give me strength to fight battles. It reminds me of a strong leader—like Yagan ... (CAN WA, 2011, p. 24).

This is consistent with Maxine Greene (2007), who asserts that “art has a humanising effect ‘an action reflection’ that helps artists to look at things as if they could be changed” (cited in Segalo, 2011, p. 230).

The Noongar dolls captured many people’s imaginations. They were first exhibited at the Western Australian Museum in 2011, attracting more than 80,000 visitors to the exhibition and 800 children to the interactive doll-making workshops during a school-holiday program (CAN WA, 2012). The Noongar dolls were then curated as part of a national contemporary arts exhibition, *String Theory*, for the Sydney Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), which travelled across Australia between 2013 and 2015. *String Theory* attracted a total of 220,656 people across the country (CAN WA, 2015a). Before this, in one of the many workshops in Narrogin, I recall seeing the dolls lying on tables amongst bits of fabric, food, and cups of tea. A visit from the then-Indigenous curator of the MCA, Glenn Barkley, changed that. It was a joy and a revelation to see the Noongar dolls being carefully handled by the curator, who wore white gloves and packed each methodically for the journey to Sydney for an exhibition at the MCA. There was a sense of respect for each doll and the stories they embedded. The dolls went from being the women’s expression of a personal story to becoming ‘works of art’.

During the interview, Margaret proudly recalled that one of her creations has taken her into a journey beyond anything she had expected:

My doll now is going to Queensland. There is a big art thing over there about self-portraits⁵ ... that doll has been everywhere! Well, the story behind it, I was born in Moora and I grew up on the mission not knowing the background, as a young kid, what happened there, and not knowing that my grandfather and all his brothers and sisters were put there, taken from Badimaya Country, and put there.

⁵ Margaret is referring to the National Self Portrait Prize of the University of Queensland Art Museum, 2017. <https://art-museum.uq.edu.au/national-self-portrait-prize-2017>

... When I learned that story, instead of saying that I wasn't born here, I made that doll and dyed the fabric with paperbark (Margaret).

Each one of the Noongar dolls became an emancipatory act, a vehicle for communicating a unique story, a reflection of the past, a power symbol, or a symbol of desire; each doll challenged and transformed the artists' reality, and each of their dolls and their stories were witnessed by thousands of people. Their story was not only told but acknowledged. It was recognised and validated by the same public institutions that in the past had denied their existence.



Figure 8: The Noongar doll-makers with their creations at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA)—part of the *String Theory: Focus on Contemporary Australian Art* National Touring Exhibition (2013–2015). Photograph: Courtesy of CAN WA.

3.2.2 The Noongar Pop Fashion project

In 2009, after a very public and violent family feud between some Noongar families in Narrogin, the local high school became the centre of claims of racism. Noongar parents decided to withdraw their children from the school, citing fear for their safety (Kasat, 2014). Since the establishment of a CAN WA

cultural hub in Narrogin in 2010, Noongar Elders began to consistently articulate the need to engage young people in Noongar language and culture. Under their guidance, CAN WA instigated a series of projects, in partnership with the high school, that began the slow process of building bridges between Noongar parents, the young people and the rest of the school community. By 2013, three years later, and after several arts projects, the Narrogin High School began reporting significant positive results.

An indication of the success of the Noongar pop culture programs was a dramatic shift in school attendance by Noongar students. “Narrogin high school deputy principal Maxine Clark said Noongar attendance rates increased 10 per cent to more than 90 percent after the program” (Bevis, 2014, para. 7). The foundation of the Noongar Pop Fashion project was the Noongar Pop Culture project. This involved a team of Aboriginal (mostly Noongar) artists, musicians, filmmakers and a specialist language consultant working with the students, translating their favourite pop songs into Noongar language.⁶ The significance of encouraging young people to learn Noongar language in creative ways cannot be underestimated. At the time, it was projected that there were only 250 fluent speakers of Noongar out of a population of 30,000 in Western Australia (Diss, 2014a). One of the artists involved, poet and singer songwriter Della Rae Morrison, commented:

We almost lost our language, since the Stolen Generations, and my grandparents being told in the missions, “[You] can’t speak the language.”

If they did, they’d have it flogged out of them ... and with that came the shame factor. I’ve grown up with my grandma never speaking language to me (Diss, 2014a, 05:19 min).

⁶ Noongar Pop Culture: Meet the artists. <https://vimeo.com/89468377>

Seeing the young people readily taking to learning their language, Della Rae added:

By the end of the project they were up there! ... dancing and singing their songs in language; songs that they had written themselves ... I'm really proud of them (Quartermaine, 2014, 01:35 min).

Notwithstanding the success of this project, the high school reported that the young Noongar boys became more engaged than the girls, and therefore the high school requested and supported a Noongar girls-only project, which became known as the Noongar Pop Fashion project. The project began as a way to create a safe space for 17 young women from years 8 to 10, to motivate them to attend school and to provide them with new skills and opportunities to express themselves. The project introduced them to new skills by intertwining cultural traditions with contemporary craft work (CAN WA, 2014a). They learned weaving skills and eco-dyeing from Noongar artists Sharyn Egan and Marcelle Riley, upcycling skills from Lady Bananas, and fashion design from designer Elisha Quintal. Choreographer Sete Tele and photographer Simon Pynt helped them to prepare for a photo shoot and a catwalk. They paraded their creations in front of about 900 people at a NAIDOC celebration in Narrogin, and the program culminated in an art exhibition of their works at the local Nexis Gallery.

Margaret recalled the young girls' attitudes when they began the project:

Always with the Noongar kids, they are always "shame." When they started out, it was all about being shame. And then, seeing them change, doing it to the end! I was so proud of them. Proud of the dresses they made, and the photos, and for them to get that far, and they did it all themselves!

They are still in high school [two years after the project], a lot of them were leavers last year while we were working at the school, so

they were going on to bigger and better things, and they stayed in school, to get that far, to year 12 is amazing (Margaret).



Figure 9: A student models her fashion creation for a professional photo shoot by Simon Pynt. Photograph: Courtesy of CAN WA.

In the year 2014, when this program took place, the Smith Family reported that only 28 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and young women had completed a Year 12 certificate (The Smith Family, 2014). The significance of engaging young Aboriginal girls to continue a path into education can't be overestimated, especially at a time when incarceration of women is considered "one of the most challenging human rights issues facing Australia" (McDonald, 2020, para. 1). Since 2013 there has been a 49 percent

increase in the sentencing of Indigenous women compared to a six percent increase among non-Indigenous women (McDonald, 2020).

Importantly, for these young women, this project provided an opportunity to develop self-belief, gain confidence and affirm their sense of self. Jade Parker, one of the students, stated: “I was happy and more confident afterwards, and I would like to do this type of workshop again” (CAN WA, 2014a, p. 18). Another said: “I learnt that I can be a lot more confident, if I just get in and try things” (CAN WA, 2015b, 00:57 min). In the act of ‘doing’ and finding their own capacities they also found the opportunity to reflect and process grief:

I actually did the dress for my mum. She passed away when I was really little. It was something to show how much I miss her and how much I remember everything about her (CAN WA, 2015b, 02:13 min).

The opportunity to remember and to honour those who have passed away, and to express grief and loss, are critical factors for social and emotional wellbeing, which in turn impact on people’s capacity to develop a positive sense of self (Dudgeon, Milroy, & Walker, 2014), and an individual and collective sense of empowerment (Dudgeon, 2014).

Margaret remembers fondly when the girls where working on their creative project:

I remember sitting and listening to the girls talking while they were sewing their dresses. They were sitting around the table; they were talking about who they are and where they come from. They were talking language ...

I was amazed that they didn't forget. People in the community, the teachers, would say that the kids are not learning nothing, but when it comes to something that means something to them, their

culture, they never forgot. We hear it all the time, that our culture and our language is lost. It's not!

We are finding it. And the kids are living proof. It's gonna be there, *always* (Margaret).



Figure 10. Noongar Pop Fashion students preparing for the 'catwalk' with artist Lady Bananas, project officer and artist Marcelle Riley and I. Photo: Courtesy of CAN WA.

Margaret's affirmation that Noongar culture and language are not lost is a potent counter-narrative to what has been a common misconception, that Noongar culture, traditions and law have disappeared (SWALSC, Host, & Owen, 2009). The affirmation that culture will prevail, and that the young people are the embodiment of this survival, is an assertion of hope and of cultural affirmation that defies the persistent narrative of the colonial project.

3.2.3 The Bush Babies project

Bush Babies is a long-term community art program that voices the stories of Noongar Elders who were born in the bush and the midwives who delivered them. This project had its genesis in 2010 with the late Noongar Elder Auntie

Winnie McHenry from the Badjaling Reserve. Winnie had been involved in previous CAN WA projects, which seemed to invigorate her idea to tell the stories of people born in the bush.

Many of our Elders were born at a time when they were not permitted to live in town or cities, let alone be born in a hospital. Some were in tents, or makeshift shelters, or under the stars. Many don't have birth certificates (Michelle White, project coordinator, in CAN WA, 2014b).

Since 2010 the project has been undertaken in the Wheatbelt towns of Quairading, Kellerberrin, Narrogin, Bunbury, Moora and Goomalling. Each has found a unique way to honour these Noongar Elders through a diversity of means, including photography, portrait paintings, repatriation of state archival material, the recording of oral histories, short films, and reunions on country (Quayle, 2017).



Figure 11: Intergenerational Bush Babies project in Goomalling. Photograph: Natalia Brunovs, courtesy of CAN WA.

In each town the project gathered the local community around opportunities for storytelling. In the case of Goomalling, a very significant

photographic collection was uncovered after community members were asked to bring photos or objects that inspire a personal story. Mary Anne (pseudonym) recalls:

A few people turned up with a few old tatty photos, and Dallas turned up with a chocolate tin of just pure joy ... 'My mum took these; they may be significant. I have been carrying them for 40 years in this chocolate tin, they have been to Broome, they have been to Kununurra, they have been everywhere, they have been kept in the shed...'

She had no idea they would be so valuable ... the fact that it's capturing a moment in our history from an Aboriginal perspective; genuine day-to-day interaction, and not the anthropological lens. It was like, wow! (Mary Anne).

The rare collection of photographs taken by Mavis Wally in the 1950s and 1960s detailed moments in the lives of Aboriginal people in Goomalling from her perspective. Mavis had 11 children, and her husband worked as a butcher in the town.⁷ The Indigenous liaison officer at the State Library of Western Australia, where the collection was presented for preservation, considered this collection to be of national significance because "photographers had historically depicted Aboriginal people in two ways, as traditional spirits or savages or as people in missions, dressed to the nines and doing writing exercises" (Laurie, 2015, para. 14).

This chocolate tin and its contents generated a very unusual (for art for social change projects) level of mainstream publicity: national radio and print covered the story (Laurie, 2015; Walley & Kasat, 2015). The images of Noongar people presented in this photographic collection undoubtedly challenge the image of Noongar people of the time. In this collection we don't see 'spirits', 'savages' or 'institutionalised children'. The photographs show healthy and

⁷ To search for the Mavis Walley collection of photographs, see: <https://storylines.slwa.wa.gov.au/archive-store/start>

smiling children, proud young women wearing hats and floral summer dresses and dignified older women holding their grandchildren. The sentiment of a simple and, at times, happy existence was also reported by 12 senior Noongar people who were interviewed for this project. They gave testimony on their early years of growing up on the small Goomalling Reserve; living with extended family, picking mushrooms in winter-time, looking for bird nests, hunting rabbits and kangaroos, collecting water, playing all day long, and eating together at the end of the day, while the fires were constantly burning.⁸

The images that these narratives conjure are very different from the stereotypical accounts of hopelessness and destitution that abound about Aboriginal people. Allowing Noongar voices to “speak back against against essentialist representation of ‘Them’ as powerless” (Samie et al., 2015, p. 925) was intrinsic to each of these art for social change projects. These contrasting accounts reveal a nuanced reality experienced by Noongar people on the reserves. The counter-narratives that emerged from the people who lived there offer historical points where Noongar people can anchor and model a different way of imagining history that facilitates cultural recovery. As Shauna Bostock Smith puts it “There are many good ‘against all odds’ stories to be found about Aboriginal survival and resilience when researching Aboriginal history” (2013, p. 195).

Dallas’s chocolate tin is without a doubt one of these stories; a testimony to the survival and resilience of the Noongar people. What is more, it illustrates the impact of the repatriation and reclamation of cultural material. As Mary Anne recalls:

Dallas was able to go through these photos, as well as other community members who’ve seen other family members in that collection and identified them all, so they are not just in the collection now, they have

⁸ The Goomalling Yarns can be listened to here: <http://www.canwa.com.au/project/bush-babies/> (Goomalling tab).

been properly captioned, so people know who they are. So, for instance one of the photos was of Mavis Wally's mother, Julia Wally ... that was very significant because she had been referenced in a lot of oral histories. It's Richard Wally's⁹ grandmother. She is a significant figure on Noongar country. People are always referring to Julia Wally as the matriarch of the Wally family. That was the first time anyone had ever seen a photo of her (Mary Anne).

The three projects described above—the Yarns of the Heart, the Healing Songs and the Goomalling Yarns—form part of the continual history of Noongar gatherings and cultural celebrations that, despite government efforts to suppress them, have stood through time (Haebich, 2018). These projects were driven by Noongar histories and embedded in their cosmologies, and thus have played an important role in Noongar endurance. As Anna Haebich explains, “these events were ceremonies of survival and healing for close-knit communities responding to oppression, poverty and bereavement as well as joyful entertainments” (2018, p. 177).

Claiming cultural material and maintaining culture alive are critical to cultural renewal and can be considered acts of ‘epistemic disobedience’ as Walter Dignolo (2019) suggests. That is, they comprise a way “to delink from the illusion of the zero-point epistemology”, which in Australia can be seen as a way to push back against the persistence of *terra nullius* (Dignolo, 2009, p. 160). Each time Indigenous people bring memories of their ancestors to the present, recall the histories and stories of those who have lived, and continue to live in colonised spaces, it is a form of “stubborn resistance” (Bostock Smith, 2013, p. 194). It is also an affirmation; a way of making their knowledges visible

⁹ Dr Richard Walley is a highly respected Noongar leader. He is recognised as having been the first to perform an Indigenous Welcome to Country to non-Aboriginal people in Australia. In 1993 he was awarded an Order of Australia Medal for his contribution to the performing arts and Noongar culture.
<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/feb/23/ernie-dingo-and-richard-walley-on-the-40th-year-of-their-welcome-to-country>

and credible (Smith, 2005) as well as an act of healing fragmented identities (Ramirez Oropeza, 2002).

3.3 Empowerment, critical hope, trust and healing

The underpinning philosophy of CAN WA and their art for social change practice, as showcased in the above projects, is congruent with decolonising methodologies; each project allowed for decolonial thinking and action to take place. Below, inspired by scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gloria Anzaldúa and Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Anzaldúa, 2012; hooks, 2015; Mohanty, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Smith, 2012;), I explore three themes which emerged from the accounts of the interviewed women: empowerment, critical hope, and trust and healing. The women's testimonies provide an insight into their understandings as they come into contact with art for social change practices. Their reflections illustrate the ways in which they theorise and construct knowledge based on their experiences and the specific contexts in which they live (Lavia & Sikes, 2010).

3.3.1 Empowerment as healing

According to Pat Dudgeon et al., the connection between Aboriginal healing and empowerment are relatively new subjects of scholarly discussion (Dudgeon et al., 2014). What researchers argue is that, in the context of Aboriginal colonial history, empowerment needs to be understood as:

A process of healing that involves Aboriginal people coming to terms with past and present situations and dealing with the pain. They describe healing through empowerment as a process of 'decolonisation' and redressing the ongoing inequality experienced by Aboriginal people and communities (Dudgeon et al., 2014, p. 441).

Marcelle Riley's story illustrates this point in a beautiful way. Marcelle was employed by CAN WA as an Aboriginal arts and cultural development officer to work alongside the community of Narrogin in 2014. Prior to this, Marcelle had been involved with the Noongar dolls project as one of the participants, but she could not complete her doll at that time. She revealed that she had two unfinished dolls. However, she showed interest in the arts, and her artistic talent led her to enrol in a certificate IV in visual arts at Narrogin TAFE. I remember Marcelle as an incredibly thoughtful and introverted person who did not seem comfortable speaking in public.

In 2019, four years after the completion of the project, Marcelle presented a public talk at TEDxPerth. The title of her talk was "How story dolls heal unspoken trauma" (Riley, 2019). Listening to her reflections about how the project and the process of making dolls impacted her personally was particularly moving for me. At the time, I had no knowledge of the deep and personal trauma she had experienced and the transformation that was occurring in her life. Understanding the multilayered influence this project had on her life is important, because it allows the reader to connect with how Marcelle framed her vision and understanding about her own empowerment; what empowerment means to her, how she believes she gained power, and how this power manifests in her day-to-day life.

In the year 2000 Marcelle lost her brother to suicide. She revealed experiencing complex emotions after this: a mix of sadness, grief, anger, and a deep sense of failure. Marcelle reflected that, in her attempt to stay strong for her family, whom she described as "falling apart" (Riley, 2019, 02:33 min), she bottled up her own emotions. But her grief took a toll on her, and in 2007 she found herself in deep despair: "I didn't want to live anymore. I tried to end my life, but I survived, and I am here telling my story" (Riley, 2019, 04:01 min). In 2009, after losing another family member to suicide, Marcelle realised she had to stop her destructive behaviour. "I went hitting the drinks and the drugs

really heavy, ‘If I didn’t stop now, I am not gonna be here’” (Riley, 2019, 04:25 min).

She made a choice to give up alcohol and move away from the town. She explained how she began to heal and to reclaim a sense of self, but something was missing. This is where her Noongar doll, *Bibool Yok*, which in Noongar means ‘paperbark’, became very important to her empowering process. In 2014 she went to the town of Moora, with CAN WA to run a new series of Noongar doll-making workshops, and here, at the place of her birth, on *Yued Boodja*, she was finally able to make and complete a doll.

The reason why she [the doll] is so important, and this story is so important, is because it healed my spirit. I found my connection. I found the place where I belong, where I come from. That was not only [about] going back home to where I was born but also my journey of going back and finding out who I am, who I belong to, where I come from. I can go to my old people now, right back to their language names ... back to my language, back to my country and back to my culture (Riley, 2019, 08:03 min).

Marcelle attributes her reconnection to culture and country to her doll. While she could not complete a doll in Narrogin, something happened when she was back ‘home’. As she made *Bibool Yok*, Marcelle connected to herself and to her country, and this carries enormous power—“finding who I am and who I belong to” is a powerful affirmation of her existence and her cultural identity, which in the context of the continuation of the colonial project is “an act of resistance and strength” (hooks, 2015, p. 92). While *Bibool Yok* has been in many exhibitions across the country, Marcelle tells us that her doll now carries her story. In doing so, Marcelle’s identity as an artist and an Aboriginal woman has now been honored and validated. She has gained a form of personal power that “is creative and life-affirming” (hooks, 2015).

Understanding the importance of connecting to culture and gaining personal power is further explained by Noongar Elder Gloria Kearing:

Once you understand the bush, you can understand your culture. Once you get respect, you'll understand what the Elders are trying to teach you. Then, one day, you will stand up and say, 'I am a Noongar person and I respect my culture and my boodja' (Kearing, 2014, p. 23).

The idea of 'understanding', 'standing up' and claiming one's cultural identity declares that one has reached a point of self-acceptance. In *Writing Beyond Race*, bell hooks considers acceptance of self to be significant, because: "Accepting and loving ourselves just the way we are is vital to our emotional longevity, to our emotional wellbeing" (hooks, 2013, p. 189). Tellingly, this notion of connecting to oneself is similar to the sentiment echoed by Yordy, an Eritrean woman, at the end of the 2016 documentary *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe* (discussed in Chapter Five). This documentary traces the lives of several women from different parts of Africa who experienced unimaginable sexual violence and abuse. They give testimony on how they confront and heal aspects of their trauma through a theatre program on the outskirts of Sydney. "I found me, I found my voice, I am enough, I am enough," Yordy says poignantly (Horin, 2016).

Similarly, the experience of finding one's own personal power, through art for social change practice is echoed by Ava (pseudonym), who discloses how the work she was doing at CAN WA began to have a transformative effect on her personal life and the way in which she was seeing herself in the world.

It was a life-changing experience, that project [the Noongar dolls] and all the projects that I worked on within the organisation. Not to be dramatic, but definitely it changed my life, and my outlook on life. It was exhausting, but it was also really fulfilling. It could be frustrating, but it was also very enlightening and eye-opening, and soul enriching;

to be able to be a part of something as amazing as that with an amazing group of people ...

It gave me a confidence in my work, and in my personal life that I didn't have before working in community arts ... I was in a quite emotionally abusive relationship and then, through the work I did at CAN WA, and through the growing level of confidence and empowerment that I got through the work ...

I was able to leave that relationship ... It was me figuring out who I was as well, so being exposed to a bigger world, and being exposed to other things and different opinions and ideas that I hadn't heard or seen before that made me solidify who I was ... Seeing in myself my own capabilities, where I was being told I didn't have those capabilities from someone close to me and being able to actually see through the work I was doing, "Wait! No, I do have these capabilities, I can do that, I am stronger than I think I am. I am a lot more competent and confident than I am being told I am" (Ava).

The potent testimonies above demonstrate how these women were able to claim their personal power through self-reflection after having experienced trauma (Atkinson, 2000). Marcelle and Ava in Western Australia and Yordy in New South Wales show that they were able to tap into a source of strength that enabled them "to reject the powerful's definition of their reality" (hooks, 2015, p. 92). This, hooks contends, is an important step before being able to develop a positive self-concept. The creative projects help to clarify to these women "the powers they exercise daily and show them ways these powers can be used to resist sexist domination and exploitation" (hooks, 2015, p. 95).

Marcelle and Ava began to question their negative narratives of self, as their actions, in their role of creative facilitators, were being reflected back to them in a positive way by the community. This had a profound impact. Their newly acquired personal power and capabilities began to impact others. The capacity to name what is happening in one's daily life, to engage in critical

reflection about planning one's own life and having control over one's environment, are considered key to the right of self-determination for Aboriginal women (Davis, 2012).

As Margaret, too, developed her doll-making skills, she felt positively impacted by her new identity as a Noongar artist. To be called an artist:

It was very important. To be recognised in your own right is a good thing, to have people to call on "Margaret, she knows" ... I feel proud. I have come a long way from where I was (Margaret).

During the interview Margaret recalled the Noongar Pop Culture project. She highlighted the importance of teaching Noongar language and the essential connection between cultural identity and a sense of empowerment. Two young women, Kiara Jones and Marion Slater, who participated in these programs, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) *7:30 Report* how important the experience was for them. "I didn't know how to speak Noongar at all. This was the first time we ever experienced this" (Diss, 2014a, 01:15) said Kiara. While Marion added, "It is really important to us [to learn Noongar] it makes us who we are" (07:01). Speaking Noongar, said Kiara, "show people how much it means to us being Aboriginal and hopefully it will show that they [the Noongar community] can start talking it again" (Diss, 2014a, 07:10).

These adolescent girls demonstrate awareness that the connection between language and culture is critical to their sense of self and their collective empowerment as Noongar people. This notion resonates with the concept of self-determination. The Australian Human Right Commission states that, "The right to self-determination is a right of 'peoples' rather than of individuals" and that "self-determination is an 'ongoing process of choice' to ensure that Indigenous communities are able to meet their social, cultural and economic needs" (2013). National Indigenous leader Megan Davies argues that a capabilities approach needs to be considered when advocating for the right

for self-determination of Aboriginal women; that is, that in order to live a valuable life, one must have the freedom to make choices, and in order to exercise that freedom, “one must have the capabilities in order to do and to be: to work, to be healthy, to read, to care, to love, to be well fed or to have shelter” (M. Davis, 2012, p. 83).

Kiara Jones’s statement also shows the relational aspect of self-determination, that is, strengthening personal power can ripple out to strengthen others. As Kiara implies, if young people speak the language, it will give permission to others to start “speaking it again”. Further, Maxine Clark, the high school deputy principal highlighted that “Any engagement program to raise the profile for Noongar students and allow them the opportunity to display their culture in a positive light is really important to their success in education” (Diss, 2014a, 06:51).

The importance and urgency of connecting to Noongar language is further articulated by Noongar actor Kylie Bracknell (née Farmer), a lead artist and Noongar language specialist for these programs. In a 2014 TEDx talk, Kylie revealed:

A huge number of Aboriginal languages are vulnerable. They are either critically or severely endangered: dormant as I’d rather like to call it, rather than being extinct. So, it’s really important to revitalise them as much as we can. When I say ‘we’, I mean all us mob (Farmer, 2014, 04:30).

Noongar language, according to Uncle Tom Hayden from Kellerberrin, contains four principles: *Koort* (heart), *Moort* (family/people), *Boodjar* (land) and *Koolungka* (legacy for children) (Williams, 2014). These elements are considered defining in relation to Noongar cosmology; the interconnections between *Boodjar*, *Moort* and *Katitjin* (knowledge or learning) (Wooltorton et al., 2017). *Moort* is the connection with family, but also plants and animals in a particular place. The kinship structure includes humans and non-humans.

This way people are tied to place in a manner that guarantees meaning and familiarity, a connection called: *gurduboodjar*—which translates as love of place. This is ‘home,’ in the sense of the English adage ‘home is where the heart is’ (Wooltorton et al., 2017, p. 58).

Rose (pseudonym), another of my interlocutors, illustrates this point beautifully.

I'm Noongar. I come from Ballardong country; it's out in the central Wheatbelt, which is only two hours from the city, east. I love that country, it's home, and it really, really means a lot ... Like, now I've got my father and my brother out there, who's buried, you know that—I've lost them just recently, and that is home (Rose).

Rose highlights a profound understanding and connection to *Boodjar* and *Moort*—the love of place and the connection to the heart as a symbol of the home in Noongar cosmology. This idea of the connection that emerges ‘from the heart’ is an expression commonly found in Australian Aboriginal texts. For instance; *It's still in my heart, this is my land* is the title of a book that tells the story of the Single Noongar Claim history. These words were said by Elder Angus Wallam during an ‘on country’ hearing in October 2005. What the title means is that, despite colonisation and dispossession of the land, the connection between Noongar people and their country has not been broken (SWALSC et al., 2009). “Land, while not owned by Noongar people in a legal sense, remains as much the Noongar *country* as it was before European, or *wadjelas*, claimed the land nearly 180 years ago” (SWALSC et al., 2009, p. vii).

The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* is another example; a nationwide statement made by representatives of all Aboriginal nations of Australia in 2017, fighting for constitutional recognition.¹⁰ These ideas are similar in some ways to Abya Yala’s *sentipensar*, as explained in Chapter Two. These concepts,

¹⁰ The Uluru Statement from the Heart: https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru_Statement_From_The_Heart_o.PDF

which are outside Western epistemologies and anchored in Indigenous worldviews, are helpful to understand the depth of feeling associated with empowerment when it emerges from a cultural context. Margaret gives a very lucid reflection on how she believes she became empowered, which clearly points to the prevailing link between strengthening the self and the connection to cultural identity.

I can say that a lot of it is to do with knowing who I am, and where I come from and my connection back to culture, back to learning my language and the arts. I think it is everything to do with culture which empowered me, makes me a stronger person, it's that connection and finding it and helping others to re- connect too, to know who they are, I guess is a journey I am still on. It's a good one. I am looking forward to knowing more and learning more and going places (Margaret).

There is a clear thread of connection in how these women and girls conceptualise low self-esteem and lack of awareness of their own capacities to heal, as well as the realisation of their personal power and their ability to reclaim their power to act in the world. The women's testimonies show a distinct link between the development of their capabilities, their expression of freedom from oppressive situations, and a deep, rich connection to their cultural identity.

3.3.2 Critical hope

We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water.

—Paulo Freire, 2014, p. 2

Paulo Freire proposes that believing that hope alone can transform the world is a road to hopelessness and pessimism. At the same time, he asserts that the idea of transforming the world without hope is a “frivolous illusion” (2014, p. 2). He states that “hope as ontological need, demands an anchoring in

practice” and “Hopelessness and despair are both the consequences and the cause of inaction or immobilism” (2014, pp. 2–3). Therefore, working towards social change requires us “to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be” (2014, p. 3).

When CAN WA began working in Narrogin in 2009, despair had set in. The suicides had taken a toll and family feuds ensued, driving many families out of the town (Davies, 2010). The Narrogin Stories project helped to lay the foundation for the collective articulation of hope amongst the Noongar community (Kasat, 2014; Sonn, Kasat, Quayle, 2017). Through the development of a soundscape based on the community’s testimonies, a collective story that represented the reality at that time was woven together in one piece. “We went around to every household in Narrogin and we sat with every woman, child, young man, Elder, and asked questions” (Sonn, Kasat, Quayle, 2017, p. 97) From these wide-ranging conversations hope began to emerge:

At the end of the day, I want peace, I want it for my kids (Kasat, 2014, p. 63).

Makes you feel good, taking little steps towards a better future for everyone in this town (Sonn, Kasat, Quayle 2017, p. 98).

It’s about turning the light back on and encouraging our people back home (Kasat, 2014, p. 64).

During her interview for this thesis, Dumbaart revealed that that, six years on from the Narrogin Stories project, many Noongar people have welcomed their families back to Narrogin. The articulation of hope expressed in the metaphor “turning the light on” was, according to Dumbaart, somehow realised. And she attributed this shift to the increased harmony in the town:

What those old people wanted was people to stop fighting, and families to come back together, and yeah, so they never sat together and play

cards, but now ... six years on, a group of people, womans, sitting around playing card and we can't stop them! [laughter] (Dumbaart)

Critical hope has been defined as “an action-oriented response to contemporary despair” (Bozalek, et al. 2014 cited in Grain & Lund, 2017, p. 51). But it can also be described as “an act of ethical and political responsibility that has the potential to recover a lost sense of connectedness, relationality, and solidarity with others” (Zembylas, 2014 cited in Grain & Lund, 2017, p. 51).

This point is illustrated by Margaret as she recalls how a group of young Noongar boys and girls who participated in the Noongar Pop Culture project demonstrated that in the act of ‘doing together’—that is, in their cultural action and participation—they were not only able to mobilise but also to ‘connect’ with their culture and identity with one another.

On the night of the launch of the video *The Burdiya (boss) Mob*, all the boys, they got together, from the older ones right down to the younger ones, and did the dance. They didn’t have to, if they didn’t want to, but they did. They didn't forget. It's good that they held down to their culture. It's good that they didn't forget it after the project finished (Margaret).

These reflections about the young people’s reconnection to culture and Noongar language are noteworthy. Five years earlier, I had heard and witnessed the despair and pain at the loss of so many young people to suicide, which that resulted in many Noongar parents taking their children out of the high school in protest, as discussed earlier (Davies, 2010). Hearing Margaret telling me about these young people spontaneously jumping onto the stage and performing a Noongar dance, and about the Noongar girls speaking Noongar, reflects a powerful shift in the narrative of Narrogin: from despair and feuds to one of hope and cultural affirmation (C. C. Sonn, Kasat, et al., 2017). Kylie Bracknell movingly reflected:

When I heard these young fellas sing that [in Noongar], it made me cry, because this is a town where young fellows are suffering, and to give them a bit of their culture back changed their perspective on who they are as young Noongar people (Farmer, 2014, 14:47 min).

The young people who participated, together with the Indigenous artists they worked with, created new forms of cultural expression deeply rooted in Noongar culture, and in doing so they engaged in critical hope. The foundation of these programs—locally based, culturally informed, creative and self-determining—laid a fertile ground for these young people to believe and trust in their capabilities, which in turn were celebrated by their peers, parents and teachers, and publicly recognised by mainstream media on national television¹¹ (Bevis, 2014).

Bracknell's comment above also implies that the young people changed, for the better, their perspective of themselves as Noongar people: "There is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope" (Freire, 2014, p. 81). Critical hope is necessary and foundational to change, but it is also fundamental to the generation of a future *vision*—a future that is more positive than the now. Fostering critical hope is a counter-narrative to hopelessness, and this is very important in communities where despair has set in.

The examples above demonstrate that critical hope can be fostered by creating conditions where "people can rebuild their wishes and their desires—the desire of being again or starting to be in different ways" (Freire, 1970 cited in Wood, Fredericks, Neate, & Unghango, 2015, p. 42).

¹¹ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) 7:30 Report
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfreXZHhu68>

3.3.3 Trust and healing

Both ‘trust’ and ‘healing’ have been recurring themes in CAN WA’s documented CCD work (Green & Sonn, 2008; Kasat, 2014; Palmer, 2010, 2013; C. Sonn et al., 2015). This is not surprising, as gaining and building trust are essential contributors to the ability for people to work together, and they are considered important elements of principled engagement practices, especially when working with Indigenous communities (Morgan & Drew, 2010). Art for social change practices are inherently collaborative, thus trust-building is a cornerstone of CAN WA’s approach its work. Dumbaart reflects on how the reciprocal nature of trust worked inside the organisation.

I felt like I was used as a cultural advisor for Noongar people, and I guess that made me stronger because you trusted me to actually be that advisor ...

The trust! the trust was there, and that's why I would never betray that trust because of the working relationship that I had (Dumbaart).

This is further explored by Mia, who reflects on how trust evolved and was amplified in a vicarious way in the practice of art for social change:

So that was my learning at Navarino [a place where CAN WA conducted a two-day workshop with Noongar Elders in 2011]. It was twofold; the first thing is around trust ... people were sharing stories with me in the space, who they didn't know, and they were doing that because there was trust that got bigger or stronger as the weekend went on. And then, what I realised as well, is that that trust wasn't just about the CAN staff and this group of people ... but that trust was being built with each other, so when Uncle was telling the story, which was quite traumatising, and finding out that this was the first time he shared that—the man is 55 years old and that was the first time he shared that story publicly—and he was able to do that because he felt safe, in that

environment and of course as time has gone on, you realise that is the arts creating that environment (Mia).

This testimony shows another aspect of the art for social change methodology, which is enabling the generative nature of the project to evolve. Allowing time for the establishment of a dialogue between the creative facilitators and the community is a crucial element in art for social change work. Fostering the development of relationships allows for an atmosphere of trust and respect to be built between the artists and different members of the community, as well as amongst the individuals that were forming the group. Many of them already knew each other—in fact some were family members—however, in this context their relationship was mediated by ‘doing’ something that some of them had not done before.

Similarly, healing from loss and trauma is something that has often been attributed to community arts processes. Margaret expresses this powerfully:

From my point of view, to use art was a part of my healing, a lot of it was suppressed, a lot of it was covered up by drugs and alcohol, and to go off all that stuff, and to find something creative to do. I started writing poems, started sketching, I started telling my story and sharing that about so other people could tell their stories. That is why art is a big part of healing, especially for Noongar people, our men which won't talk about it. Now thanks to CAN, the husbands and wives came together, and all their families came together, and the parents sat in one room and they talked about losing their sons, and their grandsons. One lost a son-in-law to suicide and just had to have them sit together, because I never ever did it. No one came together and sat together—we were all feeling the same—to sit down and talk to each other about it was a big thing; because they just went straight into feuding in Narrogin, so to have them sit in one room on their own, talking about

how they were all feeling and all sharing, it was just amazing (Margaret).

Further, Margaret tells the story of a woman coming to terms with painful memories through one of their creations as part of the Bush Babies project held in a small town in the southwest:¹²

There was an old lady when we were doing blanket-making in Bunbury. And when [the artist's facilitator] says we are using old army rags; warfare rags—they were given to my old people when the army was finished with them on the reserves, and on the camps ... That was part of their welfare and part of their rations. Anyway, she said, 'I am not going to use a rug, I'm never gonna use it, I never want to see one of those army rags again!' because all the memories she had. I looked at her and said, 'That rug is always going to be part of your story, part of your life', I said. She ended up putting this rug into her rug. She concealed it of course, but it was still in there, underneath the layers. For her it brought back memories of poverty, freezing cold nights, and that one rug was not enough for all of them. They had to lay on a concrete floor in a dairy shed with these rugs. 'I hate them I don't want to even look at them'. I said, "It's still part of your story, no matter what.'

She ended up telling me her story. I don't know whether she shared that with her sisters. I still don't know that to this day ... a lot of things in life she tried to run away from, she never ever wanted to remember her past and not even where she came from. Through that story I was very sad, but she ended up making this rug, and it was the most beautiful rug I have ever seen ... All these old memories that she tried to suppress and didn't want to remember was on the rug. Just one

¹² A photo of the rug and further information about this project can be seen at <http://www.canwa.com.au/project/bush-babies/>

rug— she didn't even want to have anything to do with the project because of that one rug, that's how bad her memories were. Somebody would say, 'It's only a rug get over it', but to her it took her back to a place that she was trying to forget (Margaret).

In the narrative above, Margaret probably does not reveal the full story. It was not her story to reveal. It is possible that the old army rug and the stories of pain concealed in it were not only memories of cold weather and poverty but also memories of childhood sexual abuse. As Hannah McGlade reveals, child sexual assault is prevalent in Australia, and rarely discussed in either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal communities, but sexual assault on Aboriginal children is compounded by the legacies of colonisation (McGlade, 2012a). During my time at CAN WA, I often heard very oblique references to sexual abuse; full stories were never disclosed. However, considering how much and how often painful stories were shared during CAN WA art workshops, this issue was latent. It was only 'revealed' in the stories that were not told, in the prevailing silences. "Many people will wonder how something so terrible could ever be forgotten, but I know that some things are so terrible they must be 'forgotten'" (McGlade, 2012a, p. 14).

I may be mistaken in my interpretation of this story, but what is perhaps more relevant is that Margaret's validation and encouragement throughout the process enabled this senior Aboriginal woman to create an object that contained her sorrow, known only to her and perhaps others very close to her, as well as a more public expression of her memories of family and joy. In the end, beauty emerged from the stitches of her pain; from her hatred of the army a stunning quilt was created.

The connection between using the arts as a mechanism for storytelling and building and gaining trust and healing, has been highlighted throughout this chapter. However, there were ongoing issues around the limited

understanding of the lived experience of Noongar people, by non-Aboriginal CAN WA staff, and how this impacted the Noongar women. Dumbaart reveals:

We had Astrid [pseudonym] and we taught her ... Ava was amazing, she always asked questions, there was a beauty of learning, and we always answered those questions. Astrid [however] was like a bull in a barn, but we told her, "This is what you have to do." She was very open. She meant well, but we had to pull her back. And she was good. And [then] we had Deborah [pseudonym], another one out of the barn. It was very hard ... what was coming out from these project officers, and how they were approaching our community. They were hurting us more. We try to help them to accept that ... [but their response was] "You can't tell me anything, I'm the project manager here." I don't give a shit about a title! "It's how you can work with us, the team" (Dumbaart).

The trust gained, and the healing reported by different individuals, always occurred in a fragile environment where colonialism and its legacies were never too far from being expressed. It is evident that some of the non-Aboriginal staff members working at CAN WA had different levels of awareness, and despite the organisational intent of working towards an anti-racist practice, this was not always achieved (Haviland, 2017).

Notwithstanding these obstacles, Margaret's final reflection on the influence that art for social change projects had on her was:

I don't know, I felt like someone gave me wings! Yeah, Community Arts Network! I blossomed I guess in my art, in my communication skills, I let the art do the talking now (Margaret).

3.4 Summary

This chapter showcases the art for social change practice of the Community Arts Network of Western Australia, conducted with Noongar communities in

the context of a settler-colonial society, with an emphasis on the women who participated directly in these programs. Located at the intersection of geographical and social contexts where structural inequalities and everyday racisms continue to exist, the women explored and reflected on very personal processes and group dynamics while they were engaged in community arts. Whilst the ongoing dominant power relations embedded in coloniality continue to be extremely challenging, these women have found their voices and agency through collective creative processes which are anchored in Noongar culture, sense of place and identity. This chapter demonstrates that art for social change is anchored in intersectional feminist ideology and practice, because these projects encouraged women and girls to believe in and to act on their own power. Through art for social change the women also came to realise they had power to resist domination and to reinvent their own narratives. Conceptualised and practiced from the vantage-point of people from the global South, art for social change can be understood as a decolonising methodology, as this practice allowed for decolonial thinking and action to take place.

Postscript

A few weeks before this thesis was due for submission, one of the Noongar women I had interviewed made the decision to withdraw her contribution, as she did not want to be associated with CAN WA any longer. The decision to withdraw was not attributed to the research itself but to the irretrievable souring of her subsequent relationship with the organisation's management. This withdrawal, which had an impact on the thesis and on me, highlights the fragility and contingency of arts for social change practices between communities and organisations. I explore these issues further in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR

Exploding Together: We are all protagonists!



Figure 12: La Gorgona Theatre, Mexico (participants at Entepola 2017). Photograph: the author.

For Víctor, art and social justice were one and the same. His songs continue to be sung today and inspire both artists and those who seek social justice.

—Joan Jara (Víctor Jara’s widow), 2016

4. Introduction

In January 2017 I travelled to Santiago, Chile, to speak at the *Festival Internacional de Teatro Comunitario, Entepola* the International Festival of Community Theatre. For years I had wondered how women who are involved in the nexus between art and social justice make sense of their creative processes in post-dictatorship Chile. Why are they involved in art for social change, and what drives their participation? Does art for social change give them a particular sense of agency? These questions, and other motivations

harder to explain, are entangled with this part of my research and my trip to Santiago. The concept of *sentipensar*, which I introduced in Chapter Two, becomes a useful notion to explain this. When I *feel-think* about Chile from a distance, the memories are almost always interconnected with family, the mountains, and a time in my youth when the collective struggle for freedom and the fear of state violence loomed large. The memories are also connected to a deep nostalgia associated with iconic figures such as Víctor Jara, whose music become emblematic of hope and resistance after his torture and killing in 1973. Víctor, as I witnessed in Santiago, continues to be loved and cherished, and his music and legacy is never far from community activism. In July 2018, 45 years after his assassination, his killers have been prosecuted ("Víctor Jara murder: ex-military officers sentenced in Chile for 1973 death," 2018). In some sense, justice have been served.

The experience of going back to Chile for the purpose of this research is as much an inquiry into women's empowerment as it is a messy and visceral revisiting of my own perpetual unfinished business with the process of identity and displacement. This chapter examines the art for social change practice that is given a platform by Entepola—the longest-running free, open-air, community theatre event in Chile ("Fundación Entepola," 2018). This chapter gives voice to women activists and artists who are involved in art for social change projects showcased at Entepola. It investigates their experiences and stories through the lens of scholars from the global South, with particular emphasis on Ofelia Schutte's feminist methodological orientation (Schutte, 2011). I am interested in examining to what extent the Entepola festival supports the advancement of a Latin American feminist practice.

My account begins after I immersed myself in the 2017 Entepola festival. During this 10-day residency, I participated in theatre workshops and critical conversations, watched community theatre from across the continent, and interviewed six women who are involved in art for social change in the communities where they live. I also include my own reflections and

experiences as a I revisited well known and new places and connected to activist and artists in contemporary Chile. The fullness of memories, smells and sounds I experienced evoked a myriad of impossible-to-describe sensations, all of which inform, and are connected to, the case study below.

4.1 The Context: Entepola Foundation

The arts are not just the patrimony of the artists.

—Entepola Foundation

The history and trajectory of the Entepola Foundation is scantily documented (Glass, 2017). This is not uncommon for community arts and activist organisations working at the grass-roots and relying on unpaid workers. Historical records of these types of organisations are important, as the work itself is often at risk of disappearing without a trace (Hawkins, 1993). The background information on Entepola provided here is the result of my direct observation during the Entepola festival in 2017, access to archival sources and an interview, together with several conversations and email communications with Penelope Glass during 2017 and 2018. Penelope is an Australian theatre worker who has a long career in developing community theatre in prisons, both in Australia and Chile. Penelope has lived and worked in Chile for the past 20 years and until recently was a member of the Entepola board.

The Entepola Foundation is a not-for-profit community-based organisation that exists “to strengthen the artistic community movement using theatre as the tool for social, educational and cultural change.” (“Fundación Entepola,” 2018). It was founded by a small group of activists and theatre practitioners in 1987 in the capital, Santiago, during the last years of the dictatorship. The Foundation focuses on three main programs: the annual Entepola festival, a 10-day community event that celebrates and showcases (mostly) Latin American community theatre; a series of theatre workshops and performances for and with underprivileged neighbourhoods across regional

and outer metropolitan areas; and a professional development program about the pedagogy of theatre and social action inspired by the teachings and philosophy of Paulo Freire ("Fundación Entepola," 2018).

The Entepola Foundation describes its trajectory as having had three distinctive phases since its beginning. These are relevant to mention as they reflect the political changes that have happened in Chile during this time. The first phase, *La Utopía Vive* (Utopia is Alive), began in 1987 and lasted until 2006. This phase is described as a project of *resistencia cultural*, or cultural resistance, and as a way to generate solidarity, using theatre, to end the dictatorship. The second phase, which was post dictatorship, from 2006 to 2014—*Los protagonistas somos todos!* or We are all protagonists!—responded to an increased subsidy and competition for government cultural resources, which resulted in a reduction of autonomous cultural activity. Entepola's response to this was to sharpen their emphasis on *autogestión*; on their autonomy and self-management.

The concept of *autogestión* was repeatedly raised during my field trip in Chile as a desirable and essential part of the cultural resistance work of activists. *Autogestión* is also closely linked to the feminist struggle in Latin America, and the term is associated with the Indigenous uprising in Chiapas, Mexico in 1994, which has rippled across the continent since (Álvarez & Painemal, 2016). According to Glass, the word in the context of Entepola's theatre practice means: "resistance to neoliberalism and patriarchy; collective decision making; autonomy from government and collaboration with resistant others" (Glass, 2018a, p. 102). Many of the art interventions, festivals, and carnivals discussed by participants during Entepola emerged as a political response to specific issues. For example, the arts collective *Carnavalón*, in the northern city of Arica in Chile, emerged in 2012 in opposition to the development of the thermoelectricity project in Cerro Chuño that threatened to pollute the environment. *Autogestión*, as explained by Glass, is a highly

political term that goes beyond self-management or autonomy, as defined in the English language.

The third phase of Entepola, from 2015 onwards, is described as *Entepola, mucho más que teatro, es comunidad*, or 'Entepola, more than theatre, is community'. The change in slogan reflects a shift in the articulation of their work as a 'right to culture' framework. This is explained by Entepola as supporting situated and locally produced theatre activity where there is grass-roots *autogestión* and participation; that is, recognition of locally based talent, and the formulation of locally based cultural policies. Entepola also advocates for the development of networks across Latin America. In 2014, the Foundation signed two international agreements to share their community theatre model with two other cities in Latin-American, Aguas Calientes in Mexico, and Jujuy in Argentina.

Since the roots of community theatre are located in South America (Erven, 2001), it is not surprising that this form of art for social change has a long and entrenched place in the resistance movement of Chile and in the way Entepola articulates their work. The connections are evident between Entepola's practice, and Freire's libertarian ideals and Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1979). Theatre is a "weapon for liberation", states Boal in the foreword of his seminal work, which was first published in 1974, while he was exiled in Argentina. Boal contends that theatre is an inherently political action, and that the main objective of the Theatre of the Oppressed is to shift the audience from being passive consumers of stories, to being subjects or "spect-actors", as he names them" (Boal, 1979, p. 122). Boal devised a process whereby theatre audiences could stop a performance and intervene, by suggesting different actions. Through this process of participation, the spect-actor is born. In this an active role, the spect-actor "tries out solutions, [and] discusses plans for change," making this form of theatre an opportunity to rehearse for change (Boal, 1979, p. 122). These principles are reflected in the

abridged version of Entepola’s statement on “What is Community Theatre and What is Not.”

Community theatre is/does	Community theatre is not/does not
pluralist, and fosters belonging and inclusion	answerable to political parties or religious beliefs
fosters liberation, critical reflection and the formation of opinions	impose one way of thinking
makes visible stories that have not been told	appropriate stories
free of charge for participants	welfare
fosters collaboration and exchanges	competitive
a tool for the cultural transformation of individuals and communities, particularly for those who have been marginalised	only focus on the aesthetic aspect of the arts
based on the belief that everyone is able to express themselves through the arts	support an elitist view of the arts
belongs to all who participate	just the inheritance of artists
rigorous, serious and disciplined	shambolic
requires a conscious commitment	Participants are not seen as blind followers
inspires and motivates participants to work as a team, incubates leadership and respects diversity	discriminate
healing	therapeutic

("Fundación Entepola," 2018; Glass, 2017, 2018b.)

This theoretical articulation, apart from being inspired by thinkers of the global South, is also grounded in more than 30 years of collective practice in shantytowns in Chile. With the articulation of these principles, Entepola outlines a place from which community theatre practice ought to begin. If their road map is followed well and with integrity, it can guide towards libertarian terrain (hooks, 2013). Witnessing first-hand the Entepola Foundation's commitment to grass-roots communities and their model of practice was both encouraging and inspiring. Clearly, their practice has not been defined by state funding models. Despite the challenges of opting for an autonomous practice with minimal resources, Entepola has sustained an uninterrupted and deeply grounded community theatre festival for three decades. In the next section I give an account of my personal experience and reflections during Entepola 2017.

4.2 My Entepola Festival

*The path we have followed
à la Latin American
starts with corporeal experience,
with material experience,
with the affective-sentimental attitude
of feeling the feet on the ground.
To feel ourselves
one with each other, palpating us naturally, affectionately,
spiritually: brothers and sisters of the stone, the river, the tree,
the air, the thunder, the huacas¹³ and the spirits, the mountains
and the skies,
starting from that natural interconnection of one with each other*

¹³ A *huaca* is a sacred place/character, a material spirit who takes care of that place; an existential testament to divinity in (Cepeda, 2017, p. 15).

*and everyone to everyone,
under the horizon of
sensing sensitivity
which, as a starting point,
is basic and fundamental, irreplaceable.*

—Juan Cepeda H., 2017

Coincidentally, the Entepola Festival began the year I fled Chile. On the eve of the 30th anniversary of my departure, I had the chance to tell that story to a Chilean audience. Over 150 cultural workers, artists, performers and activists travelled from across Abya Yala to gather at the 31st Entepola in Santiago. For 10 days we lived together in the *Colegio El Salitre* (a primary school) in the poor neighbourhood of *Pudahuel* and shared diverse approaches to art for social change practice. Each day during Entepola there were theatre workshops, reflective sessions called *popul teatro* where practitioners discussed their creative work. Unlike most conference presentations, *popul teatro* allowed ample time for questions and critical discussion. Workshops were held in shantytowns to meet local activists. Lastly, there were *desmontajes* or dismantling sessions offering the opportunity to critically deconstruct the themes and production of the plays that were presented during the festival.

Each night at 9 pm, two or three plays were performed, free of charge, at the *Pudahuel* amphitheatre, an open-air venue set up with food vendors and artisans' market stalls. The festival attracted over 40,000 people over the 10-days; the consistent size of the audience was impressive. The theatre in this context was a welcoming place for all, young and old; a venue where they interacted, clapped and whistled. The Entepola community theatre festival was a very different experience from the sacrosanct places where audiences are expected to 'behave' and watch in silence. The arts in this context remained close to the milieu in which it was created; unlike the Noongar dolls discussed

in Chapter Three, the art form was not ‘elevated’ to established mainstream cultural institutions such as galleries, theatres or museums.

Some days we travelled through several neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Santiago to get to the *populteatro* sessions. Many of these poor *barrios* are considered to be too dangerous to enter. During the dictatorship, these neighbourhoods resisted in such a way that they were considered *terrenos liberados*, or liberated places, where the police would not enter. The only forces that would be soldiers in army tanks heavily equipped with machine guns and tear gas (Ensalaco, 2000). Traveling through these *poblaciones* on a bus full of creative theatre workers was a little surreal. There were no visible signs of the years of repression, but the graffiti, murals and political slogans were a reminder of these communities’ continual struggle. For these Chileans, democracy and freedom did not bring about the end of poverty (Posner, 2012).

The conversations on the bus were rich and enthralling. I sat next to an older man who was a theatre student in the early 1970s. He was an avid storyteller and eager to tell me that the ideas of social theatre and art for social change were not new in Chile. He talked about the strength and vitality of the popular culture movement during Allende’s socialist government, when the university theatre program was almost exclusively dedicated to popular theatre. However, after the coup d’état, social theatre was abolished from the theatre school’s curriculum, only reappearing scantily at a tertiary level in the 2000s (Glass, 2018a).

This workshop took us to the Víctor Jara Cultural Centre in the suburb of Pedro Aguirre Cerda, about ten minutes from where I grew up. At this centre, which was full of symbolism and echoes from my past, I had the opportunity to speak about my work with Aboriginal communities in Australia. For many years I carried guilt associated with having left the political struggle for democracy in Chile, and I never thought I would have the

opportunity to share the experience of my work with Chileans in Chile. My experience of shame and guilt together with the anxiety about being blamed for leaving the country was not imagined or isolated; 400,000 people left Chile during the dictatorship. Many Chileans in exile returned to Chile in the 1990s, only to find that they were often stigmatised for having left (Schugurensky, 2007).

My mother was in the audience, and so was my colleague, Penelope. Both of them were moved by what I had to say, but for different reasons: my mother told me that she hadn't, until then, made the connection between my story of leaving Chile and the work I have been doing in Australia. Penelope, on the other hand, experienced a sense of regret for her absence from the political struggle of Indigenous people back in Australia. In that moment, my mother and my friend, each from vastly different subject positions, were able to recognise the colonial legacy of both countries and its manifestations in our day-to-day realities. They understood that, despite Chile and Australia being distanced by the vastness of the Pacific Ocean, they are still interconnected by a global web of economic and social injustices.

The experience of being in front of other Chileans, who gave me such a warm reception and showed respect for my work with Noongar people, filled me with a sense of gratitude. Ultimately, the whole experience was healing for me. Strangely, I felt a sense of forgiveness (Adams, 2012).

The Entepola festival and its format of doing, reflecting, and witnessing enabled a real bond and a sense of comradeship to occur among the participants. Together we played theatre games, shared meals, laughed a lot, engaged in deep conversations and watched performances every night. I was amazed and delighted at the kind of political conversations we were having. I was energised by the young people I met, most of whom were between 18 and 35 years old. Listening to their experiences in political and cultural activism in

their local communities made me feel both optimistic and hopeful (Solnit, 2016).



Figure 13: Mask Workshop at Entepola 2017, run by Almalpaso Theatre company from Argentina. Photographer: unknown participant.

Entepola 2017 was a window on how art for social change is happening in different parts of Chile and Latin America. Entepola played an important role in creating a cultural space, which was situated, political and intellectual. The festival provided a place, literally and figuratively, where different modes of praxis were showcased, challenging us “to reflect, to think, and to *know*, in order to act in different ways, and to help us to continue thinking and doing in different ways” (Walsh, 2017). All of these are important ingredients for critically combatting monolithic forms of cultural expression that do not challenge the status quo. Entepola helped me to put into perspective how the Latin American women I spoke to in Santiago are making sense of their political agency through art and cultural practices, and how they are

theorising and formulating useful tools to “think and to act” from the vantage point of their local realities (Walsh, 2017).

4.3 Schutte’s four-fold methodological practice

In order to contextualise the voices of the Latin American women who participated in the research and to understand whether Entepola facilitates the furthering of feminist thinking, I turn to Ofelia Schutte’s four-fold feminist methodological practice (Schutte, 2011). Understating the specificities of Latin America women is an important consideration. Schutte argues, for an epistemic inclusion of Latin American feminists who have had the complex task of carving a voice in amongst the “cultural imaginary with which Latin American feminists are interpellated” (Schutte, 2011, p. 784), particularly in view of the imperial lens applied to Latin American women in the United States. Schutte ultimately argues that it is not yet possible to talk about a Latin American feminist philosophy, because there has not been enough grounding and theorising that has attended to the living conditions of women and girls in Abya Yala (Schutte, 2011, p. 784). What is necessary, according to Schutte, is to build a perspective that disrupts the limiting cultural imaginaries of Latin American women. Whilst a very strong strand of representation paints the Latin American woman as nurturer and self-sacrificing mother (described in relation to the Madres de la plaza de Mayo in Chapter One), a counterpoint to this image is the role of women as activists in the cultural and political resistance movement over the several decades. Key to this representational shift, is to increase the visibility of women, both individually and collectively and recognise the role of women in the history of resistance (Schutte, 2011).

Schutte’s four-fold methodological feminist approach to knowledge, like other Southern epistemologies, is articulated as a bridge, rather than a definite method, and as an invitation to look for certain key elements when engaging in feminist work. These are: first, the need to “look for a critical conception of knowledge” (Schutte, 2011, p. 791); that is, to deconstruct the

associations that have been vested in Latin American women and to pay close attention to the privileging of Western constructs of knowledge over those of Indigenous, mestiza and Afro-descendant women. An example of this is the need to break with the colonial ethnic binaries of Indigenous versus Spanish and embrace the notion of *mestizaje*, as described in Chapter Two. Second, Schutte invites us, at least implicitly, to move “to connect theory and practice critically” (Schutte, 2011, p. 793). Many feminists have called for connection between the two in order to build feminist leadership for social justice (Batliwala, 2010; hooks, 2015). However, in many instances the connections tend to fall away, especially due to the demands of the academy and the intensity of activism, where the doing can sometimes take time away from critical reflection (Schutte, 2011, pp. 793-797). This is also true in the context of art for social change practice (as explained in Chapter One), where the doing has left little time to reflect on the practice (Kester, 2011).

Third, Schutte asks for feminists to consider the ways in which their methods support “progressive projects and concepts of freedom and liberation” (Schutte, 2011, p. 797). Schutte warns, however, that the concepts of liberation and freedom need to be grounded in historical and cultural context if they are to be understood appropriately. At the heart of feminisms in Latin America, there is a strong tradition of support for the emancipatory cause of women, in a region where patriarchy and militarisation have left historical scars that followed the widespread wave of dictators. Schutte believes there is a need to move from “freedom from” dictators to “freedom for” democratisation and social justice. That is, “freedom to live peacefully and creatively without fear of violence, hostility, abuse, or deprivation of support for material and social needs” (Schutte, 2011, p. 798). As discussed in Chapter One, the Latin American transition from repressive regimes to a global and neoliberal political economy that happened in the 1980s and 1990s meant that activists were able to gain “freedoms from” military regimes. Subsequently, they have had to face the realities of a neoliberal system, which has progressively widened the gap between the rich and poor.

The fourth component of Schutte’s approach to knowledge is “the enacting of transformative politics of culture” (Schutte, 2011, p. 799). A transformative politics of culture, argues Schutte, needs to be decolonising in approach and it must be feminist led and, above all, grounded in feminist theory and political movement:

Decolonisation signals an empowering approach to unleash the testimonies and perspectives of women of colour, lesbians, ecological feminists, and anyone whose political values and/or socio-cultural standing has been reigned in or suppressed by male dominant consortiums of power (Schutte, 2011, p. 800).

This method often relies on documentation in the form of oral narratives from the women themselves (Schutte, 2011). Below I showcase the stories and experiences of six women I interviewed during the course of the Entepola festival. The analysis I elicit from their responses is the result of deploying the analytical framework of Schutte’s approach to knowledge.

4.4 Women’s voices at Entepola

My interlocutors are women artists and activists located within different social movements and grass-roots art collectives in Chile and Argentina. As Chapter Two emphasises, making visible the voices of women who have been silenced is an essential task of decolonising praxis and a method strongly advocated by feminists of the global South (Palermo, 2009; Paredes, 2015; Segalo, 2016). Not only are these histories and stories in short supply (Mohanty, 2003), but they have also been missing from dominant narratives. These stories need to be rewritten “on the basis of acknowledging our shared histories and the inequalities with which they are associated” (Bhambra, 2014, p. 420). In doing so, these stories can become a way of resistance and a place hope (Chappell & Chappell, 2011); they can help us to name and articulate a position from which to speak and think—the place from which we can create new words, concepts

and categories to counter “globalization, modernity and neoliberalism” (Paredes, 2015). These are the counter-narratives from women from the South who, through art for social change, illuminate the intersectionality of their struggle for social justice (A. Davis, 2018). As my interlocutors reflect on their personal experiences, they often make references to other people and their stories. This highlights the dynamics involved in the inherently communally situated and collective experience of art for social change, where one is “catapulted back and forth between the poles of the common and the individual” (Bruyne, 2011, p. 4).

4.4.1 *Las Melisas of Cerro Navia*

Rubi Figueroa, who explicitly asked to be named in this research, has been involved with the Entepola Foundation for more than 20 years. She was 17 years old when Entepola ran a series of theatre workshops in Cerro Navia, another poor neighbourhood near Santiago. Theatre was a completely new experience for her, and it was so significant that Rubi continues to be involved two decades later.

I wanted to be a computer engineer, I had the desire and hope to get out of poverty ... I wanted to have what I never had.

I was in year 11 when I started doing theatre, and everything changed ... The thing that captivated me about popular theatre was not the theatre, but the social justice aspect of it (Rubi).

Soon after becoming involved, Rubi started running theatre workshops herself. Although she didn't have the teaching experience or the tools to teach, she recounts:

I had the desire to be involved, and this meant I began to recognise my neighbourhood. I began to understand what was going on in my community. Cerro Navia is one of the poorest neighbourhoods of the metropolitan region. I don't need to tell you what this means (Rubi).

What Rubi means is that poverty is synonymous with entrenched disadvantage, class discrimination, violence, exploitation and an uncertain future. At the same time, Rubi reveals that through her participation in popular theatre, something unveiled—she began to see the intersectional nature of the issues that were affecting her community.

I think I was able to recognise myself—I was at the service of the ‘system.’ We’ve been trained to serve the system; sadly, we inherit this. You can see how your parents work from sunrise to sunset. They don’t stop, and I was part of this vicious circle. I was not aware of it.

Thinking about others does not exist in the rat race (Rubi).

Becoming aware and gaining critical consciousness of the context and situation Rubi found herself in is consistent with a body of work on the role of community theatre (Boal, 1979, 1998; Erven, 2001; Saeed, 2015). Not only does Rubi realise that she has been conditioned in an unequal and unjust system but she also understands that this is systemic and widespread, affecting her family and community. Rubi was socialised, during the 1980 and 1990s, in one of the most aggressive neoliberal states in the world, established by the dictator Pinochet (Chomsky, 2003; Klein, 2007). Through her engagement in Entepola, Rubi recognises that the neoliberal system privileges individual wellbeing over the wellbeing of communities, and she becomes increasingly aware of the patriarchal nature of this system (Paredes, 2015).

Rubi tells me that the majority of those who participated in the theatre workshops in Cerro Navia were women. This does not surprise me. Over two decades, I have witnessed more women than men participating in art for social change programs. Interestingly, there is empirical evidence that suggests that gender is a determinant in cultural participation in the highbrow arts (Christin, 2012). Would gender also be a determinant in cultural participation in art for social change? Perhaps, but the reasons for why this may be the case are unlikely to be the same. What Rubi reveals, however, is that:

Evidently, being involved in theatre empowered some, more than others, coincidentally, the women of the group were more impacted by this. We were three times more women than men. Hence, the coordination of meetings and activities were done mostly by the women in the group.

The majority of the women in the group were teenagers, and some older women. One of them had problems with her psychomotor skills; she became the most loved member of the group. The artistic expression helped her to accept herself. She was rejected everywhere. Nobody liked her, an older woman with problems, a spinster with no children. She was like a *bicho raro*.¹⁴ In the group she found her place. She was incredibly talented, although we didn't talk about artistic talent, we talked about the transversality of issues, and that was much more important than the artistic development alone ... Everything was about the *doing*, it was very transformative (Rubi).

The notion of solidarity and acceptance the group afforded the 'odd woman out' in this story is noteworthy. Perhaps as the group became aware of the intersectional nature of the issues that affected them, they were able to afford solidarity to the woman who otherwise had been ostracised. As bell hooks reminds us, "solidarity strengthens resistance struggle" (hooks, 2015, p. 44). Together, the women began to realise that besides being 'strange', this woman had talent to offer the group. In doing so, the group engaged in what Schutte names the critical conception of knowledge. They were able to challenge their own prejudices and opened themselves up to diversity.

The self-acceptance accepting and the group's acceptance, as Rubi describes above, were occurring concurrently. This was also highlighted in

¹⁴ Colloquial expression that means weird and different at the same time. It literally means a rare critter.

Chapter Three as a critical element towards self-determination and the development of agency and empowerment in Indigenous Australian women.

In the interview segment below, Rubi underscores and illustrates further what Schutte (2011) considers to be key to feminist commitment to social justice as described in section 4.3.

Our creativity was unleashed—it was something that had been lost with time. We were trying to recover what we couldn't do in times of the dictator. I was born during the dictatorship ... we hadn't heard about community organising, so, when we started to occupy the neighbourhoods, we had lots of barriers and we couldn't understand why. We had to understand our history, and what happened before us. Theatre meant all of this (Rubi).

Theatre enabled the women to unleash their creative potential, while at the same time it became the vehicle that supported them in understanding their history. The connection between the two is important, through their theatre experience, the women engaged in Schutte's notion of a "critical conceptual of knowledge", whilst at the same time they were involved in their pursuit of "freedom and liberation".

I was called to a community health centre to do mental health workshops ... The theatre workshops were meant to be the last part of a program the group had already done with mental health professionals. This group had older women, in their 60s, 70s and 80s. When I started, it was very difficult; they were not relating or sharing much with each other at all. They didn't want to touch each other. Many of them were battered women. They would react quiet violently, or with a lot of fear, at physical contact.

It was a slow but marvellous process. To see how, through theatre, they began to accept and to know themselves and their bodies. They began to love the group dynamics. They called themselves *Las*

Melisas, the name of a plant that has calming effect; you drink it and it helps you relax. We were together for about five years.

We did about four or five plays. I am very careful with the processes and the time required for these kinds of practises. I don't like to put someone on stage and expose them gratuitously. Here the process was very complex, to work with their bodies and with everything that had to do with their corporeal blocks.

It was amazing, and it exploded! They all exploded together ... I said to myself, as we Chileans say, 'Where is this bus going?' 'Where are we going with this?' The most beautiful thing is that the group came out together, at different levels but together (Rubi).

Through the slow pace and consistency of the work, the women began to accept themselves and one another, and the group dynamic shifted. From feeling "ugly, fat, and old", they began to stage their work using "feathers, flowers, and colour: they generated their own aesthetic and their forms to represent their work. It was amazing!" This process led to an outpouring of creativity that gathered its own momentum. There is a liberation moment in which the group itself generated a kind of power and control, that was beyond the individual. At this point Rubi asked herself, "Where is this bus is going?" She recognised that the energy the group generated was beyond her as an individual facilitator. The collective was energised and began to determine their own agenda, as Rubi described:

They wanted to be queens and princesses. I didn't mind because they wanted to represent their work like that. We began to tour through the community, and they started organising their own performances.

The process of change of these women was extraordinary. I can say this now. That experience was very formative for me ... and the process was evidently very important for them. Many of them were widows, but the ones that had husbands—many of them, abused all their lives—and to see how they [husbands] started to get involved,

they would accompany them. I am not sure whether this was because they were pathologically jealous. Even though they are old and decrepit now, that won't change! They started to come along to their performances and started to involve their grandchildren ... it became like a movement for the families.

I believe that their dream was to be recognised and valued. They were so happy! Theatre helped them to see their lives from another perspective. They were accepting their pain. Many of them had to accept it, because they say it was their decision to stay in their marriages. They began to see their problems—which had them emotionally stunted—differently, and they become loose. Like a catharsis, but not with hatred or resentment. All of this happened through community theatre (Rubi).

Rubi's testimony demonstrates that the women in the group expanded their capacity to sustain complexity and that this is an important element for attaining liberation (Sandoval, 2000). The women in the group reached different perceptions and understandings of their own situations, individually and collectively, and from this awareness they were able to mobilise themselves and their families. They gained a level of autonomy and collective responsibility (Freire, 2011). This in itself was socio-political change of the women in their communities. As they bonded together, they were seen, and they reported feeling valued.

The transformational and liberating nature of community theatre has been acknowledged by scholars in many parts of the world (Perry, 2012; Bozo, 2014; Dutta, 2015; Erven, 2001; Saeed, 2015). However, within the context of participatory theatre (and through many adaptations of the Theatre of the Oppressed, particularly in the global North) there are many practices that are disguised as liberatory but which serve to reproduce the very structures that create the conditions of oppression (Blair, 2013). Rubi is critical of particular

kinds of biographical narrative or testimonial theatre, which are widely used with disenfranchised groups (Blair, 2013). She explains:

I don't like to do testimonial work. I don't like to exploit that kind of work. At the beginning, we only did collective stories, and during that process certain themes started to emerge, like violence against women, opportunities, and abandonment. We worked so they had the capacity to distance themselves from the hard issues; everything became comedy and also resilience. They talked a lot about their issues but distanced themselves from those. This process was very helpful for them; to look at their lives, their stories and their problems with different eyes. They didn't need to put their lives on stage (Rubi).

Rubi is reluctant to use testimonial theatre, as she does not want to 'exploit' or expose the women "gratuitously." Rubi's work avoids the public confession of the testimonial but is not devoid of political context and complexity or the capacity to generate empathy or understanding. Sujatha Fernandes discusses the way many stories are used and misused and the pitfalls of this practice in her book *Curated Stories: The Uses and Misuses of Storytelling*. Fernandes argues that, although some of these stories may entice audiences to identify with the tellers, the erasure of structural conditions and the omission of alternative standpoints does little to disrupt the status quo or break down social inequalities (Fernandes, 2017c). In the following chapter I examine one of Fernandes's examples in more detail.

Rubi's refusal to exploit the women's stories marks an important distinction in approach from testimonial performances orchestrated in state contexts. For example, Allen Feldman discusses how, in the context of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, some stories "may reinstall the traumatized subject at the centre of historical process, but this installation will not disinstall violence from history" (Feldman, 2004, p. 196). Rubi, instead, is careful to work with the shared stories over time, allowing the

participants to unravel their narratives at their own pace, and creating space for the women to generate common ground and solidarity around their collective lived experiences (Mohanty, 2003).

Feldman (2014) argues that the production of oral histories and testimonies in the “aftermath of ethnocidal, genocidal, colonial and postcolonial violence occurs within specific structural conditions”, and therefore testimony and historical inquiry ought to pay attention to the structural conditions inherent in settler colonial societies (Feldman, 2004, p. 163). Clearly, Rubi subscribes to the notion that emancipation is not guaranteed solely by the telling of the suffering, nor of the witnessing of it. In a poignant example illustrated by Feldman, the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo refused to accept a State-sponsored memorial for their disappeared sons and daughters. They did this because a commemoration act of this kind would have, in some way, brought closure and thus exonerated the Argentinian State from their ongoing demands for justice (Feldman, 2004).

Rubi does not use the ‘battered’ women’s stories to either glorify the women or demonise their men—this way, the women’s testimonies do not absolve the culpability of systemic failures that continue to perpetuate and condone violence against women:

To us, theatre was helpful, firstly to organise ourselves as a collective, secondly to develop themes and ideas, thirdly to communicate and relate with other people. But the most beautiful thing was, we weren’t saying ‘We are making theatre’; the theatre was like an excuse to come together and *do* together (Rubi).

Rubi highlights the way that theatre became a vehicle not only for self-transformation but also for transforming the wider community by taking the changes into collective action outside the confines of the workshops. That is, as Schutte would say, they began to enact transformative politics of culture by

taking their renewed awareness and understanding outside their communities and into their wider worlds.

4.4.2 The only thing we don't have is money; in everything else we are very rich

The Entepola festival format described in 4.2 fostered the opportunity to connect theory and practice, and it encouraged critical consciousness amongst the participants. It also highlighted projects and practice that inspired active resistance and fostered an unwavering sense of optimism among the participants. Everyone with whom I spoke talked about their creative work in the context of their political struggles, but equally they spoke about their measures of resistance. One of the collectives that stood out for me was a group of young activists from the *Centro Cultural Mandrágora* who work and live in the largest and most populated shantytowns in the hills of central Chile, the Achupallas/ Manuel Bustos camp. The living conditions in this camp are extremely precarious. Improvised shelters with minimal access to running water or electricity are the norm (CNN Chile, 2020). These young people decided to unlawfully occupy an uninhabited derelict dwelling and rallied together to build a cultural hub. From this space they regularly conduct a series of art workshops, from hip-hop, poetry, and painting, to recycling and reusing waste for building construction. They also launched a community printing service that they use to communicate locally. Whilst they were presenting and discussing their *Somos Tierra* (“We are Land”) workshops, one of them pronounced: “The only thing we don't have is money; in everything else we are very rich.”

This sentiment encapsulates many aspects of what I heard during Entepola: solidarity amongst the neighbours, strengthening the social fabric of their communities, developing trust and the need for humanising spaces. They also talked about emotions, warmth and the importance of *los afectos* (affections). This was echoed in many of the presentations, people talked

about love as a powerful force from which the resistance work emerges. This articulation of love and hope is not foreign in activism. bell hooks argues that love is what inspires change and makes it possible for activists to live humanely within an unjust and oppressive system. “The radical nature of love is that it is profoundly democratic” (hooks, 2013, p. 199). The *Mandrágora* representatives expressed the capacity to see that the circumstances in which they found themselves—poverty and lacking suitable accommodation—are not necessarily inevitable or unchallengeable (Solnit, 2016). Their presentation conveyed an unyielding sense of pride in the autonomy and empowering nature of their creative work through which the arts gave them the capacity to gaze at the world with different eyes. In English, theatre is called “play,” says Lucy, one of my interlocutors. “I think theatre is a pretext; playing gives us the place from which to create an alternative reality.”



Figure 14: Image of the collective community map of the Achupallas/Manuel Bustos Camp by Centro Cultural Mandrágora. Photograph: the author.

Lucy, like Rubi above, expresses the idea of theatre as a vehicle, a process that can take participants to another place. Theatre and the arts are

articulated as an experience or practice “where change and transformation is registered” (hooks, 2013, p. 169). The participants from *Centro Cultural Mandrágora* embodied this potential. I was given a booklet and the map pictured above by one of the young people who presented at Entepola. This map contains beautiful hand-drawn illustrations of their community. On the bottom left there is list of 13 names, those who made it. This collective depiction of their neighbourhood, apart from noting street names, provides information on key landmarks like schools and shops, meeting places, native flora and fauna. Dotted amongst these are drawings of different people with happy faces. This map depicts an inviting and safe place, not the poverty and misery that is almost always associated with such camps. The *Mandrágora* collective engages in projects of freedom and liberation wherein the participants are empowered to think and act differently in their communities. In doing so they are contributing, as Schutte would argue, to the development of a situated Latin American feminist thinking that emerges from the living conditions of women and girls.

4.4.3 Casa Witralen Rukan and the liberation of cultural spaces

Carolina (pseudonym) from the cultural collective *Casa Witralen Rukan* (‘stand tall’ in Mapudungun,¹⁵ the language of the Mapuche people), is located in Colina, a poor neighborhood 30 kilometers north of Santiago. Interestingly, in Perth, Australia, a leading Aboriginal theatre company is called Yirra Yaakin, which in Noongar also means ‘stand tall’. The sentiment behind ‘standing tall’ with pride and dignity, mediated through culture and the arts, connects across continents. It is echoed by the Noongar dolls-makers in Chapter Three and by Carolina when she says, “We need to make changes to the oppressive regime; our souls must fight.” Stand tall is a powerful message;

¹⁵ Mapudungun, the language of the Mapuche people of the south of Chile <https://es.glosbe.com/arn/es/witralen>.

¹⁶ Murgas: Street carnival. Murga is culture, in the sense that integrates the repertoire of the collective memory (Piñeyría, 2007).

it foregrounds an intention and a standpoint that signals autonomy and action.

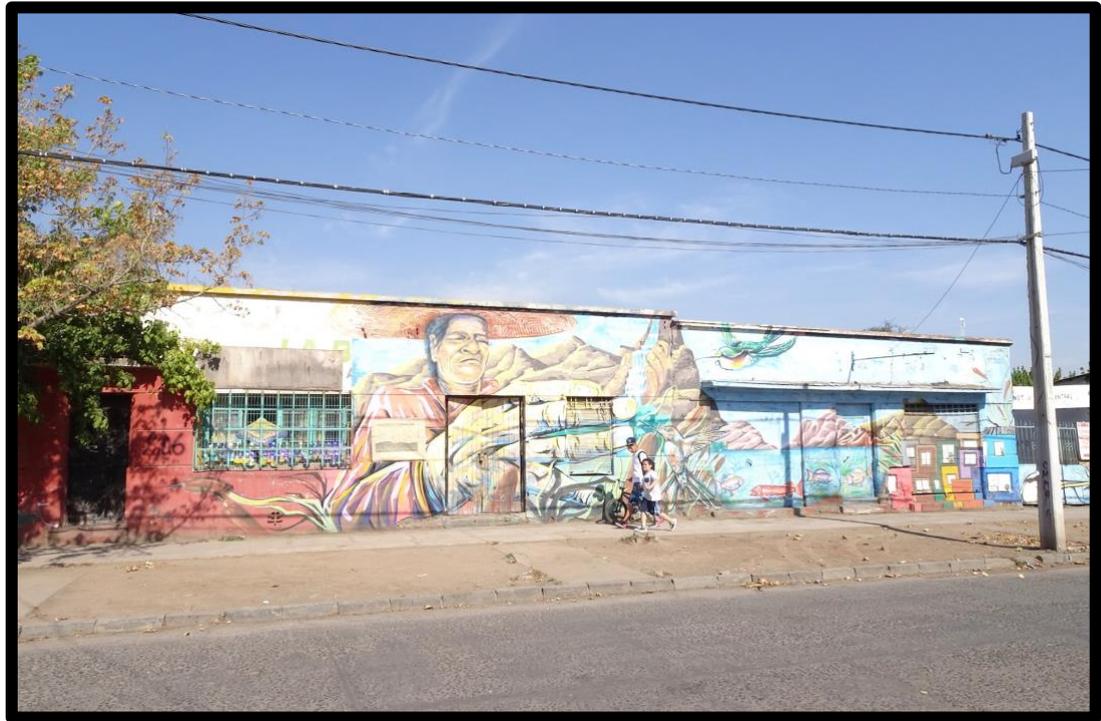


Figure 15: Outside of *Casa Witrallen*. Photograph: the author, taken during a site visit as part of Entepola 2017.

Carolina is one of four women who currently manage and coordinate *Casa Witrallen*, an abandoned house that has been reclaimed as a community cultural space.

There was the necessity to occupy a space from which to open up to the cultural expression in Colina, because there is a political system that does not support [local culture]. The resources that exist for culture here are only for *cultura mercantil* (Carolina).

According to Penelope Glass, the *cultura mercantil*—a phrase I often heard while in Santiago—is used to refer to the cultural production that emerges as part of a commercial and globalised culture and is driven by financial incentives. The term is also used in the context of the competitive arts-and-culture grant system established by the Chilean Government post-dictatorship. Glass explains that, within the grass-roots arts sector in Chile,

there is a shared view that the subsidised system does not support the development of local popular culture. On the contrary, activists argue, the current system drives competition among artists and cultural workers, and the resources continue to favour the rich (Glass, 2018b).

The above position is possibly shared among some cultural workers in Australia, where still, as explained in Chapter One, the subsidised community arts sector readily aligns with government policy. Notwithstanding the chronic underfunding of this sector, there is a web of companies and organisations that have continued to work at the interface between community and art-making for the past 40 years. However, despite or perhaps the survival of some organisations, the politicisation of the sector in the main continues to be highly focused on lobbying for these meagre resources to continue to exist, rather than engaging collectively in art activism or overtly oppositional forms of social change. Those in Australia who are working towards an anti-racist and decolonial practice struggle with the fact that they find themselves within a neoliberal multicultural economy, as will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Entepola has managed to provide a strong structure of continuity outside the system of subsidised funding and that structure has been enabling for individuals and groups who work in different art collectives with local communities. For artists and creators (most of whom have a “day job”), Entepola provides a platform to showcase their creative and activist work, and it is a resource for strengthening networks and developing solidarity. For communities, Entepola offers opportunities for active participation in culture and the arts as well as allowing disenfranchised groups to see their stories represented on stage. In doing so, it can be argued that Entepola offers a different mode of validation for these groups; “validation of knowledge born in struggle” (Santos, 2016b, p. x) as well as broader and more democratic aesthetics. This is in contrast to Australia, where the adoption of creative works into established cultural institutions such as museums and galleries is

considered a significant measure of success (As discussed in Chapter Three, when the Noongar dolls become part of the *String Theory* exhibition).

Despite these differences, what is similar between the subsidized arts systems in Australia and Chile is that both continue to privilege highbrow arts, which are overwhelmingly directed at white middle-class audiences in Australia and the rich in Chile. Nikanor Molinares, a Chilean cultural activist, states in a radio interview that that 73 percent of arts-and-culture grants awarded through the 'open' competitive process are spent in the metropolitan region, and of this, 84 percent is allocated to the seven richest municipalities of the metropolitan area (Molinares, 2017).

The town of Colina is not one of the seven wealthiest municipalities; in fact, it is the opposite. In Colina 10 percent of the population do not have basic services such as water, electricity or sanitation, and 90 percent of the houses are considered overcrowded (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2020). Colina has three military bases and two maximum-security jails. One of these prisons is considered to be among one of the most dangerous in Latin America (Tele 13, 2020). The town is also a long distance from the centre of Santiago and has limited access to public transport. All of these are compounding factors that make Colina a difficult place in which to live, work and access recreational activities, especially for young people.

The idea behind *Casa Witralen* was conceived when a group of young people realised that they had no public spaces in which they could express and practice their local culture. In a short video on the foundation of *Casa Witralen*, these young people articulate why they opted to occupy the site ("Documental Witralen Parte 1," 2012).

At Christmas last year, a group of us came to see it, and a few of us really liked the house. From then on, we decided to occupy it. That is! Let's do it! We have to try it! ("Documental Witralen Parte 1," 2012, 04:12 min).

The project began in 2010 with the idea of having *murgas*,¹⁶ or cultural interventions, in the *poblaciones*. The idea of doing these interventions was to bring a different kind of culture to the shantytowns. A different kind of culture, evidently, to the hegemonic culture that is the dominant culture; the culture that is offered through the TV, the communications giants and forms of the elitist culture, we wanted a more popular form of cultural expression. From this project, the desire of having a space where we could organise ourselves, was born ("Documental Witralen Parte 1," 2012, 04:24 min).

The young people occupied the abandoned house and claimed it as their own "cultural territory."



Figure 16: Interior *Casa Witralen*. A site visit as part of the Entepola Festival. Photograph: the author.

¹⁶ Murgas: Street carnival. Murga is culture, in the sense that integrates the repertoire of the collective memory (Piñeyrúa, 2007).

Pamela (pseudonym), a young Argentinian woman who lives in the small town of Ingeniero Maschwitz, 50 kilometres from city of Buenos Aires, tells a similar story. A group of young people took action. They occupied and transformed a privately owned, unused space and made it public. Today this building houses the *Colectivo Cultural Ingeniero Maschwitz*.¹⁷ Pamela recounted that older people of Maschwitz remembered going to the movies at this site. It served as a meeting place for the community. So, when the building got burnt and later condemned by the council, it become stuck in a legal limbo.

We recognised that it would be better that we take over this place before the municipality grabbed it to do a shopping centre or something else.

I felt like—we had to recover this space; this was not just for me ... We did it so that there was something for the community. I feel there is a necessity to have a space where everyone is welcomed, where everything goes ... everything is decided in assemblies, where everyone can participate, these processes hardly happen anywhere.

The first thing we said was, “This space must be open always.” The place had been closed for so long that when people began to see that it was opened, they began to arrive. The neighbours began to come around, people were bringing food, the volunteer fire brigade helped to take the old locks—people arrived with chainsaws to cut the overgrown trees ... and we did night guards, so the police wouldn’t force us out (Pamela).

In both of these stories, the motivation was the reclamation of private ‘wasted’ spaces and the repossession of these spaces by the community. Carolina used the word *territorio* to name the reclaimed space. This is another

¹⁷ <http://www.colectivo-cultural.com.ar/>

term often used by activists in Chile. Julieta Paredes, a Bolivian feminist, argues that the word *territorio* is a very important concept in the fight for Indigenous rights, and that it is a different term from *tierra*, or land. *Territorio* refers to political relationships and decisions that occur within First Nations contexts (Paredes, 2015, p. 102). In both of these cases, it can be argued that taking the abandoned buildings and the process of occupying them are political acts of resistance to capitalism and its *cultura mercantil* (Venegas, 2014). Carolina and the women who manage *Casa Witrallen* have created a *territorio* from which music, theatre and the visual arts are used as counter-media to deconstruct the *cultura mercantil* and, at the same time they create ways of resisting the hegemony of the capitalist Chilean system (Venegas, 2014).

Casa Witrallen had no utilities; people had to ‘hang’ for electricity (a common practice in poor suburbs, where cable is attached to a main electrical power pole) and negotiate with the church next door to get access to running water. In Maschwitz, the people transgressed the authorities in such a way that they decided to guard it, around the clock, “against” the police. In the process of repossessing vacant buildings, these young people created and sustained anti-capitalist cultural collectives in which to ‘create’, and to ‘be’. They harnessed and galvanised the will of the community. In the process of doing so, they found solidarity, as Pamela recounts above. Both of these buildings were successfully reclaimed and retained by their communities, and they opened to the broader public in 2012.

Five years on, four women coordinate *Casa Witrallen*. Their work is unpaid, and they still have a flat organisational structure that uses the assembly to make decisions, a method that is widespread in the Okupa or Occupy movement in Latin America (Venegas, 2014). Using assembly is a way to reject and critique representational democracy models, which are seen as another manifestation of the capitalist system (Venegas, 2014). All decisions are made as a collective, and each person takes responsibility for a different

aspect of *Casa Witrallen*. The house is available to anyone in the community who needs space for a creative pursuit, and they hold regular art workshops such as poetry, music and photography. The place is often used as a performance venue where locals come to listen to local musicians.¹⁸

We all organise the ‘house.’ We don’t have a [hierarchical] structure; we make decisions together, we debate our points of view. If we disagree, we have the open space amongst all of us to be able to discuss it.

Together we can bring new and better ideas. That’s the point; together we can work on that ("Documental Witrallen Parte 1," 2012, 01:32 min).

In a society where violence against women is naturalised (Peña Axt, Arias Lagos, & Sáez Ardura, 2017), and where overcrowding and limited employment opportunities are pervasive, *Casa Witrallen* offers a safe place for women to come together and develop local networks of support. Catalina says:

We need to make changes to the oppressive regime; our souls must fight. I feel us women are naturally more *aguerridas* [fierce], clearly [the collective cultural work] opens up a different space for women, to be able to get out of the house, to be able to work with another neighbour and say, “I can help you, I can support you with this or that ...” Everyone can recognise that they are valued, not in the economic sense, but as a human being. People give their work; they offer their labour ... (Catalina).

Pamela and Carolina are involved in similar freedom and liberation projects in different geographical regions across Chile and Argentina. The examples above illustrate how the women engage in parallel acts of reclamation to carve spaces from where unique and localised expressions of art and culture emerge. These acts of liberation constitute, as Schutte would

¹⁸ A singer songwriter performs at *Witrallen Rukan*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frGoF4quU1Q>

argue, a way of enacting transformative politics of culture that are both decolonising and grounded in the feminist political movement.

4.4.4 *Hay que sacar la voz*—‘Finding one’s voice’

Lucy (pseudonym) is a young theatre practitioner who has been working alongside Penelope Glass in male prisons. During the course of the interview, Lucy disclosed that she had a difficult childhood. Her mother experienced mental illness, and her conservative father was abusive towards her mother.

I arrived into this space—theatre—and it has been very healing for me. I have acquired tools to be able to make decisions and to be able to *sacar la voz* [find my voice] and say, “I want to do theatre, and I don’t care what you, or Mum thinks. If you wish to support me, fine, I am ok with that.”

I did ballet since I was very young. At home my parents inculcated this idea of femininity ... I needed to sit like a lady at the table; many things that were the established canon of behaviour. Then I started doing theatre, and all of the silencing I had lived at home was difficult to overcome. With the undermining I had experienced at home, I forgot what it was that I wanted to say (Lucy).

Lucy reflects that the experience of domestic violence at home left her with scars. Theatre helped her “to get in touch with a liberating place.” Now, she claims, she has the tools to be in the world because she knows how to use her voice.

I have the capacity to do it. I can use my voice ... I have tools with which to connect with others. This is what I find the most amazing in the work we do in the prison (Lucy).

For Lucy, theatre became a tool with which to break down the patriarchal structures that were imposed on her as child. Using theatre in this context can

be seen as a circuit-breaker, as she decided to pursue community theatre whether her father supported her or not. She is able to find and claim a new place in the world that does not reproduce structural violence.

I can work with and for others, and for myself at the same time. It is not just about working for and by myself and staying in the ‘poor me’ mindset. It is in relation to others that one grows! (Lucy).

The reciprocity and relational aspects of theatre Lucy express above are principles that both Freire and Boal pronounce as essential for a liberating pedagogy(Boal, 1998). This is encapsulated in an iconic phrase used by Boal: “I taught a peasant how to write the word ‘plough’: and he taught me how to use it” (Boal, 1998, p. 19). The creation of a place that can be reciprocal and where people can bring their capacities and experiences is what Lucy describes below:

For me, theatre is a space of freedom—we have spoken a lot about this with the guys [inmates]. We meet each other in freedom, without prejudices, without taboo. It is a space where we can create equality, where we can forge a democratic space, hence an alternative space—an interstice, in relation to what is happening around them ... From this place empowerment emerges ... (Lucy).

In such a complex and highly controlled environment, Lucy and Penelope manage to explore libertarian ideals with the inmates. In a set of extraordinary circumstances and with massive support of security operation, Penelope and Lucy have been able to take *Fenix e Ilusiones*—the prisoner theatre company—out of the prison to perform at Entepola each year. The play they performed in 2017 tackled issues of domestic violence. Most of the men they work with are perpetrators of gender violence; herein lies an incredible ‘space’ that has been created and mediated by theatre where all the actors meet to heal in some way. By using theatre to tackle domestic violence issues with male prisoners, one can argue that Lucy refuses to reproduce the

patriarchal knowledge imposed upon her, because she has come to understand, “The master’s tool will never dismantle the master’s house”—to use the well know phrase by Audre Lorde (Lorde, 2003). Lucy has found a way to free and liberate herself from gender violence and, in the process, she commits to work towards the liberation of others.



Figure 17: The ‘actors’ of *Fenix e Ilusiones* perform at Entepola. On the right, the pink sign reads *Ni Una Menos* or “Not One [woman] Less”, which is a slogan of a feminist movement against gender violence founded in Argentina in 2015. Photograph: the author.

In different parts of the world, a similar emphasis is placed on the importance of finding the interstices—those small places where a different reality can be constructed and where women have the opportunity to find their voice and rehearse for change. Huma Saeeh (2015) reports how Afghan women, after participating in Theatre of the Oppressed workshops over a period of time, found their voices:

One issue became clear to me through my engagement with theatre of the oppressed: Afghan women are not silent victims ... As I was

listening and experiencing the workshops in Kabul, I could not help but keep thinking of a verse by Ahmad Shamlu: 'I am a common pain, cry me out!' It was as if all the women at the workshop bore one pain, and all were united to fight and overcome this pain with one voice (Saeed, 2015, p. 324).

This notion of finding one's voice, mediated by a creative and artistic process that happens when working 'with' others, continues to be an important common denominator of art for social change practice. Javiera, another of my interlocutors said, the arts offer the opportunity to connect and open our sensibilities:

Opening this sensibility channel helps us to connect, to accept and to love oneself ... the arts gives you the possibility to express who you are (Javiera).

4.5 Entepola, a platform for Latin American feminist thinking

Coming back to Australia after being immersed in the Entepola festival was both a relief (I didn't get much sleep for ten days) and also a challenge. I was so energised and inspired by the women I met that I had to be careful not to romanticise the experience. Despite the extraordinary challenges faced by the women I met, the festival seemed to provide a moment of suspension, an instance where things could be different, an interstice from which to imagine a better world. The instances of solidarity, good will and joy I witnessed seemed to carry the festival along, despite the serious and confronting themes that were tackled through the plays we saw and the conversations we had. Scenes of domestic violence, environmental destruction, and intergenerational trauma, along with frivolous and exuberant dance and music performances, were the backdrop of our discussions. Entepola in some ways exemplified the space that Pamela and her friends were looking for, 'a place where everything goes' an uncensored environment where we could 'rehearse for change'.

I found that the methodologies of social theatre deployed by the Entepola festival are enabling and effective forms of art for social change for women in Abya Yala. The festival presented multiple opportunities for women to discuss and develop a feminist practice that is grounded in their own lived experiences and which responds to their specific contexts. By providing opportunities throughout the festival for critical reflection and the deconstruction of knowledge, as well as for the creation of new knowledge, Entepola and their extended work in shantytowns across Chile support Ofelia Schutte's four-fold feminist methodological approach. In so doing, Entepola acts as a conduit to advance "a conceptual home" (as Schutte describes it) for and towards a distinctive Latin American feminist philosophy. Entepola fosters a critical approach to knowledge where *mestiza*, poor, working-class, and 'odd' women have the opportunity to be visible and to be witnessed. Entepola's very existence represents a counter-hegemonic political resistance, first to the dictatorship, then to the notion of *cultura mercantile*, and to the social inequality that is prevalent in Chile. Entepola also facilitated opportunities to connect theory and practice, especially through the *populteatro* sessions.

For over 30 years, Entepola has showcased theatre practice across Latin America. This consistency has given women (over time) the chance to grow and to speak about their projects of freedom and liberation in a way that honours what Schutte describes as freedom for social justice; that is "freedom to live peacefully and creatively" (Schutte, 2011, p. 798). Within the confines of the 10-day festival there was a sense that freedom and liberation were possible. Entepola provided a decolonising space from which to advance a feminist practice. Personally, this experience consolidated the position from which I speak, that is, it empowered me to claim the places of contradictions in which I live (hooks, 2003).

This better prepared me to critically analyse the testimonies of women of colour who live and work across the settler-colonial society of Australia, which I present in the following chapter.

4.6 Summary

Aided by Ofelia Schutte's feminist methodological orientation, this chapter examined the art for social change practice of the Entepola festival and its capacity to support the development of an empowering Latin American feminist practice. It did this by exploring accounts of different projects involving Latin American women artists and activists that were showcased at the Entepola community theatre festival held in Santiago, Chile in February 2017. The chapter voices the experiences of the women as they contextualised and reflected on their involvement in art for social change in their own situated communities.

My interlocutors showed acute political awareness about the intersectional nature of the issues that impact their lives and living conditions. This was reflected in the ways they spoke about their creative practice, the critical lens they applied to taken-for-granted knowledges and their activism.

The women revealed that an empowering practice is a process that requires working creatively within collective structures that apply group decision-making at all levels, organisationally and aesthetically. The capacities to identify complexity, including violence and abuse, and to give oneself permission to connect with others, and to find one's voice, with autonomy were unanimously echoed across my discussions with my interlocutors as key to gaining agency. Further, the relational nature of gaining empowerment was best illustrated by Rubi as she described a group of women with whom she developed theatre as "exploding all together". The 'explosion' is the collective recognition and acceptance of their shared reality and their refusal to be victims. The chapter also argues that the Entepola festival provided a platform for women to 'do' and to 'be', which is essential for advancing a liberatory agenda. By claiming their own *territorios*, which in many cases meant the occupation of unused spaces, the women pushed back against capitalism and hegemonic globalised culture. Throughout the chapter I have argued that art

for social change, situated within Entepola, can be understood as a decolonising practice, because the knowledge created during the process is uniquely grounded in the bodies of those who participate. In this sense, the chapter argues that the creative work of these women offers political resistance, which can be symbolised by the well-known feminist phrase coined by Audre Lorde, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” Their practice is creative, autonomous, collective, and democratic; it emerges from their unique, and situated realities. Their creative process is in itself a subversive act as they develop counter-narratives and disrupt the status quo (Lao-Montes, 2016, p. 17). Finally, the chapter argues that art for social change as promoted by Entepola supports the empowerment of women and is contributing to fostering Latin American feminist thinking, thereby advancing, in some way, towards what Schutte would describe as a distinctive Latin American feminist philosophy.

CHAPTER FIVE

Singing the Women Back Up: Epistemologies of Women of Colour in Art for Social Change

The narrative voice, the teller, is important to critical race theory in a way not understandable by those whose voices are tacitly deemed legitimate and authoritarian. The voice exposes, tells and retells, signals resistance and caring, and reiterates what kind of power is feared most—the power of commitment to change.

—Derrick A. Bell, 1995, p. 907

5. Introduction

Racism and white supremacy are ongoing challenges that people of colour, women in particular, face in the settler-colonial society of Australia. This chapter is based on in-depth interviews with three women leaders in community cultural development or CCD, as it most commonly known in Australia. These women identify themselves as women of colour and are nationally recognised for their contribution, knowledge and experience in art for social change, especially with ethnically diverse communities and people with disabilities across Australia. With more than 20 years' average experience in the community arts sector in Australia, Lena Nahlous and Paula Abood (based in Sydney) and Veronica Pardo (in Melbourne) provide unique epistemological explorations of the connections between art for social change and the empowerment of women. I use their names as all of them explicitly requested to be identified. The insistence on the use of their own names is a mark of their desire not to be silenced and to own their voices; it connects their narratives to emancipatory forms of life-writing as an affirmation of the authority of one's personal experience (Beverley, 2005).

As discussed in previous chapters, often the participants in art for social change projects are women, and they commonly identify as belonging to First Nations, migrant, refugee and other minoritised groups or those living with a disability. Notwithstanding the increased interest in arts-based inquiry and narrative research in postcolonial contexts in recent times, little theorising of art for social change practice has emerged from women practitioners of colour or from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) women in Australia.¹⁹

Following on from Chapter Three's interrogation of Indigenous women's experiences, this chapter aims to develop a more nuanced conceptual and understanding of art for social change from the perspective of women of colour, and those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, who live and work across the complex of social diversity and cultural difference that exists within the settler-colonial society. First, the chapter provides a brief historical context for the racialised nature of migration policies in Australia, then it explores and explores art for social change principles and practices as applied by the interviewees. Further, the chapter examines how my interlocutors construct the meaning of art for social change in relation to the empowerment of women of colour and other marginalised groups, and it explores the precarious nature of this practice. This is illustrated by critically examining two writing projects with Afghan women conducted in different geographical locations, but fundamentally linked to the context of the war on terror. Lena, Paula and Veronica also reflect on the role of the arts, in their multiple forms, as a mechanism for emancipation, and they unpack their personal and lived experiences as the base from which their theories emerge.

¹⁹ The bureaucratic phrase, "culturally and linguistically diverse" (CaLD) has been widely accepted as the preferred term in Australian governmental discourse since the 1990s to refer to non-English-speaking and non-Anglo minority groups. However, the phrase oversimplifies diverse populations, which may reinforce institutional racism and tends to position migrant communities as inferior, implying that they need 'fixing' (Adusei-Asante & Adibi, 2018, p. 75). I use this term hesitantly, in the absence of better one, because the interviewees use the term intermittently.

5.1 *The lucky country? A racialised migration history*

On 15 March 2019, 50 Muslims were massacred while they gathered at a Friday congregational prayer in Christchurch, Aotearoa (New Zealand). The perpetrator was a white supremacist Australian. The initial outpouring of grief and shock, both in Australia and Aotearoa, quickly gave way to critical questions about why and how this act of extreme violence occurred. Australian Senator Patt Dodson, Yawuru Indigenous leader from Broome, Western Australia, stated: “mass murders like Christchurch don’t just happen. First Nations’ peoples ... know the impact of murder wilfully carried out [is] morally justified by hatred of minorities, misplaced power and bullying superiority” (Allam, 2019, para. 4).

Australia has a racialised migration history that goes back to the birth of the nation. Along with the exclusion of Indigenous peoples, the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, most commonly known as the White Australia Policy, embodied a racial identity which declared “Australia for the white man!” (Barton, 2011, p. 17). The White Australia Policy was firmly in place for seven decades. It was slowly dismantled from the mid-to-late 1950s to the 1970s, aided by an unprecedented post-war migration program, with the admission of a progression of racially marked groups from northern, central and southern Europe, and later from the Middle East (Castles, Kalantzis, Cope, & Morrissey, 1990 ; Jayaraman, 2000). The policy was formally put to rest in 1973, when the Whitlam government passed the Racial Discrimination Act, which made it illegal to discriminate against a person based on their race. However, the ideology embedded in this policy has continued to linger, with a marked resurgence after 2001 (Jayaraman, 2000).

Anne Barton, the great-granddaughter of Edmond Barton, Australia’s first prime minister and one of the architects of the White Australia Policy,

offers a critical lens on how the legacies of white privilege continue to be perpetuated and replicated by seemingly “decent folks born into white settler societies,” because:

They are embedded into our institutions, discourses, cultural expression and become ‘normal.’ They draw power from silence and invisibility. They function, in Australia, to perpetuate the defensive project embodied in the White Australia Policy and continually re-enacted by those of us who are a part of the dominant society (Barton, 2011, p. 19).

Similarly, Maria Giannacopoulos argues that it is impossible to declare that the racist ideology entrenched in the White Australia Policy vanished by simply abolishing a particular piece of legislation while the system of law from which this policy emerges continues to be perpetuated.

Since Australian law is born from colonisation and continues to work in line with colonial interest, racism must be seen as a product of this colonial system and not simply as the product of bad laws (Giannacopoulos, 2011, p. 4).

By the 1970s it was clear that the radically exclusionary aims of the White Australia Policy had not succeeded. Diversity in the ethnic make-up of Australia persisted and slowly expanded, and these non-white communities were not assimilated into a supposedly singular and superior Australian culture and tradition (Castles et al., 1990 ; Gunew & Rizvi, 1994). This enduring cultural difference forced successive governments, both Liberal and Labor, into the articulation of different policies that could move the discourse from exclusion to assimilation and, finally, to a more palatable doctrine of ‘managing’ the growth of ethnic populations, their needs, and the increasing power of the ethnic lobby (Castles et al., 1990). This eventually became known as multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism, which by no means has been a coherent or stable state policy, has been the subject of numerous critiques (Khan, Wyatt, & Yue, 2014). Stephen Castles et al. consider that “multiculturalism remains an ambiguous and ephemeral phenomenon in Australian politics” and that it has failed to deliver the cultural pluralism that it promised (1990 p. 78). In fact, the authors argue that the multiculturalism doctrine has not challenged the underlying racist and exclusionary ideology of Australian immigration policies and, in the main, has served to mask the fundamental ideology of white supremacy.

Ghassan Hage, in his popular text *White Nation*, further argues that “many of those who position themselves as ‘multicultural’ and anti-racist are merely deploying a more sophisticated fantasy of White supremacy” (1998, p. 23). That is, they uphold the ultimate illusion that the policy of multiculturalism was an institutional ‘gift’ to non-white migrants on behalf of the nation, and that, regardless of difference, it remains white. That is, a symbolic space of power and control over ethnic ‘others’ (Hage, 1998). Hage is adamant that the policy of multiculturalism was conceived from a white nation’s fantasy framework that did not acknowledge that “the spread of culturally diverse social forms and processes was happening regardless of assimilation”, nor that if the “monocultural Australian mould” did not change, it would have thwarted the capacity of government to manage social complexity (Hage, 1998, p. 236).

In response to Hage’s argument, Giannacopoulos presents a critique from a legal and political framework, contending that, although Hage carefully considers Australia’s racial immigration history, his argument is one that pathologises the state. That is, Hage attributes human characteristics to the state and in so doing disregards “the [white] colonial structuring dimension of Australian law that generates the enabling condition for ‘Australia’” (2011, p. 1). In other words, according to Giannacopoulos, Hage firstly “exculpates the system while appearing to be critical of it” and secondly, by pathologising the

state, he “places the institutional violence that founds and maintains the Australian state out of view” (2011, p. 11).

It is within this contested terrain that multiculturalism has become the official way to acknowledge the ethnic diversity of contemporary Australian society (Khan, 2015a). It has allowed, as demonstrated above, for the expression of a more critical and anti-racist discourse of Australian immigration policies and the interrogation of the make-up of Australian cultural identity. However, in some equal measure, multiculturalism has also functioned to contain the expression of more nuanced aspects of cultural difference and has curtailed the voices of those belonging to less powerful ethnic groups (Castles et al., 1990). Notwithstanding this, multiculturalism opened the way for the development of new social and cultural policies. On the one hand, by providing ethnic minorities with better access to social services, it has been seen as a step forward towards social and economic fairness. On the other hand, Robert Mason suggests that, rather than considering migrants and refugees as “a cosmopolitan acknowledgement of shared humanity”, the multicultural project, at its core, was designed to ensure that they did not become an economic burden on the nation (2014, p. 551).

Conversely, Raja Jayaraman (2000) suggests that multiculturalism highlighted something that had existed on the continent since Aboriginal occupation: the cultural and ethnic diversity of Australia. At the time of colonisation, the continent was occupied by more than 250 distinct language groups with over 500 different dialects (Dudgeon et al., 2010). Thus, the official recognition of multiculturalism was seen as a significant shift away from the White Australia Policy and its overtly exclusionary practices towards Aboriginal people and non-white migrants. Further, Jayaraman goes on to argue that multiculturalism has caused further social division amongst different migrant communities by obscuring class differences within and between ethnic groups. That is, the policy enabled whiteness to shift and extend to include certain groups and not others, while at the same time has

continued to exclude Aboriginal people from this model of accounting for ethnic diversity (Gunew & Rizvi, 1994; Jayaraman, 2000).

5.1.1 Multicultural policy: The Australia Council and community arts

While it can be said that state-driven multicultural policies enabled a “multicultural canon in the making” (Schechner, 1991), manifesting in a proliferation of ‘ethnic’ festivals and ‘world music’ events, these were predominantly shaped by arts policies that emanated from the Australia Council for the Arts. What is more, the trajectory of Australia Council’s multicultural policies have been characterised by a history of internal debate ranging from resistance to acceptance as it gradually shifted from policies of integration in the 1970s towards multiculturalism in the 1990s (Blonski, 1994). As community arts practices and the policy of multiculturalism began to intersect, a strong connection developed; not surprisingly, as community arts practices have always been associated with working with and across difference (Khan, 2015a).

The flowering of officially sanctioned arts and cultural activities helped fill the “national imaginary of multiculturalism” through an explosion of colour, food, street parades and carnivals (Castles et al., 1990 p. 79). The celebratory aspects of multiculturalism were happening in the public domain, not inside the walls of prestigious cultural institutions, thus painting a picture of a government’s desire to promote and praise cultural difference at the grass-roots and on the peripheries, without having to tackle the cultural exclusion at the heart of the cultural establishment. Undeniably though, ‘multicultural arts’ became a legitimate platform for many artists and groups to express their contemporary realities, some of which were linked to social justice agendas, while also allowing the state to showcase its rhetoric on the economic and cultural ‘benefits’ of multiculturalism (Gunew & Rizvi, 1994).

A continual point of unresolved tension within the structural parameters of the Australia Council has been its persistence in maintaining a narrow aesthetic of artistic difference. The categories of ‘ethnic art’ (1970s) or multicultural arts (1980s and beyond) (Grostal & Harrison, 1994) have been perpetually associated with community arts, folk and traditional art, not with contemporary arts, the Council’s preferred area of responsibility, making it easy to position these artistic practices as outside of its remit (Blonski, 1994). Anne Dunn, who was the deputy chair of the Australia Council during the 1990s, acknowledged that multicultural arts were often portrayed as “amateur, unprofessional and more about welfare than the arts” (Dunn, 1991, p. 1). The official multicultural arts canon was limited and unable to ‘accommodate’ the many art practices perceived as traditional arts were in fact contemporary expressions or part of classical non-Western traditions (Blonski, 1994). Many of these ‘multicultural artists’ were caught between multiple cultural identities—expressing “cultural fractures, ideological contradiction, and crumbling national and ethnic myths” (Schechner, 1991, p. 11). As a result, many classically trained artists from non-European traditions could not find a platform of expression anywhere else but in the community arts field (Kalantzis & Cope, 1994).

This reveals that Australia’s multicultural policies failed to decentre the monolithic cultural paradigm that was embedded in the Australia Council during the 1970s and 1980s. In the early 1990s the Council embarked, yet again, on another policy shift but this time it was considered to be a “profound cultural change” (Blonski, 1994, p. 193). The policy statement “arts for a multicultural Australia” was delivered with the commitment that “Council now recognises the importance of tapping the wealth of talent that cultural diversity offers us” (Dunn, 1991, p. 1). This is consistent with Rimi Khan’s (2015a) argument that, over time, programs based on ideas of multiculturalism “formed part of a nation building project that sought to redefine national identity in plural terms” (Khan, 2015a, p. 63). That is, a nation that not only

recognises its ethnic diversity but also values the contribution that cultural difference can make to the nation-state.

A significant policy document that encapsulates the idea of re-imagining the nation as a pluralistic society was Australia's first national cultural policy, *Creative Nation*, launched in 1994, as mentioned in Chapter One. This policy not only linked multiculturalism with Australia's national cultural identity (Khan et al., 2014) but also shifted the state narrative to "one which sought to include non-white Australians in the national project" (R. Hawkins, 2014, para. 8). The policy did this, in part, according to Hawkins, by positioning *Creative Nation* as an economic policy (2014). In this new paradigm, culture was considered essential to the nation's financial success by redefining Australia as "being open to the world" (Australian Government, 1994, para. 10) and by broadening the definition of arts and culture to include different and 'popular' forms of cultural expression such as television and film, new technologies, radio, community-based art and libraries. *Creative Nation* aligned with the values synonymous with a plural nation. However, this national cultural policy was short-lived. It was shelved in 1996 with the defeat of the Keating government. Arts and cultural policies reverted back to "reinscribing an elitist and exclusionary model on national culture" (R. Hawkins, 2014, para. 14).

Ultimately, what has been echoed by many scholars is that the rhetoric of a "brave new multicultural nation" (Perera, 2006a, para. 9) did not deliver the systemic and structural changes required to remove inequalities (Castles et al., 1990). Unsurprisingly, multiculturalism as it was conceived in the 1970s has been in decline for the past decade, not only in Australia but also around the world (Papastergiadis, 2012). This has been attributed to a rise in conservative policies as well as the complexities associated with a much more fluid and heterogenous reality of what cultural difference means in contemporary Australia (Khan et al., 2014). In response to the apparent failure of multicultural policies, including that they have "legitimised a retreat into

culturally and physically separate minority communities” (Vertovec, 2010, p. 90) and that the practice has sometimes fostered, migrants’ reluctance to integrate, a new set of counter-policies have emerged around the globe. From initiatives couched under the banner of fostering community cohesion (Vertovec, 2010) to nationalist border protection legislation enshrined in white sovereignty, as seen in Australia, these conservative trends are on the rise (Perera, 2002).

This perhaps explains the contradiction that, at the pinnacle of multicultural policy implementation during the mid-1990s (Gunew & Rizvi, 1994), Australia experienced an upsurge of white supremacy, together with an anti-refugee political rhetoric that has endured to the present day. The combination of the rise of the openly racist and populist politician Pauline Hanson and the speed with which global whiteness spread through the internet increased the “racial violence and racial terror” directed towards non-white migrants and refugees (Perera, 2006a, para. 8). Perera reminds us that this upsurge needs to be understood as part of the ongoing racialised history during which entrenched colonial racial taxonomies and classifications have been regularly “reworked and redeployed”, affecting different groups of brown and black bodies (Perera, 2006a, para. 9).

Two events further illustrate the point above. In the weeks leading up to the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, the *Tampa* and the Children Overboard affairs, both involving the arrival of refugees by boat, transpired. The Norwegian freighter *MV Tampa* carrying over 400 rescued Afghan asylum seekers, was refused entry to Australian waters in August. The Children Overboard incident involved Iraqi asylum seekers being falsely accused by the government of the day of throwing their children into the ocean to secure a rescue operation by an Australian naval ship. These events unleashed a series of political manoeuvres and a media frenzy that has branded these events as defining moments for how race discourse has been reconfigured in contemporary Australia. They are further explained in section

5.4.1 as they form the backdrop of two women's projects that are showcased later in this chapter: The Afghan Women's Dobaiti Poetry Project and the Afghan Women's Writing Project. The former was highlighted by Paula Abood as an example of her art for social change practice in the context of the Islamophobia that both produced and was exacerbated by these events.

Given the ongoing manifestations of racism in Australian's migration policy and practices, it is hardly surprising that the women I interviewed underline their personal experiences of growing up during the 1970s and 1980s as being marked periodically by racism and other forms of discrimination, both overt and indirect. They speak about the insidious ways in which white privilege is perpetuated by powerful forces of socialisation and the wilful means used by their beneficiaries to maintain the status quo (DiAngelo, 2018). Their work with communities is located at the juncture of denouncing, making visible, and connecting their creative practice with the structural roots of oppression (Ledwith, 2007). In the next section I introduce my interlocutors.

5.2 Identity, naming and the question of self-positioning

Our counternarrative
boundary-spanners, bilingual, bicultural, biliterate
filled with stories, proverbs, lullabies, bible verses
cuentos, corridos, canciones, comedias, novelas
poetry in motion

—María del Carmen Salazar, 2017, p. 433

Common threads run through the conversations with Paula, Lena and Veronica. They convey an awakening to feminism and express a sense of familiarity with the experiences of marginalisation, exclusion and being 'othered' in their early years. They share an understanding of the multiple intersectional powers that give rise to inequalities in our society (Carbado,

Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013, p. 305) and an awareness of how colonialism is being perpetuated and recycled (Ware, 2015). Similarly, these women are articulate, educated and capable of making their own stories visible by deploying testimonial narratives that link their personal struggles to the much broader struggle of other women of colour in Australia (Beverley, 2005).

Paula was born in Australia and identifies as an Arab feminist with a history of critical thinking on issues of race and racism:

My mother was a feminist. My grandmother was a feminist.
I've always identified very strongly as a feminist, but not just a feminist generalist, but an Arab feminist ...

My mother, because she endured so much racism, was onto it all the time, and protected us. Well, kind of alerted us to it, so that we didn't internalise it (Paula).

Veronica was born in Uruguay and identifies as a 'culturally and linguistically diverse woman' from a working-class background whose parents did not speak English on arrival.

I migrated here when I was five ... I grew up in a very impoverished neighbourhood in Melbourne where it was predominantly migrant families also mixed with quite working-class, and long-term unemployed [white] Australians.

At 14, I don't know how, but I discovered feminist writing, and I began to read a whole range of feminist writers. I found myself compelled and completely captivated by this voice, this idea that my experiences as a woman are part of a political superstructure that's to be understood ...

And of course, feminist thinking leads you into all sorts of political movements, so then you understand human-rights issues; you understand power, oppression, you understand privilege (Veronica).

Lena identifies as a Lebanese woman and as Arab Australian. The racism she experienced growing up had a profound impact on the political consciousness she developed as a young woman, and she attributes the impetus to collaborate with others to counter the mainstream narrative and the negative stereotypes about Lebanese people to the lack of cultural representation of ‘people like me’.

not seeing myself represented, and not seeing my family represented, except in the segments on the news about the war, or about gang rapes, or about September 11, or terrorism ...

I remember the images of the civil war, these were the only images that I saw in the public domain, when I was growing up, of Lebanon ...

At university I became involved in student activism ... [we developed] a CCD project for NESB,²⁰ CaLD, people of colour, and First Nations ... to give them a space in this magazine to create content, whether it was music, poems, writing or photography. This was in the ‘90s, and it was very politicising for me. It was life-changing ... it was probably the first time I talked to all these other people who'd experienced similar kinds of racism to me. [It was] really transformational ... sitting together, working together, creating work together, music together, poetry together ... And saying, “Yes! I've had that experience too” (Lena).

The commitment and necessity to work with and across other minoritised groups as a way to combat systemic racism is reflected in Mason's view that “Migrants' recognition of shared vulnerability across multicultural divisions deepens their capacity to form coalitions of like-minded groups” (Mason, 2014, p. 559). The solidarity with the experiences of people who have been marginalised and excluded emerges from the depth of the interviewee's

²⁰ NESB: Non-English-Speaking background

lived experiences and from the realisation and recognition that the microaggressions contained in contemporary racism are insidious (A. K. Fisher, Moore, Simmons, & Allen, 2017). It is often the case that individuals apportion blame to themselves rather than understanding that these microaggressions and discriminatory practices are largely based on broader and systemic structures that are designed to invalidate and deny the reality and experiences of a person of colour (A. K. Fisher et al., 2017). Veronica clearly illustrates this point below:

I have to say that, for a long time, I would persist in this kind of narrative, this fiction of my own life that I created, as others do, that I did not experience racism in this country. I accepted that other people experience racism, but I could not identify racism in my life. I was really fixated with this idea for a long time. Of course, I didn't understand indirect racism and indirect discrimination ... I had to also counter a very powerful narrative within my family, which is that we came here for opportunities, and so, if you're then describing your opportunities as a kind of racist oppression, then it brings into question the whole mythology of migration (Veronica).

Veronica's 'fiction' is indeed a big part of the Australian migration story. "Narratives of economic development and escape from inequality are at the core of the national identity" (Mason, 2014, p. 551). While the Australian multicultural model has often been exalted as an international success (Smolicz, 1995), Mason reminds us that the multicultural project was designed so that migrants would gain economic independence as quickly as possible, saving the state any economic responsibility for their welfare (2014).

As Paula, Veronica and Lena come to understand how the inherent inequalities of their subjective positions intersect and overlap, they articulate the political position in which they ground their work. This involves making a conscious decision to form broad alliances of solidarity with all of those who

experience discrimination and with those who work against the perpetuation of exploitation:

I probably have more a political community than an ethno-specific community, and my political community really reflects a very solid anti-racist, anti-homophobic, anti-transphobic, anti-misogynist, anti-patriarchal, anti-ableist, anti-classist. That's constant work (Paula).

Paula's reference to the ongoing work that is required at the intersection of multiple inequalities has been enunciated by women of colour and Black feminists for a few decades (Anzaldúa, 2012; Eddo-Lodge, 2017; hooks, 2015; Mohanty, 2003; Paredes, 2015). Being a race-aware feminist means seeing clearly how race and gender are interwoven when it comes to exploitation (Eddo-Lodge, 2017). This has implications for art for social change.

5.2.1 Race-aware feminists and art for social change

Feminists of colour doing art for social change recognise the significance of raising intersectional consciousness, and they validate the strengths and lived experiences of the women with whom they work. This includes, among other things, challenging the pervasive construction of women who are involved in community arts programs as disadvantaged, because this term has become a synonym for broken, weak, victim, and poor. These kinds of categorisations are systemic, but often bestowed by white women upon women of colour, and they only contribute to the further marginalisation of women of colour by stripping them of their agency (hooks, 2015). The political imperative of art for social change practice informed by a feminist agenda means speaking out and confronting injustice in order to build political awareness, while at the same time ensuring reflexivity by examining one's own positioning, values and political beliefs (hooks, 2015).

Paula recounts a project based on storytelling where she witnessed how Sierra Leone women offered support and solidarity to their fellow women. The

Western Sydney Health Service had asked Paula to plan a project with newly arrived Sierra Leone refugee women in the early 2000s. At their first meeting, as Paula entered the room, she found more than 40 women who had gathered together. She remembered them saying ‘We’ve just left refugee camps and the war zone. I just saw my husband killed. We never mourned our dead. We had to run’. Being fully aware of the violent and difficult circumstances from which these women escaped, Paula carefully considered an activity that would not retraumatise the women. However, as they began sharing their stories, a few of them showed signs of distress.

What was amazing was, when the women started telling some of their stories, some women just collapsed on the ground and cried, and all the women would start singing them back up. They *sang* the women back up (Paula).

By the end of the gathering, the women decided to continue meeting to pursue the storytelling workshops. They decided they did not want the Western psychological model of one-on-one trauma counselling ‘I don’t want to sit with a stranger. I want to tell my story to heal. I want to tell my story to this group of women,’ Paula recalled the women saying. A series of workshops in three different locations ensued, culminating in professional recording and a publication called *The Book of the Living*. The strength of the women to share their painful stories, to be vulnerable, and to support each other by *singing themselves back up* informed every aspect of the project.

Despite the satisfactions of these individual projects, all three interlocutors are conscious that they occupy a complex place as women of colour doing social justice and anti-racism work with minoritised communities. This is heightened by the fact that their roles are inevitably bound up with state-sponsored arts activities. That is, these women are precariously embedded in a neoliberal multicultural economy through the infrastructure of the agencies within which they work. Most of their work is

funded through state and federal agencies which tend to have particular social and/or economic agendas, often articulated through catch-phrases such as ‘social cohesion’, ‘rural revitalisation’ and ‘access and participation’, to name a few. Therefore, community arts work is often framed around state-sanctioned aims.

However, as Rimi Khan argues, there are many kinds of impacts resulting from arts programs some of which are not always predictable. Within the neoliberal framework, individuals are involved in a fluid and continual negotiation of their identities and sense of belonging in relation to racialised and gendered power structures. This means that, even within the neoliberal multicultural project, there is room “for individual, ethical practices of art-making and political expression to take place” (Khan, 2015a, p. 89). This fluidity poses interesting challenges to race-aware feminists and organisations who frame their artistic work in terms of promoting social change while working within government-sanctioned programs. On the one hand, they must articulate their work by responding to the priorities of the government of the day, and on the other hand, they must navigate community expectations and their own commitment to challenging the structural inequities that exist in the arts and cultural industries.

In either case, race-aware art for social change workers create opportunities to ‘transgress and subvert’ state agendas by ceding power and decision-making to those with whom they work. This involves facilitating a process where “culture is used as a resource in community arts to provide a means by which people intervene in, rather than simply seek inclusion in, official discourses” (Khan, 2015a, p. 92), as illustrated in the projects showcased in Chapter Three.

In the next section I discuss how Paula, Veronica and Lena articulate art for social change as a method to defy the dominant and systemic web that attempts to render difference silent and invisible.

5.3 Art for social change, self-representation and the power of one's own story

When I started to hone-in on narrative as the form, things started to change, because as soon as you start to tell stories, other things happen ... That's where I discovered the power of voice ... storytelling, and authenticity, and being able to present those narratives in a really authoritative way: "These are my stories. This is my life. This is what happened to me, nobody gets to rewrite these things.

—Veronica Pardo, 2017

The feminist and emancipatory movements of the 1960s and 1970s helped to reinvigorate life-history methods and the study of personal narratives (Chase, 2005). Since then, there have been numerous scholars who have written critically about the capacity of story and narrative to reclaim one's own power (Ibrahim Ali, 2014; Briggs, 2011; Buker, 1987; Fernandes, 2017c; Rappaport, 1995; Wood et al., 2015). Further, feminist academics argue that storytelling is a political act, "because it is through sharing personal narratives that we can speak about political experiences" (Buker, 1987, p. 45; Ledwith, 2007) and it is also subversive because of the transformational capacity contained in the methods of storytelling (Ibrahim Ali, 2014). Nonetheless, the proliferation of storytelling and its instrumentalisation in recent times highlights the way in which storytelling can also be used to reproduce dominant relations of power (Fernandes, 2017c), as cautioned in relation to the use of testimony in the previous chapter.

Veronica argues that stories can be highly subversive because they are an outlet for affirmative epistemological exploration, and they have the power to transform and transgress often entrenched values and views in a moment:

You invite audiences in, who have a set of values and a set of attitudes and expectations about the work—particularly when you put the label ‘disabled’ on it—they come in and immediately there's an invitation to subversion because you take those people's expectations and you can, potentially, completely subvert them in a moment. You can spend decades talking to people, and trying to get them to change their attitudes, or you can have a moment's transformative experience (Veronica).

Similarly, Lena makes the point that art for social change methodology is a real way to achieve self-representation, while at the same time, the process is intrinsically collaborative, as described in Chapter One.

Community and cultural development is definitely a vehicle to be represented, and to do it on your own terms, in your own voice, from your own perspective, and to not have to be mediated through the white lens ... You're the subject. You have the power to create and do it as you want to, and that is incredibly important because there's nothing worse than someone making work about you that you feel isn't representing you fully (Lena).

This is supported by the scholar Pulen Segalo, who argues that:

the creation of space and opportunity for people to tell their own stories and make meaning of their life experiences is a step towards emancipation and a way to reduce unequal power relations that exist when people are spoken for (Segalo, 2016, p. 259).

Art for social change methodology is based on stories. It always begins with the personal experiences of the participants, and it goes beyond the individual story, as the different narratives are interpreted in a variety of creative ways and in different forms. At its core, art for social change embeds collective narrative. It affords the possibilities to individuals and communities

who do not feel represented in the mainstream narrative to communicate and affirm their stories and their lived experiences in imaginative ways. That is, those stories are mediated through art. And in doing so, art for social change creates the chance not just to *tell* the story but also the opportunity to reimagine those stories, affirm authorship, claim power over one's own experiences, and uphold agency over how these stories are communicated.

As a decolonial and liberation method, the telling of these stories is part of the process of digesting the past and its connection with the present, connecting the personal and the political and seeking healing and justice (Quayle & Sonn, 2019, p. 11).

Susan Finley (2005) suggests that the interest in narrative and arts-based inquiry in post-colonial contexts is one of several concerns within qualitative research that have emerged in the milieu of “a reflexive turn that marked the social sciences” (Finley, 2005, p. 682) because:

Art, in any of its various forms, provides media for self-reflection, self-expression, and communication between and among creators and audiences. Performing social change begins with artful ways of seeing and knowing ourselves and the world in which we live (Finley, 2005, p. 692).

Equally, the effective and unique use of the arts to promote social justice through political engagement has been documented and recognised by activists, advocates, and researchers (Finley, 2005; A. Lewis & Doyle, 2008). In many cases it is argued as being a much more effective tool than traditional kinds of models of community development (Abood et al., 2017).

Veronica considers that art for social change is a rare opportunity for individuals to affirm their lived experiences:

There are very few platforms that enable you just to hold that space and say, “This is my history, this is my retelling of it, and you can like it or dislike it, but you don't get to challenge it” (Veronica).

However, while art for social change can work very well with storytelling and narrative inquiry when practiced with an intentional and self-determined framework, as illustrated in Chapter Three, Lena, Paula and Veronica warn about the proliferation of ‘poor’ practice. This is characterised, in particular, as occurring when stories are ‘taken’ from participants and then interpreted in a way that takes away their agency. Lena recounted a project early in her career with a local council located in outer-metropolitan Sydney, home to a large and diverse population of non-Anglo migrants. As far as she knew, there had not been a project like this in New South Wales before, one that dealt with Arab culture and stories in an intimate exploration of the domestic realm. Lena and her co-organiser found themselves in difficult negotiations with their project partners, who had particular assumptions about what the project was to be about.

Our partner [the local government] kept trying to push the food aspect, and in a way that white culture does in Australia, reducing us to being food. It was all about food, but it wasn't about food in a tokenistic ‘come and eat our food’ way. We were like, ‘No, we're not doing that!’ We had all of these frictions and disagreements and negotiations. It was not easy. They didn't quite get why we wouldn't just make it all about food from the angle of introducing non-Arabs to Arab food, and try and get all the foodies in. On the one hand, it *was* all about food, but about how the sounds and smells of food-making evoked memories and stories of homeland and culture. We needed to represent this on our own terms, in our own voice (Lena).

In order to maintain the integrity of the project and the willingness of the participants, both culturally and aesthetically, Lena had to contest against

institutional power. This example, about how different interests and power relations are negotiated, is not uncommon in community arts practice.

Sujatha Fernandes's scholarly work is a timely reminder that storytelling has not been exempt from a neoliberal takeover (Fernandes, 2017a). "Tell your story!" has become a catchphrase in many industries, including self-help, leadership and marketing (Fernandes, 2017a, p. 2). Alongside it, there has been a proliferation of narrative research institutions that teach programs on 'how to tell your story' and investigate the benefits of storytelling in trauma, depression and community development.

The following section explores the genesis of two projects: the Afghan Women's Dobaiti Poetry Project in Western Sydney, Australia, and the Afghan Women's Writing Project (AWWP), which was conducted online with Afghan women and facilitators from the United States. The selection of these projects began during the interview with Paula Abood, who referred to the Afghan Women's Dobaiti Poetry Project, a project she worked on in 2004, as an example of the development of agency and self-determination in Afghan women. The Afghan Women's Writing Project is a case study analysed and critiqued in Sujatha Fernandes's book *Curated Stories* (2017). It seems an opportune time to look at these projects together and discuss the conceptualisation of art for social change from the vantage point of the women of colour at the centre of this Chapter.

5.4 The Afghan Women's Dobaiti Poetry Project and the Afghan Women's Writing Project (AWWP)

On the surface, these two projects have many similarities: both claim the empowerment of Afghan women as a key aim and outcome, and both utilise literary texts and writing as the creative medium to achieve this. Similarly, both projects received state financial support: the AWWP had United States Government investment, NGO support, and philanthropic investment

(Fernandes, 2017a) while the Women's Dobaiti Poetry Project had Australian government support through the Australia Council for the Arts and the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts (Abood & Sarwar, 2006). Nevertheless, the ways in which these projects have been framed, conceptualised, and delivered, are significantly different.

5.4.1 Afghan Women's Dobaiti Poetry Project

I was working with an Afghan women's group in Bankstown during the *Tampa*, the gang rapes in Sydney, the Children Overboard, the 'Race Election,' and September 11th. That project evolved because of all ... the aggression, the racism, the violence, and the white supremacist discourse (Paula).

The *Tampa* story dominated both public and political conversations. It became exacerbated by the Children Overboard affair, an incident involving another asylum-seeker boat that occurred only a few weeks later, on 7 October 2001. The Australian government released photographs purporting to show that Iraqi asylum seekers had thrown their own children overboard to instigate a rescue operation by the Australian naval ship *Adelaide* (Rose, 2016). Although this claim was later proven to have been fabricated for political gain (Raschella, 2013), the Government and the media largely constructed the arrival of these 'unauthorised' asylum-seeker boats to Australia as a national crisis that threatened the nation's "sovereignty" (O' Doherty & Augoustinos, 2008, p. 577). Suvendrini Perera suggests that the fervour with which this crisis was handled by politicians and the media served to re-enact a tale of a "colonial naval adventure", one which is deeply entrenched in the Australian national narrative, "its contemporaneity only explicable in an age where imperial frameworks shape our understanding of the world, strenuously as we may disown them" (Perera, 2002, p. 26).

The *Tampa* and Children Overboard affairs were defining moments in Australia's recent immigration history. These events unleashed a virulent national border-protection discourse. "The phobias and hatreds that have emerged in Australian public life in the spring of 2001 open the door to a much older storehouse of images, narratives and representations" (Perera, 2002, p. 26). All of these were reinforced by Prime Minister John Howard when he pronounced, "We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come" ("Election Speeches. John Howard, 2001.," 2019, para. 66). This political stance resonated with the public in such a way that John Howard won a seemingly unwinnable Federal election in 2001. Australia quickly followed the United States in the global war on terror, placing multicultural policies under a new level of scrutiny in this context. Racial vilification of Muslims in Australia, which had further intensified after the September 11 attacks on the United States, increased. And for the existing Afghan community in Western Sydney, the outcome of these events become toxic, "The community was targeted as if they were the enemy", affecting women and girls in particular because of the visibility of their garments (Abood & Sarwar, 2006, p. 13).

On 8 November 2001 a group of Indigenous, migrant and refugee women gathered at the University of Technology in Sydney for the Women Reporting Violence forum. Responding to the silencing and violence refugee women were experiencing at that time, April Pham, one of the organisers, said:

During the last four months, Australia has spiralled out of control ... The issue of race was brought to the forefront of political debate at both the state and federal level, where refugees, Arabs, Muslims and anyone of difference—in particular migrant and refugee women—were verbally and physically assaulted, their identity and religion questioned, their safety questioned and their voice silenced ... In the hysteria, women's voices are being silenced (Deathscapes.org., 2001).

These women gathered as a form of rebellion. They spoke out, shared their views and opinions, critiqued the media and the politicians for their collusion with the escalation of racist rhetoric, and most importantly, they created a space of safety and solidarity to make sense of the events and articulate collective strategies to respond to and manage the violence perpetrated against them. When we understand that, for some of the women who attended the forum, the Islamophobia they were experiencing was compounded by the trauma of war, then the active creation of safe places becomes an even more imperative response because, as Paula suggested, “violence can often strip people of their voice”. Therefore, the act of coming together to tell stories, to create, to express one’s shared experience becomes urgent.

There are many of us who have come from the rubble of war.
Sometimes, the only way to express emotional outrage at what has happened to us, to our country, is through poetry and stories (Sarwar, 2006, p. 21).

It is at this juncture that the Afghan Women’s Dobaiti Poetry Project emerged, as a response to the political and personal necessities of a group of Afghan women. While the genesis of the project, as Paula alluded to above, “lay in the global events that have both defined and disrupted the lives of Afghan people over the last three decades” (Abood & Sarwar, 2006, p. 11), its creative expression emerged from the specific situation of a group of Afghan women living in the suburbs of southwest and western Sydney in 2004.

*I miss you mother, I am alone
That I should be so sick for my home
If only you knew what I have gone through
Then you would hurry to see me too*²¹

²¹ One of several poems created by Rukhshana Sarwar, Zahera Noor, Sediqa Anwari, Toorpikai Hashemi, Nooria Razban, Nadera Hakimi, Aqila Hassani, Lailuma Reza, Nabila Mushrif, Samila Hatami, Aqila Reza, Latifa Ahmadzai, Habiba Shafaq, Nasima Rafat and Hadisa Aymaq (quoted in Abood, 2010, p. 40).

These Afghan women were being constructed as victims or foes while the public was “bombarded with the burqa-clad woman whose silence and anonymity are insisted upon, so that her ‘rescue’ underscores the imperial script” (Abood & Sarwar, 2006, p. 11).

An endeavour like the Dobaiti Project, which centred poetry as a form of collective expression and allowed the women to exercise their voices and challenge those images, was in itself a radical act.

*Filled with joy like a bud bursting with life
My heart beats quickly like a small bird learning to fly
A tableau emerges before my very eyes
A season of beauty, it must be springtime*²²

A project like this was also a basic human act of coming together; the women gathered to share their day-to-day experiences. They mobilised to write poetry as a way to connect with their culture and to explore the experiences of dislocation and war, as well as the impact of these events on their contemporary realities (Abood, 2006). Or perhaps this project simply created the space to find solace and solidarity while trying to make sense of the ongoing “racialised punishment” experienced by many refugees and asylum seekers in Australia (Perera, 2005, p. 34).

While cultural mediation is key to community cultural work, it is crucial that the layers that give voice to culturally complex expression are not reduced to only being stories against war, or about the ‘other’, but read as allegories for living, for enabling collective action for social change, for agitating for a more just and humane world (Abood, 2014, p. 37).

²² Sarwar et al., quoted in Abood, 2010, p. 40.

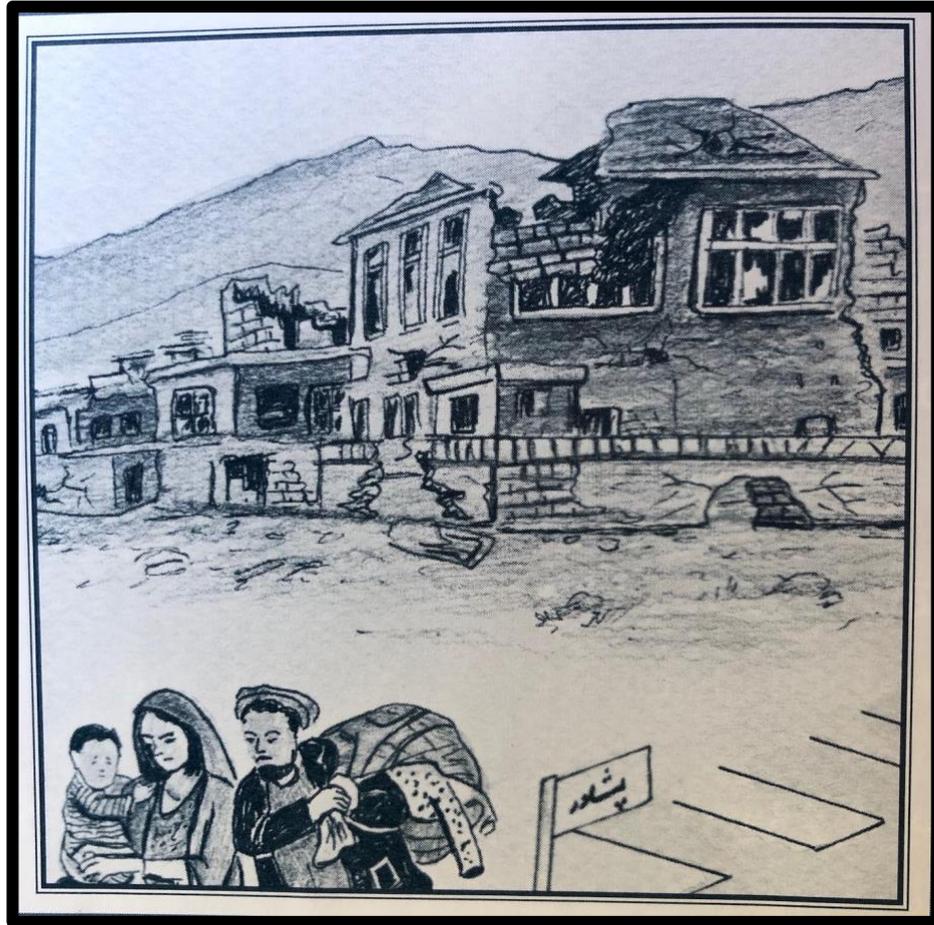


Figure 18: Image of an illustration by Latifa Aslami Shabnam published in Sarwar & Abood, 2006. Photograph: the author.

The Dobaiti Poetry Project was designed with and by the Afghan women, so that they could write their own scripts based on a traditional cultural form, the dobaiti poetry. Not only is this an ancient Afghan literary form but dobaiti is also mostly created and performed by women, and it has served to document political turmoil over the centuries. “The impact of colonial presence and the violent Anglo-Afghan wars was reflected in the poetry, songs and the stories of the people” (Sarwar, 2006, p. 23). By choosing a creative form that was familiar and deeply rooted in the women’s experiences, this project became relevant and meaningful. As one of the project collaborators concluded:

It was the women who mobilised, envisioning and organising their own healing from within, aspiring in all their sadness buried beneath the

burdens of settlement to achieve a more nourishing emotional, moral, intellectual and spiritual existence (Abood, 2014, p. 37).

5.4.2 The Afghan Women's Writing Project

In her book *Curated Stories* (2017) Sujatha Fernandes devotes a chapter to examining the Afghan Women's Writing Project (AWWP). Fernandes's analysis and observations illuminate how storytelling is used as a 'soft power' diplomacy strategy to portray Afghan women as empowered subjects speaking for themselves while at the same time the project was used to defuse opposition both in Afghanistan and in Western countries to the United States led war and occupation are illuminating (Fernandes, 2017a, p. 39). Fernandes begins this chapter by quoting a CIA Special Memorandum dated 11 March, 2010 which was released as part of a WikiLeaks drop:²³

Afghan women could serve as ideal messengers in humanising the ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] role in combating the Taliban because of women's ability to speak personally and credibly about their fears of a Taliban victory (Fernandes, 2017a, p. 38).

This memo goes on to state that creating opportunities for Afghan women to share their stories with European, including French and German, women would help to overcome the "pervasive skepticism among women in Western Europe towards the ISAF mission" (Fernandes, 2017b, p. 38).

Fernandes argues that the 'soft power' of storytelling was embraced by US foreign policy; indeed, this is demonstrated by the State Department partly financing this project until it was stopped in 2014 when the US Congress substantially cut aid and military assistance to on-the-ground activities in Afghanistan (DeYoung & Karen, 2014). Although the mission of the AWWP is framed around the right to tell one's story as being a "a human right"

²³ <https://file.wikileaks.org/file/cia-afghanistan.pdf>

(Hamilton, 2009, para. 5) the project purpose is framed from the perspective of the ‘white observer’:

we’ve seen these women gather strength, courage, and self-confidence. They become empowered to make change within their homes, their communities, and eventually their country (Hamilton, 2009, para. 6).

The purpose of the writing project assumes that, as the Afghan women begin to voice their own stories, a process of positive change will be amplified, impacting not only the participating women but also their country at large. The content of the website is clearly directed to other white women outside Afghanistan to support “these sisters of ours half a world away” (Hamilton, 2009, para. 8). This emotive language is consistent with Fernandes’s argument that, by enlisting support from white women outside Afghanistan the US could garner public support for its military pursuit of the Taliban. Nowhere in the AWWP project website is there a mention or critique of the US military intervention and its consequences for women in Afghanistan.

I scream out to the world

But no one hears my voice

No one listens to my words

Who could imagine war?

(Samila Hatami quoted in Abood, 2010, p. 39)

Some nations have airplanes

Birds and other skyward creatures

But Afghans live with blood flying

Through clouds and countryside

(From *The Blood of Afghans Cry and Mourn* in Alaha, 2018).

These lines of poetry by two different Afghan women articulate the trauma and horrors of war. They were written in the course of the above-mentioned projects: the first, as a part of the Afghan Women’s Dobaiti Project; the

second, as part of the AWWP. The writers provide an intimate depiction of a conflict seen on our television screens for years. Bringing these first-person accounts to the fore, into a public arena, was aided by the structural support, both human and material, that these writing projects afforded the participants. In this sense, the projects created the setting and opportunity for Afghan women to explore and interpret ‘their version’ and ‘their accounts’ of a contested and protracted war. The Afghan women’s voices carry authenticity and uniqueness that stemmed from their lived experiences; however, their voices and stories, when presented by intermediaries, are also exposed to being ‘framed’ in particular ways, as suggested by Fernandes. That is to say, once the women wrote the poems, the context from which the work emerges can be obscured, intentionally or unintentionally. Unless the creators are also involved in all aspects of how their work is communicated, translated and distributed, the nuanced meanings embedded in the circumstances and the place from which the poetry emerges is at risk of being lost or misunderstood. In fact, reading these fragments of poetry, which were created in two very different settings, in isolation does not shed any light on the processes the writers went through to arrive at their poems, nor does it provide any sense of the ‘empowerment’ gained by the women, if any, as the result of their self-expression. This is why understanding how these types of projects are contextualised is important. It can provide significant insights into opportunities for social change, the limitations and precariousness of community arts, and the level of ownership and risks the participants involved may face through their association with these programs.

The next section highlights some of the contradictions of CCD, as both an enabling and a disabling practice when it colludes with systemic oppressions.

When art activities are framed in terms of their capacity to ‘fix’ the ‘problems’ of people identified by the dominant culture as ‘deficient’ or ‘at risk’, there is the danger that the arts simply become an instrument

for perpetuating oppression and the status quo (Stein & Faigin, 2015, p. 72).

5.4.3 The precariousness of the practice

I think CCD creates a space where you don't have to bring structures of power and privilege in to, necessarily. Sometimes it does. Sometimes community arts practice replicates [oppression] ... You still see marginalisation, you still see exploitation, cannibalisation of story, all of that. So sometimes it's exactly the same. I don't want to pretend that it's always good, but when it is good, when it is true to itself, I think that there is a kind of suspension of societal norms that can happen (Veronica).

A community arts parody located at a similar historical time, but one centred around a young Arab male, highlights the precarious nature of art for social change practice. While, as examined in Chapter Two and Three, community arts can offer a unique space for the articulation of personal and collective identity, the reclamation of personal power and healing, and the development of political awareness, it can also contain and restrict by trapping individuals into perpetuating their own cultural differences as the only way of carving a creative space for self-expression (Idriss, 2014). Sherene Idriss suggests that many creatives have no option but to become involved in community arts as a way to “live *off* and *for* their cultural differences” (Idriss, 2016, p. 407).

Australian writer Michael Mohammed Ahmad's novel *The Lebs* offers a caricature of this type of practice in Australia. Ahmad, who received the Kirk Robson Award for his community arts work in Western Sydney in 2017, sets this autobiographical novel in Western Sydney after September 11. The main character is Bani Adam, a 17-year-old Lebanese Muslim. After finishing school at the notorious Punchbowl Boys High School, Bani is persuaded to join a community arts project at the Bankstown Theatre Company. The company

exists, in Bani's words, "to help Aussies like Mr Guy Law help Aussies like Jo [to] help multiculturalism like me" (Mohammed Ahmad, 2018, p. 18). As the theatre workshops start to unfold, Bani's world is challenged by the group dynamics.

There are cultural and symbolic assumptions made by the white artists' facilitators which transgress Bani's cultural safety. Bani is largely pigeonholed and stereotyped as a 'Leb'; an identity mould he has been trying to break out of during his school years. Coming from a group of 'artists,' as Bani calls them, the racism the community arts workers display is profoundly disconcerting for him. He expected the artists to be 'progressive' and to recognise him for who he was: a fellow artist in the making; instead they see him merely as an authentic 'Leb,' a cultural resource to be drawn on rather than a subject in his own right. The dissonance between the reasons why Bani thinks he is there, to develop as an artist, and the intention and purpose of the project initiators becomes apparent. So, when Jo, the director, asks everyone to share stories about drugs, Bani chooses silence:

Drugs might lead to subject matter for artists, but they lead to hellfire for Muslims. "I do not have any drugs stories," I say. "Sorry."

(Mohammed Ahmad, 2018, p. 39)

This racialised parody is not far from the truth. Idriss argues that artists from ethnic minorities are afforded marginal opportunities for expression and are often racialised and typecast in community arts projects. In the ongoing 'othering' of migrant cultures lies the drive to maintain the marginality of difference. This is what Ali Nobil Ahmad calls "the multiculturalist will to construct them from elsewhere" (Ahmad, 2001, p. 76).

Idriss's study of young Arab men from working-class backgrounds who aspire to work in the arts found that there were processes of racialisation which severely limit their potential. These young men were the subject of multiculturalist discourses that framed their relationship with cultural

institutions, so that, deliberately or unintentionally, they were continually thrust into “specific vocational identities, namely that of the ethnic minority, community artist who uses their creative forms of expression to redress social inequalities” (Idriss, 2016, p. 406). This is partly because those young men can’t escape their prescribed identities, like Bani Adam, who is seen only for his potential to play a ‘violent Lebanese drug dealer’. The invitation for Bani to join the theatre group on the one hand, confines him to responding to what is ‘expected’ from his ethnic and gender identity, and on the other hand, casts him as the beneficiary of the opportunities afforded by creative aspects of community arts. When used strategically, the latter can open up prospects for self-determined stories and community development, but it can also, as in Bani’s case, further entrench a consciousness of being exploited (Idriss, 2014).

Idriss further argues that the narrow opportunities available for creative young people of colour often lead them into community arts practice as an easier alternative entry-point into the arts. This reveals the “exclusionary and hierarchical nature of the creative industries” (Idriss, 2016, p. 406). At the same time, community arts practice can also offer participants the opportunities to use creativity “to deal with their experiences of racial prejudice and discrimination” (2016, p. 418). This view of community arts at its best is consistent with the way in which Lena spoke about her experiences in her early years as a university student, when those same creative tools helped her not only to combat her personal experiences of racism but also to recognise that she was not alone. She understood that there were others like her, who had lived experiences of discrimination, and this realisation had an impact on the way she constructed her identity and the tools she deployed to combat day-to-day microaggressions.

Interestingly, it has been in the realm of community arts policies, as stated earlier in the chapter, that we have seen a progression from state-sanctioned ‘celebrations’ which use ethnic communities for the purpose of cultural maintenance, to more nuanced support for artists and community-

driven projects. This push has allowed for the support of projects and programs by federal agencies such as the Australia Council, and state and local governments, that challenge the rigidity of the multiculturalist boundaries and allow for some degree of self-determination in arts and cultural practices (Idriss, 2016).

5.5 The question of critical autonomy

The Afghan Women's Dobaiti Poetry Project, as explained above, was explicitly conceptualised by Afghan women in Western Sydney in response to multifaceted local and global events that were directly impacting upon them. On the other hand, the Afghan Women's Writing Project was founded by Masha Hamilton, a United States journalist and writer, in 2009 as a way of combatting the perceived silencing of Afghan women by the Taliban (Hamilton, 2009). Who initiates these projects and their motivations matters. It gives an indication of the reasons why people—the instigators as well as the participants—mobilise their time, power and resources toward their chosen purposes. It also reveals the individuals' understanding of the connections between their personal investments and a much larger societal context.

Equally, the participants must decide the terms and conditions of their participation, which is a prerequisite to gaining empowerment. As Sprague and Hayes assert, "to empower someone is to facilitate their self-determination" (Sprague & Hayes, 2000, p. 681). It is implied here that those who initiate these so-called transformative processes, which in a state-sanctioned environment is often done by organisations rather than individuals, must do so with the objective of ceding power by virtue of encouraging self-determination.

Considering the above, perhaps one of the most obvious distinctions between the two projects is that the Dobaiti Poetry Project was initiated by Afghan women and, in particular, was instigated by community leader,

mentor, translator and poet Rukhshana Sarwar (Abood & Sarwar, 2006, p. 13). By making connections between their lived experiences of war, the discrimination faced in western Sydney, and the way their subjectivities were being denied in the public spheres, these women applied a feminist logic to the conceptual development of their project (Sprague & Hayes, 2000). These knowledges and experiences combined to frame the Afghan Women's Dobaiti Poetry Project.

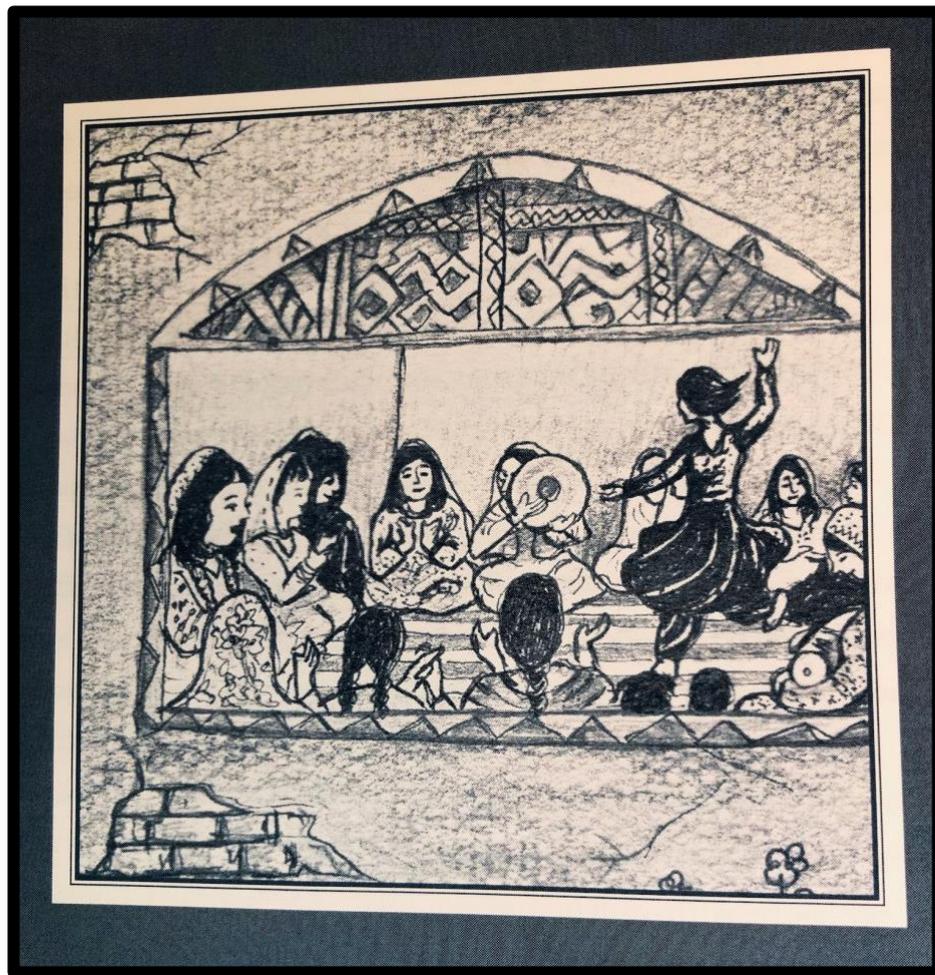


Figure 19: Image of an illustration by Latifa Aslami Shabnam (published in Sarwar & Abood, 2006). Photograph: the author.

The AWWP, on the other hand, was initiated by Masha Hamilton, who was impelled to act in support of Afghan women after viewing the execution of Zarmeena (in 1999) at the hands of the Taliban. Hamilton travelled to Afghanistan in 2004 and in 2008, where she observed “that not only were women hidden beneath burqas, but their stories were silenced” (Hamilton,

2009, para. 3). Thus, the AWWP was set up to support women to tell their own stories in a country where “women have been told their stories do not matter” (Hamilton, 2009, para. 4). Masha Hamilton’s motivation appears to have emerged from a compassionate impulse, but one limited by a narrow, white Western feminist frame (Hamad, 2019). In fact, the project tends to decontextualise the Afghan women’s experiences by presenting them as completely powerless; in doing so, it perpetuates the myth that these women are in need of salvation. This objectification leads to the oversimplification (Sprague & Hayes, 2000) of the issues experienced by the Afghan women and does not acknowledge that the Taliban, as oppressive as it has been, is not the only source of violence perpetuated against women in Afghanistan (Jeong, 2017).

Fernandes stresses that while Hamilton’s intentions, and those of the people who assisted in the development of this project, appeared noble, the AWWP project fails to analyse the impact of the US military intervention of Afghanistan. The project is silent on the impact of the war, and does not mention the thousands of civilians, including women and children, who have been killed during this decades-long war (Fernandes, 2017c). Further, it is probably relevant to point out that there has been a close connection between the project’s founder and the US government. Hamilton, who is now an advisor to the AWWP’s Board, completed 18 months’ service (between 2011 and 2013) as the director of communications and public diplomacy at the US Embassy in Afghanistan (Afghan Women’s Writing Project, 2009). This connection does not imply a deliberate personal ‘collusion’ with the official US agenda; however, it does put into question the systemic frameworks that are at play behind the support afforded to these kinds of projects.

This is further exemplified by a story reported by *The Guardian* on 15 September 2019. SuperSisters, a UK online platform targeting young Muslim women, with the aim to be “a global platform for young Muslimahs in East London to share and create inspiring an empowering content”, has been found

to be funded by the Home Office's counter-terrorism strategy of the UK government (Iqbal, 2019, para. 3).

While SuperSisters has advocated for an alternative narrative for Muslim women, the platform was initiated by non-Muslims, and for a period of time had no Muslim women on the editorial team, although it gave the impression that its content was developed by these young women themselves (Iqbal, 2019). Thus, the platform's credibility is now in question, and it has to contend with "the widespread suspicion that it was purposely designed to promote a state-approved notion of the Islamic faith with the potential to track its target audience of British Muslim girls aged 13 to 19" (Iqbal, 2019, para. 9). This comes on the back of another incident in the UK in June 2019 where several writers withdrew from the Bradford literary festival, when they learned that the festival was funded by the same counter-terrorist program. The first writer to withdraw from the program, poet Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan, stated that the Home Office's counter-extremism strategy "relies on the premise that Muslims are predisposed to violence and therefore require monitoring and surveillance" (Wolfe-Robinson, 2019, para. 10).

The examples above support the premise that under an 'empowering' arts and cultural initiative, surreptitious ideological state control can co-opt the agenda by directing funding allocations that serve to reproduce dominant relations of power. In this context, questions about the self-determination of these projects and programs become imperative. Paula advocates for what she calls 'critical autonomy' in these types of creative programs and workshops, where the participants must set the agenda in order to counter any predetermined ideas of who they are:

Participation, for me, has to be meaningful, so I can step out as an outsider and the women define the terms of reference and what they want to do. That's a more critical kind of autonomy (Paula).

In advocating for women to set their own 'terms of reference', Paula argues that the women are capable of exercising individual and collective agency to decide for themselves what is meaningful as well as how, when, and under what conditions they are prepared to participate.

Doyal and Gough (1991) coined the term 'critical autonomy', which they articulate as follows:

We prefer the distinction between autonomy as freedom of agency, which is compatible with relatively high levels of critical reflection, and the higher degrees of critical autonomy, which are entailed by democratic participation in the political process at whatever level. For critical autonomy to be a real possibility, individuals must have the opportunity to express both *freedom of agency and political freedom* (Doyal & Gough, 1991, p. 68).

The Afghan women who initiated the Dobaiti Poetry Project in Western Sydney had higher degrees of critical autonomy than the women of the AWWP, as they were the initiators and participants of their own project. They chose the literary art form of dobaiti poetry in Dari, one of the main languages spoken in Afghanistan, with which to express their personal and collective stories. This cultural affirmation can be seen as a critical assertion of their power.

We see similar expressions of critical autonomy in previous examples in this thesis, such as in Chapter Three, where one of the Noongar artists recounts how she gained power and described the way in which she enacted this in the world, and again in Chapter Four wherein several Latin American women provide testimony on their experiences. Lucy, who I introduced in Chapter Four, explains:

When I began to understand that 'the word' generates reality, [I realised that] we have to take charge and speak up, to do, and to reflect

what we say and do. In this sense, for me as a woman who experienced domestic violence, it has to do with getting in touch with a liberating place. There are still parts of me that remain closed—I find it very hard to speak in public—however I know now that I have the capacity to do it. I can use my voice ... I have my body; I have tools that I can use to work and connect with others ... I can work with and for others, and for myself at the same time. It is not just about working for and by myself and staying in the ‘poor me.’ It is in relation to others that one grows! (Lucy).

Lucy’s reflection connects to both freedom of agency and political freedom, but she also highlights the relational power of the collective. She asserts that it is ‘in relationship to others’ that personal growth happens. She does not merely stress that the collective has a power of action, or the power to propel individuals to action. Lucy argues that the relationship in itself, the doing together, the reflection and the capacity for action that stems from the collective process gives her the tools to act in the world. This echoes Freire’s philosophy, as discussed in Chapter Four, which is not surprising considering that Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed methods were explicitly inspired by Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. What is interesting is the clarity with which Lucy articulates this thinking. “Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2011, p. 79).

Likewise, Paula believes that community arts practice offers the opportunity for the collective creative work, which can lead to activism.

I think CCD is a particular kind of work because it is group work, and within that group I think people develop relationships and a solidarity ... When women get together and work out what's going on, and share their experiences of the world, and they decide to act, that's when activism and change occurs (Paula).

This assertion is also supported by long-term community development scholar Margaret Ledwith, who believes that personal stories and collective narratives are the kinds of practical tools that enable political discovery and lead to collective action (Ledwith, 2007). In the next section I explore the relational and contextual aspects of the Afghan Women's Dobaiti Project and the AWWP.

5.6 Relationality and context

Another important difference between the Afghan women's projects is the relational and contextual nature of the creative work. The Afghan Women's Dobaiti Project was facilitated face-to-face by two women: Paula Abood and Rukhshana Sarwar. Further, "Without Rukhshanda's guidance, her knowledge of poetry and language, her respect amongst the women, the project would have faltered" (Abood, 2006, p. 43). The workshops were run in Western Sydney, where the women lived, and the context surrounding its genesis was explained in detail above. Paula's acknowledgement of the trust Sarwar had already established with the participants, and the collaborative nature of the work that emerged from these relationships, are essential components of CCD practice (Green & Sonn, 2008; Kasat, 2014). Similarly, the 16 project workshops were facilitated in Dari. "This was a crucial element in the empowerment of the participants and their expression" (Abood, 2006, p. 44). Privileging the use of Dari above English indicated a commitment to shift power relations, ensured that the women's cultural references were central to their own creative processes and showed an understanding that the use of mother tongue is "vital to self-expression" (De Luca, 2018, p. 161).

Conversely, the AWWP was an online program where the writing workshops were mostly facilitated in English (only one workshop was in Dari) and therefore was mainly accessible to English-speaking Afghan women. In a country with low literacy levels amongst women, the workshops targeted a very select group of women: upwardly mobile and educated Afghan women

(Saeed, 2015). The workshops encouraged the participating women to meet and to write, and each small group was assigned a mentor located in the US. According to Fernandes, the mentors were genuinely motivated in their attempt to support the Afghan women to tell their own stories. However, while the women are supported to conduct their own discussion groups to foster the creative work, the themes of the writing appear to be framed in particular ways. In a nine-minute documentary posted on the Afghan Women's Writing Project website, under the heading Watch the AWWP in Action, the facilitator, an Afghan woman, can be seen telling a group of several other Afghan women, in English, "Today we are going to talk about freedom of expression." This directive could be a reflection of the translation rather than a 'pre-determined' topic of discussion; however, on the surface it appears to perpetuate the persistent narrative that Afghan women do not speak for themselves.

The connection between the stories produced by the AWWP and the US official narrative as "a global crusader for women's rights" presented by Fernandes (Fernandes, 2017a, p. 165) is difficult to dismiss. But as the positive image of righting the wrongs of the Afghan women began to disintegrate with the growing evidence about the role the US has had as a human rights violator, the 'official' position of the US is finally revealed. On 21 August 2017 Donald Trump made a public admission that dispelled the myth. As he recommitted to the US military presence in Afghanistan, he stated that after 16 years of military intervention, "We are not nation-building again. We are killing terrorists" (Landler & Mark, 2017). As May Jeong points out, "Women's rights, cited again and again over the years as the reason for maintaining [the US] presence, was not mentioned" (Jeong, 2017, para. 17). Ultimately, "the estimated \$100 billion" that flooded into Afghanistan for gender initiatives has been described as a women's rights "fiasco" driven from outside Afghanistan (Jeong, 2017, para. 4 & 8). Further, many of the so-called empowering initiatives at the hands of well-intended but culturally and politically decontextualised Western feminist agendas have left underprivileged women

exposed to further violence not only from the Taliban but also from within their own families (Jeong, 2017).

Notwithstanding the structural failings of some of these gender-liberating projects, Fernandes reveals that there are voices of dissent that managed to reverberate and surface within the AWWP. She presents the example of an Afghan writer who, at an event in New York, shared a poem which revealed a much more nuanced and layered account of the life of women in Afghanistan as a consequence of the war. She exposes that in the many narratives of the Afghan women she studied, there were several stories that stepped outside the frame provided by the project's facilitators. "The micro narratives often contain double voicing or multiple registers that allow the expression of experiences such as gendered poverty and betrayal that do not fit the macro framings and epic narratives" (Fernandes, 2017a, p. 166).

The account above tells us that participants in the AWWP willingly or unwillingly were able to disrupt the framing of this project. Paula suggests that interrupting established forms of power should be an intrinsic purpose of CCD:

Disrupting, that is how we make sustainable change. If we just tell stories and leave it at that, it's individualized. It has a purpose. I'm not diminishing the outcome ... [but] one purpose of CCD is to transform society. It's about social justice (Paula).

Fernandes articulates that in fact those collective modes of subject-making have the most potential for liberation, and "it is those stories grounded in collective movements and struggles of everyday life that contain the seeds for more oppositional modes of agency" (Fernandes, 2017a, p. 137). These seeds are more likely to come to fruition when a different kind of leadership is enacted.

5.7 A different kind of leadership: Practising having power

Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, 2012, p 109

Veronica highlights the entrenched racism and lack of opportunities for creative women of colour in the arts-and-culture sector in Australia. She recounts a leadership event organised by the Victorian public sector after 30 years of affirmative action for diversity.

I saw a sea of white faces ... so I thought well, if that's what happens after 30 years of trying to do something, we need radically different interventions. That's when I began to really start thinking about how I am complicit in maintaining these systems of oppression (Veronica).

The question Veronica poses is fundamental to addressing the monocultural nature of arts and culture in Australia. The problem is that this question is not being asked by white leaders. *Shifting the Balance*, a report released by Diversity Arts Australia in August 2019, confirms that across the culture sector the majority of the leadership positions are held by white people. According to the report, CEOs of colour represent 10 percent of leadership roles across the arts (Diversity Arts Australia, BYP Group, & Western Sydney University, 2019).

I interviewed Veronica in November 2017 while she held the position of executive director of Arts Access Victoria. At that time, she had recently made the decision to restructure the organisation and vacate the executive director's role in order to employ a person with a disability in the top leadership position. She made this decision upon reflecting that she did not want to continue what she considered to be perpetuating a system of inequality (Simpson, 2019, para. 10). As an able-bodied woman leading a disability arts organisation, she reflected:

Imagine getting to a point where you're in a leadership role, but you've done nothing to change the system that actually created you? So that's when I thought, well what can I do? Again, about decision-making, empower, and that's when I thought, actually, I can do lots of things. I can choose to vacate this position. I can actually actively support and commit to the development of new leadership in my organisation that reflects a diverse agenda. So that's what I've done (Veronica).

She not only oversaw the transition as Carolyn Bowditch was appointed as Arts Access Victoria's new CEO but also has since collaborated with her in a number of joint initiatives on behalf of Multicultural Arts Victoria, the organisation Veronica now leads. On several counts this model of leadership is worthy of note. Firstly, Veronica was prepared to relinquish power and remove barriers to leadership so that a qualified person with lived experiences of a disability could fairly compete for the position. Secondly, Veronica set up internal structures so that would permit her to lend solidarity and support to the new CEO, if she required it. Finally, Veronica has continued the relationship with the organisation, and both women have formed a coalition and regularly do presentations about diversity and inclusion together.

Veronica explains her rationale as follows:

Structural and systemic change requires a different kind of commitment. It requires people who hold power to think deeply about how they wield that power, and who benefits from that power. We need them to make choices that cede power and privilege others for whom the getting of power remains out of reach. We need them to recognise that being a good ally is an action, not just a set of values. It's what you do, not just what you say (Pardo, 2019, para. 10).

Veronica tells us that leadership that promotes equality necessitates relinquishing power to effect change, and she asserts that her capacity to reflect must be followed by action that is anchored in her principles. "I argue

that this is courageous, strategic and political, as much as it is an act of commitment and love, one that transcends one's own interests" (Kasat, 2019). This model is fundamentally different from the model of leadership we are used to; persistently male, stubbornly white (2019; McKelvey, 2019) doing nothing to challenge unequal relations of power.

So how did Veronica arrive at this kind of leadership model? Veronica suggests that there is something contained in CCD practice in itself that allows for thinking and practising 'having power'. This thinking represents the opportunity to consider CCD not only as a practice that nurtures empowerment of women but also as one that can nurture a different kind of leadership among its participants and beneficiaries.

There is something about this practice that enables us to suspend oppressive practices and to do something that is very different. That's something I like because I think that's where people practice having power. It's very difficult to envisage a life free of oppression when you've never actually had the moment where you feel powerful ... So, as an empowered artist working with a set of collaborators who acknowledge you, respect you, what does that do for you inside? That you then take back to your life, and then challenge the oppressive structures in your life? So, I think that is exciting. I mean, where else do you get to practice being powerful if you come from an oppressed minority? (Veronica)

This idea of practicing your personal power to make change is akin to both the notion of critical autonomy discussed above and what Augusto Boal describes in his methodology of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, the notion that the action of the participants not only seek to create change but to also "create a space in which it can be stimulated and experienced, and where future actions arising from it can be rehearsed" (Boal, 1998, p. 20). The idea of 'rehearsing for change' implies that: firstly, as Anzaldúa suggests in the quote above, we must imagine

the change we wish to create; then we have to externalise it; and, as Boal advocates, rehearse it so that we can better understand it before we can enact it (Boal, 1998). This is what Boal developed in his practice of Theatre of the Oppressed: a mechanism for minoritised communities to imagine and enact different realities through theatre. This is the unique attribute of the arts. It can make visible what has previously been invisible. The arts can support to the notion of gaining a ‘voice’, which is so central to feminists’ literature on empowerment (Gammage, Kabeer, & Van Der Meulen Rodgers, 2015). It can help to materialise the images we have for change.

Lastly, feminist leadership that advocates for anti-discrimination and anti-racist work must understand the dynamics of power, whiteness and privilege, as well as the importance of the development of alliances (Kasat & Pardo, 2019). “Consciousness, voice and action” are all facets of agency and of an empowering agenda (Gammage et al., 2015, p. 5). Leadership that aims to generate processes of empowerment must clearly facilitate the spaces and resources to rehearse for change.

In the next chapter, I expand on the role of the arts to facilitate more oppositional modes of agency and illustrate their role in developing solidarity across social movements.

5.8 Summary

This chapter centred art for social change practices from the perspective of women of colour in arts leadership roles who live and work in the settler-colonial state of Australia. It did so by examining the results of in-depth interviews with Lena Nahlous, Paula Abood and Veronica Pardo where my interlocutors theorise the relationship between art for social change and the empowerment of women from their subjective positions as race-aware feminists. Firstly, the chapter provided a brief historical context of the racialised nature of migration policies in Australia and illustrated how

colonialism continues to be perpetuated and recycled. It then examined the increased interest in arts-based inquiry and narrative research in postcolonial contexts, considered CCD practices and their precarious nature, and outlined some of their shortcomings. Two projects are featured and contextualised in this analysis: the Afghan Women Dobaiti Poetry Project and the Afghan Women's Writing Project. The chapter concluded that key elements of an empowering practice are self-representation and critical autonomy, together with awareness of the relational and contextual nature of art for social change. Without these elements, projects run the risk of being executed without political awareness and can, and often do, reproduce structural conditions of oppression rather than challenging them. The chapter also suggests that stories mediated through the arts and framed within principles of critical autonomy can be effective in creating opportunities to not only to tell a story but also to reimagine those stories, affirm authorship, claim power over one's own experiences, and uphold agency over how these stories are communicated. The chapter ends by suggesting that art for social change that aims to empower women, in particular women of colour, requires a different kind of leadership. Race-aware feminists understand the dynamics of power, whiteness and privilege, as well as the need to deploy strategies that carefully balance action, reflection and the ceding of power. To be effective in the long term, art for social change needs to contribute to the development of collective alliances of solidarity that go beyond the life of individual projects.

CHAPTER SIX
Rehearsing for Change:
Women and Counterhegemonic Globalisations

6. Introduction

In this final chapter, I return to Chile, where I examine two case studies that highlight focus on Chilean women’s creative resistance and questions relating to art for social change practices—such as healing, autonomy, co-creation, and collaboration—that focus the discussions of the previous chapters. The two case studies centred in this chapter, the *Arpillera* movement and *LasTesis’s* performance on gendered violence, emerged at different historical times but during periods of highly volatile social and political upheaval. Both are responses to state violence and systemic human-rights violations. These movements became known internationally and are widely recognised as structurally connected. Women and art are at the centre of these movements, and both used the streets—the public realm—as a platform for their activism. Moreover, at different times and in different ways, these movements redefined the role of women in public protest. The *Arpillera* movement, which I discuss in detail in the second half of this chapter, began in 1974, soon after Pinochet’s bloody military takeover, when a group of women gathered to denounce the forced disappearances of their loved ones. *LasTesis’s Un violador en tu camino* (‘A rapist in your path’), in contrast, is a contemporary performance that emerged in November 2019, in the midst of an unprecedented social uprising sparked by economic inequality, after decades of aggressive neoliberal policies. This performance, initially a part of a larger play, was adapted as a short piece of participative street theatre, was filmed and went viral.

I discuss the case studies in reverse order, as the energy and force of the 2019 social uprising provides a unique juncture from which to excavate the continuities of women’s creative responses to conditions of political upheaval

and extreme state violence. Further, the chapter focuses on the context in which common patterns of art for social change practice are revealed across the two case studies, such as the use of the street, as a public platform of struggle and the denouncement of sexual and political violence. The chapter also highlights some of the differences between these two projects, both of which have had a decisive impact on the feminist movement and forms of women's protest in contemporary Chile. Argentinian scholar Rita Segato's scholarly work is highlighted, as her feminist theories have strongly influenced the creative work of *LasTesis*. Additionally, this chapter explores the collaborative dynamics of art for social change that emerge across the case studies. Finally, throughout the chapter, I argue that the *Arpillera* movement and 'A rapist in your path' can be understood as examples of counter-hegemonic globalisation: defiant acts of feminist social emancipation that mobilise communities against systems of violence and oppression (Santos, 2016b).

Two Chilean women, Paula Fernández and Catalina Barrientos, who are not directly linked to *El Colectivo LasTesis* but who participated in various live *LasTesis* performances in Santiago, agreed to offer their views on the impact of this creative intervention on themselves personally, and on the broader feminist movement in Chile. Their chapter deepens the theoretical approach of this thesis by highlighting a thread that runs through the dissertation, which is an exploration of the forms of collaboration that are integral to art for social change practices with particular focus on autonomous and collective action, that sit outside the parameters of state-funded models.

6.1 *Chile despertó!* The awakening of a country and the emergence of *LasTesis*

Chile woke up! is the chant that was repeatedly echoed across streets up and down the nation from 18 October 2019, when a social eruption involving massive acts of civil disobedience started in the capital Santiago and continued

unabated for months—until COVID-19 slowed it down. A three percent hike in the cost of metro fares (\$30 pesos, or \$0.052 AUD per ticket) was the ostensible trigger for this public uprising. For Chileans on the minimum wage, the announcement of a fare increase would have meant that 10 percent of their monthly wages would be spent in getting to and from their places of work (Hodgson, 2019). In response to this announcement, high-school students began protesting across the metro network, and in multiple acts of civil disobedience, they jumped en masse over ticket turnstiles to avoid paying the fares. The act of rebellion spread like wildfire, and they were quickly joined by thousands of others, a significant proportion of the 2.5 million commuters who use the metro system every day. The reaction of Chilean president Sebastián Piñera was to decree a state of emergency and deploy the full force of the army and the police, in the same way that Pinochet had done decades before. This only served to inflame the discontent. Several metro stations were burnt, and many protesters suffered severe injuries at the hands of police. The entire metro network collapsed, and Santiago was paralysed. What followed were the biggest protests the country has ever seen.

As many commentators have explained, the uprising in Chile cannot be understood solely as the result of a metro fare hike (Herrscher, 2019; Taub, 2019). This action became, rather, the tipping point of an already volatile situation. *No son treinta pesos son treinta años*: Chileans are not protesting for 30 pesos but for 30 years of aggressive neoliberal policies that began, and were enshrined in the Chilean Constitution, during the 16-year rule of the dictator Pinochet (Taub, 2019). As a result of the ongoing privatisations and growing public debt, Chile is one of the most unequal countries in the world (The Editorial Board, 2019). Despite its fiscal credentials as being one of the most stable economies in Latin America, the gap between rich and poor has widened, reaching untenable proportions. What is more, the level of state repression mobilised to stop the discontent in Chile has been colossal, and in the attempts to stop the unrest, the military and the police deployed unnecessary and excessive force against the protesters. Acts of sexual violence,

such as rape, molestation, and indecent assault, were perpetrated against demonstrators in custody. These were documented and condemned by Amnesty International and a delegation from the United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Amnesty International, 2019; United Nations Human Rights, 2019).

Women, according to the UN Report, have played a crucial role in spurring on the contemporary social movement and in denouncing the violence perpetrated against them (United Nations Human Rights, 2019). Among these, a remarkable creative intervention, *Un violador en tu camino* from the Chilean feminist collective *LasTesis*, has attracted unprecedented attention through social media. The first of *LasTesis*'s artistic interventions held on 20 November 2019 (Colectivo LasTesis, 2019) (see Figure 20 and video link below), was executed in their hometown of Valparaiso, 120 kilometres from Santiago. A group of approximately 30 women, in flash-mob-style, stopped the traffic and performed 'A rapist in your path', a choreographed routine of movement and song (Timmers, 2019). While most of the women took part in the performance, others can be seen using chalk and writing 'A rapist in your path' several times on the pavement.

A few days later, on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 'A rapist in your path' went viral after it was performed again at Santiago's main square, La Plaza de Armas, followed by two other performances, outside the National Palace and the Chilean Supreme Court (video link below;²⁴ *LasTesis & Colectivo Registro Callejero*, 2019). Since that date, *LasTesis*'s defiant and powerful creative intervention has been replicated by thousands of women in all major cities in Chile and several around the world, including Berlin, Bogotá, Brussels, Istanbul, Madrid, Mexico City, Melbourne, New York, and Paris. In Mexico City's main town square El Zócalo, more than 2,000 women took part in the performance, and

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aB7r6hdo3W4>

outside the Chilean National Stadium—the key detention and torture centre in 1973—10,000 women gathered (BBC News Mundo, 2020). One of the latest performances took place in 11 January, 2020, in the United States (in English and Spanish) in front of Trump Tower and outside the County Court building in New York where the criminal trials of Harvey Weinstein, the Hollywood producer charged with multiple acts of rape and molestation, were taking place (Aratani, 2020).



Figure 20: *LasTesis*'s first performance in Valparaiso still circulates on social media and can be viewed for example on Youtube.²⁵

The founding members of the collective *LasTesis* are four women who, in September 2020, were named by Time magazine among the 100 most influential people of the year (Tolokonnikova, 2020). Its members are: Sibila Sotomayor and Dafne Valdés, involved in the performing arts, and Paula Cometa Stange and Lea Cáceres, who are both designers. *LasTesis* began working together only a year before massive international success of their performance 'A rapist in your way'. The name *LasTesis*, or theses, encapsulates their aim to use and collectivise feminist thinking by making impactful creative interventions. Their key purpose is to bring feminist ideas to a public

²⁵ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sbcUopmViM>.

forum where women who may not have had the opportunity to read, critique, or analyse theoretical works can access these concepts (Huenschmil, 2019). *Un violador en tu camino* emerges in response to *LasTesis*'s desire to make visible the institutional violence used by the Chilean Government during the social uprising and is inspired by Rita Segato's ideas on gendered violence, which I discuss in more detail later in the chapter.

What can we do? "Let's take this song, which is a part of a play we are still working on, and let's adapt it as street performance." We called for people through social media, and about 45 people rocked up. We took to the streets to perform it and thought it will be the end of it.

However, it was not the end (Noticieros Televisa, 2019).

The impact was far from over. Not only has *Un violador en tu camino* circled the world but it has changed the consciousness of Chilean women, according to Paula, whom I interviewed in March 2020. The performance produced a collective catharsis that completely surpassed the creators' expectations. Chilean women said, 'Enough is enough!' They said '*basta*' to the state gender violations that stemmed from the military forces that occupied the streets but also, they said no to all systemic oppressions.

The lyrics of *LasTesis*'s powerful chant read as follows. In the next section, I examine why these words echoed so strongly in Chile and around the world.

<i>Un violador en tu camino</i>	A rapist in your path
<i>El patriarcado es un juez</i>	Patriarchy is a judge
<i>Que nos juzga por nacer</i>	That judges us for being born
<i>Y nuestro castigo</i>	And our punishment
<i>es la violencia que ya vez</i>	It's the violence you can see
<i>Es femicidio</i>	It's femicide

<i>Impunidad para mi asesino</i>	Impunity for my assassin
<i>Es la desaparición</i>	It is the disappearance
<i>Es la violación</i>	It is the rape
<i>Y la culpa no era mía,</i>	And the fault wasn't mine,
<i>ni donde estaba, ni como vestía</i>	nor where I was, or the way I dressed
<i>¡El violador eras tú!</i>	The rapist was you!
<i>¡El violador eres tú!</i>	The rapist is you!
<i>Son los pacos</i>	There are the cops
<i>Los jueces</i>	The judges
<i>El estado</i>	The State
<i>El presidente</i>	The President
<i>El estado opresor es un macho</i>	The oppressive state is a rapist
<i>violador</i>	macho
<i>El violador eras tú</i>	The rapist was you
<i>El violador eres tú</i>	The rapist is you
	[Extract from Chilean police anthem]
<i>“Duerme tranquila niña inocente</i>	“Sleep well innocent girl.
<i>sin preocuparte del bandolero.</i>	Do not worry about the bandit.
<i>Que por tu sueño dulce y sonriente</i>	Your sweet dreams are protected
<i>vela tu amante carabinero.”</i>	by your beloved policeman.”
<i>¡El violador eres tú!</i>	The rapist is you!
<i>¡El violador eres tú!</i>	The rapist is you!

6.2 Harnessing women's power: The collective cry

LasTesis's effectiveness lies in several elements. The performance is highly disruptive and visible; it occurs in the public realm: *en la calle*. Women collectively occupy public places and, in most cases, literally disrupt car and pedestrian traffic. The work is performed as a collective and on the streets; in

this way, women politicise the space that belongs to them, says Chilean screenwriter and actress Nona Fernández (Fernández, 2020). The street, as the realm of the public, where social relationships are forged and collective and cultural exchanges take place, is transformed by *LasTesis* (Luján Kammerer & Sánchez Roncero, 2005). Their performance is defiant and at the same time provocative; wearing what could be considered ‘revealing’ clothing and covering their eyes with black bands symbolising how women have been made invisible.

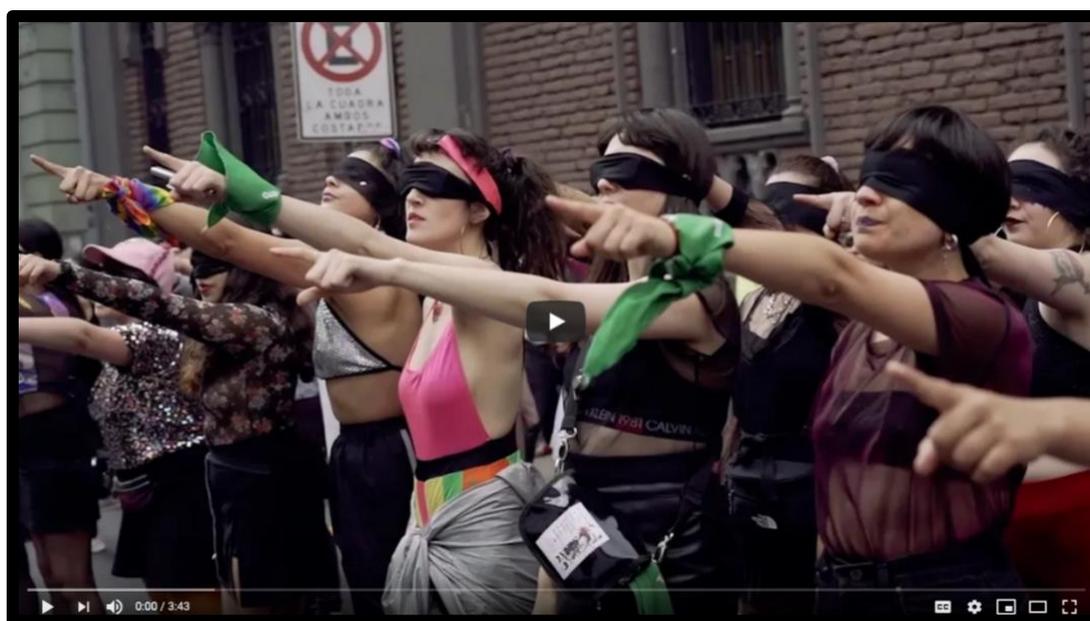


Figure 21: Still image from *Un violador en tu camino*, Santiago, 25 November 2019 (*LasTesis* & Colectivo Registro Callejero, 2019).

According to both my interlocutors, Paula and Catalina, *LasTesis* have undeniably energised the feminist movement in Chile.

Those who weren't [feminists] now are ... *LasTesis* helped to activate and propel dozens of women's networks that have been building over time. And they helped to rebuild some that had lost momentum, such as those who protested during the dictatorship or participated in the university movement [in the 1980s]. It has given us hope. It brought back the desire for change. For a long time, I have been living with a sense of massive failure, that we lost the battle and the opportunity [for

change]. We have been battling in our separate groups. We didn't contemplate the street as a place to fight, or the possibility, as we have now, to change the Chilean Constitution! (Paula).

Catalina believes that *LasTesis* has been vital to the social uprising and the feminists' demands in Chile. When the social uprising began, the political discourse was centred on many aspects of social vindication, such as the need for dignity in the pension systems, universal health care, a minimum wage, and so on, but when *LasTesis's* intervention erupted, it was a powerful reminder that sexual violence against women is linked to the multiple oppressions experienced by Chileans (Segato, 2016).

LasTesis appeared in a context of numerous sexual assaults against women committed by the police, and not just against women but other gender-diverse individuals. Rape again [since the dictatorship] emerges as a symbol of state power and as a normalised form of social control that is sustained by the state and its law enforcement institutions. In this context, *LasTesis* emerged with an incredibly simple but yet powerful chant: 'And the fault wasn't mine, nor where I was, or the way I dressed'. This is very important, especially for people in my mother's generation; many of them didn't consider themselves feminists, but when my mum saw the performance, she froze and said: 'It is true, it wasn't my fault!' This resonated with so many women because sexual violence is universal. It affects all women (Catalina).

Catalina, who has been both a witness and a protagonist of *Un violador en tu camino*, further adds:

For me, the most powerful moment, the one that hits me, is when I say and 'do' "The rapist is you," and I point to the outside. This is a very potent and liberating moment. It is like saying, it was not me. It was not my fault or any of these women's fault (Catalina).

Likewise, Nona Fernández believes *LasTesis*'s significance also lies in its capacity to offer a new aesthetic to feminist protest in contemporary Chile and beyond (Fernández, 2020). In Chapter One, I referred to the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, who also captivated the public and made visible the violence and hypocrisy of the military regime. However, the aesthetics of these two groups are quite different and reflect particular historical moments. While *Las Madres* politicised the role of motherhood by presenting themselves as devoted women in search of their missing loved ones, often wearing scarfs on their heads and dressed in black, they appeared deliberately “elderly, physically weak and non-sexually active” (Taylor, 2001, p. 103).



Figure 21: *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*: “The grandmothers are not scared. The worst that could happen to them already happened. They defy the military regime that continues to deny their loved ones’ disappearances” (Abuelas, 1980).

LasTesis, on the other hand, explains Catalina, contrasts the idea of the virginal female with the image of a woman whose body has been constantly sexualised and violated because it continues to be objectified by the desire of the male gaze. *LasTesis* use and create a different imaginary of womanhood, one which defies social norms and is outside the domestic and the family realm, and in doing so, they contribute to reinventing the role of women in the

protest movement and reinvigorate the idea of ‘how-to’ protest in contemporary Chile (Fernández, 2020, 16:13 min).

Catalina believes *LasTesis* marks an advancement of the feminist movement in Chile. Central to this progress is the diversity of the movement itself, which bonded different forms of feminisms into a hugely unified front during the social uprising. For example, the 2020 International Women’s Day March in Santiago attracted an unprecedented number of women, estimated at two million (Digitalproserver, 2020).

LasTesis’s performance at the National Stadium was amazing! I think this activated so many women. On the eighth of March, women marched together as a family; cousins, aunties, mothers, and grandmothers. I know friends whose entire families marched, and many had never marched before (Catalina).

The awareness of the intersectional nature of the political struggle among Chilean women, and the understanding that the feminist movement today is part of a continuum, has consolidated in the collective feminist consciousness.

It [the feminist movement of today] has been built by those who came before us and will go on with those who will come after us. It has enabled a deep sense of solidarity amongst generations of women (Catalina).

This renewed sense of solidarity has had an impact on the way women perceive the composition of the feminist movement today. Catalina argues that it is very diverse, and this diversity forms part of a new aesthetic of Chilean feminism:

All bodies are beautiful. All bodies are different. All vulvas are different ... Some of us are fat, some are skinny. Some have fatty rolls, some have muscles. Diversity is beautiful. All breasts are beautiful. All vulvas are beautiful. All bottoms are beautiful (Catalina).

LasTesis's choreographic movements and lyrics are deliberate and full of symbolic references to the political history of Chile (Página 12, 2019). The name of the performance, 'A rapist in your path', is a parody of a police marketing campaign created in the 1980s when the Pinochet regime was attempting to shift the image of the police from that of perpetrators of violence and brutality to the role of community protectors and companions. The slogan 'A friend in your path' was plastered on billboards and television advertisements for many years. It is etched in my memory and the memory of many Chileans, making the resonance of *LasTesis*'s performance much more impactful. Accompanied by the lyrics of the second verse, "it is femicide, impunity for my assassin", the women perform what is known as *sentadillas*, a knee squat while placing their hands on the back of their heads. This represents a common degrading torture method used by the police during the recent social uprising. Women and young females have reported that, after being detained by the police, they were often forced to strip naked and perform knee squats as a way of inspecting their vaginas for concealed weapons (United Nations Human Rights, 2019).



Figure 23: Women performing *Las sentadillas*. Source: Still image from *Un violador en tu camino* 25 November 2019 (*LasTesis* & Colectivo Registro Callejero, 2019).

Probably the most subversive intertext of *LasTesis* is the last verse, a segment of the official police hymn *Orden y Patria* (Order and Fatherland), which was compulsory to learn and sing in all primary schools throughout the country during the Pinochet regime (Página 12, 2019). I recall not only singing alongside these lyrics as a child but also marching around the school grounds to the sounds of its military beat. By using such an iconic state symbol and overlaying it with the context of the contemporary state violence, *LasTesis* manage to clearly illustrate the hypocrisy of the state and its law and order institutions. The police force, which claims to be a community ally and one that promises to uphold care and protection towards women, betrays them by degrading and raping them. *LasTesis* brilliantly execute a rebellious act which is inspired by the prominent Argentinian feminist, anthropologist, and writer Rita Segato (Huenchumil, 2019). In an interview with Segato, before *LasTesis*'s creative intervention, she reflected on her academic role as a 'giver of words', saying that when the words offered by an intellectual do not resonate with people, because they do not express a collective experience or name a shared reality, they tend to fade away, whereas when people find those words useful, they pick them up and share them (Segato, 2019). The performance *Un violador en tu camino* seems to be an exemplar of this.

I think *LasTesis*'s performance is a gift and one that made visible the power of the female energy and their contribution to the social explosion that has occurred [in Chile] during the uprising (Fernández, 2020, para. 10).

They gifted it to all women to use, to adapt and to change. As a consequence, says Nona Fernández, "*Esto se vuelve una catársis colectiva a nivel planetario*"—it becomes a collective catharsis at a planetary level (Fernández, 2020, 14:36 min).

Un violador en tu camino and its many iterations have been seen and shared by millions of people through social media, but more importantly,

women across the globe have embraced it and embodied it by performing it themselves.

Se nos escapó de las manos y lo hermoso es que fue apropiado por otras.

It [the performance] escaped from our hands, but the most beautiful thing is that it was appropriated by other women (Pais, 2019 para 25).

Using their bodies, women have chanted the verses and danced the moves. They have adopted it and claimed it as their own, which is demonstrated by the way the lyrics and movements have changed and evolved as women make it relevant to their own *territorios*, or their places of resistance (Postigo, 2015). Women have identified with it, use it and transform it, and have been able to do so, because *LasTesis* has not claimed authorship over the content of the performance (Fernández, 2020).



Figure 24: Still image from *Un violador en tu camino* performed on 8 December, 2019, in Lima, Perú (La Prensa Gráfica, 2019).

Above, Peruvian women perform *Un violador en tu camino* in Lima. A contrasting and powerful image of bare-breasted women, with single letters written across their chests that, combined, reads ‘the rapist is you’ stand behind Indigenous women wearing their traditional attire. The symbol of

solidarity and unity of diverse groups of women has been seen across, not only in Chile, as Catalina mentioned above, but also in the hundreds of interventions and marches throughout the continent and, in particular, during the 2020 International Women's Day that commemorates the struggle of women across Abya Yala. This is significant, as it demonstrates some of the specific demands of women, but it also shows how their issues intersect across multiple oppressions. The writing on the chest is a powerful symbol of the reclamation of the female body *como territorio de Resistencia*, as the first 'territory' of resistance, to defend and to look after (Paredes, 2015). This thinking which emerges from Indigenous feminists who have been fighting for land and human rights in Abya Yala, is spreading amongst other feminist groups across the continent. Catalina explains:

El territorio es el espacio donde nosotras habitamos, nosotras creamos, en el que compartimos. Ha sido usurpado y negado también...El volver a ocupar territorios tiene que ver con el cuerpo. Con esa cosa política de decir: ésta es mi casa, éste es mi hogar. El cuerpo como espacio de empoderamiento de conocimiento y de auto cuidado.

The territory is the space we inhabit and in which we create and share. [These spaces] have been usurped and denied. To return and occupy the *territorios* has a lot to do with the body. It is political; it is like saying, 'this is my home.' The body as a space of empowerment, of knowing and getting to know oneself, and of self-care (Catalina).

Through *Un violador en tu camino*, collectives of women make visible the invisible and voice the unspeakable: the structural and systemic violence towards women at the hands of the state. The institution that supposedly exists to protect its citizens is exposed by this performance. Women denounce and condemn the symbiotic and violent relationship between patriarchy and the state, an act made possible because it is done communally, performed in

the public realm of the street; the space that belongs to all. Herein lies a key aspect of its transformative and political power.

Whilst in Chile this performance emerges out of a very specific political juncture, the nation's violent historical past continues to echo in the present, as strongly highlighted since the social uprising in October. This echoing through time was recognised in 1996 by Marjorie Agosín, who documented the *Arpillera* movement for 20 years. As she reflected on Chile's return to democracy, she stated:

Women have not forgotten the empowerment they gained when they learnt they could change things by taking to the streets and protesting the dictatorship, and this confidence inspires them as they face Chile's contemporary problems (Agosín, 1996, p. 31).

Is this true? Are the memories sufficiently alive in contemporary Chile to ensure that, after more 190 allegations of sexual violence since the social uprising began (Mur, 2019), women will continue to take to the streets? *LasTesis's* creative intervention indeed suggests that *Un violador en tu camino* has resonated with thousands of women in Chile because it brings to the present the unforgotten memories of the dictatorship and connects them to the experiences of violence the state continues to perpetuate against its citizens today (Pais, 2019, para. 20). However, this does not fully explain why this artistic intervention has struck such a deep chord outside of Chile. It is conceivable that most of the performances outside the continent have been executed by diasporic Chileans and other Latin ex-pats. Most, but not all (even in non-Spanish speaking countries) have been performed in Spanish, but there are many, and still counting, which have been performed in other languages including Arabic, English, French, German, Greek, Mapudungún, Portuguese, and Quechua Cusqueño (El Ciudadano, 2019). The hundreds of performances executed outside Chile “become a feminist anthem worldwide” asserts Pussy Riot member Nayda Tolokonnikova (Tolokonnikova, 2020), which confirms

the global resonance of the performance. ‘A rapist in your path’, represents a global response, a collective cry of women all over the world to denounce violence against women (Pais, 2019, para. 24).

6.3 Rita Segato on patriarchy: From *dueñidad* to *dignidad*

Rita Segato’s scholarly work, which is founded on an understanding of patriarchal power as a formative force, provides a standpoint that illuminates why *LasTesis*’s intervention has echoed so strongly around the world. Below I attempt to summarise Segato’s nuanced and layered arguments, which have not as yet been translated into the English language. In a historical sense, patriarchy, a term that has “burst its way out of the attic” in recent years (Higgins, 2018, para. 4), is the social structure that has been most stable across the globe through time. This is revealed through the structure of several myths, such as the archaic Adamic myth that, alongside other similar allegories, can be found in many different forms on the five continents and through several historical epochs. In such creation stories where women are defeated, dominated, and disciplined; that is, ‘She’ is put in a subordinate role and must surrender to obedience (Segato, 2016, p. 21). These myths, in many cases, also exemplify the appropriation of objects that have been intrinsically feminine (or belonging to women), as masculine symbols. For Segato, this illustrates how stories of domination of women are rooted in creation myths and have emerged alongside civilisations in different parts of the world (Bidaseca, 2016, p. 94). These entrenched narratives, which in turn have become law, form the basis of patriarchal structures as a political order.

Segato contends that, amongst decolonial feminist thinkers, there is widespread consensus that gender inequality precedes colonial rule (2016, p. 94). Patriarchy, for Segato, is the foundation of all relations of power. It is a political system; an order of things whose fabric is interwoven with inequality wherein public morality and religion assist its continuation and reproduction worldwide. Perhaps the recent resonance of *LasTesis*’s performance across the

globe demonstrates this view; the existence of deeply ingrained patriarchal systems that perpetuate violence against ‘all’ women but, in particular, against women in colonised territories.

It is worth noting, however, that Segato makes the clear distinction between settler state patriarchy and what she calls *un patriarcado de baja intensidad* or “patriarchy of low intensity” (2016, p. 21), by which she refers to systems of patriarchy amongst Indigenous cultures prior to the colonisation of Abya Yala. She argues that these patriarchal systems were not femicidal in nature and that women had different degrees of political influence within them. Her views are also contextualised and informed by Quijano and his thesis on the “coloniality of power” (Quijano & Ennis, 2000) as well as by her together with her-long-term research with Indigenous women in Brazil, and her critical stance on Eurocentric feminisms for their limited analysis of the impact of patriarchal domination systems on women in colonised continents (Bidaseca, 2016). While Segato’s view of patriarchy as a ubiquitous political order may not necessarily be new (see Kate Millet, 1970), what is particular about her views is her analysis of patriarchy in the context of Abya Yala.

In studying the impact of colonial rule on First Nations women of Abya Yala, it is necessary to understand the emergence of the *criollo* (Spanish descendants) as the dominant class. The *criollos* continued to favour colonial decrees, and its powerful elites have been central to successive regimes of violent dictatorships in contemporary Latin America. Therefore, Segato concludes, the concept of gender inequality is no longer adequate to indicate the domination of modern patriarchy. She replaces this term with the notion of *dueñidad*, which is loosely translated as ownership, or a new form of lordship (Segato, 2016, p. 19). This lordship, Segato says, is the result of the acceleration and concentration of capital at the hands of very few who now control and own “life and death” on the planet (2016, p. 100). Their power is of a magnitude never before known, making the ideals of a democracy a fallacy (Segato, 2016). In Latin America, this *dueñidad* manifests in forms of

administrations of power that are *mafializada y gansteril*—similar to those of the mafia, or gangster-like—across the realms of business, politics, and justice (2016, p. 101).

This idea of *dueñidad*, in which citizens have few or no rights (and no access to wealth), has resonated strongly with the protest movement in Chile. A word that has emerged as a symbol of the social uprising, which also serves to counter *dueñidad*, is *dignidad* or dignity. One of Santiago's principal squares, La Plaza Baquedano, where thousands of protesters gathered every Friday since October 2019 (until COVID-19 restrictions), has been renamed unofficially as *Plaza Dignidad*: a common place to reclaim citizens' rights to live with dignity. Antonia Zegers, a well-known Chilean actress, claims that the word *dignidad* appeared and echoed across the social uprising as a basic need to be reclaimed. It emerged from the collective demands for a new social pact—that is, a dialogue among, and between, all sectors of Chilean society to reconfigure how politics are done (Rodríguez, 2019, para. 6). Further, the social pact asks for a different kind of social contract, one that is agreed not just amongst the Chilean elite but is transparent and involves a renewed articulation of the basic principles that build civic and political order. To many, this means a new Chilean Constitution (Herranz, 2019).

The salience of Segato's work on gendered violence makes her one of the most authoritative voices on this topic across Abya Yala. Challenging the assumption that gender and patriarchy are colonial legacies is key to her thesis. It is the Western conception of gender binary, states Segato, that brought with it the intensification of the patriarchal rule as the system of social organisation, and this became a key imposition of the colonial rule ("Segato, Rita," 2020).

6.4 Female bodies on the front line

The former Plaza Baquedano features a large monument of the 19th century army general Manuel Baquedano on a horseback; it is one of the many military-themed statues of male ‘heroes’ dotted across Santiago. As the idea of a new social pact emerges, women are convincingly taking protagonist roles within the new social movement, including transgressing and reclaiming powerful patriarchal symbols, such as the monument to Baquedano, as seen in the image below. Climbing these monuments, covering them, and otherwise repositioning them, is a way to delegitimise the institutional power they represent and reject the patriarchal conception of history and its European mythology (Aliwen, 2019). Throughout the protests, and in the past, these historical monuments have been almost exclusively occupied by young male activists, but now, as Catalina noted, things are changing: “Women took over the monument of Baquedano.” The image of the three women (Figure 25) symbolises the new public spaces women occupy: dismantling patriarchal symbols and at the front - line in direct confrontation with the police.

La primera línea is the first line of protesters, whose role is to slow the advance of the police. Usually, by using rocks and other improvised weapons, members of *la primera línea*, with the support of volunteer medical brigades, direct police attention away when there is the need to evacuate the wounded. In an online interview, one of the women who belongs to the ‘first line’ says:

I do it because I know it is important women occupy this space; I am a feminist. This is my way of fighting, I put my body on the line, to make us visible in this struggle (Reyes, 2019, para. 33).

This is another manifestation of women transgressing established cultural norms. Cherie Zalaquett, who investigated the role of Chilean women in the military and the armed insurgency during the Pinochet regime, suggests that before the current protest movement, women had a very marginal place in direct combat (cited in Reyes, 2019). This new place women occupy has

elicited a brutal response from the police. *El cuerpo de mujer se transforma en un trofeo de guerra*; that is, women's bodies have become a trophy of war (BBC News Mundo, 2020, para. 18).



Figure 25: Women take the statue of Baquedano in the *Plaza Dignidad*. Source: Reyes, 2019.

6.5 The betrayal of the State

In 1992, the Indigenous women from the Zapatista National Liberation Army were the first to demand equal participation in the revolutionary fight against the Mexican government. They claimed that democracy was not possible without them (Hess, 2018). This precedent has undoubtedly been an inspiration for feminist movements in contemporary Chile, which together

with the emergence of new social movements, has seen increased participation of women in all aspects of the civic fight, including on the front line (Hess, 2018; Reyes, 2019). The heightened presence of women in insurgent spaces, which in the past have been the domain of mostly male bodies, is an invitation to re-imagine gender power relations and to decolonise the protest movement.

Segato (2019) explains that, up until recently, many feminist movements in Abya Yala have wasted time and energy looking for answers in European feminist models, and in demanding rights for women, as women have done in Europe. However, the relationships between the state and society in Europe (particularly in Western Europe) are not the same as they are in Abya Yala. That is, women in Latin America have not succeeded in battle for equality to the same extent as women in Europe. Nor have they gained the same level of protection through the state's legal and judicial systems (Segato, 2019). Violence against women on the Latin American continent has continued to be widespread. Women have continued to be murdered in vast numbers across the region. In 2018 at least 3,529 women were victims of femicide in Latin America and the Caribbean (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018). That is why Segato maintains that the politicisation and activism of women at this point is critical, and the battleground for further transformation has to be accelerated and driven by social movements and by the women themselves (Batthyány & Segato, 2019). *LasTesis's* performance can be seen as an example of the way in which women in Abya Yala are responding collectively to the betrayal of the state with creativity, defiance, and intelligence.

Hemos visto a tantas mujeres que sin conocerse han salido a la calle ... Esa es la clave, el camino: el trabajo colaborativo, la sororidad, la cooperación entre nosotras, indicó Valdés.

We have seen so many women who, without knowing each other, have gone out into the street ... This is the key, the way: the collaborative

work, our sisterhood, the cooperation amongst us, said Valdés, one of *LasTesis*, in an interview (Mur, 2019, para. 7).

6.6 *LasTesis* as a reinvention of social emancipation

In his book *Epistemologies of the South*, Boaventura de Sousa Santos contends that Abya Yala is witnessing the beginnings of new emancipatory energies that he calls “counterhegemonic globalisations” (2016b, p. 48); that is, social movements and insurgent cross-collaborations among the struggles of those that oppose the forces of neoliberal globalisation. In this sense, *Un violador en tu camino* has the characteristics of these kinds of social movements. It emerges from the specificities of a group of Chilean women and finds its way as an international anthem that, in redefining women’s struggle against patriarchy, also challenges how women fight against these oppressive forces.

The power of this performance beyond the embedded political symbolism, as explained above, lies in the new ways in which these women organised and presented themselves. Santos suggests that this new way for social organising presupposes the “carnivalization of emancipatory social practices and the eroticism of laughter and play” (2020, p. 61). The playful and insurgent manner in which they present their performance exudes vitality, power, and a sense of being in control.

They do not ask for permission or appeal for understanding. Their audience is not the establishment or the state; it is other women who can relate to the messages embedded in their performances. That is why, on one extraordinary occasion, more than 10,000 women aged over 40, as the social media announcement specified, gathered outside the Chilean National Stadium. But more impactful than the gathering, according to Nona Fernández, was that all of those women were talking about their experiences of violence:

What really impacted me from ‘*LasTesis Seniors*’ performance was that, in an incredible carnivalesque and festive tone, the women started talking about their experiences of abuse. We were there to receive, and to tell, and to hear each other’s stories, and to do a collective catharsis. *All* the women that were there had experienced some form of abuse, some more complex and difficult than others, but all had an experience, and when I extrapolate this to all the versions of this performance that have happened around the world; this is ferocious! (Fernández, 2020, 15:15 min).

The nature of sharing a common experience helps to heal and process untold trauma (Herring et al., 2013). The collective catharsis occurs as women ‘liberate’ themselves, along with others, in a shared expression of their disclosure of abuse. The catharsis is both personal and collective, and it is transformed into a joyous atmosphere propelled by the sense of bravery. The coming together of so many women engaging in such a courageous act of voicing their multiple experiences of violence renders the veil of silence no longer possible. This is undoubtedly an expression of collective women’s power, which is illustrated by Paula:

We were rehearsing for a while, then it was time to take it to the streets. That was incredible. We only [performed] it twice, and all women left after that. But the collective scream and the feel of community: a big herd, a tribe, a sense of togetherness, of power. A sense of ‘No More!’ That was very, very strong! ... My experience was very corporeal. At that moment my sense of individuality disappeared. We were there together, and for those who couldn’t be there; for the women who were killed by their partners, for our grandmothers. That is the sense of power, not as an individual, but of a powerful collective. We were there for ourselves and others; and you were there *with* others. It was very emotional to witness that. Many women broke down in tears during the performance. This was very moving. Together we shouted, it felt like a mantra. It was very tribal (Paula).

At that moment, it can be said that the women gain a form of empowerment. As Yuval-Davis argues, “empowerment can be felt momentarily or can be transformative” (Yuval-Davis, 1994, p. 180). The extent to which women gained a sense of agency through the performance and whether this was felt for a moment or, as Yuval-Davis suggests more deeply, is perhaps immaterial. The experience described by Paula undoubtedly will stay with her as more than just an instant of empowerment but a transcendent moment of deep, embodied human connection. This quality has been echoed throughout the thesis’s case studies as fundamental to gaining power.



Figure 26: *LasTesis Senior* outside the Chilean National Stadium on December 5, 2019. Source: Cooperativa.cl., 2020.

6.7 Intimacy, laughter and the power of the domestic realm

For the past 30 years, there has been an increasing trend in cultural production to use humour to combat racial stereotypes and social injustices amongst the Latina and Chicana cultures (Valdez, 2018). The idea of laughter and good humour, together with reclaiming the power of the domestic realm, are essential elements in the quest to dismantle patriarchy (Segato, 2018). In an ethnographic essay that maps the work of Black American writer of the 1930s,

Ralph Ellison, Cynthia Dobbs argues that laughter can be seen as a form of rebellion, particularly when it bursts out of black and brown bodies, as this represents a gesture of defiance to power and control (Dobbs, 2016). Similarly, joking and humour are also considered in many Aboriginal contexts to be important vehicles that allow resistance and healing as well as the expression of fear and weakness (McCullough, 2008).

The ‘carnavalesque’ and ‘playful’ atmosphere Nona Fernández reported during *LasTesis Seniors’* performance emerged as a result of coming together and the power of the shared experience, which is also reported and described by Rubi in Chapter 4, when the women of the community theatre group *Las Melisas* began using “feathers, flowers, and colour” to express themselves in a display of exuberance and joy. Paula recounts a moment of cheekiness and laughter during *LasTesis’s Seniors’* performance.

At that moment I had no sense of how many women were there, it was impossible to judge. Young women were directing the rehearsals instructing, “To the left! To the right!” and many others interrupted by shouting, “To the left, and the *other Left*.” It was very funny; this playfulness was marvellous (Paula).

Many of the women who attended this demonstration, as my interlocutors suggested, were new to protesting on the streets. Many of them (especially those over 40) have been inculcated that their place is in “their home” whilst at the same time, under an aggressive neoliberal economy, the domestic sphere has been progressively stripped of value. Systemically, relationships and domestic work are not only devalued, but mostly considered low-paid work, or not paid at all. Historically, in this settler-colonial society, the domestic realm has been one of the most unequal places for relations between women. The subjugation of Indigenous, mestiza, Black and poor women has been an assertion of the domestic power of white women (hooks, 2013). This power play continues to be exercised, as domestic work is currently

one of the main occupations of poor women across the world (Brown, 2006). Encouraging women to reclaim and assert the value and the politics of the familial realm is key (Segato, 2016). This was illustrated by Lena in Chapter Five: the project she was working on with the Arab community in Western Sydney was “all about food, but it was on our own terms, in our own voices” that is, in a way that claimed the power of the domestic realm. It is place where one can simply move through, tending to things; it is a space of intimacy, of precious objects and utensils, and of relationships in which people are at the centre of their own stories. This is what Lena was arguing for: the creation and protection of “decolonial contact zones” (Santos, 2016b) where a different set of values are applied, and more egalitarian set of relationships are forged, which continues to be a very important role of art for social change (Sonn & Baker, 2015; Sonn & Quayle, 2014).

What becomes apparent from the examples above are the ways that women’s domestic work and the work of their bodies is brought into the public sphere in order to underline and make visible political violence

6.8 The *arpillera* movement

How do you find a voice when society censors you? How do you find a voice when, as a woman, you are not able to feel empowered by a very, very patriarchal society? How do you find a voice when you have been victimized? And yet they found a voice. And I think, if you ask me, what is the most important thing about *arpilleras*, it's the ability of people who have been victimized to tell their own story.

—Marjorie Agosín, 2012, para. 1

Chilean women are no strangers to denouncing police brutality. Decades before *LasTesis*’s creative intervention, during the Pinochet regime, a group of women who become known as the *arpilleristas* also generated international

attention, in this instance by denouncing Chile's state violence through their embroideries. Unlike *LasTesis's* very public performance, which was aided by social media, the *arpilleristas'* political resistance emerged amid a nation that had become silent and paralysed by fear (Agosín, 1996). The *arpilleras*, named after the hessian backing of old sacks, were made surreptitiously, but they quickly became public testimony of the atrocities committed under the Pinochet regime (Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, 2019). In her book *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love*, Majorie Agosín documented two decades of the *arpilleristas'* work.

In 1974, one group of women, many of them mothers of disappeared people, came together to protest the brutal regime and demand the return of their loved ones. The focus of the protests was vivid, hand-stitched quilts that told the sad and gruesome stories of the disappeared. These quilts were called *arpilleras*, and the women who made them were known as *arpilleristas* (Agosín, 2012, para. 7).

Their highly subversive topics, laid out on colourful pieces of cloth with beautifully stitched patchwork, were often smuggled abroad, helping to spark international solidarity with the Chilean people. In this way, the *arpilleras* “will remain one of the most important and fundamental movements in Chilean history as well as in Latin American popular culture” (Agosín, 1996, p. 89).

The *arpilleras* are extraordinary works of memory. They narrate the unspeakable: the unprecedented bombing of the national presidential palace of La Moderna; methods of torture, massacres, detention, exile and the search for the disappeared; and many acts of resistance and hope, as well as the hardship of ordinary life in the shantytowns.

The women worked together and “were empowered by the communal experience” (Agosín, 2012, para. 12) of the search for their missing relatives who had been forcibly disappeared. Looking for the missing was particularly difficult. It meant enduring the uncertainty of searching for someone who was

neither dead nor alive. During this painstaking task of keeping the memories of their loved ones alive, the women collectively turned their pain into demands for truth and justice. The shared experience of grief, and the solidarity they afforded one another, was an important force that sustained the



Figure 27: *Marcha de mujeres familiares de detenidos desaparecidos*. March of women relatives of detained persons. The words 'Where are they?' can be read on the signs. This *arpillera* is a part of the Isabel Morel Collection (in Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, 2012, p. 42).

relentless quest to find the missing. For years, the women rallied in front of torture centres and hospitals and chained themselves at the front of state institutions, demanding answers. One of the women remembers, “We’ve sat in the streets, knowing they were going to imprison us. We started hunger strikes. They imprisoned and chained us” (Gala Jesús Torres Aravena cited in Agosín, 1996, p. 136).

The women’s embroideries began out of necessity. Many of them turned to sewing as a way of earning an income after their husbands, daughters, and sons were killed or disappeared. These women not only had to contend with not knowing what had happened to their family members but also had to deal with the poverty that ensued after Pinochet installed Milton Friedman’s aggressive free-market economic model (Klein, 2007). *Arpillerista* Violeta Morales commented: “Our country has never seen so much prostitution as in those years, where poor jobless women maintained their families by prostituting themselves and their daughters in the streets” (Agosín, 1996, p. 109).

Before the women began making the *arpilleras*, they were searching for the missing. As they searched for their loved ones, they found each other: in police stations, hospitals, and morgues. The women became “an alliance of sisterhood that tried to negate masculine authoritarian power, oppression, and exploitation” (Agosín, 1996, p. 10). In these painful circumstances “a unique form of protest was born: the *arpilleras*” (Allende, 1996, p. xii).

We the *arpilleristas* not only wanted to denounce the disappearances of our loved ones but also wanted the people to know about the misery of our *compañeras* living in the townships, and the huge abuses that the military was committing in our country (Violeta Morales, cited in Agosín, 1996, p. 109).

The *arpilleristas* become storytellers in a similar way to that of the Noongar doll-makers, described in Chapter Three, who used their dolls to tell

and to remember. Both groups of women narrated the present and preserved histories and memories through colour and threads. They stitched remembrances of traumatic and contested political times that the state and its defenders continued to deny for decades. In the case of the *arpilleristas*, linking their search for their missing with acts of collective creation became an unique aspect of this work. As Agosín reflects, “the search for a loved one was always linked to the search for beauty or to the search for making art or denouncing what has happened ... their lives and their art were inseparable” (Agosín, 2012, para. 14).

This was also reflected in the fact that the *arpilleras* in themselves contained, in some cases, fragments of the clothes of the missing, or a strain of hair which had been jealously stored in a cupboard since their childhood. In the making of the *arpilleras*, the life of the women, as citizens looking for justice, merges deeply with the life of the artists; the creators of a powerful portrayal of that time (Agosín, 2013). “They found a voice through art. And they found their voice ... through the power of the human hand” (Agosín, 2012).

6.9 From charity to co-creation and collaborations

Although the *arpillera* movement in some cases become autonomous—that is, some groups formed independently in certain shantytowns—the majority of them were initially supported under the auspices of a few charitable organisations, most notably the Catholic Church. They began with the support of the *Comité Pro Paz* (Committee for Peace) and later were under the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (Vicariate of Solidarity). These were the first institutions in Chile to denounce the human-rights abuses committed by the Pinochet regime and provide the families of those detained and disappeared with legal and other infrastructure support to begin the search for their loved ones (Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, 2019). The Vicariate provided a space for women to congregate, the materials to begin their work, and the

help of an artist named Valentina Bone, who provided the artistic skills and facilitated the first *arpillera* workshops in Santiago. This organisational structure, infrastructure and resources, both artistic and material facilitated the creative processes of the participating communities. Their assistance operated in ways somewhat different but also similar to those used by CAN WA (discussed in Chapter Three) and Entepola (discussed in Chapter Four) to support the development of cultural production in the Wheatbelt region of Western Australia and the city of Santiago, respectively.

6.9.1 Co-creation and collaborations

In her book *Side by side? Community art and the challenge of co-creativity*, Maya Haviland looks closely at the collaborative dynamics in community arts projects and considers how co-creativity is valued or obscured over the cycles of different cross-cultural projects (Haviland, 2017). Haviland points out that the importance of the co-creators and collaborators in these collective creative processes cannot be underestimated: “Co-creativity is a relational process, rather than simply a form of co-authorship” (Haviland, 2017, p. 136). Haviland argues that project facilitators play defining roles that, in many cases, shape the way relationships are forged amongst participants; however, their influence can be hidden. This is true particularly when facilitators emerge from differential positions of privilege. In the name of empowering participants, especially if they emerge from minoritised communities, or to avoid accusations of neocolonial exploitation, facilitators often diminish their roles in these collaborative projects (Haviland, 2014).

A comparison may be drawn here between the *arpillera* movement and the Tjanpi Desert Weavers in the NPY lands of Australia. Valentina Bone’s role as the artist in the *arpillera* movement was foundational but not highly celebrated. In an article that outlines the *arpilleras* as providing employment opportunities for marginalised women during the dictatorship, Bone’s role is noted not for her artistic skills, but for her leadership and facilitation. This is

expressed by one of the participants: “without them [Valentina and her family], none of this would have happened. It was these people we relied upon” (cited in Snyder, 2016, p. 329). Bone’s role was underlined after she was invited by Isabel Morel, a Chilean exile in the United States, to tour universities and churches to raise awareness of the situation in Chile during the late 1970s. Her role in “teaching the technique” of the *arpilleras* is otherwise silent (Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, 2019, p. 155).

Similarly, the role of Anglo-Australian artist Nalda Searles in the work of the Tjanpi Desert Weavers is scantily documented, despite her pivotal contribution. Jennifer Biddle in her 2016 book *Remote Avant-Garde: Aboriginal Art Under Occupation* briefly describes Searles as someone “whose skill base has been crucial in the development of NPY Tjanpi arts” (Biddle, 2016, p. 205). Searles, like Bone, is rarely linked to the works of these contemporary Aboriginal artists, and her seminal role remains almost invisible. Biddle argues that, likewise, the forthright and savvy political role of Aboriginal people in sourcing appropriate whitefella expertise has been mostly invisible. The role of the white artist has been described as the “absented Whitefella” in Aboriginal arts and media history (Biddle, 2016, p. 205).

Having had a personal connection with Nelda Searles (through the Noongar doll project) it is conceivable to me that the part of “absented Whitefella” has been a deliberate positioning on her part as a white artist who understands her role as being outside the confines of a Western-centric model of single authorship and instead one that aligns with what Afro-Canadian artist Vanessa Richards describes as “binding the community together” (Richards, 2015). This is a positioning that is more closely associated with the role of the artist or collaborator in community arts and CCD practice, as discussed in Chapter One.

Why is it relevant to understand the dynamics of these collaborative processes? Haviland proposes that by having deliberate models of cross-racial

collaboration, co-creativity can “destabilise existing structural relationships potentially moving us towards the kinds of social changes that many arts-based collaborative ethnography projects are seeking to achieve” (Haviland, 2014, p. 127). Further, co-creativity, argues Haviland, is key to resisting the tendency to focus on individuality and single authorship with which the contemporary art world is so preoccupied. Collective modes of cultural production are inherent to humans and are constantly occurring, but they are often misunderstood and undervalued in our contemporary globalised cultures (Haviland, 2014, p. 122).

6.10 Healing works to art works: From fear to courage

While the *arpillera* movement began as a mechanism for women to grieve and remember the disappeared, the process of ‘doing’ together helped them to process trauma, gain strength, and organise as activists with a global reach. The *arpilleras* have been categorised, in the main, as a craft; their creators were not considered artists, and most of the pieces do not have individual attribution. However, their work transcends the most commonly known utilitarian purpose of a piece of craft: That is, the *arpilleras* represent a piece of art that communicates lived experiences, localised in time and space (Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, 2019, p. 13).

Similarly, in the case of the Noongar doll-making workshops in Western Australia, the workshops began as a space of healing. Sharyn Eagan, one of the artist facilitators, recalls, “These workshops have such a healing quality, they feel peaceful and good—away from everything else” (Meredith, 2011, 00:08 min). The work proceeded to develop important artistic, and aesthetic and political qualities. Although the political aspects of the work with regard to Stolen Generations histories was somewhat muted by its incorporation into a mainstream gallery space, the dolls can be seen as part of the broader imperative for ‘truth-telling’ by Indigenous communities across Australia.

Again, though the Noongar dolls were crafted by ‘non-artists’, their transcendent quality as art pieces is expressed by Aboriginal curator Glenn Barkley when he said:

I loved the dolls from the moment I saw them. I responded to the raw vital energy that seemed to have gone into their making and the pure power of love and spirit that seemed to pour out of them (Barkley & Albert, 2013, p. 70).

In a different way, *Un violador en tu camino* also presented a healing opportunity for women, in particular at the performance outside the Chilean National Stadium, where the women were able to ‘say’ something that has been largely unsaid; something that has been waiting for the opportunity to be aired. Older women found a moment of courage and, as they were supported by other women, they were no longer silent. The younger generation of women who are daring to speak out declared that they are not scared anymore. In the words of Catalina, they assert:

“This is my body, and no one can touch it.” The consequence of this has been that women began to talk. Women shook off the burden and the guilt and started talking about sexual abuse in their families. This has shaken family relationships—we have normalised and sometimes silenced abuse. The collective force and the sense of support and shared experience [as spurred by *LasTesis*] made women brave. In many families this was a women’s secret: the mother, the aunty, and the sister knew, but they were all silent. Now, women have lost their fear (Catalina).

The healing, aesthetic and daring qualities of the examples described above share commonalities, but they also differ. The hand-stitching work in the *arpilleras* and the Noongar dolls is an inherently time-consuming task. The work reveals itself over time. It can take days or weeks to complete. The art pieces were made while the women took time and exchanged moments of pain

and joy, as is revealed in many of the *arpilleras* and Noongar dolls. The *arpilleristas* initially depicted state and military violence, the deaths and disappearances, but the themes began to change over time. They incorporated scenes of life in the shantytowns and women cooking in soup kitchens; their daily work became interwoven with themes of hope for the return of democracy. At the same time, these women were engaging in courageous and dangerous acts of street protest that defied the violence of the state.

Un violador en tu camino, like any other piece of theatre, would have also been developed over time; however, the execution of the performance and how women were able to join in, using social media, presents a radically different model. The velocity with which messages were shared, in many cases through existing online networks, represents the massive appeal *LasTesis* managed to generate. However, the women did not stop at receiving the messages; they decided to act collectively. It is the willingness to participate in an anti-patriarchal public performance that is itself a huge act of defiance. They dressed up, as the call for *LasTesis*'s Seniors suggested, in black clothing (representing women in mourning) and red scarfs (symbolising female power), and they 'showed up' outside the National Stadium because they wanted to be there represented in the 'flesh'.

Paula remembered that she very was inspired to attend. She closed her clinical psychology practice early that day and went by herself, thinking that she was going to be able to meet up with her friends there. Paula never imagined seeing 'that' number of women; "It was a sea of women shouting with one voice." And besides being an incredible event in itself, it had a wider impact; "*LasTesis* has given a huge push to the social movement [in Chile] in general", and it has highlighted the use of the arts as a powerful tool of insurgence. The arts have become a form of resistance and also something that sustains the social movement in Chile. "There is a huge diversity of artistic expression coming from equally diverse groups; all working on the streets; murals, dance, photography," says Paula.

In contemporary Chile, *LasTesis*, informed by Rita Segato's feminist thought, has helped women to understand how state violence has been normalised and reproduced. Catalina says that besides the femicides and all the systemic injustices impacting women—wage inequality and the lack of rights, intrafamily violence, and the lack of protection for sexual violence, women are faced with 'A rapist in their way'. *LasTesis* and their street performance *Un violador en tu camino* offered a highly destabilising creative intervention that captured the experiences of Chilean women at a very particular moment in time. They used a model of collaboration and co-creation unlike any of the others discussed in the case studies throughout the thesis. *LasTesis* did not act as co-creators in the conventional sense used in most community arts projects; that is, in a face-to-face exchange of skills that occurs over a period of time. *LasTesis* used *auto-convocatoria* to call for participation, a term used widely in Chile to mean that the artistic or political actions are self-organised, autonomous and not linked to any official organisation; they do not have an official agenda or respond to state-sponsored activities. They are generated, coordinated, and executed by those who participate. *Un violador en tu camino* became the catalyst for dozens of performances completely outside *LasTesis*'s creative control. In this way, *LasTesis*'s performance escaped from their hands. *LasTesis* did not retain control over the creative output, nor did they wish to retain control. This is an example of how these new types of creative works are received by others, in this case "coinciding with cultural and political moments which imbue them with new value, fresh meaning and significance other than that originally imagined by their creators" (Haviland, 2017, p. 154). The art, in this case, was a "gift", as Nona Fernandes described it. It became an 'iterative' creative and political act to denounce, to connect, to create awareness, and to communicate.

The role of *LasTesis* can be understood as akin to Rita Segato's in being a 'giver of words', but instead of words, *LasTesis* held up a symbolic mirror to

women across Chile and beyond, and thousands saw themselves reflected in those images. Paula illustrates this point.

On a micro level, in my clinical practice, I have seen a huge turn during the period since *LasTesis*. Many of my women patients disclosed abuses; for others, memories of abuse resurged. For instance, a 58-year-old woman told me that she never realised that her first daughter of her 23 years of marriage was the result of rape. This mobilised many women to recognise their situations of abuse, and to be able to name things and see them from a different perspective (Paula).

In holding these images up to women, *LasTesis*, and the hundreds of women who participated in the performances, together and publicly laid bare a ‘code’ of violence, betrayal, and abuse of power that was ‘universally’ recognised by women. *Un violador en tu camino* and its associated images were used by the women themselves to decode the meaning of the performance, and in doing so, each intervention became an interpretive mechanism to reflect and to deepen women’s critical consciousness. This notion is central to Freire’s popular education methodology (Barndt, 2011).

What *LasTesis* and the [warrior] women of my generation, and other women that came before us, and will come after us, are given us, is a way to reimagine what it means to be a woman (Catalina).

6.11 Rehearsing for change

In recent years, with the proliferation of media platforms, there have been increased boundary crossings between creators and collaborators, art and activism, and the use of the internet. These emergent forms of cultural production are more often than not bringing together a range of collaborators who are often located across “differentials of class, ethnicity, privilege, and power, individuals as well as organisations and institutions” (Haviland, 2017, p. 134). Further, the emergence of creative cross-cultural and collaborative work

that is set against a backdrop of state violence and inequality, as in the case of *LasTesis*, is giving rise to diverse and more complex dynamic movements that fight for social justice. This is the case currently in the Black Lives Matter movements where the public realm is being 'flooded' with collective creative responses to police brutality, in such a way that the ideas and messages they carry can't be ignored by people passing by (Gehl, 2020). It can be argued that within these new and emerging forms of art-making the creative process itself can be considered more important than the result, taking precedence over the artistic outcome (Tate, 2020), as it is true in the case of the case studies throughout this thesis. That is because "it is in the intersection that co-creative works are made, meanings are conveyed, and social and political relations are embedded" (Haviland, 2017, p. 156). As these margins of co-creations continue to be blurred, they pose important questions about how the work that emerges from these collectivist processes can be attributed, reproduced, distributed, or even commercialised. This is in itself a form of resistance to the way in which art and creativity are transacted in a neocapitalist world.

With their creation of *Un violador en tu camino* and the 'iterative performances' that emerged from it, *LasTesis* achieved an unprecedented form of social change. Successfully, and on a massive scale, *LasTesis* altered the hierarchies of knowledge-production (Haviland, 2014, p. 127). They devolved power to all women who wanted to execute 'their' work and, in doing so, they distributed value among the women who participated in 'A rapist in your path' (Haviland, 2017). From a short street-art intervention to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 2019 in Santiago, *Un violador en tu camino* became a formidable mechanism for women around the world not just to denounce violence against women but to 'rehearse for change'.

6.12 Summary

This chapter examines two separate art and activist movements, both of which harnessed the collective and creative power of women in Chile to denounce state violence, to gain courage, and to assert themselves as having a political voice. Although creativity and the arts are at the core of both of these movements, the methods by which these projects emerged, and how they were created and disseminated, are vastly different. The clandestine movement of the *arpilleras* developed over time to become one of the most important social resistance efforts by women during the Pinochet military regime. In contrast, *LasTesis's* street-theatre intervention, inspired by feminist theories and aided by the internet, went viral within days of their first performance. Through *Un violador en tu camino* women found courage and, in doing so, the veil of silence over state and sexual violence can no longer be sustained. This colossal collective and collaborative experience challenged hierarchal forms of cultural production, transformed women and the feminist movement in Chile and, more broadly, in Abya Yala. Finally, *LasTesis's* performance raises questions about future forms of collective activism and the use of the arts.

These questions are particularly relevant and have come to the fore in the context of the Black Lives Movement and the upsurge of art production that is emerging with and alongside it. This chapter has expanded the theoretical understanding of art for social change outside the parameters of the state-sponsored and organised collaborative practice into forms of activist and more autonomous practice that seek to engage and politicise the role of women in the public domain.

CONCLUSION

Taking up Space

Collective liberation requires collective action.

—Amin Husain (Vartanian, 2020, 20:21)



Figure 28: Andrea Olivares, “The goddess of dignity”, at *Plaza de la Dignidad*, Santiago on International Women’s Day 2020. Photograph: Marcela Martínez.

The idea for this thesis began with my desire, as a non-Indigenous woman, to make sense of the complex and contested terrain of working with First Nations people in arts and culture. It began with my personal reflections on art for social change after years of having direct involvement in community arts, both as a practitioner and as an arts executive. Soon, it became a much deeper exploration of how to decolonise my own subjectivity, supported by feminist theories from the global South. This is how I set out to critically understand the relationship between community-based collaborative arts practice and the empowerment of women, especially those who have been impacted by legacies of colonial rule. I began this research by drawing from my lived experiences

and a complex set of subject positions, which have informed the methodology used and the themes explored throughout the thesis. As I have traversed multiple worlds—born and raised in Chile during highly politicised times, the daughter of ‘uneducated’ parents, a political refugee, a woman of colour, and an arts professional—I developed a grounded and informed perspective that guided this research.

The case studies examined in the thesis are set across the settler-colonial societies of Chile and Australia. They centred the voices and narratives of Indigenous women and women of colour, with most of whom I had a close and personal connection over several years. This closeness allowed for an honest and deep exchange which enriched our interactions. A thread that runs through the thesis is an exploration of the forms of collaboration that are integral to art for social change practices. Collaboration, which most often implies interaction across categories of race, class, privilege, and other differentials of power, is central to both decolonial and empowerment work. Throughout each case study, my interlocutors offered deep and insightful reflections on their experience as practitioners, artists, and collaborators in art for social change. As scholar Srilatha Batliwala suggested (cited in Chapter Two, page 94), “listening to their values, principles, articulations, and actions” became key to building a language with which to frame the connection between the empowerment of women and art for social change. Throughout this research, I carefully listened to the lived experiences of many women (my interlocutors and others) who are resisting the forces of patriarchy, racism, and state violence using arts and creativity.

Positioning their thoughts and reflections ‘in conversation’ with feminist theories from the global South, this study illuminates how Indigenous women and women of colour are framing their quest for social justice. In doing so, the thesis supports a renewed understanding of art for social change as a decolonising possibility. At this critical time, when activist movements across the globe are seeking to develop ties of solidarity to counter the

hegemonic forces of white supremacy and continuing colonialism, a multiplicity of voices, approaches and creativities are much needed to shift these increasingly dominant consortiums of power. This thesis exemplifies how art for social change projects—when conceptualised, practiced, and executed from the standpoint of feminists of colour—can be an effective mechanism to challenge power relations, and therefore it can be a catalysing force toward the empowerment of women.

Art for social change and the discourse of women's empowerment share similar histories, theoretical roots, and encountered a similar fate of co-option in the global North. Emerging from the 1960s to the 1980s, amidst libertarian movements driven by scholars and activists from the global South, these oppositional and radical movements experienced a decline in the 1990s. Understanding why these social movements weakened is important at this present time. As we witness global demands for decolonisation and racial justice, galvanised through several social movements and in particular the Black Lives Matter movement, we must learn from the past. As I suggested previously, the adoption of community arts into the mainstream policy agendas of the global North, combined with more aggressive and globalised neoliberal economies, was key to watering down the discourses of arts for social change and women's empowerment during the 1990s. In the global South, however, the trajectory of art for social change and the empowerment of women remained ongoing battles explicitly linked to the structural violence that stemmed from the persistent territorial occupation of First Nation lands. The continual and disproportionate disadvantage of Indigenous people, both in Australia and Abya Yala, and the militarisation that continued unabated throughout the South American continent from the 1970s to the 1990s, impacted the lives of women, especially Indigenous women. That is to say, whereas in the global North there was some policy advancement towards equality (for some), in the global South, the struggle for equality and justice continued unabated. In many cases, activists became increasingly persecuted and were driven underground, as explained in Chapter Six.

This study emphasises how women of colour and Indigenous women have sustained their struggles against patriarchy, capitalism, and racism through localised and creative epistemologies that build a language of resistance and which are connecting across the global South. In this way, women are counteracting these consortiums of power collectively, and arts and creativity have been central to their fight. In the ‘doing’, women are finding their voices and one another, and these processes develop a solidarity that galvanises women into political actions of defiance and courage. Throughout the chapters common patterns have emerged, and they provide insight into how and why Indigenous women and women of colour are using art for social change as a platform for collective activism as well as highlighting the unique role arts play in the struggle for systemic change. These patterns reveal that there are some intrinsic qualities in the process of collective creation, especially when they allow for autonomous and self-determined creative exploration.

Through different modalities of art-making, women use narrative to communicate and affirm their stories and their lived experiences in creative ways. Despite some obvious cultural differences and geographical variations between the case studies, art for social change manifested in similar but also different ways between Indigenous women, women of colour in Australia, and Chilean women. What became apparent during the evolution of this study is that art for social change processes, when they are true to their liberating origins, allow for multiple subjectivities and knowledges to coexist, and it is in their collective becoming that power manifests for individuals and groups. This is exemplified in the Noongar dolls, Noongar Pop Fashion, Afghan Women’s Dobaiti Poetry, and *Las Melisas* projects, as well as the *arpillera* and *LasTesis* movements. Across these projects and movements, it became evident that art for social change is deeply anchored in Southern feminist praxis. That is, through these projects’ modalities, women came to realise they had the power to challenge domination and could reinvent and validate their own narratives. Universally, women spoke about the connection between healing

and self-determination, and about the power of the arts as a vehicle and a language for processing trauma and expressing new ways of being in the world. For some women, collective art-making became intimately linked to their fight for social justice, as in the case of the *arpilleras* movement, and the expression of emotional responses to moments of upheaval. For others, it provided a source of friendship and spiritual solace that countered the pain and fatigue they confronted, as in the cases of the Noongar dolls and *Las Melisas* (Remenchik, 2020). Through the process of collective art-making, women bore witness to social injustices and found the energy to respond with resolution and dignity.

Art for social change inspired women, not just to tell their own stories but also, more importantly, to recognise the collective resonance of those stories. This awareness gave the women a renewed sense of their individual and collective power to reimagine those stories, affirm authorship, claim power over their experiences, and decide how their narratives were enunciated. The case studies also revealed the pervasive and interlocking nature of multiple oppressions and the impact these are having on women, especially on Indigenous women and women of colour. But women are pushing back by creating different ways to represent themselves and one another with defiance, humour and joy, as well as by applying different models of leadership that account for their experiences and realities. Race-aware feminists understand the dynamics of power and privilege, and they are capable of implementing careful strategies that balance action, reflection, and the ceding of power.

Women are using and reclaiming their bodies as a legitimate platform to assert themselves, to take up space, and to affirm their political voice in the struggle for decolonised justice. My interlocutors, through their creative actions, have declared that decolonisation is overdue. The rumblings of discontent are being felt across the globe. In the past two decades there have been increasing visible signs of the push toward decolonisation. Some of these

have come from governments of states, but they are more often from subjugated communities who themselves are demanding change.

In 2002 the Left-leaning President Hugo Chávez, of Venezuela, decreed 12 October as the ‘Day of Indigenous Resistance’, previously known in the continent as *Día de la Raza* or ‘Columbus Day’. Two years later, in 2004, in an action which indicated that justice had not been served, activists brought the Columbus statue in the capital city Caracas to a symbolic public trial, where it was toppled and sentenced to a public ‘hanging’ without Chávez’s endorsement. As the statue hung by its feet, an Indigenous dance ceremony followed, until the police arrived. A decade later, the statue of the Indigenous warrior and leader, *cacique Guaicaipuro*, who fought against Spanish colonisation, was erected in its place (García Marco, 2020).

Similarly, the Native American movement in the United States has confronted monuments of Columbus and, in so doing, has created a counter-narrative to the idea of the ‘discovery of the Americas’. In these movements, as in the Zapatista uprising highlighted in Chapter Six, women are demanding a central and equal place.

On 9 March 2015, a statue of British colonialist Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town was bucketed with excrement, sparking the ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ movement and a series of other student movements across South Africa. But for Black feminists, this meant having to assert their place in the political movement. For their male counterparts, decolonisation has not yet been understood as being part of the gender struggle. “Our focus right now should be on the questions of race; we will deal with the gender question later” (Azania, 2019, para. 1) said a young Black male activist at one of the subsequent rallies. Despite this retrograde position, Black women have continued to insist on being visible. “Black women have mobilised and organised against the heteronormative patriarchal violence that defines our existence” (Azania, 2019, para. 15). Their struggle is gaining traction. In 2019 at the University of Cape

Town, where the protests began, the name of a colonial ruler was replaced by the name of a powerful female symbol of contemporary South Africa, Sarah Baartman, a Khoi woman enslaved and exhibited as an oddity in England three centuries ago. This symbolic gesture, although it does not replace the deeper problems of race and racism in South Africa, it signals an institutional willingness to begin tackling a decolonial agenda (Lever, 2010).

In Chile on International Women Day, 8 March 2020, Andrea Olivares, a Chilean feminist, mounted the statue of Manuel Baquedano in Santiago (as seen in Figure 28). The dancer, who became known as *la Diosa de la Dignidad*, or the ‘goddess of dignity’, took possession of the statue. She sat on the horse’s head as if ‘ousting’ the male rider. This is a powerful symbol of decolonisation and shows the potency of the female body. Brandishing a black flag that represents grief for the assassinated and wounded during the uprising, as well as for the hundreds of femicides, a long red cloth is tied to her waist and she is bare-breasted, adding to the theatrical poetics of this image, which went viral. In an interview, Olivares reveals that at that moment she represented the freedom fighter in every woman who collectively says, “We are victims no longer.” The daughter and granddaughter of women who were tortured during the Pinochet regime, Olivares is adamant that Chile is experiencing a change in consciousness: “We are a colonised country and only now we begin to decolonise” (González, 2020, para. 12).

In the United States, after the killing of George Floyd at the hands of the police in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement galvanised activists around the globe. The movement is largely led by Black women using diverse art forms (Steinhauer, 2016), supported by LGBTQ2+ sexual and gender minorities and migrants across diverse ethnic groups (Parker, Menasce, & Anderson, 2020). The impact of this movement, and the way in which COVID-19 is exposing gross inequalities, is highlighting the common demands of activists across recent history: systemic change, truth-telling, and decolonisation. In Australia, three women—Tarneen Onus-

Williams (Gunditjmara, Bindal, Yorta Yorta and Torres Strait Islander), Crystal McKinnon (Amangu) and Meriki Onus (Gunai and Gunditjmara)—are part of the ‘Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance’. These women have been key to the Australian response to the Black Lives Matter movement. Seeing the images of George Floyd’s desperate cries of “I can’t breathe”, they were “horrified and outraged, but not surprised”, and were reminded of Aboriginal people whose lives have been crushed in similar circumstances: Dunghutti man David Dungay Jr, Aunty Tanya Day, Ray Thomas Jr, Ms Dhu, and many others (Onus-Williams, McKinnon, & Onus, 2020, para. 1). Despite vast state opposition, they went ahead with a public rally in Melbourne, arguing that “It is not enough to condemn police violence—we have to take action and fight against it” (Onus-Williams et al., 2020, para. 9).

As Nona Fernandes stated in Chapter Six, this battle needs to be forged on the streets, in the public realm where collective and cultural exchanges take place. Time is up, it seems. Women are taking up space, and *LasTesis* and the Black Lives Matter movement are powerful examples of how quickly and impressively the wave of change can spread around the world. On 15 July 2020, a statue of Black Lives Matter protester Jen Reid was erected ‘illegally’ to replace the statue of Edward Coulson, another slave-trader and murderer whose statue was toppled into the river by anti-racism demonstrators in the UK city of Bristol. Jen Reid was immortalised with her fist in the air, symbolising the Black Power salute (Bland, 2020). On 3 September 2020, several artists and feminists took possession of the National Human Rights Commission building in Mexico City. The women were there to denounce violence against women and girls. A week after the takeover, the building had become an improvised women’s shelter occupied by more than 100 women. In a further act of defiance, they ‘adorned’ the portraits of male historical figures that hung on walls with lipstick, earrings, and flowers. In response to the official rhetoric of vandalising and disrespecting history, photographer Andrea Murcia, who was inside the building with the women, declared:

[The authorities] are complaining about the damage to the paintings and disrespect to history without talking about who painted them: women who have been raped, abused. But they're not victims anymore. And they're not weak. They're strong. They are putting their bodies into the movement to create space ... It's the new history. The history of women taking up space.

We're not scared anymore. That's what the paintings represent (Mendelson, 2020, para. 13).

Throughout the thesis, my interlocutors echoed this sentiment. Women spoke about the time when fear stops winning and they could recognise their own capacities, as they saw themselves reflected in the image of others. The arts, practiced collaboratively, have given women an epistemological tool with which to engage and rewrite history. The arts became a mechanism and a language to share thoughts and feelings; a platform to process and express unique experiences and realities. The arts are also a vehicle through which one can exercise and gain control, and a platform to envision beyond the present moment and cultivate critical hope. Artistic creation gives us the possibility to see and appreciate particularities, beauty, and contradictions, as well as catalysing the imaginary (Garneau, 2017). Art, says Métis artist and scholar David Garneau, "is the site of cultural adaptation, of experiment, and it is the pre-figuration of change" (Garneau, 2017, para. 2).

By claiming art for social change as a platform from which Indigenous women and women of colour can gain power, I contend that these creative and artistic practices can help delink from the colonial burden. That is, they can become decolonial spaces from which to invent anew. But it is only in the 'doing' that this can become so. In the connection and the relational nature of collective creation, anchored in the lived experiences of those whose bodies understand and who speak with their 'hearts', a new conception of social justice can begin to emerge. The heart, as discussed in Chapter Three, is a concept located outside Western epistemologies, anchored in Indigenous

worldviews. The symbolic notion of the heart is where the body-mind connection occurs, which is similar to the Abya Yala concept of *sentipensar*.

Nigerian-English artist Shantell Martin reveals that through the arts she found what “connected my head to my heart, and my hand to everything. I could see the world in new ways” (Martin, 2020, 2:59 min). This moment of connection and recognition mediated by the arts has been described by women throughout this dissertation as an instant when fear stops winning and courage begins to grow.

Symbolically and collectively, the Black Lives Matter movement is a call to ‘stand tall’, as discussed in Chapter Four, and the arts have much to offer the social movements that are connecting across the global South. Lucy’s words resonate strongly when she describes what theatre can create for her and for those who are incarcerated (on page 190):

We meet each other in freedom, without prejudices, without taboo. It is a space where we can create equality, where we can forge a democratic space, hence an alternative space—an interstice ... From this place empowerment emerges (Lucy).

Lucy’s proposition can be understood as a springboard for deepening processes of democratisation against multiple forms of injustices (Lao-Montes, 2016, p. 17).

Arts and creativity are vital ingredients in the expression of these contemporary social movements. They allow for the imagining of new ways of being in the world and embodying the change we wish to see. Creativity provides a space that allows a rehearsal for change; a space of becoming. That is, in the act of ‘doing together’ we give permission to one another to be what we wish to become. Activism using arts is also giving way to new forms of cultural production, such as *Un violador en tu camino*, wherein women are pushing back against institutional control of visual language and aesthetics.

Activists like *LasTesis* are self-determining what they wish to say in a way that is not compromised by the systemic structures established within the art and cultural industries.

These spaces of freedom of expression cannot be underestimated. They are places where women can see themselves as empowered subjects. Ironically, after operating completely outside the art establishment, *LasTesis* were named by *Time* magazine as one of the 100 most influential people of 2020, in the artist category. Similarly, the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement—three Black women: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—were acknowledged at the same time in a different category. Cullors is also an artist who founded the Crenshaw Dairy Mart, a space that fuses arts and activism in South Los Angeles.

We're focused on the liberation of the community first ... Art has a place in that liberation. Every one of our peoples has used art as part of liberations struggles. We see ourselves in that lineage (Cullors, cited in Stromberg, 2020, para. 3).

By using the word 'lineage', Cullors declares the centrality of the arts in her conception of liberation. She also speaks about the longevity of the struggle. This is not new; it is part of an ongoing process of negotiating identities that are continually measured up against the prevailing whiteness. The impact of global recognition on these activists and the movements they lead is yet to be revealed. Encouragingly, in celebrating the award, *LasTesis* said, "*el feminismo es lo más influyente de este año*", or feminism is the most influential this year (Riff, 2020, para. 1). This statement signals that *LasTesis* are searching for larger structural changes and understand that this will not be delivered through one theatre intervention alone. Undoubtedly, there is a risk that they could be 'mainstreamed', and the oppositional movements they sparked could experience a degree of co-option and backlash, as in the case of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Questions of their autonomy could be

raised, something all progressive social movements have to wrestle with—that is, the potential and the dangers that come from their recognition by governments and other similar agencies (Lao-Montes, 2016).

Nonetheless, something appears to be different now. The feminist discourse *LasTesis* are fostering is anchored in the experiences of Latin American women and is based in theories that emerge from Abya Yala; it is a feminism that has been reinvented and reclaimed by Indigenous and mestiza women through decades of struggle. This feminism, as expressed by my interlocutors, particularly from Chile, is firmly diverse and intersectional. It is no longer oversimplified, nor is it calling for naive solidarity amongst women. It is a movement that uses the arts to engage and communicate. It is also localised and is building community in a space of complexity and fluidity, across social movements. The artistic actions and creations that have accompanied all the projects discussed in the thesis, large and small, with local and global implications, point to new possibilities, which is the central argument: that art for social change practices have been used as a powerful tool to decolonise because of the counter-narratives that emerge through community-based arts practice and activism.

These movements generated and conceptualised in the global South (including, in this instance, Black America) are rippling across the global North on a massive scale, which has not been seen before (Vartanian, 2020). And despite the hope that these social movements are engendering across communities the massive response they have elicited around the world, the optimism needs to be celebrated but also critiqued. Art for social change processes can be fragile and vulnerable to co-option, and the healing nature of these projects continues to be situated in a postcolonial world that is deeply entangled in a thick web of historical violence that remains largely unacknowledged (Feldman, 2004). That is why these creative interventions have such an important role to play; they are making visible what can no longer remain concealed.

I was reminded of the fragility of art for social change practice while writing this dissertation, as that fragility was at the core of the biggest challenge I encountered. This involved the withdrawal of one of the Noongar participants just weeks before the thesis was due for submission. The retraction of her interview came as a surprise at a time when the chapter was considered in its final stages. I grappled with the timing of the withdrawal and the loss of valuable material I had used. Now I had to remove it all. I began to recognise the dimensions of her withdrawal and the implications of the breakdown of the relationship with the organisation I once led, an organisation predicated on empowering Indigenous people.

Her withdrawal was caused by an irreconcilable conflict with the current management of the organisation. This led me to reflect on the precarious nature of this work in contexts of unequal power, as well as the structural issues that made my interlocutor so adamant that she wanted no further association with the organisation, despite having had a fruitful relationship with it for many years. Having discussed some of the limitations of the practice in this thesis, this should not have come as a complete shock, but it disturbed and distressed me deeply. The incident has left an indelible sadness on the research, an absence that, although invisible to others, marks how structural inequalities and dominant power relations continue to permeate, even in organisations and structures which have attempted to engage with them. Ultimately, this reinforced for me the findings of a report CAN WA produced in 2008 (discussed in Chapter Two), which stressed that supporting Indigenous empowerment requires an ongoing cultural critique and engagement in intercultural practice in order to challenge the continual racialised processes of social exclusion.

The situation above grounded my thinking and compelled me to reflect on the implications of this research. In a contested field of art practice that has been under-researched and rarely contextualised against the backdrop of the colonial project, community arts, CCD, social practice and art for social

change have, in the global North, been seen in the main as a tool to enable communities to affirm identity, to adapt, and to tell their own stories. Many communities have benefitted from this approach by cleverly using the opportunity of resources and a platform from which to speak. However, rarely are these practices led by the minoritised communities themselves, as underlined in Chapter Five, where I illustrated two instances of arts collaboration (one fictional, one actual) that are top-down and politically obtrusive. This means that the more radical aspects of art for social change practices, those which challenge the establishment, are seldom seen within the parameters of funded practice in the global North.

By contributing to broadening the theoretical understanding of arts for social change and their contribution as decolonial methodologies, this thesis offers an alternative perspective to collaborative arts practice. It highlights the trajectory of this practice across differentials of power in the global North and the global South. I hope the thesis is read as an invitation to white artists, practitioners, and activists who practice in art for social change to explicitly frame their work against the realities of a settler-colonial society. This stance provides the opportunity to begin to decolonise their subject positions and, through their artistic practice, develop solidarity when working alongside and in collaborations with First Nations people and people of colour. For people of colour, I encourage them to read this work with the view to 'take up space' and to strengthen alliances that extend their solidarity with Indigenous people and other people of colour.

In closing...

As activists and artists continue to denounce the crisis in which we live in 2020, we have been reminded that we are not just facing an economic recession and a health emergency; further, the catastrophic consequences of inequality are threatening to dehumanise our existence. What these social

movements are highlighting is that those who have experienced multiple forces of oppression can no longer struggle in isolation.

In *Writing Beyond Race* bell hooks declares:

Many of us found that it was easier to name the problem and to deconstruct it, and yet it was hard to create theories that would help us build community, help us border cross to truly remain connected in a space of difference long enough to be transformed (hooks, 2013, p. 2).

I believe art for social change can contribute towards *that* space of difference that leads to transformation. After reading and writing about art for social change for so long, I'd like to suggest different language, perhaps to better reflect what is required at this moment in time, and that is *Art for Social Justice*.

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