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I am here now: A play – and – Polyvocality, the unhomely, and the methods of Mike Leigh in playwriting: An exegesis

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I am here now

A play

– and –

Polyvocality, the unhomely, and the methods of Mike Leigh in playwriting

An exegesis

This thesis is presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The aim of the research was to investigate how the devising methods of theatre and film director Mike Leigh might generate material for a new play text and what the implications were in regards to authorship. Central to the research was an exploration of the collaborative devising processes of Leigh as a point of origin and how this might lead to an intended and deliberate case for a plurality of voices in a written play text. It was conducted with a focus on utilising many voices. In this instance the 'voices' were young participants from Perth's African Australian community. The practice-led research project was principally carried out in two parts – the developing of the play *I am here now*, inspired by material devised by the experiences of eight African Australians, and the writing of the sole authored play. The thesis outcome captures the conflict between myself as a practitioner playwright and the process in which the play was developed and written in context with Mike Leigh's devising methods, the wants and needs of the participants, and the question of plurality in theatre writing.

Chapter One of the thesis is a critical examination of how Leigh's methods assisted in generating raw material, the challenges of practice-led research, and the writing of the play itself. Chapters Two and Four respond to understandings (and misunderstandings) apparent during the creation of *I am here now*, especially in the devising and writing processes. Chapter Three, in between the development and writing analysis, is the play itself. Chapter Five is an overview of the key discoveries of the project. The thesis examines notions of separation and exile in the migratory experience, Homi Bhabha's concepts of 'home' and the *unhomely*, and ultimately *polyvocality*, understood by Mikhail Bakhtin and others, as the multiplicity of voice(s) in a text. What became apparent through the research was a battle between the efficacies of the devising methods – that is, the facilitation of improvisatory workshops emerging from a collaboration with a heterogeneous group of African Australian non-theatre makers – and the skills and techniques used to write the final outcome, a sole authored fictional play. Ultimately the findings of the research is that while the play text is sole authored it contains multiple traces of what the participants offered, which came from our formal and informal meetings, to which I understand speaks of a *polyvocality*.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

1. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

2. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or

3. contain any defamatory material;
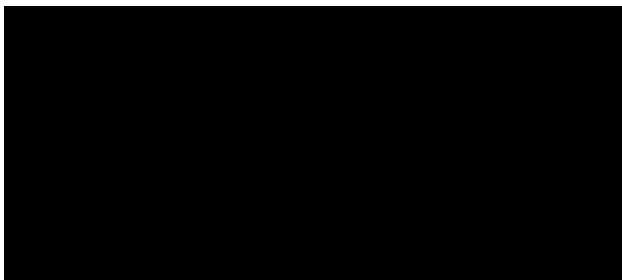
Signature: ..   Michael McCall

30th October, 2018

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This thesis also owes a massive thanks to my original supervisor, Associate Professor Maggi Phillips, who passed away in early 2015. This research has been peppered with her acumen. And while I am saddened that Maggi is not here in person, the notes of wisdom she left upon the work have been welcome beacons on my path. It is Maggi's grace, enthusiasm and profound intelligence that I miss most, but I feel very fortunate to have had the time I did with her, as do all who were lucky enough to have met her on their own research journey.

I would like to thank the bold participants of the African Australian community of Western Australia and the contributors in that community who, directly or indirectly, supported this research, and in particular Mr. Tichanona Mazhawidza. It would not have been possible to conduct this type of investigation without the overwhelming graciousness I encountered during my research from many men and women. I wholeheartedly thank you all.

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<u>Contents</u>

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Video Clips

*The submitted thesis refers to video clips which demonstrate the workshops that contributed to the generative material for *I am here now*. For the purposes of de-identification, these clips have been removed from this document and stored securely at ECU. This list of video clips remains as a place marker should there be a requirement to view the materials in the future.

List of Abbreviations

BAFTA	British Academy of Film and Television Award
CRT	Critical Race Theory
ECU	Edith Cowan University
HGCC	Herb Graham Community Centre
NIDA	National Institute of Dramatic Art
RADA	Royal Academy of Dramatic Art
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WA	Western Australia
WAAPA	Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts

Chapter One: Beginnings…

A. Preamble

The rationale for this research was based on a desire to see three separate, yet interconnected, threads of my professional and personal life combine to create a written play. First, my practice in the theatre, as a director, writer and actor; then my fascination with the devising techniques of the British film and theatre director Mike Leigh; and, lastly, a personal commitment to advocate theatre that deals, in some way, with social justice issues. The material that emerged from these threads drove the continuing development of my playwriting practice and the contribution I offer to playwriting scholarship, and includes the ambivalent missteps and sideways glances which occurred during the project that will be properly unpacked in the thesis.

Over the course of the research I worked with eight participants who identified as African Australian. They came from a range of backgrounds: some had arrived in Australia as asylum seekers; others identified as migrants from Africa or as having African heritage. They were in their late teens and early twenties. They had limited or no experience at all in theatre making processes or acting technique, although experience in the theatre was not a precondition of participation. I wanted to develop a new written play with a group of people who were not steeped in Leigh's or other acting techniques. I was interested in the rawness that this would bring to a theatre making development process and that would assist the writing. I also wanted to see Australian theatre broaden in diversity and at the beginning of the research I was already working in a community setting with African Australian youth and was eager for opportunity to work on an extended project with such a group. I explore the time spent with the participants and the devising project in detail over the coming chapters.

The thesis is in several parts. This chapter, *Beginnings*, introduces several important points that provide context to the development process and the writing of the play: a brief discussion of pertinent points about Leigh's methods, a review of the key conceptual threads that continually emerged across the research, such as notions of *polyvocality* and the *unhomely,* and the characteristics of the practice-led research methodology. Chapter Two, *Development*, analyses the approach used to generate material for the play from the participants' character-based improvisations. It includes in-text video clips (available also as separate video clip files on an

accompanying USB) of selected excerpts of the improvisatory workshops, which are important to fully comprehend the research practice. Chapter Three is the play itself, *I am here now*. I have deliberately chosen to position the play in between the development stage and analysis of the playwriting. Chapter Four is *Writing*, which critically analyses the dramaturgical process. Finally, Chapter Five, *Discoveries*, reflects on the significance of the research findings; the thesis concludes with a summation in Chapter Six, *Endings*.

There were two central aims of the research. First, to explore how Mike Leigh's techniques might be utilised to create material for theatre. In this case, working with (predominantly) non-theatre makers from various sections of Perth's African Australian community. Second, it aimed to examine how Leigh's methods might assist in writing a sole authored new play that engaged a multiplicity of voices. In this sense, the research became an exploration of the strengths and limitations of Leigh's methods, which were challenged by the specific context within which I worked. The stages at which these methods are taken up and sometimes abandoned are outlined and analysed throughout this thesis.

Before analysing Mike Leigh's approach in full, the following is his methodology in brief for some context, based largely on *The improvised play: The work of Mike Leigh* (1983) by Paul Clements. To begin with, Leigh starts with no script. He chooses a cast of actors and works individually with them on character and action through developmental improvisations to formulate the structure of a play text or a screenplay. The actors base these characters on people they know in some capacity in their lives, usually compelling acquaintances with interesting idiosyncrasies. The resultant characters (known as 'originals') are an amalgam of several of these people. Leigh then brings the actors, in character, together in different formations in order to devise extended improvisations which enhance the 'originals'. By working collaboratively, over weeks and months, Leigh is able to structure objectives and dramatic conflicts in collaboration with the actors. However, during this period, Leigh withholds certain information from the performers about each other's character trajectories. This often leads to an unsettled energy for the actors/characters which generates spontaneity and dramatic tension. From these improvisations, Leigh then collates the generated material, scripting the various scenes and scenarios he has documented. At this stage, as self-declared sole author, Leigh then writes a full length play or film script (Clements, 1983). This present research explores my adaptation of Leigh's methods and the finished artefact – in this instance a play entitled *I am here*

now. The research also interrogates my role as the sole author of the play, taking into account the multiplicity of voices at work within the play and how *polyvocality*, as a concept, lends itself to the entirety of the project.

B. Polyvocality – a question of voice

Mikhail Bakhtin's theories have illuminated voice and dialogue in literature including the idea that any individual speaker contains multiple 'voices' and myriad influences and conditions that surround what is spoken. The Russian philosopher notes that:

> It is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding—in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people. (cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 55)

This quote takes into account influences of others on the 'Self', not simply in regards to how an individual expresses themselves, in 'truth' as well as in 'fiction'; rather, Bakhtin argues that our insights about ourselves come from how we must resonate through others; it is actually those individuals that are forever contributing to our 'voice'. In addition to this is the idea of self, is the relationship to 'Other', which in the context of the research are the African Australian participants. Here I turn to Claire Kramsch who states: "we only learn about ourselves through the mirror of others and, in turn, we only understand others by understanding ourselves as the Other" (2009, p. 18). Therefore, it follows that the entire project has been an attempt to move between understanding others. There is much scholarship on the relationship of 'Self' to 'Other', but what I find useful in the Kramsch's quote is the image of the mirror and the relationship of self and identity formation to empathy. At the heart of this process has been an act of understanding "ourselves as Other". However, I need to make clear that I am not suggesting "I am Other", but rather that throughout the project the participants and I practiced at understanding the lives of others; the participants with their 'originals', me as facilitator and at times improviser; and in the writing phase, as playwright, seeing inside the minds and worlds of the characters as they began to emerge. My relationship to migration allowed me to unpack on a deeply personal level the experience of separation, the difficulty of transition and the balance of home to unhomely. On reflection, this was to a certain extent a negotiation with my own 'reality', my 'truth', and my place as both 'Self' and 'Other'.

In *New playwriting strategies* (2001), Paul Castagno notes that by "appropriating a definition of the dialogic novel, and substituting the word novel for play, we can establish a working definition of the dialogic play" (2001, p. 3), which means that these concepts can be used in relation to my project. The same substitution between literary and dramatic texts can be applied to Bakhtin's notion of polyvocality. Bakhtin, speaking about Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels, defined polyvocality as: "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices […] a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (1984, p. 6). This idea must also take into account the specific 'locatedness' of voice and the inherent 'Otherness' to be found in dialogue, which often reflects socio-cultural specificities. Slavic literary scholar, Michael Holquist (1990), notes that for Bakhtin, polyvocality is "a situation, the situation of a subject surrounded by the myriad responses he or she might make at any particular point, but any one of which must be framed in a specific discourse" (1990, p. 69). These discourses establish the ground for contestation over whether there is a singular voice or a plurality of voices in a text, and whose dominance will bestow meaning(s) upon an individual author, character or a written work.

Bakhtin observed that the dialogues in Dostoyevsky's works not only contained a variety of voices, but that these dialogues have "a specific quality of completion that expresses a particular position of the speaker, to which one may respond or assume, with respect to it, a responsive position" (1986, p.72). This concept of positioning is crucial to understanding the nature of polyvocality in literary texts, such as plays. This concept could be applied to Leigh's methods, where multiple subjects influence improvised events in order to turn them into opportunities to advance a narrative, generating dialogues to which Leigh alone, positioned as the overarching facilitator, is privy. It is also important to point out the Leigh himself is the sum of a multiplicity of lived experiences that stipple his scripts, and which contribute to his own voice being layered throughout his works with various sources and points of origin. It follows then that the sole authorial 'voice' is a container of multiple voices, and polyvocality is the presence of layers upon layers of these voices inside any given text.

It is also important to comprehend that at the centre of polyvocality is the concept of dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981). Dialogism takes into account the inclusion of many different and differing 'voices' to exercise the characters' points of view articulated within a specific scenario. By dialogic, I take from Bakhtin to mean that the characters in a play create a dialogue between different positions,

ideally without any one position or 'voice' being allowed to dominate; together there is a resonance produced that allows the reader to understand and to empathise with those characters and the layers of interactivity in the text. This notion of different positions is operative in the project between participants in the improvisatory stages and apparent again in the written play. In addition, each of these processes invites revisiting of one's own subject position (Bakhtin, 1981). It is also worth remembering that the idea of 'truth', as Bakhtin adopts it, "is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (1984, p. 110), which returns to the importance of positionality once again. According to Bakhtin, dialogism is the use of the metaphor of literal resonance between speaker and listener. In *The well-read play* (2011), Stephen Unwin notes that metaphor "enhances the power of the narrative and lifts the play beyond literalism into a complex web of significance. By listening to patterns of imagery and metaphor we grasp the writer's insights into life and the world" (2011, p. 186). However, there is also the possibility that we lose intonation in our speech when we do not have "choral support" from like-minded or sympathetic listeners that resonate with us (Bakhtin, 1976, pp. 102- 106); this was a risk that I was continually aware of working with a group of individuals that had vastly different lived experiences to mine (not to mention that my experience is one of which I understand as having a privileged position). While keeping in mind the notion that words originate from the mouths and voices of others, Bakhtin is equally fascinated by how we make those words our own. He (1981, p. 348) notes:

> The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to dialogical consciousness, is enormous. One's own discourse and one's own voice although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse.

Philosopher, Julia Kristeva, expanding from Bakhtin on these issues of authorial discourse, writes in Desire for language (1980) that the position of author not only contains a variety of 'voices', but also operates as a position itself (1980, p. 75). This becomes important for the dynamic of the project, which I will detail further in Chapter Two. The polyvocal landscape, as related to dialogism, presents fundamentally transitional and enticingly original intersubjective discourses, expressed in the multi-narrative of a play like I am here now. Literary theorist Jonathon Culler observes that the dialogic play is "fundamentally polyvocal or dialogic more than monologic. The essence of the play is its staging of different voices or discourses and, thus, of the clash of social perspectives and points of view" (1997, p. 89); an emphasis on multiple 'voices' over a single 'voice' within the text. Castagno expands on this evaluation, noting that "dialogism represents the play's capacity to interact within

itself, as if the various components were in dialogue with each other" (1997, p. 3), which will be taken up in the Writing chapter of this thesis. According to Marvin Carlson (2018), after Bakhtin, dialogism in relation to I am here now, must nevertheless take into account two concerns: 1) that the playwright is designated as "the original author" and "the authoritative "speaker" of the text"; and 2) the "assumption that the text guarantees a continuing more or less stable context of communication between that speaker and an audience" (p. 75), assumptions very much at odds with the concept of the author as "a shifting "function" in the text" (p. 75), or positioning as Bakhtin coined it. Bakhtin's concept of polyvocality also focuses on how meaning is factored only into the moment of utterance. Contextually, utterance is dependent upon circumstances, intonation, inflection, and past history. Bakhtin observes that:

> Every utterance must be regarded as primarily a response to preceding utterances of the given sphere... Each utterance refutes affirms, supplements, and relies upon the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account [...] Therefore, each kind of utterance is filled with various kinds of responsive reactions to other utterances of the given sphere of speech communication. (1986, p. 91)

Utterances work similarly to the multitudinous ways that statements, according to Michel Foucault in *The archaeology of knowledge* (1969, 2002), relate to one another; and his understanding of the discourse and truth formations, though Foucault centred more on the emergence and consolidation of authority and power. For Bakhtin, the utterance can be viewed as language within a text that, while "always individual and contextual in nature" provides an "inseparable link" to a discourse, and never recurs in an exact or similar context (1986, pp. 88-89). The positions of these multiple and continuous discourses within Bakhtin's concept of the utterance are also closely linked to the tensions of a 'voice' that is, at any given time, dominant. Bakhtin notes,

> An utterance is never just a reflection or an expression of something already existing and outside it that is given and final. It always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable, and, moreover, it always has some relation to value […] What is given is completely transformed in what is created. (1986, pp. 119-120)

Bakhtin hypothesises that in these utterances, what would otherwise be excluded within a singular monologism, or fixed discourse, can exist within the multiple voices that comprise polyvocality in a text. Bakhtin's observations depend on the author's recognition of the origins of the many voices that emerge during the discourses and their integration (or otherwise) into the play. His ideas also rely on the extent to which the power of authorship is sited within that voice (in my case, the playwright's)

over the utterances of others. According to Bakhtin, utterances "involve a complex layering of previous usages and current context, resulting in a plurality of voices" (Carlson, 2018, p. 66). In regard to my project, Bakhtin's concepts in relation to the improvisatory development were helpful in understanding how Leigh's methods enable multiple voices to resonate throughout the conception and construction of the play. This follows from the initial aim of the project, which was to enquire whether Leigh's methods would facilitate a resonance of diverse 'voices' that in no way constituted a uniform or homogenous 'entity', thereby avoiding what Richard Winter recognises as "the temptation to "integrate" them into a single overarching account" (2002, pp. 151-152). It could be argued that all plays, and in fact any text in any form, have multiple 'voices' at work, as each participant in the process of writing is influenced by their own contextual experiences. These tensions in the framework of the project, sometimes overlooked in the desire to integrate generative material from the improvisatory workshops, would form the ultimate outcome of the research.

In the project, I apply Bakhtin's notion of polyvocality to the dramaturgy of a new play that was inspired by a collaboration with a group of young African Australians and the ideas of separation, transition, dislocation as well as Homi K. Bhabha's concepts around the *unhomely* (1992, 1994) in regards to experiences of migration, which will be examined further below. *I am here now* presents a series of independent yet interconnected characters on the eve of the promising re-election to the Australian Senate of Errick Nkomo, an African-born Australian politician, which could see him move nearer to the centre of power in government. *I am here now* explores the tensions of different characters (each of whom have a point of connection or origin with Africa), with many experiencing grief and loss specific to their life story. While each of these stories of migration, separation and exile has a reality and dramatic arc of its own, they intersect with one another. Bakhtin's concept of polyvocality exists through the project in the machination of voice/s: the use of Leigh's methods in the collaborative devising of characters from people the participants know; the structuring of narrative threads developed from improvisations between these characters; my own observation of the participants within informal settings, such as conversations during lulls in workshops, and the stories they would share anecdotally. Polyvocality could also be found throughout the written development: the five stages of drafting the written play; and in my subjective experiences, that inevitably finds a way into the text through voice.

In the project, there are two forms of 'application' at work: one in which I adapt Leigh's methods of devising from character; the other where Bakhtin's notion of polyvocality emerges as a conceptual frame. Bakhtin observes that:

> Language is not a natural medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions: it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. (1981, p. 294)

For my project, whilst the use of the term expropriation is rough, even brutal, the implication is that someone of power takes the property from another; but in this context, if I understand Bakhtin correctly, his point is about the confluence of voices and the seizing of these voices into a (for want of a better word) 'managed' space. However, as Bakhtinian theorist Caryl Emerson notes "genuine knowledge and enablement can begin only when my "I" consults another "I" and then returns to its place, humbled and enhanced" (1997, p. 26). When addressing relations between participants and playwright, the focus has to be on the move by the playwright to 'consult 'with the participants and then to 'return' having been 'humbled and enhanced' by the experience. Anything less plays to ideas of appropriation and expropriation, which was never the intent of this research project. It also addresses the risks of binary relations between Leigh, as well as the participants, in relation to my 'self', as facilitator and playwright. Mindful of this, it follows that the second aim of the project speaks clearly to the desire to explore how I might deliver a sole authored text that maintains a plurality of 'voices' from the origins of the development phase. This also involves finding ways to develop and extend plurality so that the play, and in turn myself as facilitator and playwright, are 'humbled and enhanced' (1997, p. 26). Peter Elbow points out in *Everyone can write* (2000), that readers' capacity to engage with story and text, and hence with 'voice' is reliant on the idea that "our main organ for listening to resonance is our own self. That is, we are most likely to hear resonance when the words resonate with us, fit us" (p. 210). It was important then that this polyvocality exist not only in my imagination, and drawn from my own life, but significantly from the lived experience of other people. In the analysis of narrative, Catherine Slater's cautionary advice is that the use of the term 'voice' needs to be explicit in context as it is "notoriously slippy", and that its meaning "fluctuates according to user" (2011, p. 93), which once again points to the importance of positioning and context in relation to 'voice'.

While the aim was to write a sole authored play, the development of *I am here now* calls into question the possibility of there ever being an absolute originating authorial 'voice' in any play. Jeremy Hawthorn notes that according to Bakhtin, 'voice' does not refer to the intentions of an originating person, but to "a network of beliefs and power- relationships which attempt to place and situate the listener in certain ways [….] That process is the means whereby language is transformed into a voice" (1992, p. 134). Put into dramaturgical terms, 'voice' carries with it the circumstances and conditions of the carrier and of the intentions of others: the multiplicity of voices in the play inflect each other. This must have implications for the presentation of the characters in the play, for the participants (who, due to the process, cannot sit apart from the play), and for the playwright. This thesis also poses questions about the convergent and divergent creative praxes of Leigh and myself as facilitators and authors. In this sense, I approach both the play and the thesis as self-reflexive; a sustained self-examination of my role at every stage of the research. This self-reflexivity problematizes *I am here now* as a script for performance, *and* challenges the notion of the playwright as its originating voice. Bakhtin proposes that writing is a process whereby authors seek to "assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate" the words of others (1986, p. 89), even though those words still carry the expression of the original speakers. However, this has dramaturgical implications for *I am here now*; in the transition from the assimilated and reworked experiences of the participants during the workshops, as they created and tested their 'originals'; then into the re-accentuated structuring of those story threads to write the play.

Speaking from a localised perspective, in Australia there is a cry for greater diversity – cultural, linguistic and ethnic, along with gender and sexual diversity, as well as a greater representation of the voices of people with disabilities (Ang & Mar, 2016). Suffice to say that there is simply not enough theatre that is made with diversity front and centre, and definitely not for and by African Australians. That is not to say that African Australian plays or theatre makers are not present in the Australian theatrical landscape. *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe (2013),* developed by Ros Horin, first staged at Riverside Theatre in Parramatta in 2013, is a notable exception. The play continued its life at Belvoir, the Sydney Opera House, and the 2015 WOW FESTIVAL (Women of the World Festival), as well as at London's Southbank Centre (Kembrey, 2015); Brink Theatre Company's production Sean Riley's *Skip Miller's Hit Songs* (2012) in South Australia; *Who's That Chik* (2009) created and performed at the Old Fitz by Candy Bowers and her Black Honey Company, which continues to produce theatre focussed on the politics around women of colour; and Briefs

Factory's *Hot Brown Honey* (2018). I am convinced of the vital impact organisations like Belvoir, Griffin Theatre, Brink Theatre and the Old Fitz have on the diversity of Australian theatre. Arts organisations simply need to do better at representing the stories, individuals and communities of the wider population. This would assist theatre, in this context, to become a platform for individuals and groups interested in creative works that address diversity and marginality, both of which also incorporate social justice issues.

While a contribution to social justice was my personal motivation for working on *I am here now* with the participants the aim of the research was chiefly to explore Leigh's methods and the relationship of these techniques to polyvocality and authorship. Similarly this research is not directly concerned with discussing the intent of the Australian small-to-medium theatre sector, in relation to their relative capacities today. Nonetheless, I do recognise that I am predominantly interested in theatre making, specifically playwriting, which relates a personal ethics to an arts practice and must recognise the places where other voices might be heard that might resonate with mine. This understanding informs my deepest motivations to reflect upon the processes of theatre writing that address ideas surrounding issues of social justice.

C. Leigh and the sole author

At this stage, it is important to elaborate more on Leigh's approach to theatre making. In order to write a play, Leigh seeks to generate raw material to create and develop character, action, conflict, and story threads emerging from what Robert Marchand describes in his contributory chapter as "character based improvisations" (cited in Cardinale-Powell & DiPaolo, 2013, p. 38). The fundamental differences between my project and Leigh's works are that Leigh uses experienced theatre makers during the improvisatory process (Rabiger, 2017, p. 181); whereas I chose to use primarily non-theatre makers in my project. The initial decision to use Leigh's methods followed a consideration of other devising and writing methodologies that could harness many 'voices' and explore social issues including ideas around marginalisation, and some of these approaches such as Verbatim theatre and Applied Theatre, are discussed later in the thesis. However, I was continually brought back to Leigh and his methodology, largely because of his commitment to a deep immersive experience to devise and then write story through character. Unlike Leigh's approach and other collaborative methodologies, playwriting traditionally lends itself to a dramaturgical process that would see characters placed into the narrative by a sole author, their identity fundamentally exposed

by cathartic events and with which a reader will (ideally) empathise (Smiley, 2005, p. 78). Characteristically, Leigh's methods in theatre and film always begin as a collaboration: selected full-time professional actors become intensely involved in the development of their characters. However, throughout the process Leigh claims sole authorship of the resulting artefact – whether a play or cinematic screenplay (Marchand cited in Cardinale-Powell & DiPaolo, 2013; Clements, 1983). As well, Leigh uses the title 'director' to describe his overall input on his projects, namely as his intention is to direct the final script, with credits on his many productions announcing a film or a play "by Mike Leigh". For my purposes, the term 'facilitator' seemed a suitable way to describe my role in the devising stage, mainly because there were no actual rehearsals that might pertain to the direction of a project, which may have differed had a performance outcome been part of the research aims.

I have admired Leigh's work for many years and I felt his methods allowed my personal, political and ideological points of view to find a home. These points extend into my theatre practice and it was my desire to adapt his methods for this project: the collaboration with a group of young African Australians in their own community setting. Leigh's approach initially seemed to harmonise with my research aims, and to consolidate my established practice. In this practice, I was at once a performer, director, and playwright: *I am here now* draws upon all of these self-definitions which will be demonstrated in this thesis. As a teaching artist, I have also utilised various techniques ascribed to Leigh's improvisatory processes. Part of the research was to see how Leigh's methods would be an opportunity for the participants to bring their 'voices' to these characterisations. Throughout this thesis, I note three main ways that the participants offered 'information', even revealed parts of themselves: through improvisation and other techniques (including interviews); through anecdotal conversation with me in between and after improvisational workshops; and through my observation of the participants in everyday life, as they intermingled with the world at large. These three types of observation acted as methods of creative generation and inflect the final artefact in multiple ways. In fact, there was arguably a fourth type, a participant observation where there were times I joined in improvisatory work, to keep the story flowing or to question ideas around character. Other times, the participants were more open about their personal history, and I found myself engaged in what they shared. These observations were significant during writing, and in allowing for the plurality of voices to emerge in *I am here now*.

As will become apparent, only traces of Leigh's methods actually remain in the final draft of *I am here now*. The mapping of devising techniques to a sole authored text resulted, at times, in an incongruous relationship between the development and writing phases that contributed to the final play. It is important that I am honest and transparent about these concerns. While I do not see this necessarily as flaws in the research design, many issues came up during the research journey which were cause for considered reflection and insight. I recognised early that the application of Leigh's methods would not play out as I had imagined it might for Leigh, with his tightly controlled environments, abundant resources and trained actors. Nevertheless, what came from my encounters with the participants was rich and rewarding beyond my expectations.

Tellingly, the anecdotes and playfulness in these encounters brought an interesting ambivalence into the final play.

D. *Ambivalence and a research polemic*

As the project progressed, ambivalence became a particularly useful concept in my research. Helena Grehan (2010) suggests ambivalence can be understood "as something that has the potential to stimulate ongoing reflection, engagement and participation with the ideas raised by a work" (p. 10). That is to say, ambivalence can function in a generative way. The question arises at various stages in the research: how can ambivalence assist in developing nuance and complexity in a dramatic text? How does ambivalence function with authorship, in this context? To put it simply: who actually is author? Questions around the notion of authorship urged me to consider the strengths and limitations of Leigh's methods in the context of this project. It became clear during the research that the many voices in and around the workshops could find a place on the page in diverse ways.

Ongoing reflection and engagement on the progression from the devising workshops to the sole authored play made me aware of a polyvocality that resonated during each phase of the project. Beginning with the participants the case for plurality and dialogism envisages how a variety of 'voices' might be "assimilated, reworked and re- accentuated" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 89). For reasons that could not be foreseen, two participants left the research prior to completion of the improvisational stage; in fact for all the participants their commitment was only ever for a set period. For these two in particular, their irregular attendance became another kind of ambivalence that created a fragility around the research, and destabilised any consistent approach to Leigh's methods.

However, any sense of loss around the participants' departure was transformed into a new research challenge, revealing the extent to which a shortcoming was ultimately a research opportunity, which will be discussed throughout the thesis.

Before I began this research, I had never consciously reflected on the link between my commitment to social justice issues and my professional practice in the theatre, or how this contextualised much of my craft. The fact was that much of my directing, acting and writing practice had been located within the commercial theatre space, with productions such as Neil Labute's "The Mercy Seat" for Brainbox Project at His Majesty's Theatre, WA (in 2008), and Terence Rattigan's "The Deep Blue Sea" at Perth's Playhouse for Onward Production (in 2010). Yet most 'gigs' throughout my career had rarely required me to develop an artefact specifically issue driven, particularly my employment in the commercial theatre. In part, this is because my professional work derived from commissions granted by established theatre companies, catering to a veteran theatre-going audience. That is not to suggest that these projects I work on lacked attention to social injustices; rather, this reflected more on the fact that I rarely had the opportunity, outside of an education setting, to directly work with a minority group who I would personally consider marginalised by a dominant culture, such as the African Australians I worked with. Nor had I worked with a particular set of research questions, or a deliberate research paradigm or methodology in which to couch these questions. With this research the focus of my role as facilitator within a collaborative devising environment, and as sole author of a finished play, were consistent with my personal, ideological and political commitment to promote diversification in Australian theatre. I believe it is imperative for theatre to reflect the multicultural make-up of Australia, and to inflect attitudes and beliefs towards the many muted voices and (sometimes distorted) narratives that encapsulate the truth 'origins' of this nation. Therefore, my position as sole author, with the capacity to be the dominant voice in the play was a particular struggle especially, coming back to the withdrawing of participants, when some participants no longer were available to continue. With this loss, it became necessary for the research to take another direction in order to continue exploring the ways in which to 'accommodate' a plurality of voices and to evaluate how this might be realised. Although the attempt to put Leigh's methods into effect suggested that a collaboration between devising and playwriting might result, it became apparent that there was an internal struggle between the development and writing processes. My problem was to honour and negotiate multiple commitments to the research, the aesthetics of the play and my interaction with the participants. Before detailing the development process, it is necessary to return

to the research methodology, including the initial commitment to Leigh's methods, so as to frame what came to be a significant polemic concerning 'voice' and authorship.

E. Questions upon questions

Throughout the workshops and later, I was concerned that not all the 'voices' I could hear might necessarily be included in *I am here now*. From where I was positioned in the workshops, some voices, and possibly my own, were more resonant than others. As the research evolved, three research questions emerged:

1. What are the strengths and limitations of Mike Leigh's devising techniques in terms of how it might assist in the writing of a play?
2. To what extent do the 'truth' origins of the improvisations and improvisational beginnings have a place in a finished play text?
3. How might the artefact – the play – take up polyvocality?

Along with these three questions, the notion of 'truth' arose almost everywhere during my application of Leigh's methods. This could be seen in the sense of motion of performance time and space, as well as in the continuity and discontinuity of certain characters, dialogue and story threads. In terms of setting, location and dislocation operate as a subtext, to ideas of separation and transition for the characters. These ideas became particularly pertinent around the subject of migration. The notion of 'truth' in this context threw up ambivalence again, especially with the propensity of the project to turn to 'fiction'. Within all of this, I acknowledged an adaption of sorts was always taking place in the research.

F. Finding the participants

In late 2010, I was a teaching artist in several drama programs working with migrant youths in Perth. These young people came from parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia (predominantly Afghanistan). Conducting initial acting workshops with theatre companies, in schools and via the Australian Red Cross, allowed me to cultivate friendly relationships with prospective workshop participants. Over a short period, I became aware of their personal daily struggles and the concerns

of those that had accompanied them, more often than not related to the impact of separation from their homelands. This situation, sometimes akin to an exile, seemed arduous, even traumatic, in various ways: language barriers; the search for community in the new home; culture shock; the desire for access to appropriate and adequate health and education support; the aspiration for political representation and economic stability. Social justice issues relating to perceived societal inequalities were raised at various times by people I met as a teaching artist and such issues would come up in improvisations, interestingly often as humorous parodies of authority. Conversations around social justice emerged mainly during breaks or at the close of the workshops. I read these moments as us having reached some level of familiarity and ease. It was in the early stages of the research while working as a teaching artist for the Australian Red Cross that I met Tichanona 'Tich' Mazhawidza, my main point of contact within the African Australian community. Tich was the Cultural Infusion Officer for the City of Stirling, a jurisdiction of Perth. He was studying Human Rights Law while working at the Herb Graham Community Centre (HGCC), Mirrabooka, which was and remains a social and cultural hub for recent migrants, particularly from Africa. Appreciating the work I did with the Red Cross, Tich asked me to run further acting workshops in basic drama skills and techniques at the HGCC. Through these initial acting workshops, I met the group of individuals who would eventually become the participants in my research and contribute to the genesis of character, action and dialogue in *I am here now*. They came from a range of backgrounds: some had arrived in Australia as asylum seekers; others identified as migrants from Africa or as having African heritage; and some were quite closed about their past. Nearly all had come at a young age and were at the time of the workshops in their late teens and early twenties. In fact, identification was a significant issue for them. As with Leigh's actors, and I will go on to explain this in detail in Chapter Two, the participants drew traits for their character based improvisations, which would be involved in the creation of the play, from people they knew. The participants chose not to identify these individuals to me in order to preserve an anonymity of identity within the relatively small African Australian community in WA. To satisfy the request of the participants and research ethics conditions, these young women and men are only referred to within the thesis by their first names. Rachael was from Zimbabwe and Kirsty, who identified as 'coloured' South African, made up the women of the group. John and Jamal came from Burundi via Tanzania; Justin from Burundi but not via Tanzania; Malikizoh from the Congo, via Uganda; Juma from Sudan (prior to the partitioning of the country); Omar is Australian, born of Ethiopian parentage in Melbourne. Of the participants assembled, I had worked with Jamal, Juma, John and Kirsty prior to the start of the research project.

I worked with the eight participants several times a week (each time for several hours) over the course of three months. As mentioned not all of the participants were able to commit fully to this time frame. The aim of the research was to collaborate with the participants by applying Leigh's methods as a kind of genesis for a play text and maintain as much of this content produced by them in the generation of dramatic material. Clements notes for Leigh content "is not to be found at the surface of events or in the way in which he handles form, but in the lives of his people, as people" (Clements, 1983, p. 69). However, it became inevitable that the participants' part in the process would become less and less evident. This was especially the case with some participants, who chose not to return after a period of time, and yet never officially withdrew from the project. I had to ask myself what my role was and if this role best served the overall scope of the project. Rustom Bharucha argues that "in theatre, one needs to disrupt the complacencies and securities of our imagined homogeneities and fixed cultural identities before differences can be articulated and shared" (1997, p. 36). Leigh's methods, as I attempted to apply them, revealed a fragile temporality within the project conditions, which became starkly obvious when, as mentioned, two of the participants discontinued. Questions then arose about the fraught practicalities and efficacy of Leigh's methods while I worked within my diminishing ensemble. Had I used full-time professional actors, as Leigh does, I imagine the outcome would have been different. However, an account of waning 'voices' was inevitable. The task then became to excavate all possibilities of what polyvocality might mean, and how it might act as a catalyst for a deeper reading of *I am here now*. How the play came to be goes some way to evidencing the reflective nature of my research methodology.

G. The researcher embedded in the research

John Freeman, in *Blood, sweat and theory: Research through practice in performance* (2010) observes that research "is also always a form of re-search: a drawing on one's previous experience and developing this into knowledge" (2010, p. 264). This became evermore significant as my practice-led research moved forward. In practice-led research the principle data collection method occurs when the techniques and methods of the artistic practice (in this case writing for the theatre) lead the research in conjunction with an exploration of discipline specific scholarship and philosophical or conceptual paradigms. My understanding of Freeman's notion is that researcher and researched are taken to unexpected places, and also engage in a reflexive "re-search" into the

practice itself. This is inspired by critically rigorous reflection, in order to gain new insight into the specific art form and associated methods, techniques, vocabulary and context. Viewed in this way, practice-led research can be said to be "about developing practical work into knowledge by transposing the experience of what it is that one does into data and then subjecting this to the type of reflection, analysis and discipline that is involved in serious compositional study" (Freeman, 2010, p. 264). Brad Haseman (2006) iterates that "the 'practice' in 'practice-led research' is primary – it is not an optional extra; it is the necessary pre-condition of engagement in performative research" (p. 6). There has been extensive discussion about the validity of creative research methodologies over the last two decades (Frayling, 1993; Haseman, 2006; Barrett, 2007; Kershaw, 2007; Balfour, 2012; Collins, 2013; Freeman, 2016). The incisiveness of material pertaining to creative practice research assisted enormously in designing this project. Where *I am here now* is concerned, there was always the need to be open to what was offered by the participants, in terms not only of the material delivered, but an accountability of the limitations and challenges faced by both them and myself during the course of the research. I applied certain methods familiar to practice-led research: studio time for the application of the devising methods; textual and contextual review (analysis of books, articles, reports, reviews, news media, plays, films, and so on); and playwriting (the writing of the fictional play *I am here now*). To add to this, I also applied a method of participant observation in which I participated in conversations, often in informal settings such as a break from improvisation, or over coffee or lunch. I did not think of this as overly critical at the time, but later during the writing stage these moments proved to be absolutely crucial. I really valued the way each participant at different times, and to varying extents, opened their experiences to me via their 'originals'. Each of these methods is central to my research practice, especially the written reflective experience as "a vehicle through which the work of art can find a discursive form" (Bolt, 2007, p. 34).

After a stimulating beginning, the participants' relative inexperience as theatre makers tested my capacity as a collaborative facilitator, and it became clear that the improvisations were unable to bear fruit in the way that I had hoped. While listening for opportunities for the participants' voices to be heard, whether through anecdotal and informal conversation, or through formal research settings, including improvisation and interview, it became clear that my capacity to adhere strictly to Leigh's methods was limited: I would need to adapt his methods. This realisation led to questions that challenged parts of the process and called for further reflection. According to Freeman, reflective practice "embraces notions of heuristic research methodologies" that enable a researcher/practitioner

to discover through trial and error a link to the knowledge they seek. In this way, "the very act of discovery leads the discovering researcher to new points of knowledge and new directions to take" (Freeman, 2010, p. 178). A heuristic approach implies that something is learnt through the process, and of course a contribution to knowledge is made through the act of learning and a sharing of this knowledge through the thesis. As Barbara Bolt (2007) observes in relation to sharing knowledge:

> The task […] is not just to explain or contextualise practice but rather to produce movement in thought itself. It is these 'shocks to thought' that constitute the work of art and, in conjunction with the artworks, it forms the material of creative arts research. (p. 34)

The extent to which I learnt from my interactions with the participants and the research process of devising and writing became more and more evident over time, and cannot be underestimated. The reflective quality of practice-led research acts as a way to inform the interconnectedness of the overall playwriting practice.

The self-reflexivity of practice-led research prompted me to examine my relationship to the research. In part, this was because both processes, of devising and writing, revealed discord and conflict. Most of this conflict was a struggle with myself, both as facilitator of the improvisational stages and author of the final play. Estelle Barrett (2007) asserts that "knowledge is generated through action and reflection […] Learner centred activity driven by real-world problems of challenges in which the learner is actively engaged in finding a solution" (p. 5). This self-evaluation saw instances where the practice moved the research forward, and sometimes less so. Admittedly, ambivalence towards what was required at certain instances sometimes led to confusion and stasis. Barrett's point also speaks to my ambivalence in conceding that, as a person of (white) privilege in Australia, reflection walks a fine line between guilelessly 'whitesplaining' real-world problems for the participants and a genuine and important collaboration, in which dialogue occurs between both sides, as does a knowledge exchange. Thus, there is no way that I can sidestep the actuality of being embedded in my research. In this context, Bolt's "shock to thought" (2007, p. 34) required, on my part, consideration of the strengths and limitations of devising, and a determination of how the artefact could take up polyvocality. As so much of this research is concerned with 'voice/s', I needed to confront the presence, tone and impact of my 'voice'. From a place of reflection, this led me to question and challenge my own practice – from my initial intent to apply Leigh's methods, to writing the drafts of the play, and the analytical writing of this thesis.

Similar to Bolt's notion of 'shock to thought' is the concept that 'failure' is generative. Had I in some sense 'failed' to address my research aims when the project took unanticipated turns, or hit certain obstacles? Had I 'failed' in the sense that I have reached the limits of my capacity as a researcher/practitioner? Suffice to say, 'failure', as conceived by Margaret Werry and Roisin O'Gorman, is more useful when viewed as a "natural condition of collaboration […] In any collective project, some level of failure is inevitable" (2012, p. 110). While this summation of processes like Leigh's seems dire for a doctoral candidate, a condition of practice-led research must ultimately take account of 'failure', accepting that as practitioners in this space we "can regulate the level of failure, but we can never eliminate it" (2012, p. 110). If there is an upside, it is that "failure's threshold is also an opening […] after the familiar, bleak, heavy vacancy, that bottom-punched-out-of-my-world emptiness recedes, something new happens" (2012, p. 106), which in the context of this thesis presented further research opportunities. Crucially, Werry and O'Gorman's notions of 'failure' alert the practitioner to the need for a self-reflective capacity in order to embrace challenges and obstacles. It implies the need to allow for a research design that is responsive and adaptive, and to accept self-reflexivity as part and parcel of any struggle within a collaborative, practice-led methodology. Werry and O'Gorman also point out that if "failure reveals, it also exposes. And exposure is painful" (2012, p. 106); while the journey of this thesis has been unashamedly painful at times, including when I realised during the project that little of what was offered in the improvisations could be used verbatim in the play text (this is talked to in Chapter Two and Four), then what at first glance might be perceived as an irreparable design flaw in my research project became another challenge to meet. It could be said that this thesis attests to the challenges my practice of theatre making leads the research, where "intuitive messiness and aesthetic ambiguity are integral to researching theatre and performance, where relationships between the research and the researched are often fluid, improvised and responsive" (Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011, p. 2).

Once I had reconciled the idea of failure as something other than the end of the research, in order to meet these challenges, I had to reconsider how to proceed from the workshops to the actual writing of *I am here now*. Given that the improvisations (for the most part) proved to be lacking in potential dramatic character-led content, and with the end of the participants' direct involvement when the workshop phase ceased, the most feasible outcome seemed to be to incorporate as much as possible of the workshop material that I could into the written play. At this point, I became concerned about the material I had recorded – either because I could not perceive how certain improvisations would integrate with other improvisatory story threads; or because of the quality of the narratives emerging

from some of the workshop material. These complications in the devising stage actually offered an opportunity to reflect on my aims; and, in due course, to consolidate action and continue with the research aim: that the writing of a sole authored play could still deliver a plurality of voices. My critical engagement with the process would be to discover how these voices could find a place in the play, and how I could manage the dominance of my voice. This again confirms my view that, in this type of work, the researcher *is* the research, or at least a critical part of the research. Reflecting on my methodology, I came to understand the impact I had on and within the research. I became aware of a very fine tension created by being the sole author, when it came to writing *I am here now*, and via attempts at inclusivity through Leigh's methods of the many voices in and around the play. Thus, in some ways, I recognise that I became my own captured data.

Similarly, I do not and cannot claim any great knowledge of what it might mean experientially to be African Australian. Having said that, I do know what it is like to be separated from a homeland; that was something I did reflect on throughout this journey. In regard to this, Chris Bannerman (2009, p. 72) observes:

> The very issues that arise as difficulties from collaborative devising processes can equally offer new opportunities to negotiate and establish identity and to enhance intercultural understanding…. more conscious awareness and explicit discussion of the ethics of our practice will enhance the development of the arts and of practice-as-research.

The more attention I paid to the reflective (reflection on the practice, on what happened) and to the reflexive (who I am in relation to the research, how I shift and change as the research does and vice versa), the more I understood that I was both practice-led researcher and researcher-participant, with varying degrees of subjectivity and objectivity. Such insight testifies to the tensions which arose during the research but also demonstrates that challenges can offer opportunities for deeper, richer outcomes. Sally Eaves states that "a holistic and pluralistic approach to research which foregrounds the interconnections between epistemology, theory and methodology" (2014, p.150) is beneficial to arts practice. What could be considered is that *I am here now* did not just start in a collaborative improvisatory workshop in suburban Perth in 2010; rather, some of the ideas in the play were conceived as long ago as my childhood. Then, as a researcher-participant, it is appropriate that some reflection be given to *who I am* (and with whom and what I identify), beyond the solely artistic self previously mentioned.

For context: I was born in Scotland in 1977. Growing up the only connection to Africa I had was in Glasgow during the 1980s, where the plight of 'black' South Africa was, for Glaswegians, intrinsically connected to the popular ideas of socialism. In fact, a central thoroughfare of Glasgow was named Nelson Mandela Place even while Mandela was still incarcerated on Robben Island. Scotland's largely left wing political and progressive theatre cultures often left a social footprint upon their spectators. This is exemplified in its theatre by the nurturing of many writers concerned with social justice, such as John McGrath, Anthony Neilson and Morna Pearson. At that time in the theatre, it seemed, perhaps naively, that if the troubles of Apartheid South Africa could be solved then there was hope for other struggles, such as the sectarian violence in troubled Northern Ireland, lethally imported onto the streets of Glasgow each time Celtic and Rangers Football Clubs clashed, both prior to and after the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

I migrated to Western Australia at the age of twelve. This move made me extremely unsettled, by the dislocation from my homeland and the unsolicited relocation to home in Perth, a tribulation for my child self, which continues to have a resonance in my life almost thirty years later. Before that separation, I had little awareness of the world as a political place; later, I would understand the Britain of my youth as a political, social and economic hegemony, led variously by the conservative agendas of Prime Minister

Margaret Thatcher and her successors. My father was a fitter in the shipyards of industrial Glasgow which, during the 1980s, were being sold off in the first throes of Thatcher's neoliberalisation of the UK, which brought the sense of injustice into the home. Unsurprisingly, my father, a former merchant mariner who had travelled the world, suggested that the family move overseas to Australia for a better life. I think I have always perceived that moment of separation, and the subsequent 'transition', as an event which created a deep sense of unsettlement; at its worst, this act of migration felt almost punitive. It was in my self-defined 'exile' from Scotland that I began to reflect upon my origins. From very early, the world I emerged into attempted to nullify the 'voice' (with few exceptions) of the working class. This insight grew into a profound desire for social justice which embraced even-handedness, collectivism through unionism and left-leaning political principles. These thoughts were nurtured in Bob Hawke and Paul Keating's Australia; later, they were cemented by the industrial discord and social division of John Howard's years in power, which seemed to underscore all I was against. These occurrences in my youth continue to shape me; more importantly,

with reflection they continue to shape my teaching and arts practice. Kristeva argues that language "remains incapable of detaching itself from representation" (1980, p. 79) and I would add that language and representation are incapable of separation from condition and circumstance. In light of this, as sole author of *I am here now*, I sought to include as many traces of the participants' voices as possible from the improvisational stages to the final play. Eaves draws a connection between social justice awareness and polyvocality; that a practitioner must have a "particular interest in research that can give voice and support the enablement of participants by fostering polyphony, surfacing the intangible and invisible, and optimising the capacity for authenticity in representation" (2014, p.150). Giving voice and representation are fraught; the question arises as to whose right or judgement is best placed to illuminate how to 'give voice' to a group or represent any particular idea of what might be considered authentic or question what equality of 'voice' might look like, if indeed it could exist.

Throughout the research, my aim was to investigate how polyvocality could occur in the theatre making process. Polyvocality, in this case, also involved the voices of my supervisors and my subjective experiences. If asked why this autobiographical information is pertinent, I believe that to confront researcher's subjectivity signifies an act of disclosure, in various states of influencing and being influenced (as researcher, participant, playwright, teaching artist, etc.); this is critical to self-reflection. Grainne Kelly, in "Storytelling Audit" (2007), suggests autobiographical concerns underpin research and indicate, in relation to storytelling, how artists:

> […] seek understanding of our separate psychological, emotional and spiritual wounds through their disclosure to each other. It is our belief that we need to share our stories, tell our truths, actively listen to each other and document what has taken place. (p. 5)

The realisation that my voice is embedded in my research helps explain what constitutes 'voice' in this context: how the presence of my 'voice' could be measured so as not to drown out the participants' 'voices' in the final play. This means that I must also locate elements of my 'voice' that I wish to not only acknowledge, but to celebrate in conjunction with the other 'voices' in the work.

H. Exile, diaspora, the unhomely, and Critical Race Theory

Exploring ideas and metaphors of separation and exile led me to investigate the concept of diaspora. Khachig Tololyan presents a case for framing the term diaspora, noting that it "once described

Jewish, Greek and Armenian dispersion" but now shares meanings "with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community" (Tololyan 1991, p. 4). The study of diaspora is a well-established field that many theorists have covered from different perspectives (see Brah, 1996; Braziel & Mannur, Cohen, 2015; Gilroy, 1993; Kalra, 2006): the political and institutional implications throughout the world speak to a sustained academic interest in diaspora. Kim Knott and Sean McLoughlin (2010) note that diaspora "continues to have meaning beyond the academy, for diasporans themselves, with copious formal and informal connections being maintained with homelands" (p. 2). This became evident in the material produced by the participants in the early stages of the project. Rogers Brubaker (2005) observes that "early discussions of diaspora were firmly rooted in a conceptual *homeland*" (2005, p. 2), but the term has been increasingly applied to an "ever-broadening set of cases: essentially to any and every nameable population category that is to some extent dispersed in space" (2005, p. 3). This is evident at a localised level in the thesis by usage of the term *African Australian* to acknowledge an individual's relationship to an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) – African Australia cannot be completely verified as a community because it is made up of a myriad of different groupings. Moreover, as Brubaker says about the concept of diaspora, there is a perceptible "orientation to a real or imagined 'homeland' as an authoritative source of value, identity and loyalty" (Brubaker, 2005, p. 5). The problem with *African Australian* is that it suggests a binary relationship of where the participants have come from and where they are now; but of course in this 'term' specific individual experience is diminished. This said, the sense of being drawn to a 'homeland' was present in my direct and anecdotal interactions with the participants. Within the concept of diaspora, notions of separation and exile, of location and dislocation, were apparent. I wanted to include these ideas in the writing of the play, represented both literally and metaphorically.

My personal experience of immigration is an integral part of my understanding of what it means to be a migrant. The relationship to location and relocation is both unsettling and revelatory of this condition. My own understanding helped me to recognise the unfamiliar, the unsettled and, what Homi Bhabha names the *unhomely* (1992). Bhabha's ideas can be traced throughout his many writings on the subject: *Nation and narration* (1990); *The world and the home* (1992); and *The location of culture* (1994). Bhabha takes the concept of the *unhomely* from Sigmund Freud's concept of 'the *uncanny'* (Bhabha, 1994). Freud notes that the uncanny is,

> Nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old – established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression. This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand […] the uncanny as something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light (1919, pp. 12-13).

Bhabha takes Freud's work on repression from the private to the public, which at its core can be understood as a confusion between self and other. The Freudian *uncanny* – or the term Bhabha uses synonymously, the *unhomely* – refers to a kind of separation while encountering the familiar, a reaction to the fixed notion of the symbolic, or metaphorical, in society, needed in order to separate from the need for words, understood in Freud's use of the term *unheimlich* (Freud, 1919). The idea of the *unheimlich* has been taken up by many others, including Martin Heidegger and Julia Kristeva; but here I am focused more on Bhabha's application. In regards to ideas of displacement (physical or otherwise, chosen or forced), Bhabha observes that "the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (1992, p. 141). In this sense, the *unhomely* for Bhabha is also tangled up with repression. According to Freud the *unheimlich* becomes what was once *heimisch* (of home), so that the meaning of *heimisch* develops in a direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich* (Freud, 1919, p. 226). Freud in reference to literature, hazards:

> The somewhat paradoxical result is that in the first place a great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happened in real life; and in the second place that there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life. (p.19)

Kristeva applies the notion of the *uncanny/unhomely* to her idea of the *abject*, laid out in her work *The Revolution of Poetic Language* (1984). Kristeva (1982, p. 59) differs from Freud and Bhabha by broadening the concept of the *uncanny* as a condition of 'foreignness', but neatly returns to Freud by conceding a similar concept: we are foreign to ourselves, which Kristeva explains through the notion of the *abject*. Kristeva reflects in *Powers of Horror: an essay on abjection* (1982) upon the *abject* noting, that "on the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards" (1982, p. 2). According to Mostafa Farahbakhsh and Fatemeh Ranjbar, Kristeva's take on *unheimlich* realises that there is a foreignness within the self, and subsequently "the division of self and other is not plausible" (2016, p. 107), as the self is positioned by the abject presence of that other; it is that which cannot be assimilated into meaning because it has "only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*" (Kristeva, 1982,

p. 1). She states that the abject allows the individual to draw a border or a boundary around themselves. The notion of the *unhomely* accelerates a separation from home and the transition to a new homeland; it is often felt as a type of extended 'exile', all of which is explored in *I am here now*, and also goes to the heart of this thesis.

From the position of *unhomeliness*, Bhabha observes that "the modern nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor" (1990, p. 291); and I have deliberately placed the longing for an original homeland and/or a new home at the centre of *I am here now*. The connectivity that the modern world affords, even in the play, mainly through ever-advanced technology, can actually heighten the sense of exile; a sense of being so close, yet so far away – a kind of dysphoria which echoes the notions of the *unhomely* and encourages to some degree the connection with the homeland. This concept of the *unhomely* was experienced while developing and writing the play. Culture and memory is at the heart of that dislocation, both literally and metaphorically. Both culture and memory are dynamic, changeable and slippery. Culture itself is subject to forces of migration, economics, access, agency, politics, fashion, education and social awareness. At various stages, formally and informally, the participants would often point to these ideas of separation, transition, dislocation. For me, this came together in the idea of the *unhomely*. It was not until I came to assembling the material generated in the development stage into dramatic fiction that I could see just how helpful a concept the *unhomely* could be; to conceptually ground the project. It is the grief and loss, as well as the desire for something other – for home, for a future, for family, for community, for belonging – that links the piece with the *unhemilich*.

Returning to Leigh, I have always found his work compelling in that it spoke to my interest in finding creative ways to articulate social justice issues. Marc DiPaolo (Cardinale-Powell & DiPaolo, 2013) refers to Leigh's films as "sly domestic satires and heartbreaking 'social realist' dramas" (p. 1). The social realist movement in the twentieth century argued that art must foreground the reality of class-based issues, including the struggles of the working class – seen in work as diverse as Diego Rivera to Dorothea Lange – utilising photography, film, painting and more to depict the lived experience of poverty and class-based tensions (see Billington, 2007; Bond, 2010; Devine, 2006; Lacey, 2011; McGrath, 1981; Williams, 1997). However, adhering to my ideas around class in this sense posed some difficulties for me. Particularly as class based issues were not what the participants expressed they wanted to speak to, nor were they ever really offered up in any tangible way during

the development stage. To follow a social realist direction would be an imposition on my part and, therefore, would I suspect radically split the participants' 'voices' from mine. As the research progressed, I did however become more aware of social theories of culture, ethnicity and race, including Critical Race Theory (CRT).

CRT, as delineated by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001), originated from "a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power" (2001, p. 2). Notable CRT scholars, including Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado, built on the insights of critical legal studies and radical feminism and drew from a wide range of authors ranging from Antonio Gramsci, Jacques Derrida, Martin Luther King Jr., bell hooks, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Cheryl I. Harris, and 'Black Power' writers of the time to develop complex studies on race (2001, p. 4). The initial articles collated as CRT eventually grew into an even more diverse scholarly field with varied applications, including in the field of education. Ladson-Billings, in her 1998 article, *Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education*, applied CRT to what she perceives as educational inequality, noting that: "race strictly as an ideological concept denies the reality of a radicalised society and its impact on people in their everyday lives" (1998, p. 9). Ladson-Billings offers that storytelling can provide context for understanding, feeling, and interpreting issues of race. This context is relevant to the workshops process of this research project and to some extent the writing of *I am here now*.

In the context of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its place in art, Isaac Julien, the British filmmaker known for his explorations of 'blackness' says in an interview with African American feminist, bell hooks (1996), that his work attempts with a number of different racial bodies to engage with the positionality of being black. Julien notes:

> Blackness as a sign is never enough. What does the black subject do, how does it act, how does it think politically […] being black really isn't good enough for me: I want to know what your cultural politics are… (cited in hooks, 1996, p. 6)

This request for a declaration of an individual's cultural politics is a cause of ambivalence throughout the play which I discuss in Chapter Four. At this stage suffice to say *I am here now* explores ideas of visibility and slippage, of moving in and between cultural identification – through characters like Errick, who carries the albatross of his political life (especially in being a hypervisible African man in Australian politics) as well as the relationship between Amine and Nancy and their

different connections to their cultural heritage. Additionally, the 'truth' origins of the participants' improvisations wrestle against the introduction of entirely fictional characters who eventually emerged in the final play. Stuart Hall's observation that the perception of the world through our lived experience of it must not be removed from its cultural location – leads to a question of a hypervisibility of blackness/whiteness allowing for "two continuous grand counter narratives" (Hall, 1997, p.126). The participants implied at times that they were familiar with racialised discourse in Australia. This was something that they experienced, a hypervisibility of 'blackness', but without ever naming it as such. This was especially the case for the participants who were recent migrants; that they were often seen or known by others by the colour of their skin. As Hall (1997) declares, the grand narratives of 'blackness' and 'whiteness' are a duelling coupling which too often replace the specificities of individuals and communities. The propensity for Anglo-Celtic dominance within Australia (culturally, linguistically, institutionally and beyond) to subsume 'blackness' and 'black cultures' into simplistic narratives can be seen in recent news coverage (Ryan & Stayner, 2018).

Over thirty years ago Sneja Gunew (as cited in Bhabha, 1990), speaking specifically about Australia, observed that ideas about the benefits of multiculturalism "will only function as a useful expression of difference when it is seen as including Anglo-Celts" (p. 115). This implies that multiculturalism does in fact position the 'Other' in a location that is sited against the Anglo-Celtic majority, what Ghassan Hage termed twenty years ago the "dominant national type" (1998, p. 54). With this comes issues of representation and visibility. Hage calls for a "multicultural Real" which implies that "we are diversity… a "national 'we' which is itself diverse" (1998, p. 139), something that still resonates in Australia today. Hage argues that only by these means could Australia be said to encompass a 'truly' multicultural society; not a notional state that is subordinated to a dominant monoculture – 'white' Australia. More diversity in the arts, as already mentioned, is widely and continually called for by practitioners and audiences, in order to reveal the "dissimilarity and variety between the cultures it clubs together" (Gonsalves, 2011, p. 74). This leads to the idea of challenging governmental and institutional discourse and is central to any protestation against the dominance of any one culture. In effect, it is multiculturalism itself that is often the disabler of a national 'we' because it enables another type of disempowerment; one centred in the homogenisation of cultural difference rather than representing the myriad diversity within Australia's population, even if in name it proclaims to do so.

This notion is reinforced by Bhabha's interrogation of what he views as the "progressive metaphor of modern social cohesion – the many as one – shared by organic theories of the holism of culture and community, and by theorists who treat gender, class or race as social totalities that are expressive of unitary collective experiences" (1994, p. 142). Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that meaning is made in the complex interactivity of language, culture and representation, especially when it comes to identify formation – of the self, of community and especially in the well-worn concept of 'nation' building. Bhabha (1994, p. 2) notes that:

> It is the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated…Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively.

In relation to the play, this notion of an emergent interstices will be further taken up in the second half of the thesis. Arguably by developing narratives derived from the participants' experiences (and those around them), the circumstances they find themselves in can be characterised in such a way that does not reduce our interactions to missteps which depreciates their experiences, or wrongly suggests there is a singular or unified African Australian experience to be discovered. If anything, our interactions 'humbled and enhanced' (Emerson, 1997, p. 26) my experience and certainly my artistic practice. Delgado and Stefancic contend that it is chiefly up to those of "minority status" to offer "a presumed competence to speak about race and racism" (2001, p. 9), no-one else. In this instance, what becomes important is that I continually question my role and place in working with this group of people, and I would argue that this does not mean that I forgo understanding of race and racism; rather, that in this context there was an opportunity to learn from one another, and in this space a place for agency to grow. The sole authorship of the final play is steeped in problems, and certainly risks appearing to speak for others. However, I maintain that it is through writing and a deep engagement with the alternative modes of participation –anecdotal conversations, physicalisation and the individuality brought by the participants – that a plurality of voices does exist in the work.

Returning to the dangers of a fixed cultural perspective, Bharucha identifies firstly that there is an innate power imbalance between the West and the rest of the world, that "the larger economic and political domination of the West has clearly constrained, if not negated the possibilities of a genuine exchange" (1997, p. 2), of which Australia cannot be excepted. Secondly, Bharucha demands that the

author in this context must become a political force. This would see the playwright take a critical stance, one which assesses political and ideological systems rooted in the underrepresentation of minorities, more often than not. It could be said that this political arena is sometimes where Leigh's work takes him and where he encounters social justice themes that intricately manifest in his scripts. This may also have something to do with his actors; they develop situations that respond to life's minutiae, often in direct interplay with the daily struggle of those who have abundance and those who have very little in terms of education, (political) representation, or money. The actuality of Leigh's methods, in the context of this research, becomes primarily locked into the notion that an individual has a singular and specific relationship to self and society, which cannot be broken without sufficient cost or risk (DiPaolo cited in Cardinale-Powell & DiPaolo, 2013, p. 1), which was not what I wanted to necessarily lock the participants into. The aim of my research was to collaborate with the participants – individuals who all identified to varying degrees as African Australian (some identified more as African, others as Australian with African heritage) – to devise narratives stemming from the 'truth' of their experiences and the experiences of the people known to them (played out as their 'originals'). As facilitator, there were times where I could recognise issues of isolation and struggle – familiar as a migrant story – but I also had to recognise that working with non-theatre makers unfamiliar with the theatrical devising process that could lead to a dramatic narrative, was complicated.

For Ladson-Billings in the USA, as with Kelly in Northern Ireland, storytelling is significant because it draws from narratives which can convey a "construction of equitable and socially just relations of power" (1998, p. 9). While in the workshops I did not explicitly give a lot of time over to issues of equity and social justice, in the way that an improviser like Augusto Boal (1985) might approach this project, I did work actively to provide a safe space for the participants to offer what they wanted to share, especially in utilising the Leigh methods. Inevitably, this came from their experience and relationship within constructions of socially just relations of power; or at least that of their 'original' characters. There was also an opportunity for the participants to explore power relations, or even social issues that might arise in the context of a person's relationship with significant others, with their homeland, and the like. Chapter Two will go into more detail about what did come up in the workshops and what also arose in the informal settings of conversation.

I admit that seeking to capture a narrative about a marginalised group and the struggles that they faced daily was perhaps naïve and a flawed ambition. I realised fairly early on that I was at risk of telling my participants what to do and what to say within the improvisatory workshops, and that this would in itself be a misrepresentation of the participants. Even if I to some extent stayed to Leigh's methods, where he directs the actors to particular situations where complex social systems play out in narrative, this would be the case. I was aware throughout the process of the need to quieten my significantly 'loud' voice – as a member of Australia's "dominant national type" (Hage, 1998, p. 54) – in order that I could clearly listen to what the participants were offering, and how I could then fashion what I observed into a new play.

I.   The methods of Mike Leigh

Mike Leigh has written and directed regularly across theatre and film for several decades. Celebrated films include but are not limited to: *Bleak Moments* (1971), *Nuts in May* (1976), *Abigail's Party* (1977) *High Hopes* (1988), *Life is Sweet* (1990), *Naked* (1993), *Secrets and Lies* (1996), *Topsy Turvy* (1999), *Vera Drake* (2004), and most recently *Mr Turner* (2014), with a new film due this year, *Peterloo*. Leigh's methods were initially forged after a brief sojourn with acting but he is principally known as a playwright and screenwriter. *The Box Play* (1965) was the first of several plays but Leigh's playwriting gave way to screenwriting and filmmaking in the 1980s and 1990s. He has gained acclaim over the past decade receiving a BAFTA fellowship in 2015 for his film works. Since Leigh regularly applies his methods to theatre and film, the techniques easily move across mediums, so it is more than appropriate for me to apply his methods in my theatre making and playwriting research. In both instances, Leigh works to the same end – to complete a new and original script. Leigh was not always destined to take up a prominence in theatre and film. After a brief, and apparently disheartening, period enrolled as a student in the acting course at Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), Leigh moved onto the Camberwell School of Art. Leigh fondly recalls his time at Camberwell (as cited in Kellaway, 2014):

> There was a great working atmosphere, it was intense, there was a commitment, something going on…. I remember looking around the room and thinking: we never experience this at drama school, for one second, because here everyone is looking at something real and finding a way of expressing it. And that meshed with thoughts I had on the go about the possibility of what actors could do, and film-making and making theatre in an organic way.

Interestingly, Leigh (Kellaway, 2014) has described his methods as something akin to an artist, sketching in preparation to paint; that his methods are a process of "discovering through making, working with the material, the artefact" (*Big Think Interview*, n.d.). In regards to Leigh's methods, Paul Clements' first-hand textual account, *The improvised play*: *the work of Mike Leigh* (1983) is extremely comprehensive in laying out Leigh's methods. While published in the 1980s, this text is still the most extensive and objective record of his methods, with little else revealed about the actual process, other than Leigh's somewhat evasive commentary about his work in the media. Marchand (cited in Cardinale-Powell & DiPaolo, 2013, p. 51), the leading proponent and workshop facilitator of Leigh's methods in Australia, structures Leigh's improvisational work into three specific areas: foundational (creating the character), relational (contact and exchange with other characters), and cathartic (dramatic development). This structure while utilising alternative terminology to Clements' account still resonates with the expression of Leigh's early ideas; interestingly, Leigh's approach is very close to Bakhtin's reflection on how writers "assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate" words (1986, p. 89), something that became evident over the course of the project. Marchand's categories reveal that Leigh's practice has a basic shape that remains reasonably consistent to Clements' description of Leigh's practice from nearly forty years ago, and demonstrates that Leigh's methods can indeed be 're-accentuated' in the hands of other theatre makers. From when research began, I endeavoured to discover how his methods might be useful in generating material from a group of inexperienced theatre makers and inform a written play that had emerged partly from those participants but was, like Leigh, ostensibly sole-authored. One striking feature of Leigh's work is that his actors will sign up to his projects even with no script written – no action, setting or characters – it is a step into the dark. However, a cursory glance at any cast list of a Leigh film or play reveals that he principally works with actors who are very experienced in theatre making, including improvisation and play building. I find Leigh's hands-on collaboration and how that might be developed to create a new play a fascinating endeavour, multilayered and often at times incredibly difficult. His process is fertile ground for investigating research into improvisation and devising strategies for story creation, especially as it relates to social justice. Overall, Leigh's approach is an intriguing vessel for the facilitation of stories and voices that might otherwise not get heard.

I first experienced Leigh's methods when, over two decades ago, I created the character of Mark Pepper for director Mike Frencham's low budget feature film *Yorkshire* (1996). It was on this project that I first encountered Clements' *The improvised play* (1983). While an acting student at the National

Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), I also had the chance to devise from character as part of a long-form improvisatory exercise involving 20 students, facilitated by improvisation expert, Lyn Pierse. The exercise extended for over three months and at the end of this time we presented, to an audience, a three-hour sustained improvisation. Pierse brought together the two acting classes which had undergone Leigh's devising process in isolation from one another, with the improvisatory work resulting in a fictional narrative that brought two separate families (the two acting classes) together at a wedding. The result was at times humorous, at times deeply moving, and contained a raw spontaneity which revealed some insights into the characters that resembled the idiosyncrasies of humanity that are often forgotten in a conventional rehearsal period. As a teaching artist for nearly two decades, I have used Leigh's techniques in many acting workshops. As a director, I have also used his methods to finesse character building in smaller sequences of larger narratives, both in films and theatre productions. I have also adapted Leigh's exercises to enhance characterisations, rather than build characters from scratch, going slightly against the purpose Leigh intended – but with credible results.

Clements observes that during the creation of character Leigh works one-to-one with actors in "pre-rehearsal" (p. 33), which in both Leigh's approach and mine is where exchanges between director/facilitator and the actor/ would occur. In the early stages of the project, these aligned closely, which will be compared in detail in the next chapter. Leigh uses the pre-rehearsal over a period of months to explore with his professional actors all aspects of their 'original' characterisation, explained below. Leigh (as cited in Clements, 1983) states that: "as the actual world we were creating took on its reality, I began to sort out what it was actually about" (p. 29). That admission suggests a certain ambivalence towards arriving at a central subject until narrative opportunities appear to Leigh, at which point he takes assertive direction and structures the improvisations in order to pursue story threads he wishes to explore. In this context, unlike Leigh who draws chastely from the improvisations of his actors, I also drew inspiration from every point of exchange with the participants, not only the formal improvisatory workshops but also the informal anecdotal conversations, and my observations of the participants in how they moved, talked, sometimes dressed and more generally behaved with me and others. On reflection, the formal improvisation scene work produced varying degrees of success in terms of content, to which this thesis attests. The limitations of my devising process nonetheless exposed another type of creative richness. While I was not necessarily able to transcribe improvisations verbatim, as Leigh seems able

to do, the challenges I faced provided the unique opportunity to further develop my playwriting practice and interrogate deeply my other interactions with the participants.

Essential at the beginning of Leigh's methodology is the formation of what he calls the 'list'; to begin the process of devising a new character. Leigh (as cited in Clements, 1983) asks participants to "make a list of everybody you can possibly think of" (p. 24) and to think of "someone you know who could be the model for this character. Now go into character and use that person, do that person in the character's situation. Now, make that person be the character" (p. 26). The actors subsequently outline for Leigh any distinctive behaviours, physicalities and traits in those individuals selected by the performers. Choosing the people who are on the list is not as indiscriminate as it might sound – the actors know the particularities (and peculiarities) of the people chosen; they have seen them, conversed with them. Even if they do not know that person's name there is scope for an implied familiarity, such as if the selected individual is someone you sit next to each morning on the bus to work. Leigh then talks over the list with each actor (all of this is on a one-to-one basis) and keeps a record of all the characters. The individual actor then selects characteristics from the people listed that both Leigh and the actor consider have potential ingredients for inclusion in the creation of the new character. This character contains aspects of usually five or six people on the lists from possibly hundreds spoken about (Clements, 1983, p. 27). Leigh terms this newly developed character an 'original' (Clements, 1983, p. 32), a term which I also use to describe the participants' newly developed characters. Marchand notes that even from this early stage, narrative begins to build out of these newly-minted characters:

> When director and actor engage in creating a history for the character, a family tree and other 'facts' concerning his or her early life, there is an implicit presumption that such 'facts' will have consequences and lead to experiences which in turn impinge on behaviour. (cited in Cardinale-Powell & DiPaolo, 2013, p. 47)

When the 'original' has had their main characteristics outlined, Leigh works with the actor to develop and modify the 'original', taking them on solo improvisations in character, in public, to see the result and evaluate the progress of the 'original'. Leigh queries the performer about the physicality and speech of the 'original' as it develops, known as "behaviour work" (Clements, 1983, p. 33), alongside an examination of psychological and emotional motivations, which Leigh terms "narrative work" (Clements, 1983, p. 33), where the driving forces for the narrative manifest. This is

deeply immersive 'field work'. Leigh will allow any research that an actor has done to contribute to the development of the 'original'. Clements notes (1983) that:

> Research emphasises and intensifies the particular cultural and class background of the character in the play or film by giving the actor the opportunity to absorb into his behaviour and consciousness the economic, social and personal aspects of the field he's researching. (p. 43)

The actors' character biographies (what I term 'original' *profiles* in this context) are shaped by the encounters the 'original' has with the world around them; this could involve the investigation of an occupation, expertise or locale. An example of an actor using biographical research is David Thewlis, who plays Johnny in Leigh's gritty 1990 film, *Naked*. Thewlis spent a period of intensive research, reading books he thought the character would read, and "putting an awful lot of learning together and coming up with the philosophy and attitude of the character". Thewlis said he eventually felt his brain being on fire and raging with ideas "[...] I felt I could confound and out-argue anybody" (as cited in Movshovitz, 2000, p. 43). Despite this, the actor's research was also developed from encounters outside of the formalised improvisatory work, as Leigh (as cited in Hoad, 2013) recounts:

> David was living in Soho, endlessly reading Nostradamus and all the other things Johnny was into. One day, he came in for a session and said: "I've just met this real nutter." An American had assaulted him with stuff about barcodes fulfilling the Revelations prophecies. We said: "This is great, we've got to have it in the film. It's real Johnny stuff."

This is important, as it testifies to the idea that while Leigh seeks to control the material produced by the improvisatory work, there is room to add and adapt the 'original' from outside the parameters of the actor's experience in a meaningful way. Once an actor is considered by Leigh to have a good grasp of the backstory of their original, the process moves into the next stage where characters are subsequently "road tested" (Clements, 1983, p. 35). Road testing involves taking actors into public spaces – shopping malls, galleries, cafes and so forth – with characters always in role, the 'originals' having "to do what the character does" (Clements, 1983, p. 35), searching for 'truth' in each moment.

After road testing, the 'originals' are brought together in what Leigh refers to as the "structuring" phase of the process (Clements, 1983, p. 33), which is the point where collaborative improvisations with multiple actors begin. Where possible, Leigh does not put a timeframe around his

improvisations. This gives time to the structuring in order to produce options that could be used in Leigh's final written play. During structuring, Leigh brings the 'originals' into contact, by way of plausible dramatic contexts that provide "improvisation and discussion which creates the content of the characters" (Clements, 1983, p. 33). Leigh then explores various moments, such as where characters first meet and record the narrative threads that emerge. He tests the ability of these improvised moments to help sustain any narratives he likes that emerge from the story threads. In this phase, each improvisational rehearsal creates the given circumstances for the next rehearsal and so on, ideally with narrative flowing from one rehearsal to the next. It is also important to establish a common chronology and set of given circumstances for the ensemble. During intervals in the workshops, the facilitator and the actors debrief on character behaviour in seclusion from other actors. This debrief involves talking about the character objectively in third person, to distinguish between the actor and the character, giving a strong sense that the character is being moulded similarly to the way a playwright might outline the motivations of an imagined character. If needed, threads are realigned by Leigh to help accommodate encounters between characters that do not seem a natural fit, but have potential to contribute to the overall narrative that Leigh is devising day by day.

During these improvisations all action results from characters' motivations during the improvisations. With adjustment to the time and space of their 'originals', Leigh applies various techniques, to help his actors sustain the character biographies they have developed. One technique Leigh uses to gather biographical information is through improvisatory work about the 'original's' biography – what he names 'Quiz Club' (Clements, 1983, pp. 43-44). This period comes after the 'originals' have been formed, when the "characters have gelled so that the actors have the conviction to respond to the questions more than arbitrarily, but early enough for the subsequent figurative improvisations to be 'enriched' by what it's stirred up" (Clements, 1983, p. 44). During the structuring phase of development, I used a variant of 'Quiz Club' to attempt to enrich the narrative of the improvisations, which I called 'hot seat'. 'Hot seat' was used not as a replacement for 'Quiz Club', but as another way for the 'originals' to enhance their backstories and to quickly supplement exposition for any participants/characters who may or may not have been present at certain workshops, which ultimately was the case. The major difference between 'Quiz Club' and 'hot seat' was that I was also in the improvisation – prompting questions while playing a 'performed' version of myself as a way in which to assist the participants in maintaining character and improvisation for

longer and to delve deeply into the material. My adaptation of Leigh's technique is explored in detail in Chapter Two.

Leigh reveals something of a reflexive capacity to his own methodology when in relation to his filmmaking he states: "I know a lot of nothing at the start. I'm not an intellectual filmmaker; I'm an intuitive and emotional filmmaker. So I have feelings on the go and conceptions, which are more from the gut than the brain" (as cited in Movshovitz, 2000, p. 53). Leigh's reflexivity within his process appears to come from the unique position of being unencumbered by a script during the initial devising process, from the 'originals' to the structured improvisations. Leigh (as cited in Cardullo, 2011, p. 17) confesses even his choice of actors is based on instinct, but this does not mean that he is impulsive:

> In the first place, I'm pretty careful about whom I choose. I instinctively look for the kind of actor who is going to be trusting. There are all kinds of insecure people out there called actors; and some deeply untrusting actors— the kind that need to know exactly what's what at all times—might be quite good within the parameters of a certain sort of acting. But I can't work with such people. On the whole, I get people for whom not always knowing what's what isn't a problem.

It's important to emphasise that Leigh employs trained professional actors who are open to uncertainty; whereas, I chose from the outset to invite participants who had little, if any, experience as performers. I wanted to apply Leigh's methods to a) a group of non- experienced theatre makers and b) with a group of individuals who were not often represented in Australian theatre or film. Unquestionably, I had emancipatory objectives for the project. So it can be seen that right from the start I had diverted in some way from Leigh. Like any research problem, I needed to find out the strengths and limitations of Leigh's methods. Practice-led research allows for the investigation of the research problem via the methods of the practice itself. So, in the application of Leigh's methods, and by not working with professional actors, there is a greater need for my role as a facilitator of the workshops to be successful; defining what that success looks like is complicated. Working with inexperienced actors also meant that I needed to create a supportive environment so the participants could trust the process, still aware that they would not know what might happen before it did during the improvisations.

Outside of his improvisatory sessions, Leigh dissuades his performers from discussing their character biographies, with actors "strictly forbidden from discussing their work or their characters with each

other" (O'Sullivan, 2011, p. 5). American film academic, Sean O'Sullivan, hypothesizes that Leigh's fervent secrecy is based in how we live our lives; that we: "don't know what's happening outside of ourselves, we don't know why other people do things, and we have no idea how the script of our lives will develop" (2011, p. 5). What the improvisations do is attempt to divest the actor of the surety of *what comes next*, in the hope of capturing an 'authentic' moment in time and space which represents a 'truth' about 'reality'. When Leigh's actors meet in a workshop after their individual work as 'originals' it is always in role; and as the improvisational phase extends, logically so does the experience and memory of the character. The actors are aware that Leigh will seek to examine in the workshop a concrete and physical 'reality', to embrace a 'world' with them – a 'truth' in the writing of what is, finally, a 'fiction'.

Leigh tends to limit the number of actors involved in his process; presumably due to the constraints of working individually with several actors over months during pre- rehearsal; this was comparable in the context of my project. When the characters confront one another in the structured improvisations, they only know as much about each other as they ever could know in life; outside the context of their narrative nothing else really matters. However, this does not suggest the actor remains infinitely in character. O'Sullivan demystifies this part of Leigh's process: "On the other side of the equation, actors treat their characters as characters; Leigh insists that they come out of character so that they can look at what has happened objectively" (2011, p. 5), which allows Leigh to influence the next improvisation, and then the next, and so on. A deeply immersive creativity is iconic of Leigh's methods; but there is a considered objectivity required to discuss events from the improvisations, which necessitates the actor coming out of character. An example of how this technique works can be viewed in Leigh's film, *Secrets and Lies* (1996), when the working class and socially awkward central character, Cynthia, is waiting to meet her biological daughter, Hortense, for the first time since giving her up for adoption at birth. What would naturally be a challenging situation is made more so by the polarising moment where Cynthia realises that the black woman waiting beside her is Hortense; simultaneously, Hortense must come to terms that her biological mother is white. What intensifies this excruciating reunion is that the scene is shot in one take (Whitehead, 2012, p. 120), creating an unbroken, unsettling moment that positions the audience as an uncomfortable voyeur. During the improvisational stage, the two actors would never have met and the destabilisation of that moment for the actors is beautifully recreated in the eventual film. The shooting of the scene only took two takes for Leigh to be satisfied that he had captured in their

surprise what he considered to be perfectly "real" (Whitehead, 2012, p. 120), with the professional actors able to hold and sustain that initial shock from the improvisation through to the film shoot.

To add a level of security to this separation of actor and character, Leigh asks his actors not to discuss the improvisations outside of the rehearsal room because "it's easy to imagine how they might begin to try and fit them together, making, perhaps unconsciously, compromises and accommodations in their own impulses" (1983, p. 31). Or, in other words, there might be the temptation to pre-empt character or narrative trajectories which would lose the intended spontaneity of improvisation (Clements, 1983, p. 30). This key technique in Leigh's methods is considered part of the pre-rehearsal stage (see Chapter Two), which I also used it in my project. The isolation that Leigh demands the actors keep, the intensity which they devote to their characterisations, the final script; all help give an impression of authenticity, of encountering a 'reality'. However, it is impossible to truly know if the participants were in contact with each other outside of the process. During the course of my project, touched on later, the way in which the participants engaged in different ways produced different outcomes and contributed unequally to the final play.

When asked about the *Secrets and Lies* scene by O'Sullivan (2011), Leigh observed:

> That café scene has as much to do with Beckett and Hopper, has more to do with Beckett and Hopper, than it has to do with a literal investigation into two women around Covent Garden on a Saturday night in the summer of 1995. (p. 3)

I found this reference to the Irish playwright, Samuel Beckett, and the American painter of still life oil paintings, Edward Hopper, confusing at first. This suggests that Leigh understands the characters in his work as a marriage between absurdism, represented by Beckett, and realism, represented by Hopper; the strange inflection of life that absurdity often occupies the space of a presumed sober reality. This reveals that the parameters often associated with realism of his work are more fluid than perhaps I had previously realised. This fluidity is viewed not only in the scenarios presented in Leigh's film and theatre, but in the expected requirements of any actor working with Leigh. According to O'Sullivan (2011), an "ability to move in and out of character signals an approach halfway between the precise line reading of traditional British training in Shakespeare and the complete immersion of the American strain of Method acting" (p. 5). Both of these approaches, while sharing similarities in their attention to detail and commitment to character and text, operate in

a state of tension. I would argue, that to some degree, self-identification as part of immersion into character is at the heart of most 'realistic' acting, and acting training techniques strive to teach an actor how to do this. Leigh likes to work with actors that are capable of this immersion but are open to change, and do not need to know all there is to know about their character's life circumstances, and perhaps more importantly, in their interactions with others. Because as in life, we are not always privy to all there is to know, or how we might respond to new information including new people in our lives, and that there is enormous opportunity for rich dramatic narrative if the revelation of information is actually a surprise. What Leigh's methodology lends to writing a play is a distillation of character, voice and emotion that emerges from improvisations, creating unsettled pressure which any writer will seek to capture for the dramaturgical purposes of raising dramatic tension.

When it comes time to examine the scenes objectively, the improvisations are always discussed in terms of real events and never as scenes (Leigh, 1983). As mentioned, Leigh considers it important to keep the motivations of individual characters away from other characters or colleagues, so as to reduce the likelihood of one actor overriding the choices of another in any improvisation. There is a sense that this would be a "violation of reality", for the characters, and that they "would know each other's secrets, dreams and yearnings" (Clements, 1983, p. 38). Leigh considers it imperative during the structuring that the participants remain unaware of each other's motivation, in order to achieve a particular outcome which would remove spontaneity and would impede dramatic tension. The expectation is that these structuring improvisations lead to dialogue and narrative which provide the material which Leigh records and uses to write the play or screenplay which he attributes to himself as sole author – at which point, somewhat ironically, he returns to a traditional rehearsal process, usually with Leigh as the directorial voice. This movement between facilitator and director was something that I struggled with.

I documented the workshops with video camera on tripod at times; but at other times used the camera handheld, which meant that I moved a step closer to becoming involved in the improvisations. Interestingly, this did encourage active and playful engagement during the collaborative work and assisted the participants' propensity to 'play up' for the camera. I have included some transcription from interviews and 'original' profiles (the writing has been deliberately left unedited so as to indicate exactly how it was written up at the time). Selected video clips have also been imbedded throughout Chapter Two and Four, to elucidate the discussion around the

devising process and the writing of *I am here now*. The video clips are placed in an order of where they are pertinent to the context of discussion, and not according to when along the research timeline they were captured. This illuminates connections and interesting narrative threads that emerged in the development process and to analyse how they might feed into the play.

The departure of two participants was a major bump in the road, and happened before completion of the structuring phase. I analyse this in greater detail in Chapter Two, but it is important to introduce these obstacles here in order to point to what I see as a pivotal development in the project. By the end of the development stage I had to find a balance between pursing the aims of the research while honouring the investment in time and creativity that the participants made. I sensed that even though I had hit a stumbling block in the development, there was enough material derived from the workshops to begin to write a play. At this point, it was clear to me that this is where I would have to significantly depart from Leigh's methods; rather than take the improvisations of the actors as verbatim text.

This meant I would have to nuance the improvisatory work in some instances to the essence of an exchange. In other words, I would take what I thought was at the core of any given improvisation (which I had recorded and transcribed). I then had to consider what I thought had been expressed in the physicality, the tone and the meaning of these improvisations as I headed towards writing the play, and sometimes apply extra material from informal conversations and exchanges. With this in mind, I determined a need in the end to fictionalise aspects of the material, and at other points to completely fictionalise several characters and whole scenes. However, as I discuss in Chapter Four, this fictionalisation process was steeped in the development origins, and in particular the three types of observation of the participants in the devising stage, as well as self- reflection on what makes up my voice in this context, including my experience of migration.

It was at the point, as I was saying goodbye to the participants, as I moved onto the process of writing the final play in their absence, that I became aware just how much this play would be concerned with a 'ghosting' of the many voices that helped bring it to fruition. This notion of ghosting, of a trace of the participants and their offerings, is something that comes into play at various occasions in the research and incredibly important to my understanding of polyvocality. I was also aware that, methodologically, certain techniques and methods of playwriting practice, such

as feedback sessions, play readings and the like, would be impossible. However, this has never felt incongruous to the research process. That was partly due to understanding, that in the context of these participants, Leigh's methods did not quite work.

The next step was to integrate the 'voices' from the workshop phase and find a place for them in the written play. This would involve integrating conceptual material, not just from those workshops, but reflecting on my research, particularly the ideas of the *unhomely* and polyvocality. The conscious inclusion of these ideas would naturally favour certain story threads over others within the writing. The project involved, as before, a studied critical analysis of Leigh's methods and a final art object – the play – but also a deeper exploration of conceptual tropes, both literally and metaphorically. With this comes a creative licence that requires continual checking, a type of reflection in the action of doing (during the drafting stages), especially as re-contextualisation would alter any attempt at a faithful reconstruction of the participants' 'voices'.

Throughout my project, 'voice' was something that I battled with. I had to ask myself consistently who the loudest 'voice' was – mine or the participants and continually check in with the aims of the research. Christopher Frayling (1993) has observed, in relation to research for art and design, that practice-led research can often be seen as a site:

> Where the end product is an artefact – where the thinking is, so to speak, embodied in the artefact, where the goal is not primarily communicable knowledge in the sense of verbal communication, but in the sense of visual or iconic or imaginistic communication. (p. 5).

I am here now, the final play, is the artefact in this context. Following Frayling, I argue that all of the improvisatory work is embedded in the artefact in some form or another and, ultimately, so are aspects of me, as facilitator and eventual sole author. Ambivalent missteps and surprise discoveries during the development and then in the writing of the research are also tied up in the narrative of the play, just as the successes and challenges in meeting my aims for the project are inside the play.

Without doubt, the project tested my capacity as a facilitator, as a playwright, and as a practice-led researcher. Recognising the strengths and limitations of Leigh's methods, and exploring how a plurality of voices is possible in the play, became the grounds for further analysis. Furthermore, it is vital to point out that after the several months of development with the participants, over the course

of the long writing and drafting period, I lost contact with most of the participants (and not only the two during the development stage). Consequently, I have only been able to show some of the participants the play. And yet again, this did not feel as a failure of the research design, but merely another challenge to find a way to include their contributions in the final artefact in some way. The successes and challenges in meeting my aims are inside the play just as much as they are confronted with in the analysis of the development and the writing stages. The following chapters endeavour to unpack the complexities of the research process beginning with Chapter Two, *Development*.

Chapter Two: Development

This chapter describes stages in the improvisatory devising workshops with the participants, and the emergence from these workshops of notions of home and exile, separation and transition, which became significant themes throughout the project. I chart conceptual contestations that arose during the workshops, including the first signs of issues of authorship and polyvocality. Furthermore, I undertook the role of director/facilitator with the assumption that I would, like Leigh, pull the stories together into a cohesive script resulting from collaborative improvisatory work. As mentioned, in all Leigh's projects, he has directed the eventual play or film script that has his authors name to it, but in my case there was no pursuit of an actual performance outcome; hence, facilitator seems an appropriate moniker over director. If the term director did apply, it may have been when my improvisatory work failed to generate as much dramatic material as anticipated, and I had to step in to direct the work towards more dynamic and dramatic ends. I anticipated that the inexperienced participants may not immediately produce swathes of immensely useful material. Yet, how much the improvisations would prove difficult to translate directly into dramatic text was an unforeseen challenge, which would force me to explore the strengths and limitations of Leigh's methods in this context. Throughout this chapter, I describe explicitly the development of the participants 'originals' (in the sense of Leigh's methods) and how these morphed into the eventual characters of the final play. Upon reflection, it was the extent to which the participants' anecdotal offerings, the conversations in between the workshops, that would also find a place in the finished play. This does not imply a reflection on the efficacy or integrity of Leigh's methods: it arose from the particular circumstances of my process.

A. Pre-rehearsal

As pointed out in Chapter One, Leigh's pre-rehearsal stage is designed to allow him to work one-on-one with a participant/actor before moving into the workshop stage where characters are introduced to one another. This section draws upon knowledge of pre- rehearsal and outlines the adaptions made where I deemed it necessary for my project. Due chiefly to the intensity of working one at a time during the pre-rehearsal period, Leigh limits how many actors he uses. In my workshops, pragmatism won out. I worked with eight participants in total, beginning the pre-rehearsal phase working one-on-one with each participant to create their 'original'. Potentially, I could have worked with more participants, but I was wary of the dramaturgical acrobatics required in order to balance

the participants story threads; more so when it would come to distilling the improvised material for writing.

The improvisatory work was a challenge right from the beginning. Tich guided most of the participants in my direction, with some of the participants having taken part in the preliminary acting workshops at HGCC, with two exceptions. Kirsty was recruited from Curtin University. Justin joined the workshops about a month into the process, following a conversation with Jamal about what the project involved. It was necessary to expedite the process with Justin in comparison with the other participants. During this time, the participants created their 'lists', people that they knew in order to identify the individuals in the participants' lives upon whom they would base their 'originals'. Sometimes the 'original' was primarily based on one person they knew intimately, and at other times they drew on an amalgam of several people upon which to base the 'original'. This one-on-one work was extensive, so I asked the participants to attend workshops for only three to four hours per workshop.

Leigh finds out as much as he can about the people on his actors' 'lists' (Clements, 1983, p. 31), sometimes working on the details of hundreds of people. Marchand notes that the starting point in all of Leigh's works is an "inherent curiosity" (cited in Cardinale-Powell & DiPaolo, 2013, p. 51). Very quickly, I realised that in some cases, particularly for those participants who had not been in Australia for long, there was not a large social network they could draw upon. Therefore, I entered this stage of the development working with less people on the lists but with equal curiosity. I was aware that it had to contain a number of people to draw character materials from, but there was no defined number based on Leigh's methods. In the end, the decision came down to what I considered would be manageable in the scope of the project. Jamal, the first participant I met with in the pre-rehearsal stage, came up with a list of around fifteen people. Subsequently, working with this number across the other participants worked well. Significantly, at no stage did I demand that their lists be made up only from people in their immediate surroundings. Interestingly, the lists of those relatively new to Australia tended to include only people from their Perth-based family and friends circle. Those longer established in Australia recalled characters from their past in Africa. This identification with a homeland in Africa is evident for someone like Kirsty, who delighted in talking about the details of her extended family in South Africa, even though she had left there with her family as a very young child. I can only speculate, but I think this is because Kirsty saw the

opportunity to develop herself as an actor and so threw herself at the project, whatever shape it took. She was also very proud of where she came from; which is not to say others were not, but they may have been ambivalent for reasons based on their personal experiences. At the time, this seemed to me to be paradoxical; that the memory of a homeland would be easily accessible for Kirsty and less so for a participant who had recently migrated. When I have used Leigh's 'list' technique in the past actors have mentioned such a host of individuals that it would be hard to believe that these individuals are little more than incidental passers-by. However, for those recently arrived in Australia, it was as if everyone they knew from their original homes had disappeared. The opposite was the case in terms of how longer term residents identified the world from their position of experience. This arguably points to a desire for a place of origin, of belonging, that is cultivated over time; whereas for the recently re-located the desire is to focus on the community they have around them right there and then.

During the workshops, I listened while each participant went through the various characteristics of their 'originals'. I did this without recording the information verbatim, or filming everything said. The rationale for this decision was to create an open and collaborative relationship between the participants and myself; the audio-visual recording or written documentation of the 'list' conversations I felt would have been at best impersonal, at worst invasive. I became aware of this after observing how Jamal was distracted by the video camera when I initially considered using it. I was aware that by not recording the information in the moment of disclosure I stood to miss certain information. However, I judged that it would be preferable for the participants to feel comfortable with what was required of them in the context of the project and not be distracted. So, at the risk of losing significant disclosures, I chose to respectfully listen to these early conversations and be attentive to whatever the participants offered. Instead, I would document the major attributes of the list discussion directly after the workshop in 'original' profile templates.

Due to the fact that I did not know the participants beyond the initial acting workshops, I set out to create an environment of trust through a compact of confidentiality in our discussions about the people mentioned on each 'list'. Whether this was received with the spirit in which it was intended I can never truly know, but I felt that I had established trust from the participants towards me and, subsequently, the project. The participants came from varied backgrounds; some were seeking asylum as refugees in Australia, having spent time in refugee camps. One participant, who will

remain anonymous, was a survivor of child soldier combat. However, the participant's experience as a child soldier was never revealed in the workshops. It was disclosed in conversation with Tich, and spoken of in hushed tones by friends and acquaintances during the initial acting workshops. The risk of re-traumatisation, and coping with the potential fallout, was beyond my skill set. I assumed that some of the others, of the African-born participants, may have had traumatic experiences in their past, though this was largely based on anecdotal accounts of people associated with these particular participants. Any suffering that resulted from revealing this trauma to me as part of the project would have been clearly unethical, so I respected their silences. However, as a playwright, I also recognised the drama inherent in such experiences and inwardly played with the idea that at some point in the pre-rehearsal, a participant might offer up the opportunity to work with such a circumstance. This is a strange perversion in many playwrights and actors too. They often evoke an imaginative exploration which desires to articulate a 'voice', sometimes multiple voices, which seek to fathom the suffering of humanity, albeit from a distance. This distance provides safety for the artist, but allows for adaptation in the slippery space between 'truth' and 'fiction'.

The 'original', the amalgam and adaption of various people in the participants' lives, seemed to keep the participants somewhat removed, certainly distanced in a way that an autobiographical experience would not do; in doing so, this provides a shield for that individual to articulate issues that otherwise may not be raised if a participant and the details of their life were front and centre. In addition, Leigh wants his actors to remain "objective about their characters, an ability to regard the character as a third person creation as opposed to a first person manifestation" (Clements, 1983, p. 23). His methods ask a participant to refer to their 'original' and the resultant characterisation that emerges from an objective analysis of the character's actions within any improvisation; in narrative terms, development occurs as an analysis of first person experience by the third person, usually the director/facilitator. For my participants, this provided an objectivity to the exercise; the sense that their personal experience, if it comes up as part of an improvisation, would not see them overly exposed. This suggests that a certain kind of safety underwrites the process, which is important when working with the vulnerabilities of individuals (in this case African Australian migrants). This once-removed distance is therefore somewhat different from verbatim theatre, where participant's testimony is taken as the actual material for the performance. I would argue that Leigh's approach to distancing the actor/participant from their 'original' which ultimately forms their character is different from applied theatre, which is a broad term indicating the application of drama and

performance for very particular and practical purposes, enabling members of particular communities to be heard (Stern, 2014, p. 106). Judith Ackroyd (as cited in Nicholson, 2005) argues that applied theatre holds belief in the "power of the theatre form to address something beyond the form itself … in order to promote positive social processes within a particular community", ultimately with the intention to "inform, to cleanse, to unify, to instruct, to raise awareness" (p. 3). Michael Balfour (2009) also notes:

> Applied [theatre] is a broad and ever-expanding field, but it is important that the aesthetic in the work does not become subsumed in the usefulness of its social value. Small miracles and changes suggest a need to check against unrealistic claims, and to ensure that the aesthetic is interdependent with the possibilities of social engagement. (p. 356)

This idea of maintain a balance between issue and aesthetic, to some degree, is worthy of vigilance on my part, as the relationship between playwriting and my social justice agenda could cloud what is needed to make a work resonate on multiple levels. The material which the participants contributed to the project was always for a script, to be written away from the improvisatory process, which creates a further distancing if warranted. This distancing is assisted by the use of an 'original' characterisation, in order to create an objective lens with which the participants' may frame their own ideas and the issues raised, if indeed there are any raised, are about any given subject offered by the participants within the context of the improvisational development.

What was interesting using Leigh's methods was that, as time went by, was the realisation that by basing their characters on someone they knew or had met, the individual participant had the potential to invest significant aspects of their own life into their lists, but without declaring they had. Therefore, it follows that they could have also inflected this into their devised characterisations throughout the process, and this was not something I could have necessarily known. This could be viewed as a dramaturgical 'safe' distance. This distance provided the participant protection using the veneer of an 'original', particularly useful if the subject matter ciphered through the 'original' is a sensitive matter difficult to express. Consequently, using this approach establishes a 'fiction' right from the start of the devising period. However ambivalent this move towards fiction may be, there is from the beginning, a movement away from the contextualised realities of the pre-rehearsal, through to the structuring phase, and the 'originals' dialogues suggests the possible notion of a 'truth' or 'truths' existing somewhere within the story threads that may resonate with the participants' own experiences. The way that I used the 'list' technique is not in and of itself 'creative', but carried the

project towards a creative and, at times, spontaneous place which encouraged the devising of further narratives devised from character.

B. 'Original' profiles

Once we had completed the 'lists', we amalgamated the characteristics and idiosyncratic traits of each participants' character using a template that I had developed (Figures 1–3), formalising this as their 'original' profile. These profiles were drawn from Leigh's aspiration to develop characters that could be placed in a "specific, placeable, social, educational, economic and cultural environment" (as cited in Clements, 1983, p. 22). Thus, what is contained in the 'original' profiles are based upon this list of items. Although the 'original' profile is brief (see Figures 1–3), the categories were mainly designed to act as catalysts for study pre-improvisation, allowing the participant a straightforward reference to their character's past, usually considered before entering a new improvisation. Character profiling via the 'original' profiles creates an impressionistic history of the 'original'. These profiles were also used as a tool to summarise and note interesting additions to a story thread or a particular detail which could be taken further – primarily, they were used to keep the participants' 'originals' within the parameters of the character they invented. Figure 1 demonstrates how these are organised. Drawing from a variety of people in her life (principally, from a friend's life), and taking the name of her grandmother, Nancy Meth, a South African who migrated to Australia with her adult family in the 1980s, Kirsty amalgamated people from her 'list' in an effective way to develop this 'original'.

NAME: NANCY METH

AGE: 19

WHERE: PORT SHEPSTONE, S.AFRICA – LEEMING, PERTH (LAST 3 YEARS)

SOCIAL CIRCLE: HIGH SCHOOL FRIENDS (LEEMING SHS); WORK FRIENDS (BRUMBYS) – SPECIFICALLY MARISSA AND NICOLA WHO ARE FUNNY AND HAVE SIMILAR INTERESTS

EDUCATION: PORT SHEPSTONE PRIMARY; ST JOSEPH'S, PT SHEPSTONE; LEEMING SHS; TAFE (GRAPHIC DESIGN MAJOR) IN 2ND YEAR

CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT: VERY S. AFRICAN - FLAGS AND BONGOS AND AFRICAN WOODEN HEAD FOR EXAMPLE; ACCENT OF THE FAMILY IS DISTINCTLY S. AFRICAN

FAMILY: MUM – DIANNE – WORKS AT MYER AS MANAGER; DAD – CLIFFORD – WORKS AS TEACHER AT A HIGH SCHOOL BROTHERS – GERARD (DEMOLITION TRADIE); CHRIS (ACCOUNTANT); SISTER – MELINKA WHO IS THE ELDEST – STUDYING LAW, PRIDE OF THE FAMILY

GRANDMA – 'GRAN' – SHE CLEANS AND COOKS – IS DIANNE'S MUM

HEALTH: NANCY WAS BULIMIC BUT RECOVERING – THIS STOPPED 8 MONTHS AGO

HABITS: NOSE TWITCH (ALL THE TIME); PICKS OTHER PEOPLE'S FOOD; OVEREATING; BINGE DRINKS ONCE A WEEK

POLITICS: NOT INTERESTED

SPORT: USED TO PLAY NETBALL AT SCHOOL BUT WASN'T VERY GOOD

TRAVEL: HONG KONG WHEN YOUNGER (10) WITH FAMILY

INFLUENCES: ??? (PARTICIPANT UNSURE OF INFLUENCES)

ASPIRATIONS: TO LIVE AND EXPLORE CANADA; WANTS A BOYFRIEND WHICH MIGHT LEAD TO A SMALL, TASTEFUL WEDDING; TO MOVE OUT OF HOME

RELIGION: LAPSED CATHOLIC – FAMILY STILL PRACTICES

PHYSICALITY: TALKS FAST; WALKS WITH LONG STRIDES; HAS BAD POSTURE

Figure 1. *'Original' profile of Nancy Meth.*

Despite having outlined the rationale behind Leigh's 'list', in the context of my project the discussion around the people on the lists may have appeared arbitrary at first to the participants. Often I would stop and ask for more details about an individual on the list, or request that the participant extrapolate a story thread, one that seemed to stand out to me as dramatically interesting. Sometimes some element contained in the profile would might provide fertile ground for content that inflected the entirety of the project. For example, Kirsty said that the paw-paw fruit reminded her of her grandmother, who it turned out represented her strongest connection with South Africa. Kirsty's grandmother made paw-paw jam for her as a child and this activity became a link to how Kirsty thought of 'home'. From this conversation I developed the idea of paw-paw as both an instrumental and metaphorical prop. Instrumental, in terms of how paw-paw is used by various characters; metaphorical, by its role as a possession, a temptation, a connection to 'home'. Very quickly, there was an advancement from anecdotal story, to paw-paw as a critical element in the play – it shows up in the fruit shop; becomes a talisman of memory; of separation and transition from home for certain characters. At this point, I could see that the role of facilitator as anticipatory of the role of the playwright. However, it was not always as seamless as described. For example, where Kirsty serves as an example of an evenness to the process, Malikizoh just wanted to improvise, to perform – to act was his principle motivation for participation in the project. He would talk of his frustration with the process, sometimes to the point of boredom. I completely understood – having been involved in the initial acting workshops at the HGGC he had expectations around learning acting techniques and an opportunity to 'act up', and he thought that the project would be similar in content. I had explained at length what this initial part of the process involved, but Malikizoh was understandably restless and it was difficult to draw out interesting attributes in his list or in initial character work. He did however, thrive in the road testing, which I discuss later.

The 'original' profile in Figure 2 outlines the character of Caliph (altered to Khalid in the final play) as created by the participant, Juma. As I came to discover from conversations outside the studio space, and as I got to know him better, the character traits, dreams and aspirations of Caliph were synonymous with Juma himself.

NAME: CALIPH YACEAN

AGE: 24

WHERE: BLUE NILE, SUDAN – JOONDALUP, PERTH: CALIPH IS A REFUGEE FROM SUDAN THROUGH THE UNHCR AND ARRIVED IN AUSTRALIA 6 YEARS AGO (HE EXPLAINS THE REASON AS 'THE GOVERNMENT NOT BEING FAIR' AND 'MAKING LIFE UNCOMFORTABLE' FOR HIM AND HIS FAMILY)

SOCIAL CIRCLE: EVERYBODY IN THE COMMUNITY GENERALLY RECOGNISES KHALID – HE'S VERY SOCIAL; HE DOESN'T HANG AROUND WITH MANY PEOPLE BECAUSE HE FINDS THE OTHER GUYS TO BE IMMATURE AND TOO MUCH INTO WESTERN CULTURE (I.E. PARTYING) – CALIPH FEELS THE NEED TO PROTECT AND ADVISE THE YOUNG GUYS.

EDUCATION: BLUE NILE HIGH SCHOOL; THEN ESL IN PERTH (FOR 2 YEARS) THROUGH TAFE; NOW STUDYING BUILDING DESIGN AT TAFE – HE USED TO DRAW A LOT BUT WAS ADVISED THAT THE DEVIL WAS DRAWN TO HIS CARTOONING, SO HE STOPPED; CURRENTLY WORKS IN A GROCERY STORE AND KNOWS A LOT ABOUT FRUITS.

CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT: AFRICAN MUSLIM – TOLERANCE IS HIS VIRTUE, AS HE SEES IT; HE APPLIES ISLAM IN HIS LIFE, STARTING WITH HIMSELF THROUGH DISCIPLINE AND SUPPRESSING HIS DESIRES; HE USED TO SURROUND HIMSELF WITH HIP HOP BUT DOESN'T APPROVE OF THAT LIFESTYLE ANYMORE, SEEING IT AS THE WAY OF THE DEVIL.

FAMILY: CALIPH LIVES AT HOME WITH HIS FAMILY – MOTHER, MARYAM, AND FATHER, USMAN. HIS LITTLE BROTHER IS CALLED ACHMED (NICKNAMED GORGEOUS) AND HIS SISTER IS CALLED FATIMA (NICKNAMED HONEY). BOTH

SIBLINGS ARE YOUNGER THAN CALIPH. HIS PARENTS WOULD LIKE TO RETURN TO SUDAN BUT CALIPH WANTS TO STAY IN AUSTRALIA.

HEALTH: HEALTHY.

HABITS: NONE APPARENT.

ECONOMICS: COMFORTABLE

POLITICS: HE BELIEVES THAT ATTACKS OF SEPTEMBER 11TH 2001 WERE PART OF A CONSPIRACY THEORY.

SPORT: DOESN'T PLAY ANY.

TRAVEL: HIS MOTHER WON'T LET HIM – MUSLIM CULTURE HAS COMMANDMENT THAT YOU MUST OBEY YOUR PARENTS AND CALIPH HAS A CLOSE TIE WITH HIS MOTHER (MUMMY'S BOY).

ASPIRATIONS: FINISH TAFE; HAVE A FAMILY – CRAVES RESPONSIBILITY; LEARN MORE CLASSIC ARABIC; BUILD AMAZING BUILDINGS.

INFLUENCES: INTELLIGENT PEOPLE; PROPHET MOHAMMED – FOR HIS COMMON SENSE APPROACH; ALLAH; YOUTUBE – CALIPH LEARNS A LOT OF THINGS FROM YOUTUBE.

RELIGION: ISLAM.

PHYSICALITY: RICH VOICE, CONSIDERED SPEECH.

Figure 2. 'Original' profile of Caliph Yacean.

As these individual improvisations continued, it was increasingly difficult to correlate what was the 'original' and what was coming from Juma's own experience. In many ways this was acceptable to me because a) it was obviously what Juma was comfortable doing this and b) it led to a 'capturing' of his voice in a particularly unique way – Caliph was and was not Juma. Perhaps the danger was that this imbalance between what was held up as 'truth' and what was 'fiction' might allow the integrity of the process as a whole to be compromised. Certainly it meant that the application of the objective stance that Leigh calls for was genuinely ambiguous. I had this concern with other participants' process too. This meant that while on the one hand the multiplicity of voices laid the ground for the written play, through the generation of their 'originals' (leading to solo and group improvisation, 'road tests' and 'hot seats'), it was somewhat questionable as to where or at what point 'truth' rested, of whether 'truth' in the play came directly or indirectly from lived experiences. On the other hand, the participants were potentially always one step removed – Leigh needs them to be this way – and hence, as already mentioned, the road towards 'fiction' is an inevitable one. The question as how to manage the different voices and how this can exist as a plurality of 'voices', rather than a dominant central voice of the author, still has to be considered. What becomes evident even in these early stages, is that there is a sense of many potential 'voices' to be heard within each character.

C. *Road testing*

Road testing, as briefly outlined in *Beginnings* is a Leigh technique (Clements, 1983); my project also included road testing, which involved taking the participants one by one on incursions into public spaces. All participants undertook this task, except for Justin, who came late to the process. I explained the process, but Justin chose not to fully partake in road testing, for reasons known only to him; perhaps because the others had already completed this process he did not want to feel as though he was left behind. This meant that Justin was not as immersed in his 'original' as the others were to begin with; when he was present at the workshops, he was often confirming what made his 'original' Amine who he was, based on traces of his 'original' profile, rather than extending the character through dialogue and action. This had the effect of destabilising some improvisatory work and highlighted the need for frequent story realignment on my part to ensure that Justine and hence his 'original' character, Amine Lo, was able to keep up with the narrative pace of the workshops.

My experience as an actor in a devised work using Leigh's methods had proved to me that road testing is the moment where an 'original' is launched into the world. It provides the layers of depth necessary for the participant to embrace their characterisation. The level of immersion of a participant is tried and tested at this stage, as the world rises to meet the participant as an 'original', as the real thing, and not suspended in disbelief, without prejudice towards the idea of an 'actor'; simply, the 'original' is accepted as just another person. Any ambivalence or ambiguity in an 'original's' behaviour will draw scrutiny upon the participant's rendering of that character; questions over the 'original's' authenticity will also emerge. In nearly all cases during the project, the participants successfully sustained their 'original' during road testing. Rachael, as Sarah McCarthy, was the only one who found her characterisation difficult to sustain. She articulated that she felt that there was a certain amount of licence with the truth being taken via road testing, which did not sit well with her, morally – that is, for her, the removal of the line between 'acting' and taking the character into 'reality' bordered on deception; to this end, success was measured by how well an 'original' could win the belief of a person from outside the project, however duplicitous this might seem. Reflecting upon this, the craft of acting necessarily demands suspension of disbelief by the spectator, but in the artifice lies the pursuit of 'truth' in the context of a narrative. Leigh had claimed that he developed his methods in reaction to RADA's training which he believed did not adhere to the search for 'truth'. Road testing seeks to reveal that 'truth' and it was this truth that Rachel questioned, seeing it rather as a lie.

Rachael and Kirsty road tested around the central streets of the port city of Fremantle. As part of their road tests, I took them individually to shop, as a way to interact with the public along the main High Street of Fremantle, then into the busy Fremantle Markets. By the end of each one of these road tests, there was a sense that Kirsty had allowed Nancy Meth to drop into her bones; less so with Rachael, but there was potential for Sarah McCarthy to grow. Omar, Juma, John, Jamal and Malikizoh road tested individually in Mirrabooka, beginning at HGCC, then on to Mirrabooka Shopping Centre. These locations were chosen because they allowed the 'originals' to move around, interact, analyse and repeat, without drawing too much attention to themselves, being surrounded by many people. If their idiosyncrasies were ostentatious, or a dialogue had run its course, I wanted the participants to have the capability to slip away without fuss; particularly if it felt the road test had reached a conclusive moment, like Larry Malik's job application. Malikizoh (as Larry Malik) walked into a burger restaurant at Mirrabooka Shopping Centre and applied for a job; part of his 'original'

profile stated Larry Malik had one day wanted to manage a burger restaurant. Larry Malik impressed the real manager of the restaurant to such an extent that he actually offered him a job, unaware that he was fictional. I talk more about this instance later in the chapter but it was a turning point for Malikizoh.

I needed to be close in order to witness the road tests whilst maintaining a safe distance so as to sustain the 'truth' of the scenario. These public locations enabled me as facilitator to observe the 'originals' inconspicuously, and the ability to move into close proximity to an improvisatory moment. Blending in as an everyday shopper or passer- by, I had no need to excuse myself and pretend to have a reason to be within the proximity of the 'original'. Generally, the road tests went for around three hours at a time, broken up in such a way as to permit me to analyse and debrief with the participants what I observed in the improvisatory work that might lend itself to further characterisation. This was the chance to share notes about the road test, to reflect on the 'original's' behaviour and reactions in various situations. I would also set tasks for the participants. This could be as simple as pricing an item with a shop attendant, then cautiously working up to extended conversations with staff at information counters or in grocery aisles, to ask for directions and other unremarkable episodes made compelling by the knowledge that it was road test. Road testing at the end of the day needs an environment that allows 'originals' to *play up* to life. In the context of the research, this provoked different situations with associated emotional responses – for example, I had Rachael (as Sarah McCarthy) pretend to have lost a bag with her wages in it, which heightened the level of interaction as members of the public helped her distressed 'original' search for it. This was certainly a moment that Rachael felt unsettling – the mistruth or deception of the incident juxtaposed uneasily with the good will of the citizens of Fremantle.

Another scenario saw John (as Kevin, who was not included in the final draft) going into a bank to query how to get a loan to start a youth club (the impetus for the community centre story thread in the final play); and Kirsty (as Nancy) buying paw-paw and recounting why she loved paw-paw to the owner of the shop, which had come out of the conversations mentioned earlier. While this happened, I would position myself within earshot of the road test pretending to look at an item; one of my favourite ways to observe scenarios was off reflective surfaces, such as shop windows, so I could seem completely ignorant to the event behind me. At other times, I would watch from behind shop shelves – whatever I could do to avoid notice. If I could not get reasonably close to the

improvisations, I would have to rely on the participants' description of the process when we debriefed. These debriefs took place away from the area where the 'original's' scenario occurred. Obviously, it was not ideal to debrief without me having observed the situation. The road test is deemed 'successful' by the capacity to have an objective reflection of what is seen during the road test – as opposed to the subjective recall of the participant, whose memory may have been distorted by immersion in their 'original'.

None of the participants met anyone they knew while road testing the 'originals', but that was sheer luck. Chance encounters in public could have led to potentially awkward situations where characterisations would have needed to be toned down or broken entirely by the participant. Most of the Fremantle work was done away from the participants' communities, but the work in Mirrabooka put the participants in front of people they might know. Despite the fact that observing the details of the road tests was impacted by the milieu around the 'original', I remain convinced that the way it is undertaken was still the best way to deeply immerse the participants and aligned with Leigh's intent. Perhaps filming would have helped this process however having a video camera at this stage would have been highly obtrusive for the participants and the public. Despite the missed opportunity to document the road tests (by video camera), it is likely that recording in public spaces would have simply drawn unwanted attention – perhaps even require permission to shoot in these locations even though it is technically public space – however it almost certainly would have made the participants uncomfortable being watched so obviously and thus, it would have altered the outcome of the 'road test'.

Malikizoh, in particular, embraced the road testing. His zeal for the process, his naturally extroverted personality, and the experience of his road test, became the driving force of the character of Larry Malik. The 'original' emerged from what I considered to be a relatively uneventful 'original' profile, but developed more and more to inspire one of the main story threads in *I am here now*. Malikizoh explained to me that he had originally come from the Congo. Anecdotally, Tich revealed that Malikizoh had come from a country in conflict (Congo), and at some stage he and his family arrived in Australia via Uganda, which suggested a refugee resettlement. Malikizoh was closed in regards to his personal background so I was not able to learn much more about this experience, certainly no more than what I have written here. However, Malikizoh adhered tremendously to his 'original' profiling as it was plain to see in his improvisations (see Figure 3).

NAME: LARRY MALIK AGE: 18

WHERE: ARUSHA, TANZANIA-FREMANTLE, WA ABOUT 5 OR 6 YEARS AGO.

SOCIAL CIRCLE: FRIENDS FROM HIGH SCHOOL; WORKMATES, BUT NOT CLOSE.

EDUCATION: WENT TO SCHOOL IN ARUSHA (BUT CAN'T REMEMBER NAME OF SCHOOL); FINISHED HIGH SCHOOL AT MIRRABOOKA SHS IN 2010. CURRENTLY, WORKS AT HUNGRY JACKS.

CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT: MORE AFRICAN THAN AUSTRALIAN HOUSEHOLD; HE LIVES IN A MODERN URBAN HOME IN FREMANTLE, BY HIMSELF; HE IS STILL IN TOUCH WITH HIS FAMILY, HAS LIVED OUT ABOUT A YEAR; REASON FOR MOVING OUT WAS THAT HE COULD WORK TWICE AS HARD AND COME AND GO AS HE PLEASED.

FAMILY: FATHER: MALIK, A TV PRESENTER; MOTHER: MARGARETTA, AN OFFICE WORKER; 2 SISTERS – ALICE AND REBECCA; 2 BROTHERS – ALEX AND MICHAEL (WHO LIVES WITH A GIRL CALLED BIANCA)

HEALTH: GOOD.

HABITS: NOTHING UNUSUAL. HE IS VERY TALKATIVE UNLESS HE DOESN'T KNOW A PERSON THEN WILL BE QUITE STANDOFFISH. HE HAS A
MANNERISM WHICH IS TO ALWAYS FIDGET/SWAGGER (TO GET ATTENTION). LOVES GOING TO THE MOVIES – GETS LOST IN THEM AND IS ALWAYS JEALOUS OF ACTORS.

POLITICS: HE CARES ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT – HE BELIEVES IT IS IMPORTANT TO RESPECT YOUR PLACE.

SPORT: NOT REALLY – HE JUST ENJOYS FUN THINGS TO DO. TRAVEL: WANTS TO TRAVEL THE WORLD.

ASPIRATIONS: BECOME MANAGER OF HUNGRY JACKS; CREATE A FAST FOOD COMPANY CALLED THE ARUSHA COMPANY (LARRY HAS LOTS OF IDEAS); TO BE IN ACTION FILMS OR COMEDY FILMS.

INFLUENCES: HE IS IN A ROMANCE WITH A GIRL CALLED HANRI WHO IS A 19 YO FILMMAKER. HE ADMIRES JACKIE CHAN, WILL SMITH, MARTIN LAWRENCE, JAMES V SOTO (PERTH INDEPENDENT FILMMAKER)

RELIGION: CHRISTIAN, BUT HE DOESN'T PRACTICE. PHYSICALITY: SWAGGER. ECONOMICS: NOT RICH, NOT POOR.

Figure 3. 'Original' profile of Larry Malik.

Clements (1983) cautions that sometimes actors engaged in Leigh's methods "have trouble engaging with the character because of tentativeness, or misapplication of energy" or might be "anxious that the character is not apparently 'doing enough', a common worry among actors who are conditioned to the instant business of most conventional rehearsal procedures" (p. 35). This turned out to be far from the case with Malikizoh, who appeared electrified by his road test at the burger restaurant. Suffice to say that during our debrief Malikizoh was dumbfounded by the outcome; he was ecstatic that his character's 'truth' had come across as believable, and that the road test had been a success – but he was also fearful that he had crossed some kind of line that would land him in trouble for purporting to be someone he was not. As with Rachael, the dishonest undertones of devising from character caused some concern. This is arguably a reason why Leigh uses professional actors who have the experience to discern how far to go safely; this is a point of difference that should be acknowledged in regards to working with less experienced participants. Nonetheless, the confidence generated from inhabiting a character in public, in this kind of deeper immersion than perhaps many see in professional rehearsal rooms, is the rationale behind road testing and was advantageous as well as thrilling for the participants. Malikizoh's enthusiastic optimism which emanated naturally from him bled into Larry Malik and made this improvisation remarkable. However, it could be hard

to judge whether or not Malikizoh was successful in convincing a member of the public that he was his fictional character because of his commitment to the profile of the 'original', or was it just that Malikizoh was successful in playing up his own positive attributes within the given circumstances? After all, Larry Malik is somewhat of an extension of Malikizoh even if Larry is from Tanzania and Malikizoh from Congo. Indeed, this truth is stretched even further in the play, where I have the character of Larry Malik escaping a war, desperately attempting to get his family, still back home, to safety. Whatever the answer, road testing is an enlightening process which blurs the line between the 'truths' and 'fictions' of the 'original' and where the veracity of any polyvocality can be further developed and arguably sustained. With the end of road testing, so ended the pre-rehearsal period. From here, Leigh's methods move into the structuring phase.

D. Structuring

The structuring phase of the development process felt very much like it was divided in two parts over the course of the project. In what I call the 'early stage' of structuring, the process returned to a studio space where Leigh's methods continued to be explored in the improvisatory workshops, and I chose certain 'originals' to meet to see what dialogues might emerge, as per Leigh's approach. Interestingly, the 'later stage' of structuring produced more material with which to write the play, but still had its own issues, which I discuss below. At first, the participants were just excited to finally come together after the solitude of the early stage. The decision of who would meet was based on whether I thought the collaboration would produce material that would add to narratives that might contribute to the written play. These improvisatory collaborations began with Jamal and John, as Kevin and Donnell; then Kirsty, Rachael and Omar, as Nancy, Sarah and Mitch; Juma joined with Jamal and John, as Khalid; with Justin moving between work with Jamal's group and Omar's group in the last weeks of structuring. I chose who worked with who based on the simple fact that I had seen the formation of their 'originals' and wanted to ensure that similar characterisations did not end up cancelling out one another's dramatic potential – though Kevin was amalgamated with Donnell when it got closer to writing, I was still hopeful there was enough distinction to avoid this.

The story produced at that point in time was largely determined by whether I thought 'originals' would collaborate well together; this, in itself, is loaded with problematic notions of my expectations for the story threads as well as my expectations of the participants, somewhat counter to the organic collaboration I had initially hoped for. Structuring had almost immediately revealed limitations to

not just my practice, but also raised questions about the relative capacity for a project using Leigh's methods to be transferrable outside of a professional theatre environment. Carefully observing the improvisations, then reflecting and adjusting my methods accordingly to what I was observing and how that directed the anticipated play. Each workshop I was able to reflect on the potential and then consider the future direction of the story threads. While professional actors may have been useful, in developing story thread directly from improvisation, there is also an argument that with the less experienced participants something quite raw emerges, producing something completely unique for the project.

Not all of the participants were available to improvise at designated times due to clashes with other commitments, such as work or worship. This meant that a commitment to any particular story or the development of a character was often undermined, and certain story threads subsequently grew at lesser or greater rates compared to others and limited the interaction of some characters with others. I also felt obliged to fill in the narrative gaps that emerged between improvisations. This meant that the more a participant showed up, the more inclined I was to let their improvisations drive the story. On reflection, I was motivated by expediency, 'rewarding' the participants who came back by concentrating on their story threads over others. Ultimately, the oppressiveness of time took away the balance in my structuring phase, particularly when I began to lose participants. It did beg me to ask the question of whether I was taking to sole authorship a little earlier than I had planned. In hindsight, this did seem to be the case and suggests that a more circumspect approach should be applied.

During the structuring phase it became very apparent – perhaps because we had by this stage worked together over months – why each person was a participant in the research: John and Jamal had said that they wanted to learn how to be Hollywood actors, like Denzel Washington or Will Smith; Malikizoh just wanted to be famous; Juma was a dancer and wanted more performance opportunities and to talk about his newfound faith in Islam; Rachael wanted to act as she had experienced play making of sorts through her church; Kirsty was at university studying theatre but desperately wanted to go to one of the major vocational drama schools; Omar was quiet about his reasons – perhaps he just wanted to do something different; Justin was agitated by certain influences in his life and wanted a diversion, or at least a distraction.

E. Initial structuring

After piquing their interest at the initial acting workshops, there was an expectancy from some participants that these devising sessions would result in a finished play performance. I made it known that together we would develop characters and content that would make up a play text, which I would write after the workshop process was completed. While it was explained that this process took time and commitment – on their part, being open to improvisatory processes – it became apparent that the participants were largely unfamiliar with theatre making of this kind. As I have said, harnessing a sustained commitment from all participants was to prove a challenge. With one eye on parity of time with each participant to try and balance their input into the improvisatory process, and with the other on the clock (or rather calendar) knowing I would not have the participants forever, the continuity of character development became tested by the irregular attendance of certain participants. Had the participants had greater experience and been familiar with improvisation techniques the workshop sessions might have delivered more dramatic material and a more cohesive set of story threads. This also points to the difficulties in application of the Leigh techniques in a community setting. This raises the issue of whether his process lends itself to workshops that are voluntary and amateur in nature, or if they are exclusively designed for professional actors with a background in improvisation, and large budgets.

Returning to the creation of the 'originals', and remembering that these were developed in isolation from each other, the likelihood of the participants knowing the people who made up the composite of the 'originals' was slim. In fact, most of the participants tended to be complete strangers outside of the workshops (for example, Kirsty knew none of the group), or were loosely familiar with each other from HGCC (such as Justin and Jamal) however John and Jamal socialised together quite frequently. It was only on the last day of the structuring that I allowed the participants to introduce themselves, as their 'real' selves, with all the participants in attendance except for Justin and Rachael, who had left by that stage. This was a significant moment for the remaining participants – finding out who they had been performing opposite in character over the many weeks of the process, and having to say goodbye to their character. In some instances, it was also goodbye to me, though I knew I was taking the recorded material onwards into the next phase. Nonetheless, it was not impossible that some of the participants may have known who the other 'originals' were based on. It did not appear that any of the participants recognised any 'original' trait, and certainly not as a

parody or pastiche of someone they knew from the African Australian community. At least, it was never openly discussed. Being relatively unfamiliar with each other (not just as characters, but as people), meant that in initial encounters there was an element of surprise for the characters/participants when they met. However, this progression into collaboration between the 'originals' carried the potential to backfire; unfamiliarity might allow participants' characters to turn rogue, unconcerned about what other characters' objectives might be in any scene, only focussing on their own creation. Treading on the delicacies of sensitive or intimate subject matter close to a participant might result in that story thread being lost. Inevitably, if the participants felt the creative space to be unsafe, maligned behaviour could close the participants from collaboration, despite the fact that they were in a critical narrative role.

Familiarity could shut certain storylines down too; it did occur to me that the participants', John and Jamal's friendship pre-research meant that they might be hesitant to expose themselves when dealing with certain subjects. I certainly picked this up with John and Jamal on occasion, where the flick of an eye or an improvisatory offer was flat out rejected by one of them during the group improvisation. Attitudes and beliefs might also stifle an interesting story thread before it had had a proper chance to be worked through; in the course of an improvisation between Juma, Jamal and John, Juma's character (Khalid) wanted to talk about his devotion to Islam and after a while John discontinued the improvisation by leaving the scene, still in character, followed eventually by Jamal. I considered the impact of their friendship prior to bringing John and Jamal's characters together in the structuring phase. However, they both had been reluctant to be separated, which I appreciated. John and Jamal were involved from an early stage (in the initial acting workshops) and were enthusiastic and I did not want to risk losing them due to any anxiety over separation from one another. So I shifted my approach, moving a little away from Leigh's stringent policy on familiarity within the process, and allowed John and Jamal to stay together for the duration of the development. In this case, the collaboration buoyed both young men's confidence, which led to some excellent improvisatory work, which fed into the structuring phase; particularly so, as they became more engaged in the process. It should be noted that this worked out due to the temperaments of both men – with two different individuals, the outcome could have been quite different. Video Clip 1, below, is an example of early structuring. John and Jamal present as their 'originals' in a non- descript street which we staged at Kulcha, a former multicultural arts centre now no longer in operation. What is noticeable, is that both men skirt around revealing knowledge of each other from outside the

workshop space, from outside their character's ability to know certain information. However, all the while they are building a type of inventory of their characters' backstory and behaviour to assist in the future structuring of the story threads (Video Clip 1, 00:34 – 00:45).

Video Clip 1. First Meeting: Early structuring with John (as Kevin) and Jamal (as Donnell)

As observed in Video Clip 1, the characters introduce themselves, comment on their origins, ask about residency status, and other details that in the course of a first encounter, to me, would seem unlikely to come up quickly between strangers. Listening to the clip, the dialogue sounds unnatural and forced, and the two characters work hard at an attempt to enlighten their scene partner to what they believe they should know about each other. In a more nuanced improvisation scene work perhaps there would have been more patience, openness and opportunity to move beyond exposition and in to greater detail for character and story. Despite the vagaries of time, when the participants came to the workshops they would give their all, and it is significant to look at the way the process generally ran, particularly in the early stages of structuring. The strength of the structuring process lies not so much in 'order' but rather 'disorder', which brings a life-like or natural quality, a humanity or 'as in life' quality. While not the most intensely dramatic of meetings, and with clunky moments where 'originals' overtly proceed to inform each other of their back story (a common issue amongst inexperienced improvisers), this segment from the early stages is an example of the cumbersome nature of improvised initial meetings. The awkwardness is quite evident in other scenarios too, but it did prove to be quite fruitful and laid the foundation for some interesting depth to the characters. What I also quite like about the exchange in Figure 1 – which was in several early drafts of the play – is that it is 'everyday' and 'ordinary' in tone.

As Leigh's methods suggest, what exhibits from a character's improvisatory work, particularly relating to exposition, is an imperative for dialogue or action. At a specific moment, in response to given circumstances – perhaps an external pressure upon that character – what they offer resonates in such a way that it is hard to imagine the eventual written play without that 'voice' included. Interestingly, John and Jamal's final improvisations provided some of the most cohesive story threads, and influenced the content of improvisations with other participants, such as when both worked with Juma (Video Clip 11), and consequently the final play. By offering complexity in some

of the everyday scene work, John and Jamal were actually positioned as central to the overall narrative through the structuring phase, more so than other participants' voices.

However, the fact remains that both John and Jamal were further affected by authorship; they merged into one single character by the time the playwriting began, with the outcome of this analysed in the next chapter.

F. Quiz Club/'Hot Seat'

With Leigh's methods all action occurs as a result of characters' motivations towards some aim or goal, each improvisation growing organically from the one that has come before. A significant part of structuring was to ensure the characters' individual 'reality' could be sustained imaginatively, while grounded in a concrete, physical and collective world. The purpose of the solo improvisations was to explore the characters' 'reality' in the same vein as Leigh's 'Quiz Club' (Clements, 1983, pp. 43-44), mentioned in *Beginnings*. In 'Quiz Club' Leigh will ask the performer to respond to a series of questions, with the actor in role, to essentially mine them for biographical material which may have been missed or had diminished in importance for the character. This assists the actor, and Leigh, to bring that material into play again for the purposes of structuring. During my project, I used a variant on 'Quiz Club'. I set up one-to-one improvisations between facilitator and participant, like 'Quiz Club', but where I immersed myself in the improvisation, playing a performed version of myself, along with the participant in the role as their 'original'. The term I used for this adaptation was 'hot seating', a term I picked up from Dorothy Heathcote on acting in classroom drama (Bolton, 1998), though in fact 'hot seat' is a commonly used term, to refer to games where people are asked complex or provocative questions. My version of 'hot seat' provides the participant and facilitator the chance to explore narrative exposition, behaviour and motivation of an 'original', while embedded in improvisation.

Over the duration of structuring, two or three short 'hot seats' were completed with most participants, depending on how often they were able to attend the workshops, and if I believed they had missed an opportunity to delve deeper. These improvisations, somewhat of an interlude from the group work, were designed so that participants could develop a deeper recognition of their individual character's given circumstances. 'Hot seats' also highlighted the nuanced and sensitive responses of participants' developing characters to certain subject matter. I found that the 'hot seat' allowed for a

more detailed exploration of circumstances which 'Quiz Club' was not quite designed to do. I felt that 'hot seating' caught the urgency that was often part of the tension that arose when it was realised that a particular narrative transition was absent within or between story threads. This allowed an unbroken immersive experience, to develop the work collaboratively, rather than simply as a 'Q&A'. In addition, the 'hot seat' speedily provided material to navigate the ongoing narrative around any conceivable stumbling block. For instance, if Justin or another participant had not attended and the narrative was moving on to a next stage, this material would be needed to connect story threads. Rather than relying on the participants to have the skills that many professional actors have who are experienced in improvisation – including the ability to 'shelve' stories (bring back previously introduced information when required) – 'hot seating' provided the participants with time to explore their back story and gave me more material to work with later. The ability to retain the information Leigh asks of his actors is demanding and needs concentrated experience in improvisation, which my participants did not have the opportunity to gain in a relatively short period of time. The following is an example of the 'hot seat' exercise with John who is playing his 'original' character Kevin (e.g. Video Clip 2 00:05–06.15).

Video Clip 2. 'Hot seat' with John (as Kevin).

Video Clip 2 gives a sense of how 'hot seating' worked in the context of the structuring phase with the participants. Over the course of this particular 'hot seat', the character, Kevin (John), reveals his distaste for Australian food after he first arrived from overseas. He brings up McDonald's at a particular point. The burger joint in the play actually arose from this disdain; but in the end shifted to focus on Larry based on Malikizoh's road test as mentioned earlier. As can be seen in the clip Kevin goes into detail about his frustrations with the Australian accent "being hell different" (Video Clip 2 01:00), and the fact that his English is more "British" than that spoken by Australians (Video Clip 2 01:42-01:52). He also went on to explain why Australian slang confounded him. For me, Kevin brought to structuring a sense of exile from his homeland and a profound solitude, which appeared to arise from his dislocation from home. Other characters reported similar experiences, but Kevin's stood out as quite melancholic; he immediately articulated how unsettled he was by his separation from Tanzania, and the hardship of the transition into Australian student life. He mentioned the economic stress he experienced during his studies that provoked aspirations to open a small business; then to establish a home (at odds or even playing up the presence of *unhomeliness*). He spoke a lot to the experience of many African Australians that I had known prior to the research and others who I

had talked to formally and informally for the purposes of the research; in the end, the original of Kevin inspired much of Donnell in the final draft of *I am here now*. The need to belong is very much part of the human condition, but perhaps most acutely experienced by the migrant. The story of Donnell captures this desire; a need, for home, for community, to belong.

Another interesting moment with John as Kevin, in the 'hot seat' was when I brought up the question of racism and whether Kevin, the character, had experienced it (Video Clip 2 04:40-06:15). Kevin dismisses this, but then I ask him again – to provoke a response that would allow John, the actor, to explore this experience if he so wished. Kevin, the character, proceeds to give voice to an elaborate tale of a friend who has suffered racism. Where this story came from is unclear; it is also unclear whether the story has truth origins as an experience for John. Ultimately, its origin is not the heart of the matter, but it gave me material to work with in the writing phase. This active participation by myself, as facilitator, is quite interventionist in the development of the character. I acknowledge that this was another departure from Leigh's methods. During structuring, the ambivalence of 'truth' would lead more and more towards a 'fiction'. The 'hot seat' then becomes another site of struggle between 'truth' and 'fiction'. Some threads emerge from the improvisations, others are encouraged by me, as facilitator. These threads are the platforms for the 'originals' to speak. It also becomes the platform for me, as facilitator, to harness any potential dramatic material which might serve the eventual play. Admittedly, this leaves traces of my 'voice' within the material born of the 'hot seat'. This then leads further toward the playwright's 'voice' dividing consciously between the continued and discontinued story threads.

The 'hot seat' also put pressure on the participants to speak unprepared as their characters, instead of taking moments to listen, reflect, or to embrace hesitation. Hesitation, in a dramatic sense can have creative potential – as in all drama, what is unspoken is often as significant as what is spoken. Had the participants actually availed themselves of these hesitations, or perhaps if I had been more aware of this potential and therefore less quick to prompt via the 'hot seats', these moments could have offered many further insights into the characters and provided significant material for the written play. Video Clip 3, in which I 'hot seat' Caliph (played by Juma), was one in which I deliberately spoke less and encouraged Juma to sit within his character without extra pressure from me. This delivered dramatic material that would otherwise have been absent or harried by devising content that points to Caliph as a strong moral force within the play.

Video Clip 3. 'Hot seat' with Juma (as Caliph)

Caliph, the character, talks about negative influences on his life that paralleled what was happening in Juma's life; I only know this because Juma shared it with me off camera. For instance, Caliph discusses his move away from violence toward prayer at his mosque (Video Clip 3, 02:33-03:28). Incidentally, this also revealed to me that Juma had a strong sense of narrative control, and an understanding of how Caliph could be built by selectively drawing experiences from what may be his own lived experiences (Video Clip 3, 03:20). Juma makes a strong case for change in the 'hot seat', warning that "you either change them, or they change you" (Video Clip 3, 04:24) in reference to the influencers of his past. This presents Caliph as a strong moral force, which to a degree continues in the written play. The last session with Juma and Amine (Video Clip 4) sees Caliph at work to assuage Amine from his maligned ways, actively pursuing Amine for the money that he knows has just been stolen. At the point where I believed the improvisation had reached a climax, I shouted, as can be heard in the clip, for Justin to grab a knife – an imaginary one – which he did, breaking character for a moment. Then Amine stabbed Caliph. This moment, in retrospect and viewing the clip, borders on the ludicrous: the director calling out a provocative direction that essentially could only end one way in dramatic terms. What this reveals is the need for facilitation before improvisations, in order to clarify the objectives of any given scene for the participants, particularly if they have limited experience with improvisation. Comparing early recordings of the improvisatory work with those that came later, the pressures seem to appear in the ability of the participants to sustain the narratives that were set. This is not a criticism, but rather an acknowledgement of the difficulty of the process and the skillset required for long form improvisational development, which lasted over months.

Video Clip 4. Caliph is stabbed

G. Boundaries

As we progressed through the structuring phase, the participants began to talk to me about the content of the improvisations. As we continued I saw that my instructions helped make the process clearer for the participants, filling in gaps that lay in the path of certain improvisations. As noted, there was sometimes the need to fast-track expositional gaps which occurred between threads

provided the excuse to use 'hot seating'. 'Hot seating' then, at its best, operated as a kind of 'sounding board' as the story threads evolved and helped sustain character voices. These 'hot seat' moments were important in terms of my developing understanding of polyvocality – 'hot seating' sees the incorporation of another 'voice', the facilitator's, into a process that should be focussed on the individual voice of the character in the 'hot seat'; or preferably, the voices from the collaborative dialogues in the participants' improvisatory scene work. While each of the participants used the 'hot seat' in an expository way, my voice was dominant in shaping the 'hot seat' dialogue (albeit drawing from the 'original' profiles, as well as the current scene work), more so than it had been up until that point of the project. If a character was unable or unwilling to answer a question, they did not have too; but the improvisation would continue, perhaps in another direction, or as in the case of the racism question, might receive continued prompting. The need for continuity in story was a strong motivation behind 'hot seating' – with an example of an expedited story thread seen in Video Clip 5 (Video Clip 5, 00:53-04:15). As previously mentioned, it became difficult to maintain continuity of story threads whenever participants failed to turn up to the workshops; the dynamism of the prior session was compromised, story threads were abandoned and ultimately forced into the shape that I thought would expedite the process in an interesting direction.

The example in Video Clip 5 demonstrates scene work where Justin and Kirsty explore aspects of Amine's passionate pursuit of Nancy. At times, some participants came across as more willing than others to push themselves as performers, which I noted would sometimes unsettle some of the other participants. This was often the case when it came to subject matter that included intimacy or passion. Video Clip 5 reveals that Kirsty as Nancy was eager to pursue a depth to her character whereas Justin as Amine demonstrated a more offhanded approach to his characterisation – this is evident in the way that Justin consistently sought to dominate the scenario by blocking Kirsty's improvisational offers. As the structuring progressed, I analysed those characters, such as Nancy and Sarah, Kevin and Donnell, who seemed to continuously work well with each other and in contrast or in commune within each other's given circumstances. At first, I measured the success of these introductions by the degree of continuity and dramatic conflict an improvisation could sustain. When I brought together characters who clashed, I would keep them under pressure for a while to explore where that dramatic tension might lead. If the story thread developed well and dramatic tension manifested, I would suggest to the participants that aspects of these improvisations actively continue.

The direction in which the story material developed indicated that Amine and Nancy's relationship would unfold as a doomed romance, as it remains in *I am here now*.

Video Clip 5. Kirsty (as Nancy) and Justin (as Amine): Direction on the run.

During the improvisations, Justin came and went with common irregularity. It meant that Justin's story was discontinuous and needed to be consolidated between workshops. This became more difficult as the story threads became interwoven and increasingly complex. Ironically, this unsettled quality in Justin translated well to the unsettled and elusive nature of his fictional character, Amine Lo. The participant Rachael also provides an example of the discontinuity that prompted such interventions; she wanted to know why an audience was not present during the development process, and when there would be one. I had explained the process, but Rachael's reticence towards some of the subject matter in the workshops and her desire to perform outright for an imagined audience influenced her to withdraw, which I will discuss more below. As a consequence, I chose to shift focus to what could possibly be developed with the remaining participants who attended the workshops. Having no script parameters or fixed points to guide their improvisatory work in the early stages of structuring, some participants found it difficult in a general sense to maintain narrative continuity. What was clear, after initial structuring scene work, was that improvisations were enhanced as the 'originals' became more grounded in the complexities of one another's scenarios, inherent in the spontaneity and experimental collaboration that improvisatory work depends upon. I too found that the various improvisation stages – from road testing, to 'hot seat', and solo and group improvisation – were where my reflexive studio practice existed. I was playing, deliberating, offering and discarding, just as the participants were, slowly emerging over time with a clearer picture of where the play would lead. Libby Byrne describes reflexive studio practice as:

> A qualitative method of enquiry employed by artists to consider and explore a question that captures their attention. Working with a defined directive in mind, the artist welcomes seemingly disparate ideas into the practice until the ways in which they are connected become evident. (p. 198)

At this point in the process, it became clear that these developments in the workshops provided space for me as facilitator, and eventually as playwright, to be open and responsive to the dynamic nature of the creative process.

H. Collaborate and listen

With regard to the creative potential of discontinuity, Leigh says that if an improvisation or story does not productively lead anywhere, he tries to avoid the statement 'that didn't go anywhere' dramatically; instead, he takes the story in an alternative direction (Clements, 1983, p. 39). In my initial meetings, none of the participants were aware of Mike Leigh or his methods, and were mostly unfamiliar with structured improvisational practice; so boldly, as inexperienced theatre makers, they let stories unfold for a length of time (see Video Clips 1, 5, 9, and 11). Most of the improvisational scene work in the workshops lasted for around 10 minutes, a duration that seemed a sufficient time to cover rising dramatic potential, or otherwise. More time or less would be given, depending on the perceived dramatic potential of the material. The participants and I developed this into a workflow, and as the participants engaged in an improvisation they began to allow for obstacles to develop as part of the improvisatory work, usually another person in the scenario. In nearly all the improvisations during structuring, the introduction of 'originals' to one another developed dramatic tension (see Video Clips 1, 5, 6, 9, and 11). These obstacles were seen as discoveries which shed light on the participants' 'originals', rather than impediments that were insurmountable for the development of their characters. I had talked with the participants about Leigh's methods intermittently in the initial stages of the project, and before launching into structuring, I detailed how the coming weeks would unfold. In particular, I outlined the kind of improvisations he requests of his actors. Incidentally, I did not show the participants any of Leigh's films, because I did not wish them to imagine that his films anticipated a certain outcome for our project. That is not to say that I gave no directions, particularly as I sought to sustain creative momentum within the workshops. In Video Clip 6, my director's voice can be heard cajoling the participants' character choices towards a certain narrative outcome.

Video Clip 6. Malikizoh and Justin: Example of improvisational blocking.

Due to the participants' limited time or other circumstances, I made bold adjustments during structuring. Video Clip 6 gives insight into my facilitation of the structuring phase: I can be heard to call "action", a director's phrase to initiate performance on film sets. I can also be heard to call out Justin's name a couple of times. In the clip, Justin, as Amine Lo, appears to delay a confrontation with Larry Malik, which can be read as a character choice. From a facilitation standpoint, this could be read as inappropriate direction: potentially, it breaks character mid-flow for Justin. I, perhaps

mistakenly, assumed that the improvisation had stalled. To sustain dramatic tension, I gave a directive that could have been perceived as a countermand of Justin's instinct as to what the scene required. Throughout structuring, I would give words of reassurance to the participants; if I felt they were on the right track in a certain scenario, or to acknowledge an offer of something particularly interesting in the work. Again this kind of intervention went against my intent to allow the participants to direct the improvisation with their offers to one another as much as possible. At other times, if the improvisation stalled completely, it would become necessary to restart the thread. My re-direction was quite pragmatic; indeed, I thought of it less as directing than as a form of 'side coaching' (Spolin, 1999, pp. 28-30). I felt 'side coaching' was necessary at times to guide the inexperienced participants. However, 'side coaching' can initiate its own kinds of tension, particularly if it creates the anxiety that something in the scene work had not been achieved, or gives a sense that the participant is 'failing'. The effect of 'side coaching' can be seen in Video Clip 6 (00:10-00:15), there is a moment's hesitancy when Malikizoh slips character. This slight unconscious 'tell' is symptomatic of anxiety arising in the participant from this kind of tension. In Video Clip 5, I can be heard booming midway through the improvisation "enough chit chat" (at 00:53) in order to move the scene along to what I would consider an interesting moment and away from the domestic or 'pedestrian' scene work. This could only serve to have intruded upon the improvisatory work, possibly even as a shutdown of the choices that Amine and Nancy were making in the moment of improvisation. Thankfully, during our time together, the participants appeared for the most part to be at ease with the process, and with me. Over time, they developed a familiarity with the workflow, of formal improvisations and 'hot seats' during the structuring phase. An example can be seen in Video Clip 7, a 'hot seat' with Mitch Cooke, the character devised by Omar (who was in the end not included in the final draft).

Video Clip 7. 'Hot seat' with Omar (as Mitch): Example of authorial involvement in structuring.

Part way through this 'hot seat', I offer Omar the name of his boss: "Henry the Manager" (Video Clip 7, 04:40-06:15). This ultimately is more of an instruction than an offer, and plainly comes as a surprise to Omar. This offer prompts an immediate adjustment to Mitch's backstory, which Omar must deal with. "Henry the Manager" and Mitch are cut from the final draft of *I am here now*, but in this instance I was effectively moving away from Leigh's methods to try to provoke or elicit more dramatic material out of the participant. At this point, I had to evaluate the degree to which I felt this

process would enhance the end goal of creating a work that was inspired by the material generated by the participants but that would ultimately be shaped into a sole authored text like that of Leigh. However, unlike Leigh, I absolutely knew by this stage that I could not take the improvisations as verbatim. But this idea of polyvocality inspired by the lives of the participants, of our informal conversations, of their originals, of their encounters in public spaces, and, undoubtedly, of me could find a way into the various drafts and the final text. This then begs the question: if I was too dominant in the development would this also then mean the writing process would equate the idea of sole authorship with a lurch towards monovocality. Directorial 'creep', on my part, can be observed throughout the video recordings. Video Clips 4 and 7 are perfect examples of this dominant directorial voice. As structuring continued, I became aware of my voice's influence over the other voices. This directorial intervention demonstrates the fragility of this process and the risk that the 'voices' of the 'originals' would quieten, in relation to my 'voice', to merely a whisper.

I. Skin

In Video Clip 8, Amine (Justin) challenged Nancy (Kirsty) on her heritage in an improvisation. Video Clip 8 begins with Nancy making clear to Amine that she suspects he took money from the till as part of a previous improvisation and the dialogue is framed in context with Amine's casual thievery.

Video Clip 8. Kirsty (as Nancy) and Justin (as Amine): Victimhood.

What comes up for the characters is a distinct difference related to each characters' perception of how the world views them and subsequently judges them. Amine spends much of the scene in discussion as to whether his misfortune, as he sees it, comes down to being African. Nancy is quick to retort that Amine puts himself into situations where the outcomes are limited or worse: "you feel sorry for yourself and then play up the fact you are African" (Video Clip 8, 06:30). Nancy also challenges Amine by the fact that he identifies himself as a victim. By the end of the scene, Amine has stated: "To be honest, I think you're different to me" (Video Clip 8, 03.33) in response to Nancy. This response seizes Nancy, or perhaps it was Kirsty herself, who found it difficult at times working with Justin; the tightening of her body language in the clip gives a sense of the impact Amine's casual riposte has on her. Kirsty, by now frustrated by the lack of interrogation of her character in the

improvisation, starts to point out to Amine his bellicose ways that sit in contrast from her own. It is clear from the clip and others that Amine blames his lot in life on his African heritage, stating that he believes "I'm just one of those characters that's hard to miss" (Video Clip 8, 04:34), implying a reference to skin colour and that he sees *skin* as a point of punishment. I got the sense, on the day and upon reflection that his answers could be speaking for both Amine and Justin. I found that skin colour was one of the most difficult yet profound points introduced during the development. This was more of a feeling or a sense that I observed rather than anything that was explicitly noted or continually brought into the workshops.

Video Clip 9. Kirsty (as Nancy) and Justin (as Amine): Racism discussed.

The improvisation in Video Clip 9 started initially in a conversation prior to the improvisation where Kirsty was explaining what 'coloured' means in South Africa; not entirely understanding her, Justin seems to take offence to something in the conversation. Concerned with the direction of the conversation I interrupted and asked them to begin the improvisation. That in turn led to Amine antagonising Nancy about not being 'black' enough to be African. This was of course a tricky situation and Kirsty was close to tears by the end of the scene work. It not only raised questions of safety in the creative space, but also triggered a response in me which ultimately led me to develop this tension further in the writing (between Amine and Nancy, and then also through the character of Nousiba). Michelle Lobo notes that skin becomes "a site of physical and social difference; it is a surface that feels" (2015, p. 55), and the relationship to skin is one which is deeply complex and fraught.

While skin colour was the basis for the tension in this specific case, the notion of home and the *unhomely*, of belonging and not belonging, kept coming through at different stages of the project. This was really apparent for Kirsty, and her background goes some way to explaining the strain between her and Justin. She was a university student I had taught and directed on a number of occasions. Although she had spent the majority of her life in Western Australia she had a strong affinity with her South African roots. When I approached Kirsty to be involved in the project, she was keen to come aboard, as she had planned to audition for a vocational drama school and wanted the acting experience (she was subsequently successful in auditioning for WAAPA's Acting degree, and has since graduated). Once the Leigh approach was explained to her, Kirsty recognised that the

opportunity for such in-depth character immersion. As well as the project being a chance to explore acting technique it was also a chance to touch upon a world which Kirsty felt she wished to connect to further – her African heritage. As we worked together, I observed that Kirsty had an interesting relationship between her allegiance to an African identity and her relationship to Australia. She was quite literally someone caught in a composite of peoples and places – being of mixed ethnic heritage from the incredibly complex racial and ethnic 'strata' of South Africa, not to mention the fraught history surrounding *coloureds* in South Africa (see Adhikari, 2006; Laster, 2007) – something which she explored throughout the project via her creation of the 'original', Nancy Meth. This is revealed in Video Clip 8 and 9, where the subject of skin colour is a focal point for the improvisations. However, this narrative had mostly disappeared by the penultimate draft of the script and does not feature in the final play. In Video Clip 10, Nancy speaks in a way that the subject matter is very close to her; Nancy talks about living in Pemberton, WA (Video Clip 10, 01:25-02:00), which is actually drawn from Kirsty's personal background. Nancy also talks of "racism" and racism from her friends "ignorant to who I am" (from 02:05) and the frustration of her friends' inability to comprehend what it is means to be a 'coloured' South African, a *bruin* (Video Clip 9, 00:26), with Nancy stating "no-one really understands what that means" (03:08).

Video Clip 10. 'Hot seat' with Kirsty (as Nancy): Art imitates life.

For Australians, Kirk Zwangobani (2008) points to a historical negotiation in this country with the concept of colour and 'blackness'. He observes that, in an Australian context, it is important "to understand the dynamic between the differing layers of black Australia, a dynamic that includes black settler citizen and indigenous black, both of whom must wrestle with the resultant racism the signifier black can represent" (2008, p. 58). Zwangobani's observation suggests that being 'black' in a multicultural Australia can either be a defining quality for commonality and community building or of difference and Othering; within the context of this project, I believe it is important to acknowledge that existing tension between differing layers of 'black' Australia even if it is a point that does not play out explicitly in the final script.

In exploring Critical Race Theory (CRT), I came across *Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative* (1989). Richard Delgado argues that "the dominant group justifies its power with stories, stock explanations that construct reality in ways that maintain their privilege. Thus,

oppression is rationalised, causing little self-examination by the oppressor" (1989, p. 2441). In the text, Delgado describes five stories which present how a black lecturer is denied a teaching position in a white-dominated faculty. Delgado puts forward that the same phenomena can be described in different ways, which pertains to how the perception of this event by different eyes can determine alternative meanings. Explaining 'reality' is inevitably positioning 'reality'. I raise this here because of the differing understandings of 'reality'; difference might develop a bond or a commonality through shared conditions and circumstances. Difference is subjective and ultimately produces alternative meanings dependent on the context; like that of skin colour or the ways in which migration is experienced. This means that the idea of a fixed 'reality', in the context of the structuring process, and indeed later in the writing stage is contentious. Does the structuring process actually capture the experiences Nancy Meth, her 'original', speaks of ('fiction')? Or is there the tangible possibility that Kirsty's own life resides within her characterisation ('truth'); a kind of 'Russian Doll' effect, with one 'fiction' the shell inside which another could exist? This ultimately has consequences for the veracity of the 'voice' or 'voices' that link to Nancy Meth and Kirsty. In these video clips it is clear that there are many diverse and divergent viewpoints for the participant and 'original'. Each together is interesting material for a playwright to pilot; equally in each a case for polyvocality can be made.

J. Hip Hop

The music genre, Hip Hop, was pervasive throughout the early improvisational work, prompted mainly by the 'originals' Kevin and Donnell, and continued into the structuring. Paul Gilroy suggests that the model of "embodied subjectivity" found in music associated with black cultures or 'blackness' can provide alternative models to dominant discourses in western culture. This proposes observance to "neglected modes of signifying practices like mimesis, gesture, kinesis and costume", all of which are far from neglected in theatre, and cultural expressions like "antiphony, montage and dramaturgy" (Gilroy, 1997), which speaks to the form of the play. Antiphony, traditionally a type of call and response style singing, works as another form of polyvocality, not as singing but in the form of the play, the way that each vignette speaks to the other and anticipates the start (and end) of the play. While one story thread discontinues, another continues. It can also be suggested in the music score of the play, which is anticipated in the words 'Hip Hop', as well as the drum and bass of the initial DJ set. When I asked some of the participants if they had affiliation with African American

culture (if there is such a thing), based on their appreciation of Hip Hop, they agreed that this was as an influence. Certainly, John and Jamal were heavily influenced by African American Hip Hop, which can be seen by their language and observance to the music in Video Clips 6 and 10. Prior to work on this project, John and Jamal had performed Hip Hop live and created music videos in their own time for online distribution.

Personally, I had very limited knowledge of American Hip Hop, restricted to a very basic knowledge of West Coast Gangsta Rap – Tupac Shakur and NWA – but an extensive awareness of modern Hip Hop was irrelevant for the most part in my relationship with John and Jamal. But their love for Hip Hop 'style' did affect how I approached their improvisatory work. When we began, I stated that I wanted the participants immersed in the characters they created and it was not for me to obstruct material they deigned relevant. But I admit I was initially reluctant to allow the Hip Hop become incorporated into the characterisations of John and Jamal, as though I was waiting naively for some 'authentic' voice, an 'African Australianness' to supersede any American influence. This bias prevented me from seeing that their identification with Hip Hop might in fact be the recognition of Zwangobani's (2008) ideas around the dynamism of commonality and difference. In the end, Hip Hop became the focus of John and Jamal's dialogue in early structuring, and was the material from which much of their 'originals' had grown from. During structuring, the African American influence also became viewed as a negative influence by Caliph (see Video Clip 11, 04:00), traces of which resonate in *I am here now* and will be discussed in Chapter Four. What this tension shows is that I was unconsciously looking for an African Australian experience, as though there could even be such a thing, not entirely realising that not only was I risking reducing diversity to a biased and stereotyped presumption but also that people draw inspiration and affinity from wherever they feel best served and supported. Once again, this points to 'African Australian' as more than a mere descriptor; it cannot be defined easily as a concept, nor can it be boxed neatly into the notion of a new, or newer, community – at once that idea reduces the ability and likelihood for difference as much as commonality to generate connections and ultimately material for the written play.

K. *Religion and spirituality*

Religion, and what it meant to the participants, was a subject I was somewhat surprised to find emphasised in the workshops. I was not partial one way or another to the inclusion of religiosity in the play, but I did not foresee 'originals' adopting a focus on faith. However, as it became a fixture

in the content of the improvisations, I became interested to explore it further as it was obviously part of the polyvocality that was emerging. Religion, or faith, was something that was brought up by different participants at different times in the process. Primarily, it was Juma who drove this content through Caliph's story thread. For context, I had known Juma prior to this project, having directed him briefly in a 10-minute play developed and written over a couple of days at an Australian Red Cross drama workshop at HGGC. When we initially met, Juma had been infectiously drawn to Hip Hop, but was also enthralled by traditional Sudanese dance which linked him viscerally to his homeland. In the months between that Red Cross workshop and the start of the project, Juma had an epiphany and decided that Islamic teaching and dedication to a Muslim way of life was paramount. At this point, Juma began to move away from dance which he considered unwholesome. Video Clip 11 reveals Caliph's growing reticence towards dancing, and his response to Hip Hop (at 04:04), as well as the positive influence of Islam on Caliph. From these circumstances, the character Khalid, born of Juma's 'original', Caliph, emerged as a devout Muslim in the final play.

Video Clip 11. Early improvisation with John (as Kevin), Jamal (Donnell) and Juma (Caliph).

In the workshops, Juma would also regularly speak in reference to what he told me was the Qur'an, which I have no reason to doubt. The Qur'an is a text I was not at all familiar with beyond a cursory knowledge. This allowed Juma to articulate what he wanted to say about Islam, most likely to instigate a sense of the power of faith. During interactions between Caliph and Donnell (with Jamal, who also identifies as Muslim) I was interested as to how Juma appeared zealous in character, speaking directly at Donnell about Islam, with little movement outside of this conversation even if Donnell (or John) wanted to take the dialogue in an alternative direction. I could see that this made Jamal ambivalent when it came to his interactions with Juma, as he did not seem enthused to keep discussing Islam. Arguably, however, it was Juma's prerogative as his 'original' to discuss what he felt the character would. It also created an uneasy tension between Jamal and John, which threatened to overshadow their bond (outside of the workshops too). As noted, this caused pressure between Donnell and Kevin's characters, and the resultant tension actually made its way into several drafts, but not beyond the penultimate the script. The reason for this is that the story thread did not sit easily with other happenings within the play. In terms of polyvocality, what can be heard, at the time and throughout the project, was an inflection of Juma in the 'voices' of Caliph, then Khalid, and the instances where religion and faith emerge on the pages of *I am here now*. Traces of these

improvisations, and 'voices', still exist in the final play, having emerged from the material transcribed in Figure 5 below.

Donnell and Kevin go back to the fruit shop.

DONNELL - Free apple for friend?

CALIPH - What one you like, green or red. That'll be two dollar!

DONNELL - Check this out, it's a kinda music and dance and all mixed up together.

CALIPH - What kinda music?

DONNELL - Well, African stuff.

KEVIN holds up flyer for Hip Hop dance.

KEVIN - You not going?

DONNELL - Nah, 16 you have to be 18.

CALIPH - You have chicken-chicken money.

KEVIN - You sure?

CALIPH - You know, I know a lot of people make a lot of mistakes. You should get married. It's better for you.

DONNELL - I'm 16.

CALIPH - It's better for you.

KEVIN - The problem is the African community won't think it's good he's 16 and married with a baby.

DONNELL - As long as the female has breasts, it's okay.

CALIPH - Guys are 18 or 20, girls are 15, 16, it is okay.

DONNELL - I'm going. Playing basketball.

KEVIN - Hey Donnell I'll pick you up on Saturday.

DONNELL – Where we going?

KEVIN - Church.

KHALID - Next time I talk to you about Islam.

DONNELL - What about you know how to dance?

KEVIN - You know any?

CALIPH - I used to dance. I'll show you.

KEVIN - Come on.

CALIPH - I'll show you. Stand like this, shake your hips.

DONNELL - I can't shake my hips.

CALIPH - Every African knows how to shake their hips.

DONNELL - What are you doing?

KEVIN - I thought you were playing basketball.

CALIPH - I'm showing him how to dance.

KEVIN - That's what it is?

CALIPH - Let's all do it. This is better than Hip Hop. One and two and shake your hips like…This…Oh, you're very good Donnell. Show us your moves.

DONNELL - What do you call that?

CALIPH - Did you hurt yourself?

KEVIN - I don't want to break myself, Juma does a Hip Hop move.

CALIPH – See. When Hip Hop was popular I was into all the moves.

DONNELL - So you going to go to this dance?

KEVIN - I don't usually go.

CALIPH - As long as there is no swearing.

KEVIN – No, gentlemanly music.

Kevin leaves Caliph and Donnell alone.

DONNELL - You know what I was thinking?

CALIPH - You changed your mind?

DONNELL - I was thinking about Muslim stuff again. I was thinking about September 11th.

CALIPH - You want to know the truth, before September 11th people used to ask me what a Muslim was, in a nice way and I used to tell them. But after September 11th, everybody's scared of Muslims. Why? Muslims didn't even do that. Did you see the way they blew up that thing? The US themselves did that.

DONNELL - It's hard to understand.

CALIPH - I did some study in construction. When they blow up a building they put up explosives.

DONNELL - They plant it?

CALIPH - The way they rigged it up is to make Muslims look bad. Osama bin Laden he was an idiot. I have nothing to do with him. I don't like television. They like to fool people.

DONNELL - Tell me more about it. I feel as though there is something I should know.

CALIPH - If someone is bad and they decide to do it. You know how in US they have students who kill people and shoot up a class – no one says a Christian has killed people. The US is the real terrorist man. In Sudan, there was a factory they blamed us for making nuclear weapons and they bombed the place and it was a Panadol factory.

DONNELL - That's the one thing that can stop people becoming Muslims. And my best friend Marcus he does nothing like me.

CALIPH - Listen I tell you something. Religion is common sense. It's proven. If someone says this this this we ask where it comes from. If it's proven we believe in it. Asks people with more knowledge.

DONNELL - How long you been a Muslim for.

CALIPH - All my life.

DONNELL - How old are you?

CALIPH - 24?

DONNELL - Sounds like you know what you're doing.

CALIPH - Sometimes people used to think I was a bad guy. It can be very dangerous to watch television, too much Hollywood. And if I wear Muslim dress they think I'm a terrorist. In my family no one ever killed no one. It's the devil to me. Television. Through the media that's how they do it. I usually don't listen to music too much, because if I do I feel I want to be like them. Like the musicians. I'm really trying to stay away from it.

DONNELL - You don't even know what music is.

CALIPH - I know what music is.

DONNELL - Why don't you just listen to it a little bit?

CALIPH - Might be fine for you if you're planted.

DONNELL - Music is everything.

CALIPH - On your deathbed you will remember everything.

DONNELL - I'm going to play basketball.

CALIPH - If you help in my shop I give you free apple.

DONNELL - Nah, man. Peace.

Figure 4. Religious Experiences in Transcription.

I would reason that Juma came closest to playing a version or an expression of himself, ensuring his 'voice' was heard in the process and in the polyvocality of *I am here now*. Traces of Juma's 'original' still notably exist in the final draft of the play. Yet, I wonder if Juma did do this, something that occurred during my transition from playwright to facilitator and based upon my anecdotal conversations with Juma. I knew Juma longer than most of the other participants, save Kirsty, and my observation of his conversations with Jamal inside and briefly outside the parameters of the improvisations (in the interviews), as seen in Video Clips 3 and 11. Perhaps there is a case to argue that a facilitator could be overly privy to an individual participant's life. For Leigh, who hires many of the same actors for his plays and films, this would be the case for him too, due to the long term relationships and expectations of Leigh that they would conduct his process a particular way. I have no answer for this and perhaps it is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, in terms of working with many voices in this way, Bakhtin observes:

> The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to dialogical consciousness, is enormous. One's own discourse and one's own voice although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse (1981, p. 348).

In this context, had I not known about Juma's recent religious conversion, would I have heard his 'voice' the same way as I did, in the improvisations and even now in the final play? I realise that I was in search of a 'truth', of a 'reality'; but in the context of the project, that 'truth' could be shaped so easily into 'fiction' and has been, which is illuminated further in *Writing*. Having said this, it is

also entirely possible that Juma was in the process of the creation of a character that was deeply personal for him, and that came through in Caliph in the development phase, then in Khalid in the final play. This seemed to include more religiosity than I had anticipated, but this was also out of recognition and respect to Juma's faith journey. In addition, I had some regret with losing Rachael who at times had spoken of the process of improvisation as duplicitous and counter to her faith. I outline how this was reconciled, including her leaving, in Chapter Four.

One other important point to consider from Bakhtin's observations: was I, as playwright, indirectly born of the content advocated by the 'originals' in the improvisations? And if so, was there a rule which determined that I had to stick by whatever the 'originals' produced? They were, after all, formed by using Leigh's methods and from the choices I made during the structuring phase, which suggests that sole authorship was still applicable. This realisation was a kind of 'liberation' from the preciseness I felt was necessary to honour the 'originals' profiles, and eventually that same sense of 'liberation' would allow me to take *I am here now* in directions beyond what the structuring offered. Although not completely abandoned, the material from the process by the final draft was quite unlike what I might have contemplated from the first draft written after structuring. Like Juma, I was on a personal journey; not a spiritual journey *per se*, but one concerned with my passion for social justice, which I felt had become detached from the story threads by nature of the collaborative process, and what the 'originals' wished to explore. As structuring continued, I became increasingly self-reflective about the content of the project; migration, separation and transition from homelands. This reflection was inclusive of the Mike Leigh process, and of the emergent polyvocality, as well as my growing trepidation about authorship and the issues connected with the upcoming writing phase. This anxiety occurred mainly while I was reviewing recorded footage from the workshops. I realised I had influenced the outcome of the improvisations, more perhaps than I realised at the time, but evident in the authoritative voice from behind the camera and the final shape of the structured story threads. The issue with this was whether then any authentic 'voice', or 'voices', that had come from the participants, would exist at the end of the playwriting.

L. *Capturing the process*

As I reviewed the recordings between workshops, it became clear a physical life had occurred in front of the camera that I had not considered until then. What I observed is that the participants were

grounded in their bodies, and were agile in terms of how they used physical gesture in tandem with their speech. Interestingly, physical expression is a major skill set for professional actors, and sometimes an impediment if they have difficulty harnessing that ability to 'speak' through their body. This development with non-theatre makers was welcome as it added another dynamic to the project. Even though I was aware of something different in the participants' expressions, it was not until I looked back over the footage that I registered that the interaction between the characters had developed a subtle physicality, something I had missed while being in the room with them, as facilitator. The recordings also allowed me to reflect on what I believed worked in the improvisatory work – that is, what material lent itself to somehow becoming a part of the play text. In this way, the recordings helped to shape where the next workshop or story thread headed. If I had been writing down the improvisation – dialogue, movement, and so on – it is likely that I could only take a snap shot of the scenario, or depict a sense of the story thread. The risk is that I could miss crucial exchanges occurring, particularly subtle physical gestures. Structuring was where the material resided for the written play, but the video recording of the structuring also had limitations. While video recording was critical to the documentation of the structuring phase, I also acknowledge a very real tension between acting for the camera and live performance, which includes usually a self-consciousness, which the camera inflicts upon the novice screen performer.

During the recordings, I stayed behind the camera, which on reflection would affect the sense of an 'audience' for the participants who thought in that way. Watching the clips, some participants, who were more familiar with screen work, can be observed using the camera as a proxy audience. Jamal and John, whose understanding of performance came almost entirely from making Hip Hop videos with their own camera are a case in point. This meant that their performances were slightly more understated than other participants who had only known live performance. Ultimately, this did not matter because the participants were to generate material, not perform to an audience. However, as they exhibited what could be termed codified behaviour, I watched the participants' physical nuances with interest. Those participants unfamiliar with a video camera were initially intimidated by its presence in the rehearsal room: for instance, in the early stage of structuring, Juma appears unable to act counter to someone without barrelling the video camera (see Video Clip 11, 05:45), or searching past the camera for me, his immediate and only audience. This comes back to the fact that the participants were not full-time professional actors, like those used by Leigh. For the participants who came aboard with the connection between acting and movies firmly in their minds, such as Jamal and John, there were still moments when their concentration dropped, the demands of live performance

in need of a more sustained focus than the short takes practiced in screen production. For example, throughout Video Clip 11, John can be seen using his mobile phone to send a text message to someone. At first it appears as though this is a part of the scene. However, John *was* texting, and therefore not entirely present in the improvisation, which obviously rings alarm bells when it comes to the level of immersion in not only character and story but also in the process at all.

Without a doubt, my choice of where to position the camera in relation to the participants also had an impact. While I moved the camera around the workshop space, when I came to a halt, the camera would inevitably create a 180-degree arc in the space. This presented a natural sense of being on or off screen (behind the camera being off), which is not indistinct from proscenium arch theatre spaces. However, this prevented the participants from negating delivery of their improvisation in a proscenium setting, which brings its own problems and demands a certain craft, while also being quite traditionalist. The space where the workshops took place, principally Kulcha in Fremantle, meant that the shape of the improvisations was dictated by a space that was part bar, part music venue. Once I recognised this as a limitation to the improvisations, and took the camera off the tripod to move around with the participants, this handheld style freed up the participants' ability to change up their scenes. I was no longer an objective camera, rather this was now a subjective camera style. This flexibility allowed the participants to break out of the proscenium limitations and work in a less static capacity.

Much of this documented work then began to take on an intimate sensibility. However, there was another limitation within this freedom and led to a further dilemma for me – which character should be allowed to dominate the frame, especially if characters moved between different rooms, or sat at distance from each other. Once there was more than one subject to attend to through the camera, the recording became erratic, particularly if there was no clear protagonist driving the scenario in a given moment. In many ways, the capturing of the physical subtext via the recordings was not unlike the decisions that had to eventually be made around capturing the various stories, characters and hence, voices of the participants. When reviewing the improvisations, it often was apparent that I had allowed a bias towards one character who I perceived as the driver of a scenario. These choices definitely affected the structuring and influenced which characters I considered in the context of *I am here now*. Despite these issues in recording the workshops, if I had been left to work purely with

memories of the workshops or tried to scrawl down what was occurring, I would not have captured the amount of material which the fixed recording allowed.

Video Clip 12. 'Africans don't stay still': African culture discussed with John, Jamal and Juma

Video Clips 12 and 13 are footage of group interviews with Juma, Jamal and John. I asked their opinion as to whether there was anything regarding physicalisation that I might not understand, or was important to perhaps include in the final play; John's response was "Africans don't stay still" (Video Clip 12, 06:22), perhaps best illustrated with the demonstrative arms and hands of the languid Juma in the same clip.

Video Clip 13. 'Smack on the head': physical nuance discussed with John, Jamal and Juma.

During the interviews (seen in Video Clips 12 and 13) the participants spoke about what they understood to be the differences between themselves and non-African Australian actors, with Juma defining his physicality as one of power, with "strong moves" (Video Clip 13, 00:25-02:58), compared to the "stiffness" and "stillness" (at 06:09) he and then John read as being inherently non-African, and by inference 'white'. Considering that, for John and Jamal their experiences of acting were largely imagined through cinema, this observation most likely came from screen performances; in retrospect, it would have been useful to gather the participants' various perceptions of physicality in performance and in 'real life'. Juma, Jamal and John also revealed in this interview that most African people show respect to an older person and "you might get a smack on the head by looking them in the eye" (Video Clip 13, 01:22). This is something that I was not aware of, but I was fascinated to find out more about the cross-cultural complexity that was starting to reveal itself via the interviews, held in the latter stages of structuring. To the wider Australian community, deference to elders and related body language could be confusing in comparison to African Australian culture. Martin Jay notes that eye contact in the West has a long history associated with notions of truth and honesty, and that "the active potential in vision, it's probing, penetrating, searching qualities have been given free rein" (Jay, 1993, p. 63). In relation to actor training, seeking out eye contact with other performers is indicative of active listening, and the passing of a thought-based motivation between characters reveals subtext, as suggested in the context of any given play. These interviews explicitly noted cultural difference, and was not limited to eye contact but also to experience (or lack

thereof) of theatre in Africa and the physicality and movement inherent in African cultures (Video Clip 12 and 13). From reflecting on these recordings, more so than the transcription of the recordings from the captured footage, I was alerted to the embodied physical nuances in the scenarios. Michael Chekhov (1985, p. 108) noted:

> When we want to live…we cannot do it as human beings without somehow having our whole body active. If I sincerely implore someone to do something – whether I move physically or not – I can only implore really fully if I follow the experience when my whole body and being…is complete.

There is at the heart of this a proposition that the outer life must articulate the expression of our often secretive inner life. Chekhov suggests that the more holistically performers engage with their physicality, and the subtext articulated through the body, as well as their spoken subtext, the more complete meaning will be conveyed. In its own way, physical language is another means of expression, replacing dialogue, but by its absence drawing attention to the decision to replace the voice with physical sequences. This point, taken to a natural conclusion, could be argued to position physical expression as yet another voice that makes up the polyvocality in *I am here now*. Therefore, I knew that somehow the physical 'voices' needed to be imbedded into the play, which will be taken up in *Writing*.

The difficulty at this point was to trust that I would correctly select the time when enough was enough, gauge a moment where I distinctly felt (or accepted) that there was enough generated material with which to start writing. However, this poses an assumption upon the process itself – that my approach, based initially on Leigh's methods, had assisted the participants to express everything that they wished to articulate, firstly with their 'originals' and then through development improvisations. But how could I ever truly know if my instinct to end at a given point were exact and allowed the participants to feel they had spoken their 'truth' with their 'voice'? This led me to realise that I had expectations about the outcomes of the process, based on my practice and experience; however, it was complacent to imagine that the devising process would release the 'voices' of the participants and resonate their experiences; that polyvocality taken up in the play would offer self-evident 'truths' about the participants, the 'originals', or me. I never claimed to be an authoritative conduit for African Australian voices; and, in the context of this project, such a mantle would be impossible to give to any one person, perhaps even a redundant exercise, regardless of origin.

M. Towards a fiction

As I headed into the writing stage, I had to discern which characters would move from the workshops into the play. Judicious choices needed to be made, as to what material was used, acknowledging as before that certain voices would be muted at this stage, or exist in a new way after being diminished during structuring, like the example of Rachael. As I proceeded to wind up the improvisatory work, there were things that had not necessarily been brought to light in the improvisations which I would have liked to have seen and heard discussed. On reflection, I felt compelled to generate key dramatic questions drawn from my interest in class, sexuality, religion, and different relationships (intimate, familial and friendship), all of which had been provoked in the workshops. These ideas were formed not only from what was offered explicitly in the devising process, but also in anecdotal conversation and via my observations. For example, Kirsty insisting that paw-paw reminded her of her grandmother was the seed for sequences and metaphors that still exist in the final play. At other times, the way two people would pose while in a dialogue might suggest a metaphor for loss or estrangement and become incorporated into the tonality of the play; these kind of physicalities I saw when reviewing the video material.

I have mentioned several times that it was a challenge applying the Leigh techniques to actors not experienced in theatre making. I have come to reflect on the benefits of working with non-actors. Certainly experienced actors, as part of their craft, seek to divulge a sense of a 'truth' about humanity, often drawn from a personalised 'truth'. This is often an emotional experience and requires a capacity for vulnerability or at least the ability to manufacture a 'practical aesthetic' which allows for a direct access to character objective (Mamet, 1999). This was different from the experience of working with my participants. However, if I had not had people like Malikizoh question the impact of his impressive road test or Rachel feel uncomfortable with the duplicity of the improvisation, I would not have cause to really question what Leigh's methods do and the impact they have. These questions also allowed me to ask how moral and value sets would play out for various characters in the play text. This became a really important theme for the play and I am not entirely sure this would have been the case if I been working with experienced actors who would not necessarily have questioned the legitimacy of the improvisations.

Leigh's demand for taking an objective step back from the 'originals' and the improvisations was very useful at various stages of the project. I really noticed this during the break-out moments between improvisations, both in pre-rehearsal and structuring (discussed below); these break-outs assisted me and the participants to evaluate what the next choice might be, especially in terms of their gathering story threads. My assumption had been that the really important and relevant material devised during this period would exist purely within improvisatory work. I did not anticipate the richness of the insights the participants would bring in our conversations after an improvisation, often when the camera was turned off. Or the moments when we relaxed for a meal break or met for coffee. At first I was perplexed; I considered the material that had arisen in some of these conversations but knew that it was not being taped and was therefore hard to document or speak to after the fact. But these moments continue to stay with me. I reasoned that there was a particular candour that did not happen in the improvisation because the camera acted as a kind of 'curtain up, curtain down' mechanism for the participants and they seemed free to discuss what had just happened, how it reminded them of something or how they related to a particular idea, when the camera was switched off.

As part of Leigh's methods, participants were only supposed to 'meet' in character, the secrecy adding another richer layer to the process; in my workshops, the interim moments between improvisations, particularly during structuring, was the respite that gave them a chance to talk anecdotally through thoughts and ideas, to share insights, that had dawned on them in the improvisatory work. It gave time for both the participants and I to occasionally extend on cultural matters if they saw fit, or more likely were prompted by queries from me for the purposes of my education. I realised, after a while, that these interim moments were potentially full of material too. Therefore, while it was impossible for a single camera to record everything at all times during the workshops, I made the decision that the anecdotal material had to be included because these conversations and their content were in themselves valuable. Returning to Video Clip 2, for example, where John in 'hot seat' mode actually prompts the start of the recording, and drops into the character of Kevin. The instant the cameras stopped, Kevin disappears and John was back to being himself. These moments were incredibly insightful, as they imply the simplicity with which the participants are managing to work the performative and dramaturgical pivot necessary for this type of long form improvisatory work. Returning to the anecdotal debriefs, these worked as a data collection of a different kind and thus also led to another kind of analysis. In addition, this interim

time afforded the participants time to clarify what they had offered and, for my part, further clarification to demonstrate that I understood what I was seeing and hearing too, before moving onto the next improvisation.

Reflecting on this part of the process, I certainly could have used my facilitation role to leverage stories from the participants that were more directly or explicitly about their first experiences in Australia, or their experiences of being of African heritage living in Australia. However, my aim was to explore Leigh's methods and ask how this might lead to an intended and deliberate case for a plurality of voices in a written play text. And this meant that to a certain extent I needed to allow the participants produce and develop characters and story threads that were less about any particular 'issue' and more about the minutiae of everyday life: of hopes, dreams and of every day conversation. Whilst the discussion of 'what is African Australian' opens up deeply ambivalent and complex questions, I did discover different individual experiences and ideas of belonging, that as a playwright I would attempt to incorporate these important notions into a cohesive new play.

I AM HERE NOW

BY MICHAEL McCALL

(devised in collaboration with participants from the African
Australian community of Western Australia)

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8 Campbell Street, Subiaco 6008, Perth, Western Australia

Characters

Errick Nkomo, 55

Nousiba Walsh, 28

Nancy Nkomo, 19

Rachael Nkomo, 75

Amine Lo, 20

Larry Malik, 28

MC Donnell, 18

Khalid Yacean, 28

Barbara, Political Fundraiser Convenor (played by same actor as Nancy)

Driver (played by same actor as Khalid)

Floor Manager, (played by same actor as Nousiba)

<u>Note</u>

Physical Sequence indicates a moment of physical interpretation at the discretion of the director and company. The exact duration of each of these must be determined in the context of production.

(*Beat*) indicates, like in music, a short moment (*Pause*) indicates a moment of physical change.
/ indicates an overlapping of dialogue. Ellipses (…) indicate a silent thought.
Square brackets [] indicates dialogue spoken in a language potentially other than English.

If the show is in production, the language chosen should be selected based on the requirements of the ensemble cast.

PROLOGUE - *the following sequences interweave, crossfading between one another.*

Darkness. Sound of a river, fast flowing, and some shouting in a language which isn't familiar. The occasional gunshot echoes, heard as though the listener was underwater.

From high in the darkness, LARRY MALIK (28) appears. Despite being high above the stage, his movements indicate he is swimming underwater struggling for breath, looking up the night sky above the surface.

NOUSIBA WALSH (30) suddenly breaks through Larry's physical sequence, appearing as if an apparition moving across the stage. The shudder of a police helicopter starts to become more and more noticeable, until the sound becomes intense, overwhelming. The noise consumes NOUSIBA.

AMINE LO breaks out of the darkness and runs from the searchlight of a helicopter above.

Simultaneously, on monitors around the stage, flash up news reports.

NEWS REPORTERS- …yes/ police are on the lookout for a twenty year old male of African appearance/…evaded police in Melbourne and is believe to be heading west/Western Australia, yes.

The monitors, large LED screens, change over the course of the play to present a suggestion of the space each character finds themselves in. *DONNELL MAXWELL (18) perches high in the centre of everything, spinning tunes on his DJ decks, oblivious to the surrounding chaos.*

DONNELL – (affecting C*ountry Music drawl*)…and that was the news in brief. There'll be more country music next week at the same time on Community Radio. Now, *Music from Africa*:

RACHAEL NKOMO (75) enters – the space is seemingly unfamiliar and strange to her – it is her flat; she appears apprehensive throughout this sequence.

KHALID YACEAN appears and hesitates before producing a paw- paw from his pocket and savouring the juice as he eats it.

LARRY appears at payphone to the side of the stage, dialling a number on a pay phone with a large bundle of coins he produce from soft velvet bag he has in his pocket.

(*RADIO STING*) "*Ladeez*, the man who comes through your window every night – *MC DONNELL!* Welcome to *Invada FM*, bringing you the best and brightest outta the West Afro-Aussie sound posse! Yeah, I'm *MC Donnell* and I'll be bringing you *THE BEATS* tonight from the *Down-underground – I am the African Solution to your African Problem*! *DOWN UNDER, COMIN' UP*! Is you listening, *ladeez*? Yeah, here's something special just for you, uh-huh…HIT IT!"

A soundscape of Afro-Australian drum and bass, the soundscape of the play, is heard through the following physical sequence.

NANCY (19) dances balletically across the stage and appears to roll her ankle at one point and fall to the floor. The stage explodes with a helicopter spotlight on AMINE, trying to evade the light. AMINE halts, pinned by the spotlight. NANCY dances en pointe around AMINE – he is captivated by her.

AMINE -...you see someone on their own and you're just influenced in a demonic way where your…hunger is driving you and you want money - it's a want - *a lust*. And I admit I didn't give a thought to the person. When you attack them or *assault* them it's only afterwards you actually think - 'Is that person still alive?' 'Is that person alright?' At the time you're just thinking 'I want the money', or 'I want the phone'. It's kind of like you're an animal, *like a lion*, because you're not thinking about the other person's emotions. (*Beat*) I think about it *now*; I'm not even sure I did it…

AMINE, screaming like a cornered wild creature, as the police helicopter gets louder, deafening.

KHALID (*on the phone*) - Is it too much money? How much money can I get loaned from here. So how much is that? Quarter, hmmm. I've got another two years then to save. *What is it? What I really want to make is a cinema…*

AMINE enters, hesitates for a moment, isolated and distanced from the world around him. Then AMINE races off.

NANCY collapses, exhausted, and then limps off. RACHAEL enters and moves to the area where her lounge room materialises before her. She hesitates, confused by her surroundings, and then makes a phone call.

RACHAEL - Hello? Yes, I'd like to report something about (*whispers*)… Next door… (*Beat*)…

Physical Sequence representing RACHAEL'S imagination of terrorists living next door.

The helicopter light is back. Balaclava-clad security personnel descend from above and bundle RACHAEL offstage.

Scene 1

Night. Empty Perth Airport. NOUSIBA stands alone. DRIVER enters. He looks at her and chooses to stand a little apart.

NOUSIBA - You are waiting for my father?

He produces a sign with "ERRICK NKOMO" written boldly on it. NOUSIBA turns – it's clear she has been crying for many hours. She sways a little, close to fainting. ERRICK NKOMO(55) enters and props her up.

DRIVER - Ah, Mr Nkomo! I hope you had a pleasant trip from Canberra, sir.

DRIVER smiles awkwardly.

DRIVER - I'm very excited to think that come this election you will be a minister!

ERRICK looks sternly at him, then holds his case out to the DRIVER, who takes it and exits to his car.

NOUSIBA looks at ERRICK. He looks sympathetically at his daughter then holds her tightly. They both start to cry. Nousiba draws away.

NOUSIBA – I should have been there. She –

ERRICK – Sshh. We cannot tell when God will take us from this earth. *Nousiba*. Let's go home. (*ERRICK wipes both their eyes with his handkerchief*) Has Martin been in touch? He flies back from Africa this week…

NOUSIBA exits. ERRICK stands alone for a moment. An announcement welcoming visitors to the delights of Perth echoes around the terminal. The lights fade as ERRICK exits.

At the same as this exchange ends in the airport, above them a sodden LARRY MALIK descends from the inky darkness, breathing heavily as though he has breached the surface of a river. LARRY looks around, unsure of where he is, then runs off.

Lights fade.

Scene 2

Various cast members fill seats in the audience. ERRICK is finishing a speech.

ERRICK - ...and to conclude - throughout my party's time in office, we have looked to reflect the aspirations and beliefs of the Australian people. We have shown ourselves responsible and competent with each passing year. This can be seen in our national security record, sustained economic growth, lower interest rates and inflation, declining public debt, low unemployment and significant investment across the sectors in the interests of all Australians. And on that note… (*Beat*)Thank you for your time this evening. Remember to vote wisely on Election Day.

Applause. ERRICK smiles warmly at BARBARA, the Convenor.

BARBARA – Thank you, Senator Nkomo. Now, let's open the floor to the constituents…

BARBARA turns to the audience. She spots a hand up.
Perhaps *you* first?

BARBARA hands the microphone to RACHAEL.

RACHAEL – I wanted to ask Mr Nkomo what he thinks about the increasing violence.

ERRICK – Thanks for your question. What's your name? RACHAEL – Rachael.

ERRICK – Well, *Rachael*, as history shows us, our government has historically made a true effort in terms of gun control
– As for the incidents I think you are referring to…well, guns may be a symptom, but drugs are most definitely the disease.

RACHAEL – It's not the same as it used to be. What will I do?

BARBARA – Thank you.

RACHAEL – Rachael.

BARBARA – Rachael.

ERRICK – *Rachael.* Massive amounts of funding and strategic placing of these funds means that…you are in the best shape you have ever been in. (*Beat*) *You* don't have to worry anymore...

ERRICK holds RACHAEL's gaze. RACHAEL nods her head, seemingly placated by his voice.

BARBARA - Well, we've time for one more…

KHALID - I've got a question!

BARBARA looks to ERRICK.

ERRICK - It's alright.

BARBARA - What's your name?

KHALID - You're planning a new, what, Homeland Security?

ERRICK - Well, we don't call it that here –

KHALID - Why are we being raided, *sir*? *Beat.*

ERRICK - Let me put this plainly for you. National Security is the first responsibility of government. The shadow cast by the security threats of the 21st Century will not pass readily, not any time soon. We must be prepared to use any means to defend our values. I thank God every day that I live in this country and so should we all. If anyone threatens this country the consequences for them will be swift and harsh, *sir*.

KHALID shakes his head. BARBARA steps forward, sensing tension in the room.

KHALID - What are *our* interests, Senator Nkomo? What are our values?

BARBARA – Well, that'll about wrap it up.

The audience applauds ERRICK and quickly disperse from the hall and the actors leave. ERRICK awkwardly farewells them as they leave.

ERRICK - Goodnight. Thank you for taking the time to come down here on such a brisk night.

BARBARA looks into what she sees as an empty auditorium, slightly dejected, perhaps expecting to feel different, then exits. ERRICK goes to RACHAEL, who has not moved.

RACHAEL – You remind me…My husband…he died...

ERRICK – I was going to cook a lovely meal tonight, perhaps *nyama choma*? Shall we go together, mother?

ERRICK and RACHAEL exit together.

Scene 3

Evening. A restaurant, not much more than a class above a burger joint. This should be conveyed by gaudy neon decor and gauche jingle on loop. NANCY (22) and can be heard being sick in a bathroom. When she is done, she quietly returns to her station and is reading a fashion magazine when LARRY MALIK enters, wet.

LARRY – Raining hard.

NANCY does not look up.

Good evening, miss, my name is Larry. Larry Malik. I was wondering if you have any work available.

After a moment, Nancy looks up from her magazine at him.

NANCY – Come back tomorrow. The manager will be here. LARRY – It is very hard to find a job just now, isn't it?
NANCY goes back to her magazine. LARRY is bewitched by the gaudy screens around the restaurant.

LARRY imagines the store mascot appears and dances with him. The jingle for the restaurant resonates around him. He reaches out to touch one of the screens but it flickers and growls at him. He places his hand on his stomach, and then he reaches into his suit jacket and holds forth an ATM card.

LARRY - I don't know if I have anything - on this. So, would you care to swipe it first, before you serve me, to check?

NANCY - What do you want?

LARRY smiles broadly and points to a display behind her.

LARRY - The *meal*.

NANCY – The children's meal?

LARRY points to the figurines on the counter. NANCY takes the ATM card from him and swipes it. They wait for what seems a long time.

LARRY – (*indicating the toys*) I have four children, so I must wait until I have all four, then I can send them home.

NANCY looks at him.

It's good that we check.

NANCY – Here's your burger.

NANCY hands him a greasy burger.

NANCY – I'll bring the rest over when the card goes through.

LARRY takes the burger and sits down to eat.

NANCY realises the transaction has not processed. Reticently, she walks over to LARRY, who is relishing a bite of the burger.

NANCY - Your transaction didn't process.

LARRY hesitates, unsure what to do.

NANCY - Do you have cash? (*Beat*)It's late.

LARRY - But that's what… That's *why* I said. Check before?

She takes the burger away. LARRY sighs.

Miss, before you go…can I tell you a joke someone told me today?

NANCY dumps the burger in the bin. She smiles apologetically and moves behind the counter. LARRY stands.

Joseph and Patrice are beggars.

They beg in different areas of town.

Joseph begs just as long as Patrice but only collects $2 to
$3 every day.

Patrice brings home a suitcase FULL of $10 notes, drives a
Mercedes, lives in a mortgage-free house and has a lot of money to
spend.

Joseph says to Patrice, 'I work just as long and hard as you do but
how do you bring home a suitcase full of $10 notes every day?'

Patrice says, 'Look at your sign, what does it say?'

Joseph's sign reads; 'I have no work, a wife and 6 kids to
support'.

Patrice says, 'No wonder you only get two or three dollars!' Joseph
says... 'So what does your sign say?'
Patrice shows Joseph his sign....

It reads: 'I only need another $10 to move back to Africa.'

They look at each other for a moment. NANCY exits.

Physical sequence. LARRY imagines music from home playing,
replacing the musak, and then dancing around the restaurant. NANCY
re-enters and catches LARRY in the middle of his fantastical dance.

LARRY moves to a payphone to the side of the restaurant and puts a heap of change into the slot, then dials a long number which is written on what is obviously a well-thumbed napkin.

LARRY - Hello. Hello? I…it's me…I know, I know. I'm trying… I don't know how long it will take to cross the border…I am speaking to a man… The man has told me that he can get you out from the camp and onto a boat to Italy - and the children… It may take a little time. You must stay where you are, you know how dangerous to travel – It is night here… I am leaving one, and going to another… I still have your napkin – the one that you wrote on - 'Be true to yourself'. (*Beat*) Yes...tell them I miss them...

LARRY reluctantly hangs up. The restaurant dissolves and he begins his night swim again, struggling against the current, the memory of his children singing resonating loudly in his ears. He starts to struggles as he swims and disappears into the darkness.

Scene 4

Sound of a film projector rolling. The light of cinema screen: a black and white movie flickers from the darkness, bringing the stage once again to life. It becomes apparent it is an image being projected onto a wall, which shows "La Noire de…" – a 1966 Senegalese film about a young African girl going to France to work as a nanny. KHALID and DONNELL stand centre of the space, lit by the movie. DONNELL has a basketball lolling under his arm.

KHALID – It is the smell of my childhood. Can you smell it, abu? I love the smell of popcorn!

DONNELL shakes his head.

And it is the smell of opportunity. Here, there is no cinema.
About...50 people I know, at least, would come - every night!

DONNELL – How will you pay for it?

KHALID –Investors. Like my fruit and flower shop, we share the
cost. You see, I used to check the tickets at a cinema when I first
arrived in Australia, at the *big* cinema. We used to *make money*. I
had a meeting with the bank last week…

DONNELL has been engrossed in the film.

KHALID - I can get into one cinema more than a 100 people. I told
them. And there are a lot more interesting African films than
cinemas now show…Nollywood in Nigeria is huge! And what makes it
Nollywood? African accents. Cultures. Just good and successful
movies… Anyway…How old are you now?

DONNELL – Eighteen last month.

KHALID – Before we discuss this matter I need to ask you a
question. Have you stopped with the *trouble*?

DONNELL – Yes.

KHALID – What are you doing to live a better life?

DONNELL – I have friends invite me to a mosque now and then
–
They enter the main space of the community hall.

KHALID – This is it, not much to look at - what do you plan to do in my community centre?

DONNELL - I wanna do kinda like what my dad's done. He sells hip hop clothing. But I want to make hip hop classes. It'll be like a class where they can do what they want to do and come to the centre. There is no centre for that kind of thing anywhere around here. We need a centre cos this is Australia. This means that the kids who go through here, can say where they landed, and they've all been to classes. Might even get a set on radio.

KHALID smiles.

DONNELL - What?

KHALID – You. Trying to look and sound like an American. So they hear you on the radio? And, what, they want to be like you, abu?

DONNELL - Yas, to the untrained ear. I like the way it goes. The lyrics on each song change me, say to me…*depends*. To me hip hop *is* my culture, it's my life; it means the world to me. Well most of the time, let's just say, I don't have an artist here that I can look up too. I listen, second, to the lyrics. I listen to the music first - it makes sense.

KHALID - It all sounds the same to me -

DONNELL - It's telling stories. When I'm reading the lyrics - not rapping or anything - it's a story. But what the lyric is giving to the person, that's important.

Physical sequence. DONNELL begins to do tricks with his basketball, imagining himself at an NBL playoff free throw moment in Los Angeles.

DONNELL - I want to be something. I want to make something. Like you and the cinema. And one day I need to go to America, and turn to American people, y'know?

KHALID - Always with the basketball. Always with America. Abu, you are too short to be Lebron James. Your father has done well since he arrived here. You would do well to remember that and follow his lead. One day his store will be yours.

DONNELL – He doesn't let me forget.

KHALID – That's because he is a *wise* man. Your father will support you with this?

DONNELL – I have saved $1000...yes.

KHALID – I'll just put the lights out and then we can go. It is good to see you *finally* working towards something, abu.

DONNELL – Donnell.

KHALID laughs and exits. DONNELL stands looking around the empty centre, dreaming of a centre filled with African Australian hip hop. Crossfade of lights.

Scene 5

NOUSIBA's apartment. Invada FM plays. NOUSIBA enters. The screens project professionally taken images from refugee camps in Africa. One of them features Martin, her husband, and her holding a baby. This one captures NOUSIBA's attention for a moment. She begins to cry. She takes out a battered green cardboard box from behind a screen and rolls a joint. There is an intensity of focus in her task. Then she can't find anything to light the joint with.

The phone rings. She stares at the phone for a time. After a while, she answers. It's Martin, her husband.

NOUSIBA – Yes, karibu. (*Draw near, you are welcome*)…Are you back?

NOUSIBA checks herself in the wall mirror. Martin can be heard speaking on the other end. While he does, NOUSIBA looks at the photographs.

Yes, they arrived last week. I'm surprised how well you captured the…That's not what I - To understand… You're an aid worker, Martin. You will always be from *elsewhere*!

Pause.

Forget it. Please, forget it! *Sorry?*

Pause.

You should have been here? Why were you not here?

Pause.

Are you there? (*Beat*) I don't think I can - (*Beat*) I don't think I can love anymore. Yes, let's not talk anymore about this. Wait until I'm… (*Beat*) You can live the life you were supposed to live. Sorry…I'm a mess. We can still be friends, if you'd like?

NOUSIBA slowly hangs up. On the screen is an old home movie of MARTIN playing with his baby daughter on the beach. NOUSIBA collapses beside the screen. She touches the screen.

NOUSIBA - Kwa keri ya kvonana (*Farewell, till we meet again*). *Lights fade.*

Scene 6

Backdrop of a city comes into view. It is a backdrop in a TV Studio, a current affairs programme. A hive of activity.

FLOOR MANAGER - Thanks for coming in short notice, Mr Nkomo.

ERRICK – *Errick*.

FLOOR MANAGER - The reports on the raids. *Well*. They've *touched a nerve*.

ERRICK'S image appears large on the screens around him. Close ups on eyes and mouth. Final checks.

FLOOR MANAGER - So, *Errick*, just look straight ahead…

ERRICK – I do this a lot –

Complete silence descends, as the lights fade down to isolate ERRICK at the centre of the studio. After a moment:

ERRICK…Hello, Kelly!

Thank you for having me on your show.

Yes, the dog show was quite the experience. (*laughs*) I prefer cats myself. Elections!

(*ERRICK listens*) Aha. Yes, obviously - I should note that I think of myself as an Australian citizen first and foremost - after all you need to be a citizen to be a member of parliament, as we've seen in the past - but there are issues I have come to understand, that I am arguably better placed to…

What is it they say? Cometh the hour, cometh the man.

I am aware of the incidents you are talking of. But I haven't seen…

And, I would say, some exist within the African Australian population, as much as that pains me –

…The impact that our tough response is having amongst certain communities is *challenging*…

Due to the fact that through the measures our government implemented throughout our first term…

Kelly, I'm optimistic that in the life of the next parliament *we can*…I can't comment, Kelly. That's a State…

I think it would be naïve to sidestep the real community concern on these matters. The *perpetrators of fear* amongst certain sections of our community…

I don't have that information here in front of me. So…

Accepted. Heavy handed – no.

Yes, the instances of that - as I was saying - are very minimal.

No, despite the *ranting* of the opposition...

Well, I don't have figures in front of me.

Kelly, I'm not in the habit of throwing out *speculative* figures…

Can I finish…? (*laughs*)

Can...

Look, there have been… a number of independent enquiries into the resourcing, independence and objectivity of our intelligence agencies…

It is not good to set up a trap when the bird to be caught is watching –

I don't think my…(*sighs*) Kelly…
Kelly?

We seem to have lost contact. Something's *wrong* with the earpiece.
No. I can't hear anything. Kelly, can you hear me? Can you hear *me*,
Kelly? No. *Can you hear me*? (*To FLOOR MANAGER*) Shall we continue…?

FLOOR MANAGER - We're out.

Lights up in the studio. FLOOR MANAGER steps forward with phone

It's about your mother. Don't panic but it looks like she's been
mugged. Your mum said, it was a young African male.

(*Beat*)

The FLOOR MANAGER shrugs.

FLOOR MANAGER - Thought you should know.

ERRICK glares at the FLOOR MANAGER.

ERRICK –…If you are requested to carry someone's drums, it does not
mean you are requested to play. (I*nto the phone*) Hello, it's me…

Scene 7

*Restaurant. It is later than before. AMINE has been watching LARRY
smiling at NANCY and moves to the table beside him.*

AMINE - *This*. This is the hardest bit. The *beginning*. Your first
lines, your opening gambit; the first thing you say.

LARRY – Sorry?

AMINE - You probably won't like what I have to say. No. In fact, I *guarantee* you will not like what I have to say. You want her?

LARRY - I'm married.

AMINE – Dog! But that's part of the fun, the thing between – ah, there it is…let me see the *smile*.

LARRY – Smile?

AMINE - That African *smile*. Show me. Uh huh.

LARRY – My wife says I have a warm smile.

AMINE – The smile is the ultimate betrayal of your words. If a lion smiles, it's just before it sinks its teeth in. The *smile*…

LARRY - I…? My name is Larry. Larry Malik. I am from Congo-

AMINE – Well done. I'm from Melbourne. You want to find out her name.

LARRY - The girl…?

AMINE – You want her to notice and appreciate you, huh? Okay. Watch and learn – *follow me*, Larry Malik. I'll show you how a Zulu hunts his prey…

AMINE moves deftly through the restaurant, like a big cat on the prowl, towards NANCY.

AMINE – What's your name?

NANCY – Nancy.

AMINE – I'm Amine. "You are a very unusual flower, which has attracted my eye".

AMINE looks at LARRY.

NANCY – Are you following me?

AMINE – It's from a poem that I am writing. For you.

NANCY moves away from AMINE.

AMINE – Where are you from?

NANCY – Why? (*Beat*)I grew up in South Africa, but my grandmother's family is from Tanzania and we moved here when I was ten.

AMINE – Do you know Zulu?

NANCY shakes her head.

AMINE – I am Zulu. If you are from South Africa, you should know Zulu and other languages. I don't think you look South African.

NANCY – I know what Zulu is. Could you leave me alone please?

AMINE – No. Am I doing something wrong to you?

NANCY – Can you leave now?

AMINE – Not without your number.

NANCY – I'm not giving you my number.

AMINE – How can you say no to this smile? (*Beat*) Tell me the thing you miss most about South Africa. Then I'll go. Promise.

NANCY – (*indicating LARRY*) Does he say anything?

LARRY smiles.

AMINE – The thing you miss most about home?

NANCY looks at AMINE for a moment. Thunder rumbles outside, followed by the sound of heavy rain.

NANCY – This is stupid. (*Beat*) Okay. Paw-paw. My Grandmother makes paw-paw jam, which she puts on tarts. When I think about the taste, I think of Port Shepstone. It's almost impossible to find here.

AMINE – I will find you paw-paw.

NANCY - (*smiles*) Will you now? And where are you from?

AMINE - Melbourne.

ERRICK enters in a hurry with an umbrella.

ERRICK – I have to go to another community meeting. Your grandmother has been hurt –

NANCY – What?

ERRICK – And your sister isn't doing well. You should visit.

NANCY – I don't know what to say to her.
(*Pause*)

ERRICK - I don't know why you work here. Let's go. Let the others tidy up.

ERRICK exits. NANCY gets her coat and follows ERRICK. Before she leaves she stops by LARRY.

NANCY – Goodnight, Larry Malik.

NANCY drops four toy figurines from the meal on LARRY'S table. LARRY stands, speechless at her kindness. NANCY glances at AMINE, then exits.

AMINE – You look like you need a place to stay? Don't forget your toys.

LARRY - Where?

AMINE - I passed a community centre earlier; we can get through a window. Going to be a wet night.

They exit together. Thunder grows louder. Somewhere in the distance a car alarm goes off.

Scene 8

[This is an example of a scene where dialogue could be spoken in the actors chosen language].

The night is becoming colder and wetter. Lightning lights the night intermittently. KHALID stops and watches some drunken souls in the park. They appear happy and content, but with a certain sadness that reflects upon KHALID.

At the Town Hall steps, KHALID stops and puts his head on his knees, exhausted. LARRY walks by with AMINE.

KHALID catches up with LARRY and puts his hand on his shoulder, which surprises him.

AMINE - Hey, man, what do you want?

KHALID – Assalamualaikum.

LARRY - Aleikum-salam!

AMINE - Who is this?

LARRY - We know each other, don't we? From before?

AMINE – I'll go ahead – it's at the bottom of this street. Don't be long.

AMINE exits. LARRY and KHALID stand in silence. LARRY salutes KHALID.

KHALID - Don't do that, that is the past...I am in charge of three fruit shops. God is good, brother.

KHALID shakes LARRY'S hand.

LARRY - Man, you're going grey around the temples.

KHALID - You know what they say: if a beard were to signify wisdom, a goat would be a genius. Where are you going?

LARRY shrugs.

This is a beautiful place – but not a place I would want to die in.

KHALID - You need to find a job.

LARRY - I haven't been here long. [I am alone].

KHALID – "The deeds of a man are greater than the details of his birth".

LARRY – After all that happened, Khalid, I'm determined to make headway in this life, God be good.

KHALID – A clean break. But some advice. In this city, you mustn't look too desperate. They can smell it a mile off. Australia - she can be cruel. But how is it that you haven't got something better?

LARRY – Like what?

KHALID - You should be able to use some of the skills the army taught you?

LARRY - I walked up and down this street all day but there's nothing that I would call a *good job*.

KHALID – There is much opportunity.

KHALID puts his arm around LARRY.

Khalid. I know that look. You have to put it behind you now. (*Beat*)
[This, my brother, this is life. It has a tendency to be shorter
than we think. So you have to embrace it]. You cannot change what
happened back home. (*Beat*) Here is my shop.

LARRY - Only fruit and flowers you sell?

KHALID - I have *so much* to teach you, brother…FRUIT. Fruit is life…
I would go so far to say that I would consider my life a failure if
I let you die in this town without passing on that knowledge...Where
are you staying?

LARRY - I have a place…with that guy.

KHALID - Friend of yours?

LARRY - I had better go.

KHALID - This is my shop. Come see me soon.

LARRY departs after AMINE.

Scene 9
*A car alarm is sounding. RACHAEL is standing in the dark in a
chair. The now violent lightning storm outside creates a
silhouette. ERRICK and NANCY come in. RACHAEL doesn't respond.
ERRICK turns the light on.*

ERRICK – The doctor was here earlier. He said she will be alright.
I'll let you take it from here.

NANCY – You're not staying?

ERRICK – Nancy…the election!

ERRICK turns attention to RACHAEL.

ERRICK – How are you? Mother?
The car alarm turns off.

ERRICK – I have to go now. I will be back tomorrow at some stage.

NANCY – Why were you sitting in the dark?

RACHAEL – I was fine until your father turned on the light.

ERRICK – 'Thank you'. 'Thank you, *Errick*, for looking after me'?

RACHAEL – I was fine. Until you brought me here.

ERRICK shakes his head and moves to leave. RACHAEL takes his arm.

RACHAEL – Good luck, child.

ERRICK kisses her softly on the cheek.

ERRICK – (*To Nancy*) Don't let me down.

ERRICK exits. NANCY watches RACHAEL, who appears lost in her thoughts.

NANCY – Want to watch T.V.?

RACHAEL – Nothing's on.

NANCY – There's that show you like –

RACHAEL– You smell like a burger…Can you hand me my medicine. It's in that bag.

NANCY sighs and retrieves the medicine from a handbag.

NANCY – I'm going to have a shower.

RACHAEL – Can you turn off the lights so I can watch the lightning? It reminds me of home. A long time ago.

NANCY turns the lights down.

Physical sequence. RACHAEL begins to dance while the lighting and rain crescendos. She continues to dance throughout the next section.

RACHAEL – Jealous? Now you know where you got your talent from. We can cook tonight. Just like we used too.

RACHAEL embraces NANCY.

NANCY – You've perked up! I can't remember how.

RACHAEL – Cooking is like riding a bike, girl – you never forget. What do I have in…ah, I know, we will make my Mendazi Cake. Get me the ingredients – do you remember?

NANCY – Flour? Eggs?

RACHAEL – Flour, eggs, sugar, baking powder, vanilla sugar and butter. Hurry.

NANCY collects the ingredients from around the kitchen. RACHAEL beats the eggs.

RACHAEL - How are things at home? You have been very quiet lately.

NANCY –   Just tired dancing.

RACHAEL - You have an audition coming up.

NANCY - It was last week. Dad is a bit tense with the election.

RACHAEL glances at NANCY who avoids her gaze, continues beating the eggs.

RACHAEL - Where is the vanilla sugar?

NANCY finds it.

RACHAEL – Your father has high expectations of himself. He's trying to prove something... Always trying to be better than everyone else! Pass me that bowl. Now rub the butter in with your fingers…

NANCY – No lumps!

RACHAEL – No lumps, that's right! You are like your father. Put the oil on. I heard a woman at church from Guinea saying the other day *they* invented Mendazi! Everyone knows it comes from East Africa.

NANCY – Do you have any of your Tanzanian coffee?

RACHAEL – *Of course*. Mendazi without coffee is no good. Have you spoken to your sister? I have some mixed spices to add to it this time too – cassia, nutmeg, coriander, ginger. You will thank me for this one day, child. A woman who cannot cook will not hold down a man.

RACHAEL goes to the CD player.

NANCY – Is this going to be that cheesy African music again?

RACHAEL – Tanzanian music! Don't roll your eyes! You haven't answered me.

NANCY turns the CD player on. The music seems to entrance RACHAEL and she halts, looking slightly confused.

RACHAEL - The child was playing and the baby fell. Nothing could be done.

NANCY - Gran? There's nothing anyone could do…

RACHAEL - Into the ground it went and started to go under.

NANCY - Gran? The baby was in the bath. Nousiba left it too long alone -

RACHAEL - No. You're wrong! You see, people built on the lake with garbage from the tip, so they could extend the town out across it. And they had to let it settle for a while to become firmer. Of course, children - their natural curiosity gets the better of them.

NANCY - Gran, you should sit.

RACHAEL - Your father was lucky the other children were nearby. I remember the day – your father came tearing in and told us what was happening.

The women contentedly knead and mix and prepare the bread. RACHAEL sings along with the song. As they do so and encourages NANCY to join in.

RACHAEL – I get a little confused sometimes.

NANCY – You've been traumatised. Did you manage to get a look at his face?

RACHAEL – Can't remember much – it was dusk and the sun was behind him. A young man. I don't want to talk about it anymore…

NANCY – Awwh, Grandmother. (*She hugs RACHAEL*).

RACHAEL – Turn the gas down on the oil. Have you rolled it thinly?

NANCY – Yes - I think that's okay?

RACHAEL – Don't forget, too thick, hard to cook. Look at that frown - you are so like your father...These days he takes life a too seriously, since your mother passed, God bless her.

Silence. RACHAEL sits wearily.

RACHAEL – So is there a boy in your life? Look at your hands. Rachael's Mendazi Cake will be ready soon! We need to fatten you up, chicken.

Lights fade.

Scene 10

ERRICK flashes up on the screens in another interview.

ERRICK - …do I believe that Australia has some kind of amnesia of ethnicity or race? That's a fairly loaded question, wouldn't you say? Alright. I don't think race is central to the discussion. Why this moment? Why this moment to pose the question of my 'blackness' in Australian politics? Alright, I can see you don't want to let this go…okay, say that I do try to answer this question. (*Beat*) How about we talk about something less…why don't we talk about sport?

Scene 11

NOUSIBA is agitated, smoking. Loud knocking on the door.

NOUSIBA - There is nothing more to say, Martin. No moment is ever the same, isn't that what you always said? Go away! Go away!! You made your decisions. You weren't here! You weren't here.

Knocking ceases. NOUSIBA sits.

There was only me and her. Now there's only me.

NOUSIBA turns up the radio, loud. She goes to a wardrobe located behind or within one of the screens and takes out an elegant evening dress. She disrobes and puts on the dress. She takes the chair to a balcony and stands up on the chair looking down, into darkness.

Scene 12

Physical sequence.   DONNELL is lost in another Hip Hop fantasy.

LARRY and   AMINE are trying to break into the Community Centre. DONNELL approaches them.

DONNELL - What you guys doing?

AMINE – Look at this guy!

DONNELL – 'Look at this guy'?

AMINE – What's with all the American shit?

DONNELL – It ain't shit. This is my style.

AMINE – Style? How about I do a little rhyme for you:

Walking through Africa, what do I see?

I see no ladies looking at me…

127

Finished.

AMINE takes DONNELL'S basketball and throws it a long way off. DONNELL retreats slightly from AMINE.

AMINE – What?

AMINE slaps DONNELL on the head, knocking his cap off.

DONNELL – What's your problem, man?

As DONNELL bends to pick up cap AMINE starts to lay into him.

LARRY appears and pulls AMINE off of DONNELL. AMINE wrestles away from LARRY who stands between him and DONNELL.

LARRY - What are you doing, man? Are you crazy?

AMINE – Alright. (*To LARRY*) You stay here then, with him.

LARRY follows as AMINE begins to stalk off.

AMINE - (*To DONNELL*) I'll remember you if our paths cross again, *friend*.

AMINE exits.

LARRY looks at DONNELL, who is straightening himself out.

DONNELL – What?

LARRY – I don't have anywhere to go.

128

DONNELL – Not my problem.

LARRY – I might spend the night here. In the doorway. Is that
alright?

DONNELL – Not my place to say. (*Beat*)No job?

LARRY shakes his head.

DONNELL – I don't think I can help you. Maybe try the fruit shop,
or the café.

(*Pause*)

LARRY – Are you an American?

DONNELL – This is my style.

LARRY – But you are wearing the American flag.

DONNELL – Nah, I'm into Hip Hop, y'know?

LARRY – I do not understand why you are dressed like an American.

DONNELL – Enough of the American, man!

LARRY - Where are you from?

DONNELL – My dad comes from between Tanzania and Burundi. Near the
Lake. But I've lived here most of my life.

LARRY – Amine, that guy, from South Africa. Zulu.

DONNELL – I saw the movie.

LARRY shrugs.

LARRY – I'm from the Congo.

DONNELL – I went to school with lots of kids from the Congo. (*Pause*) I might go before it rains.

LARRY – You are meeting someone?

DONNELL – Just did. I wanna hire this club to teach Hip Hop. They open it to African community, for different classes.

LARRY – And people will come? And you will teach them?

DONNELL – 'Faith, true.

LARRY – They will pay you?

DONNELL – I'm pretty good with finding money, boss. (*Showing off*) My *American* clothes. They're from my Dad's.

LARRY – I might buy an American jacket once I have a job –

DONNELL – Man, what you wear – you cannot be serious? You will never pull it off.

LARRY – What is wrong with what I am wearing?

DONNELL – We gotta get you sorted out.

LARRY – I like these clothes.

LARRY shows off his unfashionable clothes. DONNELL laughs.

DONNELL – *That* goes first! You gotta start to embrace being African and get gone anything that makes you look like a refugee from Harry Potter the fuck out.

LARRY – I don't think –

DONNELL – I mean, you probably looking at me thinking this boy is all talk and no action, but I'm committed to the betterment of the individual through Hip Hop.
LARRY - What do you mean?

DONNELL - My dad said that it's important to be truly invested in an idea so that you can make the world better by it. I invested myself in Hip Hop. I think I can change a bit of the world around me. But I might need some help, Larry. You up to it?

LARRY – Me? I'm not sure I understand what you mean?

DONNELL – You seem like a cool guy. And it's all a matter of perspective in business – you've been up front?

LARRY – Why do you speak with an American accent?

DONNELL – That's the shit I'm talking about. You look at Hip Hop and you see an American *forgery*? Lots of people criticise African-Aussie

Hip Hop for being *unAustralian*, what the fuck, an example of how we've been dominated by American culture.

LARRY – Have you?

DONNELL - But Aussie Hip Hop also brings with it ideas about identity. There are so few spaces to allow that to happen around here. That's important for a lot of kids outta Africa. But it's hard to find our own identity in a country that hasn't sorted out its own identity.

LARRY – I haven't been here long...

DONNELL - Problem is that once you leave these shores, you realise how little part we play in the grand scheme. I want to make it happen for the kids, get them outta here.

LARRY – You're best to stay here.

(*Pause*)

Do you think your guy is coming?

DONNELL – I don't think he thinks I'm serious.

LARRY – My name is Larry. Larry Malik.

DONNELL – Cool. MC Donnell.

DONNELL makes to do an elaborate greeting with his fist. LARRY is thrown and the greeting becomes awkward. DONNELL goes slower to allow LARRY to get it right.

LARRY – Do you mind if I wait with you?

DONNELL shakes his head. He takes his headphones out of his ears and offers them to LARRY. LARRY puts the earphones in.

LARRY –This is your music?

LARRY starts trying to dance an old school style of break dancing.

LARRY – Grandmaster Flash.

DONNELL – Man, with your moves and my music, we could do some great things, man!

LARRY – You are offering me a job? (*Pause*)

DONNELL – You think you can teach them moves to kids?

LARRY thinks for a moment, then nods. They handshake again.

DONNELL – MC Donnell and Grandmaster Larry, together at last!

Fade.

Scene 13

Shadows lick the sides of walls. RACHAEL stands alone in her lounge, which is filling with smoke, humming 'He's got the Whole World in His Hands' then moves to listen through the wall with a glass. RACHAEL seems to hear conversations through the wall, conversations

that terrify her. She lifts the phone, dials a number written on a card.

RACHAEL - Yes, hello. My name is Rachael Nkomo. *Yes.* Lots of people coming and going at all hours. Perhaps you could send a policeman to check.... Yes... I think I need saved.

Rachael puts the phone down and sits on her chair.

Nancy, are you there, child? Are you home? Nancy, I think the Mendazi Cake is burning?

No answer. RACHAEL begins to hum a gospel hymn, almost inaudibly at first.

Physical sequence and sounds spring from her memory as Rachael's imagination begins to explode around her on the screens and reveals a past brimming with conflict.

Scene 14

From the darkness a phone is ringing. NOUSIBA runs from the darkness, screaming for the loss of her child. She collapses. The phone stops ringing. Only the sound of her breathing can be heard.

The phone rings again. Nousiba answers.

NOUSIBA - …

She holds the phone to her ear. Something is said.

NOUSIBA - *Umechelewa*…too late. Please don't call me, Martin. I want to be alone.

NOUSIBA places the phone down in front of her. After a while, she stands and looks at the phone on the ground. Images of her father at a door stop flashes up on the screens. The scene dissolves around Nousiba, who slowly exits, and becomes the…

Scene 15

…fruit shop. LARRY is working while watching ERRICK on the news channel, using a knife to open fruit boxes. KHALID enters.

KHALID - Ah, working hard, my friend. I am glad you came back this morning. (*Beat*) I forgot you knew how to use a knife so well.

LARRY - I could be working harder, no?

KHALID - Your words, not mine. Relax, my friend. You are in Australia now. (KHALID *watches the TV for a moment*) Last thing this country needs – *African* politicians.

LARRY – Don't you want someone to give us a voice?

KHALID – Ah, you need to open your eyes, Larry Malik. He won't be standing for me. Or for you. Or for anyone. He's running for *them*. You'll see…

LARRY – But this is Australia.

KHALID – Your point?

LARRY – …he might be good for Africans who have come here. He might understand what we need?

KHALID – And what do we need?

LARRY does not reply.

KHALID - I saw him give a speech. He is against Muslims, you know that? He supported the raids last week.

LARRY – I didn't know.

KHALID - His party legitimises their place by having a black man out front. And *we* will suffer for it. Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah Most High be upon him, says 'I fear for my people only the leaders who lead men astray'…

LARRY – God is good.

KHALID - Anyway, I think he will find it an elbow licking. And why we all must work hard and create our own destiny. Money is the tool to realise that. How you use money is important. If Allah gives you wealth, it's a test.

Pause.

LARRY - And if Allah gives you nothing?

KHALID – That too is a test. He tells us to pay charity to help those who are in need. Your wealth is given to you as a trust from Allah, and Allah will question you on the day of judgement about how you spent it. Yes...

Pause.

As long as you get all your work done I'll be happy to spend it on you. (*Beat*) I will vote for him. This African senator…

KHALID switches the channel.

LARRY - You know what I was thinking

KHALID – About women?

LARRY - I was thinking about Islam again. I was thinking about that.

KHALID – Listen, I tell you something for free, Larry Malik. Religion is *common sense*.

KHALID laughs.

KHALID – It can be dangerous to watch too much television.

KHALID turns the TV off. He switches on the radio. Sudanese music.

LARRY - I usually don't listen to music too much, because if I do, I feel I want to be like that. Like the musicians.

KHALID - You don't even know what music is!

KHALID starts to dance a little around the store.

LARRY – I do miss dancing a little.

KHALID - Music is *everything*. (*Beat*) I remember home. You had no coordination.

LARRY - Perhaps I'll show you.

KHALID – Yes!
LARRY takes position.

LARRY - Stand like this, shake your hips.

LARRY shows KAHLID.

They dance.

KAHLID – That's great!

LARRY – I must stop. I only show you a little. You're very good.

KHALID shows off his moves.

LARRY - What do you call that? Are you hurt?

LARRY laughs.

KHALID - Not everyone who chased the zebra caught it, but he who caught it chased it!

They laugh, as NANCY enters. LARRY and NANCY recognise each other.

KHALID   – Okay, that's me for today. I'm going to play basketball. I need to keep fit or my wife complains. She watches too much Hollywood, men with the six pack. You know what I mean?

LARRY shrugs. KHALID moves closer to LARRY.

KHALID – Oh, Larry, I may need to go away, business. I want you to look after the shop.

LARRY – Where are you going?

KHALID – Somewhere I can play basketball more - and if my wife is happy I am happy.

LARRY – When will you go?

KHALID – Tonight. I will come back later to drop you the keys.

KHALID exits. LARRY smiles, then moves to the telephone. He takes the napkin out…

Fade.

Scene 16

TV Studio.

ERRICK is talking to himself in the mirror.

ERRICK – This whole campaign has been hopeless. You have been off your game. *You* know what you have been through to get here. (*Beat*)

You profess all of these ideas, *Errick*, but in the end you're just a *fence sitter*.

ERRICK adjusts his tie.

ERRICK – We'll talk after this is over.

He moves away from the mirror. The FLOOR MANAGER arrives.

FLOOR MANAGER – Good to go?

ERRICK moves quickly to a stool and puts his ear piece in. Lights fade again to isolate Errick.

ERRICK – Lisa…Good to be with you…

Fade.

Scene 17

The community centre. Decks are set up and DONNELL is doing his thing while LARRY dances.

DONNELL - You're late!

LARRY –   I know, I have to work.

DONNELL - You found a job?

LARRY - I'm very excited, are you excited?

DONNELL – I'll be more excited when we have people show up.

140

LARRY – They will come!

DONNELL – Well, we can only hope. Did you paper the flyers around?

LARRY – Flyers? They are here.

LARRY pulls out a box of flyers.

LARRY – I didn't know what you wanted done with them. And I got a job this morning.

DONNELL – Man! How else is anyone going to know we are on this afternoon?

Pause.

Look, that's good you got a job. One of us has to stay here. (Beat) Look, I'll go. I know Fremantle people. I'll get them to pass the word around. Now, *partner*, I'm giving you this.

DONNELL gives LARRY the bag he's been carrying.

DONNELL – Look inside.

LARRY looks. He is taken aback.

DONNELL – That's a thousand dollars. Don't leave here without this. In fact, just don't leave.

LARRY – I've never seen so much money.

DONNELL – Loan from my Dad. Okay, I'll be back in around an hour. Don't move. And don't touch my decks!

DONNELL exits. LARRY mimics an irate Donnell. He then looks in the bag again and shakes his head. He then exits for the bathroom, just as AMINE enters. AMINE heads to the decks and plays around inexpertly, perhaps even damaging them. LARRY enters.

AMINE – Yo, what are you doing? You working here now?

LARRY – We're going to run a Hip Hop class –

AMINE – You? And *the American*? That's funny.

LARRY – He thinks we can make some money. Do good. As partners.

AMINE – Don't believe him…you will make no money, Larry. You told me about your family. That's why you are doing all this, yes?

LARRY – I got another job. (*Beat*) Do you really think we have no chance to make money?

AMINE points out the lack of customers.

AMINE - Stick to the other job. This won't pay for your family coming here. And I don't think you want to let them down?

LARRY – I think I'm going to be sick. Excuse me.

LARRY puts down the bag and heads to the bathroom. AMINE laughs. While LARRY audibly hurls in the bathroom, AMINE plays around with

the decks. Noticing the bag, his curiosity takes him over to look in the bag. He takes out the money. Then puts it back. LARRY remerges.

AMINE – Look, Larry. I like you. You seem like a good guy. So I want you to know that I am here because I'm in trouble.

LARRY - Trouble? Is that why you are hiding on the streets?

AMINE - I owe some people money. Back in Melbourne. And I couldn't repay them in time. I have to find money from somewhere. That's why I'm here. (Beat) Because of me, my brother is in a lot of trouble. Serious.

LARRY - I'm sorry. I'm not sure how I can help -

LARRY then panics as he realises he has left the money bag down. He goes to it and looks inside. AMINE looks at him.

AMINE - Did you think I'd take the money?

LARRY – I need to make a phone call.

AMINE – Okay, go make your call. I'll wait. I've nowhere to be.

LARRY - Amine, I'm sorry…Thank you.

AMINE - I'm the only friend you have, Larry. You're the only friend I have.

LARRY smiles, starts to exit with the money bag. He stops.

LARRY - I'm sorry for you loss. My friend.

LARRY places the bag down and exits. After a moment, AMINE turns his attention once more to the bag and the money. He hesitates for a moment over the bag, takes it and exits.

Fade.

Scene 18

Music is loud. NOUSIBA steps out onto her balcony. She stares out, watching the goings on of the people passing below, before tending to the plants around her. She shivers a little. She looks down at the road below, listening to the hum of the Fremantle. She goes back into the flat and puts music on. NOUSIBA steps out again, looks over, shakes her head to the music, then steps back in, reappearing shortly with a chair. She places it at the edge of the balcony and warily, in her heels, steps up onto it. She closes her eyes, letting her body become lighter. She violently sneezes, having to stop herself from overbalancing.

NOUSIBA – Shit.

ERRICK enters carrying a bouquet of flowers. NOUSIBA steps off the chair.

Silence.

NOUSIBA - (*indicating flowers*) I don't like white or yellow flowers.

She goes in and lowers the music. ERRICK takes out the white and yellow flowers. NOUSIBA reappears.

NOUSIBA - Don't you have places to be?

ERRICK – Had a dream last night. Not the first time. I've fallen over a cliff edge. I'm hanging onto someone's hand. Your hand, I think, but I can't see if it's you, but it feels like yours.

Pause.

ERRICK - (*indicating the flowers*) I think, if I leave these here, they should be okay…

ERRICK kisses her on the cheek.

ERRICK - Don't…well, just don't, okay?

He goes. NOUSIBA sits down on the chair and begins to sob, uncontrollably. Sirens on the street below sound. ERRICK re- enters.

ERRICK – Something happening at the fruit shop across the road, or the café – can't tell. I can't go yet.

NOUSIBA - I'm very tired.

ERRICK - I think…I can see that.

ERRICK looks up into the night.

NOUSIBA - Do you know much about the stars?

ERRICK - Maybe. Maybe not. Who cares?

NOUSIBA - I have no space left to care about anything.

ERRICK - Have you spoken to Martin?

NOUSIBA - What about?

NOUSIBA exits. ERRICK sits dejectedly, then closes his eyes. After a while, NOUSIBA enters and brings a blanket which she puts over ERRICK. He awakens with a start for a brief moment.

ERRICK - Sorry.

NOUSIBA - Sssh. Rest.

She leans down and kisses his forehead. ERRICK looks at her.

NOUSIBA - Where is Nancy?

ERRICK - Ballet. You two used to be so close.

NOUSIBA - I know.

ERRICK - What happened?

NOUSIBA - Life. Sleep, father. Just for a while. Dream.

ERRICK reluctantly closes his eyes. NOUSIBA watches her father for a while and exits.

Scene 19

…a dance studio. The screens show various artworks. NANCY moves expertly into balletic poses. AMINE comes up to her.

AMINE – I like the way you hold yourself.

NANCY stops dancing.

NANCY – What are you doing here? Why do you keep following me?

AMINE – I wasn't. I was just talking business with an old friend. Always in the right places at the wrong times…

AMINE notices one of the artworks.

I like this. What is this picture of?

NANCY – My Grandmother has a picture of it at her place too. It's by an African artist. They all are.

AMINE - Why is it hanging in here?

Pause.

AMINE sits.

AMINE-Don't be taken advantage of. Most people take advantage of who I am.

NANCY – Why are you still here?

Pause.

NANCY – You're so strange.

NANCY resumes her dance.

AMINE – You are a victim, you think? You feel sorry for yourself; play up the fact your African.

NANCY – What?

AMINE – Everywhere I carry scars…you don't even speak African language.

NANCY - I'm no less African than you. I lived there until I was eight.

AMINE – I don't think so.

NANCY – I know so, I do know so.

AMINE - If someone got beat up, I go to help them? I'm the bad guy, and how does that make me feel?

NANCY – You wouldn't help anyone out. If you did, you'd just be showing off.

AMINE – Alright, I admit I play along with it. I'm an African warrior.

NANCY laughs.

AMINE – Do you trust me?

NANCY stops dancing. She shakes her head.

If you can't, why should anyone? You see my problem? NANCY – I
hardly even know you. But you seem…something.

AMINE – Something? Just ask me what you want to know, just ask me!

NANCY - What's in the bag?

AMINE is silent.

NANCY – Why do I want to know?

NANCY begins to walk away. Then stops.

I'm trying to be a nice person. To you, to everyone...

AMINE – Keep dancing.

NANCY – Why are you making me feel like everyone else? Why can't
everyone leave me!

AMINE – So innocent. NANCY – What do you mean?

AMINE – So, you're not innocent? NANCY – No, I'm not.

AMINE – Then that makes two of us. (*Beat*) Money. There's money in
the bag.

*AMINE'S phone rings. AMINE looks at the caller ID, then to NANCY.
He cautiously answers.*

AMINE – Hallo…yes... I'll come back...the money, yes…Don't hurt him. He did nothing...not all of it...no, wait - yes, I'll bring it in two days.

AMINE hangs up.

Pause.

AMINE -... 'Is that person still alive?' 'Is that person alright?' At the time you're just thinking 'I want the money', or 'I want the phone'. It's kind of like you're an animal because you're not thinking about the other person. (*Beat*) I…I'm not even sure I…

He glares at NANCY. NANCY stands unsure what to say. AMINE exits.

NANCY turns away, leans into a balletic pose, starting to become one with the artwork around her.

NOUSIBA appears.

NOUSIBA - Do you ever stop? NANCY - No.
Pause.

NOUSIBA - Dad came to visit me. He might win.

NANCY - He might lose.

Pause.

NOUSIBA - When is your audition?

NANCY - Last week.

NOUSIBA - Did you get in?

NANCY - Look, do you need help?

NOUSIBA - Is that why you think I'm here?

NOUSIBA takes her jacket off and starts to work on demi plie.

NOUSIBA - Do you remember when I first brought you here? You were six. Mum wanted us both to be dancers.

NANCY - I remember.

NOUSIBA - Dance with me…

NOUSIBA leads NANCY onto the floor and they work through a pas de deux with one another. After a while Nousiba stops, breathless. They laugh at this.

NANCY - I miss her.

NOUSIBA - You don't have to say that.

NANCY - There's an empty space where she should be.

NOUSIBA - Are you going to keep looking at me like that?

NANCY - I don't know who I am anymore.

NOUSIBA - Is that my fault?

NANCY - Every day I speak to people is a lie.

NOUSIBA - You think I don't feel guilty?

NANCY - Do you?

NOUSIBA - Yes. Of course. She was mine.

Pause.

NANCY - Is Martin home?

NOUSIBA - No. No, he's not.

Pause.

NANCY - I better…I wish you hadn't called me that day.

NANCY starts to practice again. NOUSIBA puts on her jacket. NANCY stops dancing and the two sisters look at each other – both want to say something, but neither has the words. This is the last time they will talk to one another.

NOUSIBA exits.

Scene 20

KHALID is opening fruit boxes. RACHAEL is moving quietly amongst the fruit and flowers. DONNELL enters out of breath.

DONNELL – Has Larry been here?

KHALID – Earlier, but not now. I gave him a job –

DONNELL – Shit, man. If he comes back here, tell him to call me.

KHALID – Is something wrong?

DONNELL – I'm missing the $1000 for the club. Larry has it, I think.

KHALID – Larry – why do you think that?

DONNELL – I'm going to kill him!

KHALID – I have known Larry Malik many years. He would not do such a thing.

DONNELL - Going to kill him!

KHALID - Abu. Sit down. He'll turn up soon. If you keep looking for him, you'll miss each other again and again.

DONNELL – I can't believe he ripped me off!

KHALID – You don't know that.

DONNELL – It doesn't look good, does it? He better have it.

LARRY enters.

LARRY – Hey, Donnell! I thought you were coming back to the club?

DONNELL – Where is the money, Larry? The money is gone. Just, if you have it, please give it to me.

LARRY shifts uncomfortably.

DONNELL – Man, come on. Just give it to me. I have to pay the club or they'll take my decks and everything else and –

DONNELL throws himself at LARRY. Punches are exchanged. LARRY quickly pins DONNELL to the ground.

KAHLID - Not in here! LARRY!

LARRY – I didn't take it.

DONNELL – Who else knew it was there?

LARRY – Amine. Amine has it.

DONNELL – You gave it to Zulu?

LARRY shakes his head. He releases DONNELL.

LARRY – I left for a moment to make a call. He said he would look after everything.

DONNELL – You are so stupid, man!

KHALID – Do you know where he is, Larry?

DONNELL – Larry, it's gone now, man. *LARRY shakes his head.*

LARRY – No, I'm sure he'd give it back to me if I could find him.

DONNELL – Nah, man, it's gone!

LARRY - Let's keep looking.

LARRY and DONNELL leave the shop. RACHAEL moves to KHALID.

RACHAEL – …So, the Moon dies, and rises to life again. And the Moon says to the Hare, 'Go to Men, and tell them, 'Like when I die and rise to life again, so you shall die and rise to life.' The Hare goes to the Men, and says, 'Like as I die and do not rise to life again, so you shall also die, and not rise to life again.' When he returned the Moon asked him, "What did you say?" "I have told them, 'Like as I die and do not rise to life again, so you shall also die and not rise to life again."' "What," said the Moon, "you said what?!"

KHALID laughs.

RACHAEL - And she took a stick and beat the Hare on his mouth, which was slit by the blow. The Hare fled, and is still fleeing. And that, Khalid, is the origin of death, or so I was told in Africa.

KHALID – You have good stories, Rachael!

RACHAEL – Do you have stories for me, Khalid?

KHALID – I have…but they are sad, many of them.

RACHAEL – I should get back home. Do you have some bread I can use?

KHALID – Bread?

RACHAEL – Yes, I use it to wash down my tablets. Easier to swallow.

KHALID – In the camp on the way here I had to take tablets. Always horrible! I'd always hold my nose –

AMINE enters. KHALID and RACHAEL turn to look at him. KHALID notes the bag.

KHALID - Can I help you? AMINE - No. Looking.

RACHAEL sits down.

RACHAEL - Sorry, I need my tablets. Do you have that bread?

KHALID - I will get you some bread.

KHALID walks past AMINE and takes the bag from him.

AMINE - Hey!

KHALID takes the money out of the bag.

KHALID - You need to see those boys and give them their money back.

RACHAEL - They are not happy with you!

AMINE – Why?

KHALID – You stole money?

AMINE - That's my money. Give me it back!

KHALID - We'll see.

AMINE walks past KHALID and makes his way behind the counter to the till.

KHALID - What are you doing?

AMINE - I need money.

AMINE bangs the till repeatedly.

KHALID – Are you on drugs? Get out!

AMINE opens the till and begins to ransack it of money.

KHALID – Put it back!

AMINE – Or what?

KHALID – Just put it down!

AMINE – I owe a lot of money to people back in Melbourne. They have my brother. I'm sorry.

KHALID puts the bag down and moves to attack AMINE. AMINE lifts the knife KHALID has been using to open the boxes.

AMINE – Stay back! I just want my money and I'll go.

KHALID stalks AMINE at a wary distance from the knife. AMINE grabs RACHAEL'S bag from her.

KHALID – She needs her medicine! Give me back the bag!

KHALID moves to get the bag from AMINE. They struggle. KHALID, the larger man, holds AMINE down. AMINE desperately struggles and pushes KHALID over, off of him. AMINE gets up to escape the store when KHALID lets out a groan. AMINE stares at KHALID horrified – he fallen on top of the knife.

AMINE – …

KHALID – …I want...help…breathe…

AMINE drops the knife, wipes his hands and races off.

KHALID sinks to the ground. He struggles to get up, falls again. RACHAEL watches, picking up the paw-paw rolling across the floor, and moves quietly to KHALID.

Scene 21

AMINE stops. He opens Rachael's bag – there is no money to be found. He finds a photograph of Nancy and throws it away. Then AMINE pulls out a bottle of pills which he opens; he holds them up in the light and then scatters them around, screaming. Shaking with anger, he prepares to dash off again just as NANCY enters.

NANCY – Amine –

AMINE – Where are you going? NANCY – What are you doing?

AMINE – Nancy –

NANCY – What is it?

AMINE – I need to tell you –

NANCY–No, don't. Whatever it is, I don't want to be involved.

NANCY moves towards the fruit shop.

AMINE – NO!

NANCY looks at him.

Don't go in.

Pause.

NANCY sees RACHAEL'S bag on the ground near AMINE.

NANCY – Her medicine. (*Pause.*) She needs - where is she?

AMINE – Please –

NANCY – What have you done? Where is she?

NANCY notices blood on AMINE's clothes.

NANCY – There's blood…

AMINE – I need to leave here right away.

NANCY – What have you done?

AMINE – Do you understand? I need you to come. I have no-one else.

NANCY – *Amine*, what have you done?!

AMINE – Come with me!

NANCY – Have you hurt her? (*Beat.*) *ANSWER ME*!

AMINE – You are the same as them all, all the others! Why can't you just come with me?

NANCY pushes AMINE aside and picks up RACHAEL'S medicine bottle, on her knees, picking up some of the pills.

AMINE – We can't stay here. (*Beat.*)*Come on.*

NANCY – WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

AMINE grabs NANCY and holds her. They tumble to the ground. Let me go! /Let me go!
NANCY screams.

AMINE – I – I have to go!

NANCY – Amine, why are you doing this?

AMINE – I am in big trouble –

NANCY – Let me go. Please. Let me go, Amine.

AMINE – I want you. I want to be with you.

AMINE starts to kiss NANCY. She pushes him away.

NANCY – Amine – don't…

AMINE – …*Come with me.*

NANCY - Please don't…

AMINE looks into her eyes and sees NANCY'S terror. They lie beside each other for a moment. NANCY takes AMINE'S hand for a moment. Then NANCY turns and batters at AMINE. Eventually worn, she stops. They face each other, unsure of the next course of action. NANCY picks up the pill bottle.

AMINE – …*Nancy*?

NANCY does not look at him. AMINE drops the bag and exits. NANCY watches him for a moment, then picks up the bag and heads for the fruit shop.

Scene 22

KHALID lies still on the ground. RACHAEL comes too, but is confused about what is going on and what to do.

KHALID – *Mother. Please.*

KHALID is crying and obviously in pain. RACHAEL can see KHALID is in a bad way.

161

RACHAEL – You are in His hands now.

RACHAEL gently takes KHALID'S head in and cradles it in her lap, singing through tears.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me....I once was lost but now am found, Was blind, but now, I see… T'was Grace that taught... My heart to fear….

KHALID lies on the floor of the fruit shop, near death. He stops RACHAEL singing. RACHAEL leans closer as KHALID struggles to speak.

KHALID – … I want to see the sky…

The screens change and KHALID seems to travel to somewhere he can see the sun and the sky. He smiles. KHALID inhales a final gasp and grabs hold of RACHAEL'S hands –

Silence.

RACHAEL takes a paw-paw from KHALID'S hand and holds it, as it reminds her of something, a past event, which frustratingly eludes her.

NANCY enters. She pauses for a moment taking in the horror of the scene.

RACHAEL – Will you take me home, now, please?

NANCY responds with offering Rachael her arm.

RACHAEL – I know you. You, you are my son's daughter.

They leave. The sound of sirens can be heard in the distance.

Scene 23

Balcony. ERRICK and NOUSIBA sit quietly looking up as the sun begins to rise. The fading stars seem to revolve around them in the night sky.

NOUSIBA - What did you think? When you saw me on the chair earlier?

ERRICK – Let's be quiet here, for a moment.

NOUSIBA nuzzles into ERRICK and they sit still with each other for a moment.
ERRICK - Where did you go?

NOUSIBA - To see Nancy dancing.

ERRICK - Really? (*Beat*)Do you still dance?

NOUSIBA - Here? Now? You're crazy!

ERRICK - Here…

He offers his hand. She stares at him for what seems a long time. Eventually, she takes his hand. They slow dance.

NOUSIBA collapses into ERRICK.

NOUSIBA - I'm so tired, father. I want to go home…

ERRICK – You are home…wherever I am is your home.

She sobs uncontrollably. ERRICK tries to comfort her. NOUSIBA breaks away. ERRICK grabs NOUSIBA back to him and holds her tightly.

ERRICK - There's something you're not saying…you're a long way from where you need to be.

NOUSIBA turns on the TV. The announcer prepares to announce the election result. They stop a moment to listen.

ERRICK (*on the TV, recorded earlier*) - ...And so I say, that the deeds of a man are greater than the details of his birth…

ERRICK switches off the TV.

NOUSIBA – Will you win?

ERRICK *holds NOUSIBA a little more tightly. NEITHER wants to let go.*

EPILOGUE

From the darkness, NANCY dances around ERRICK and NOUSIBA as lights crossfade to reveal…

…AMINE finishes reading a letter and watches the sunrise. Carefully, AMINE folds the letter away and starts to dance as light summer rain falls. He looks at the audience, then runs away as the lights of the helicopter chases him, the sound coming slightly later. As AMINE leaves, LARRY desperately feeds his change into the payphone. He waits.

LARRY - I want to talk to her. (*Waits impatiently*) It's me. I have done it, I have the money…Khalid, my poor friend…he left me the money. The time *has* come, to go to the border and they will take you from there...watch them carefully, small children can disappear like smoke...I cannot describe how happy I am! I AM SO HAPPY! HAPPY! My beautiful wife and my beautiful daughters...just wait! There is so much to do, so much...I love you all so much!

Lights down on Larry and lights up on the community centre. DONNELL dribbles forward from the darkness with his basketball. He stops – can't believe his eyes: a mass of people stand in front of him. The audience.

DONNELL – You came? So many? Thank you! Thank you! HIT IT!

Drum and bass soundtrack from earlier. Blackout.

THE END

Chapter Four: Writing

A. From process to play

As outlined in Chapter Two, at the end of the improvisatory development, I chose parts of the generated material, sometimes only fragments, with which to form a cohesive play structure. This methodology of writing the final play as a sole author is fundamentally part of Leigh's process too. As the writing phase progressed, I was aware that my approach to writing *I am here now* relied not so much upon the characters' verbatim story threads; rather, it became clear that the material would assist me to evaluate how I might write the play as a playwright engaged with forming characters and a narrative inspired by a group from outside my immediate experience. My playwriting process involved five drafting stages; I take drafting as defined by Sam Smiley: "A draft of a play is the total rewording of it from a scenario into dialogue and stage directions. […] The second draft of a play means a complete rewording of the entire manuscript, with perhaps a few bits of dialogue retained" (2005, p. 42). In each of my drafts, significant narrative changes occurred. The first draft saw me transcribe material from the devising workshops as accurately as possible. This stage can be seen as the transition from development to writing and at the same time as this was happening collaboration with the participants was coming to end, as they were all moving off in different directions. The second drafting stage was where I explored a more considered form of storytelling – it was a point of transition from the 'truth' origins of the improvisational beginnings towards a fictionalisation. The third stage involved reflective writing, augmenting the script by drawing from my personal interest in social justice and human rights. It was here that I thought of ways that could incorporate my value construct without the work being an overtly 'issues based' play. I also was conscious of the way that didacticism could overshadow the contributions of the participants, so at this stage I sought to align relationships, action and story that married as much as possible with what the participants had offered into a coherent narrative.

Ideas brought forward by the participants, often anecdotally, allowed for insightful discoveries that would contribute to the 'fiction' and would help convey a dramatic arc and character progression. It was at this point that the distinct transition from the foundational improvisations to the practice of sole author occurred. The excerpts of transcribed improvisations included in this thesis are evidence of the need for the move towards fictionalisation. The clips included in this thesis, including those in Chapter Two, were chosen to best illustrate when the process worked, but also when it did not

translate easily to dramatic tension and how that might or might not find its way into the play. Consequently, the development is where tensions around authorship arise and that carries through even further into the writing process.

As has been noted, Bakhtin proposed that writing is a process whereby authors seek to "assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate" (1986, p. 89) the words of others, even though those words still carry the expression of the original speakers. My writing process essentially moved from the development of a 'truth' via the creation of dramatic material, through the improvisations of the participants towards reworking both into the eventual 'fiction' which is the final text. Through adaption and a growing awareness of the application of anecdotal dialogues and participant observation, what was ultimately revealed about the process was the degree to which the interconnectivity and multi- layered context of each 'voice' in and around the play existed in the resultant 'fiction'. Each character's 'voice' was not only connected to those of other characters (to varying degrees), but each participant was inside these characters – in physicality, in story, in personal history. Each participant brought with them the people in their lives that contributed to the 'originals' that those characters were initially based on. The 'fictional' characters were amalgams of more esoteric relationships I had experienced, which resonated in my perception and the tone of my engagement with the participants during the entire research. As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, this is how I understand the text to contain polyvocality: the text constitutes a "plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, that combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (1984, p. 6), with the notion of equal rights clearly what makes polyvocality so powerful dramaturgically.

Between the second and fourth drafting stages I experimented with the possibility of incorporating the voices of multiple ethnicities beyond the African Australian participants' characters; several characters who were second and third generation Australians of Greek and British heritage. While there was nothing erroneous with the inclusion of these 'fictional' characters, I realised over time that many divergent story threads distorted the focus of other narratives – in the end, while traces remained, certain characters were removed or became 'muted' voices for the sake of clarity or to make a particular point around the power of absence in storytelling. The fourth draft, unsurprisingly, was a sweeping reorientation of the narrative which led to an overall restructure of interconnected story threads and relationships. While I was confronting the issues and implications of sole authorship, I also asked to what extent could certain issues connected with marginality ring out. This

led to the final draft, included in this thesis, in which I allow conceptual ideas surrounding transition and separation, of the home and *unhomely*, and polyvocality to really take shape and influence the dynamic of the play.

B. *Populating memories*

The Prologue section at the start of the play establishes the basis for the subjective actions of the characters, scene by scene. It also inaugurates the dramaturgical fluidity of the mise en scene in *I am here now.* The Prologue initially appears to be a fragmented series of incidental vignettes. Rather than offering a methodical exposition of characters and plot, the Prologue operates as a montage, an effect that provides an explosive start to the play via disruption of what alternatively could have been a more realist approach to form. The Prologue does not adhere to a linearity of time, and the vignettes effectively present characters' suppressed memories of trauma. The significance and context of these trauma memories is taken up as the play progresses. Barbara Misztal, after Freud, asserts that trauma memories are "accessed only if the memories can be released from repression" (2003, p. 140). It follows then that memories presented in the Prologue can be understood as "displacements or defences constructed by the unconscious mind which performs the function of the guardian of memory" (p. 140). The rough edges and the successive vignettes in the Prologue destabilise the diegesis of the play. This is accomplished by stylistic non- representational depictions of the characters' past realities. Instead, the vignettes are revealed in the play as repressed memories which reconstruct the past in the present. Fragmented memories come to surface through the pressures of the characters' experiences, both preceding and contemporary with the action in the play. This fragmentation is presented via a non-realist montage interaction between the performer and onstage media projected on monitors and a cacophonic soundscape that ignites the Prologue.

As the play progresses, it becomes clear that the Prologue delineates a montage of "screen memories" (Isbister, 1985, p. 130) which block the characters' "access to more disturbing memories" (Misztal, 2003, p. 140) from the past. By reconstructing "those memories through the grid of contemporary feelings" (Isbister, 1985, p. 130), the Prologue's screen memories are a way for characters to negotiate traumatic memories which are essential to the dramaturgical cohesion of the play. The dramaturgical tension in the Prologue montage arises from the displacement of a secure remembered time, place and action. Furthermore, the contestation between the vignettes to succeed one another as the assured narrative is repeatedly thwarted via the displacement of one vignette for

another. The world of the play also operates within each of the vignettes. The first vignette presents Larry Malik's nightmarish ordeal, as he appears to be drowning in an African river, struggling for breath while visibly "flown", most likely by wires, above the stage. Larry's struggle to breach the surface presents his attempt to escape his trauma memory. The auditory effect of gunshots as heard underwater heightens his contemporary trauma, manifest as a screen memory of an African past in an Australian present. In the episodic structure of the Prologue, Nousiba's entry "as if an apparition moving across the stage" cuts across and amplifies Larry's night swimming sequence. The noise of the police helicopter that accompanies Nousiba's entry is in effect a repressed memory of the death of her child. Reminiscent of Bakhtin's account of polyvocal expropriation, the Prologue vignettes "populate" one another, not literally, but in a dramaturgical contestation of their significance within the opening moments of the play.

Jeremy Hawthorn notes that Bakhtin "uses the word voice, to include not just matters linguistic, but also matters relating to ideology and power in society" (Hawthorn, 1992, p. 134). This has dramaturgical application in Scene Three of *I am here now*. As Hawthorn points out, voice "is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" (Hawthorn, 1992, p. 134). This overpopulation of the intentions of others is evident in Scene Three of the play. This scene sees Larry arrive at a burger joint where Nancy works, a location that provides the space for unspoken intentions to occur in the physical as well as verbal interactions between the two, and via the action relative to the composition of the mise en scene of the burger joint. The hyperreal space of the burger joint conjures ideas and images of consumerism and neoliberalism within which Nancy and Larry are negotiating their own power dynamic. Larry's phone call to his wife is in response to what Misztal describes as "the family's capability to maintain a living chain of memory" (Misztal, 2003, p. 19) through the children's toys and the napkin. Nancy's and Larry's unspoken intentions as regards to one another, and Larry's intentions towards his family trapped in Africa, are where the action resides in Scene Three. Homi Bhabha states that "to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the unhomely be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres" (1994, p. 13). The concept of the *unhomely* is one which arises throughout the scene and the play as a whole in relation to the identity of African Australians and just how that can be defined. It is a problematic term that collectivises African migrants separated from home with the identity of a populace born in Australia. So, upon close reading, the scene is not about the physical reality of Africa, but about being *unhomed*. It is not about memories of Africa, but about the impact

of dislocation and defamiliarisation upon the voices of the characters and the subsequent intent of voices. The overpopulation of voice, après Bakhtin's polyvocality, sets up tensions between the recently arrived and those who have had time to immerse into the populace which has much dramaturgical potential.

Hawthorn provides the observation, that voice "refers not just to an originating person, but to a network of beliefs and power-relationships which attempt to place the listener in certain ways [….] That process is the means whereby language is transformed into a voice" (1992, p. 134). While the initial impression is that Scene Three establishes Nancy and Larry as originary speakers, it is actually their repositioning of each other as "listener" that is the focus. In this dramaturgical sense, the Prologue dialogues go beyond mere utterances: they resonate with the many voices that, as Bakhtin puts it, "populate" the scene. The verbal exchanges in the burger joint between Nancy, as attendant, and Larry, as customer, are populated by and framed within larger global discourses of neo-liberalism and consumerism. These global discourses are articulated on an intimate scale through negotiations of objects such as the greasy burger, the ATM card and childrens' toys. Larry's dance with the store mascot indicates a complicity and ingratiation in his relationship with the larger power structure of the burger joint. This is mediated via its employee, Nancy. Larry's gesture towards the growling advertising screens is an instance of Bakhtin's "answer-word" which "provokes an answer, anticipates [the answer] and structures itself in the answer's direction" (Bakhtin, p. 279).

Larry's telephone conversation with his absent wife shifts the focus from the global power relationship to a more intimate space. At the same time it is clear that global forces impact on and frustrate the purpose of Larry's call, which is a desire for the family to maintain "a living chain of memory" (Misztal, 2003, p. 19). His call is "overpopulated […] with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). His strategy, to present the ATM card to Nancy when he knows he has no credit, is an instance of Bakhtin's "future answer-word" (Bakhtin, p. 279) in action. In Scene Three, the intentions of others inhabit and inform polyvocal ideological power-relationships. When he moves to call his wife later in the scene, Larry is found to have reserved the coins to fulfill that intention, which confirms the future answer-word as an inevitability when he offered the void ATM card. The future answer-word can be also seen by looking closely at the racist joke told by Larry, which is inflected to make it so a person of colour, in this case a black African man, could tell it. The joke provides a dramaturgical opening for Larry to put forward his intentions to Nancy. The original context of the joke was precipitated by white men sharing it as a racist put-down online. This is proof

of the population of different voices in the joke, and reveals that differing intentions exist in polyvocality. The joke brings up discourses, some of which are more muted than others. Yet still present is Larry's intent to use the joke as an interrogatory tool to expose aspects of the voices and power-relationships around his exchange with Nancy, whether consciously or not. Larry's telling of the racist joke displaces Nancy in her power relationship, as intentionally positioned by her corporate controllers. Consciousness of the unhomely at work within the dramaturgy of this scene assists reading Nancy's altered position by Scene 6, particularly when she gifts Larry the toys for his children without having purchased the burger.

Larry's final joke in the scene infers the search for recognition of an Australian context to an African experience. There is an implicit awareness that race "is a social reality with its own ontology [that is] central to structuring" (Mills, pp. 235-36) the contemporary Australian 'world' of the play, but may not be explicitly considered Australian due to the African Australian ensemble of characters. During the writing, dramaturgical confusion brought on by too many unresolved character threads led to the decision to dislocate the white characters and restructure the play into what is the final draft. In most instances, that meant the erasure of white characters. In other instances, the preference was to mute those voices yet continue to grant them a presence, manifest as unheard voices on the other end of a phone. This gave further dramaturgical context to notions of polyvocality and the unhomely in the structuring of the play, as noted with Larry's wife and also evident in the relationship between Nousiba and her white husband, Martin.

C. *Home and the unhomely*

Due to the equivocal nature of writing a first draft from the improvisational material, the title of the play became an important jumping off point, a potential metaphor for all of the various aspects that made up the different phases of the project. There is an existentialist quality I enjoy about the title, which speaks to the interpellation of the play's characters being named into 'being', partly defined in relationship to a dominant culture that is established as *different*, though absent itself from representation in the play. It could be interpreted as a decision of the characters to live deliberately without engagement with the dominant 'white' Australia that largely determines their capacity for access, agency and representation. Throughout the project, the participants identified strongly with being *here* in Australia, but having arrived from or having strong connections to somewhere else in the *now*. The title *I am here now* spoke to me of a strength and a pride of being *here*, right *now*, in

this place and time. In this way, the *here* and the *now* operate as a type of *unhomeliness*, an idea of a type of unsettling dislocation, which occurs in different ways for different characters. Similarly, the title alludes to the separation which comes about mainly through migration, itself a kind of exile, whether forced or otherwise. The notion of separation is metaphorical as well as literal; through various concepts of death and loss in the play.

Separation brings with it displacement and destabilisation of the individual and the wider community surrounding them. It is safe to assume that home suggests a sense of security, of belonging and a 'locatedness'. An estrangement from home, or a displacement from belonging, is something that I was continually compelled to come back to, both in the discoveries throughout development and in the writing of the play. For the play's characters, this identification with displacement is tangible; the constructed 'realities' of the diverse members of the depicted community, implied notions of underlying class divisions, the presence of spirituality in different guises, and the misconceptions of a 'foreign' landscape, to whatever or whoever that 'foreignness' might refer, are all integral elements of the play.

The second aim of the research was to investigate the outcomes of Leigh's methods in the context of the project, measured by my writing of a sole authored text. Upon reflection, I became aware that *I am here now* spoke of, or contained, a polyvocality; it was a play that melded senses, tones, intonations, dress and idiosyncratic behaviours, personal histories/stories, and dialogue from the improvisations, with which to reverberate a myriad of voices, including mine. When considering how to appraise the development process in relation to writing the text, I concluded that any analysis must begin with a mindfulness to the sensitivities of the participants. Memories, the stories of lived experience from the participants, contributed a lot to the written characterisations. During the development process I was attentive of how delicate I needed to be, keeping in mind that "traumatic modernities are survived and made intelligible through a poetics of remembrance" (Mercer, 2008, p. 24).

What the participants shared with me was significant and I had a responsibility to ensure they did not experience a sense of being exploited. It was also necessary to respect their decision not to speak about certain things. What I did not realise was the extent to which I would also need to do that in the writing process, albeit in a different way. I would also need to respect what they offered during

the process and find ways, other than direct testimony, where I could develop a coherent and engaging narrative that had its origins with the participants, but in some way could also move beyond them. Ultimately, the play came into existence precisely because of the tensions between a poetics of remembrance of the home and the unhomely, which perpetually challenges the safety of the idea of belonging from within. This is demonstrated by many of the characters in the play, such as in the story threads of Nousiba, Larry Malik and Rachael, who are in search of security in a home which is constantly illusive, whether in a literal or metaphorical way. The Prologue montage sets up the dramaturgical premise that the operation of our memories does not depend exclusively on past events, but moreso on interpretations of events usually prompted by the present. This oblique approach is consistently utilised across the play. For instance, in Scene Nine, the baking of a traditional Mendazi cake by Rachael and Nancy becomes a contested site for memory. The baking becomes a social event, which Rachael uses to encapsulate the characters' past and make a connection in the present. However, the assumption that the cake stands as a representative symbol for "home" and for the memory of "home" to both Nancy and Rachael is dramaturgically problematic. This reading would reduce the baking of the cake into a singular African experience, that somehow "transfers the meaning of home and belonging […] across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation people" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 291). To a great degree, the dialogic Rachael is intent on is a way for Rachael to gain a deeper connection to her granddaughter and to the idea of Africa through baking. Taking the common definition of a metaphor, as a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, the Mendazi cake becomes the metaphor for 'home' in the scene, albeit an unstable one, especially as the cake fails to provide the necessary ground for the women to connect. The cake as a metaphor also works as a mediation of trauma from Rachael's past, but fails to assist the development of Nancy's connection to Africa – primarily, because Nancy has never actually been to Africa. Though Nancy finds less connection to the "Africa" that Rachael would like, she does not negate familial duties and assists with baking. Bhabha (1994, p. 2) notes that:

> It is the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated…Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively.

Bhabha's observation suggests that the cake acts as an interstitial point, and concedes that the Mendazi does have resonances of 'home' that go beyond the scene. Nancy's reticence to participate in the baking of the cake comes not so much from an ignorance, but acknowledges the distance

between her grandmother's remembrance of 'home' and Nancy's imagined 'home'. At the site of interstices, the distance closes, but this will always be the case that the characters exist in a state of unhomeliness, made distinct by shifts in memory and often the intent behind the introduction of a memory. In this way, Bakhtin's polyvocality continues to resonate. The scene is populated with the intent of other voices, those that have influenced how the characters' memories have been structured. Bhabha observed that one of the issues for the migrant is that there is a "progressive metaphor of modern social cohesion – the many as one – shared by organic theories of the holism of culture and community, and by theorists who treat gender, class or race as social totalities that are expressive of unitary collective experiences" (1994, p. 142). The logic is that the cake is an attempt to recall the experiences of Africa as mediated through memory. The cake cannot resolve that trauma connected to the loss of Africa/home. The unhomely then becomes the trauma for the migrant. This bears out what Bhabha refers too in terms of social totalities and unitary collective experiences.

This collective tension is highlighted in the displacement between the two women's experience of remembrance, further evident in Nancy's dismissal of Rachael's Tanzanian music later in the scene. The music distances Nancy and Rachael from one another on the basis of their differing memories of Africa – "cheesy African" is how Nancy refers to it. However, the music becomes an access point to traumatic memories too, as demonstrated by how Rachael appears to become lost in a memory trauma, but not in the immediate trauma of the earlier assault (mugging) or having lost her great grandchild, Nousiba's daughter. The more distant memory from Africa are released from repression through the performative activities (Misztal, 2003, p. 140). The memory also allows for a reflection upon motherhood that consciously would be difficult for Rachael, as a traumatized migrant, to deliver under the circumstances. Deeper meaning is made through the complex dialogic/dialogue between language, culture and representation in the moment of remembrance with Nancy. For Rachael, memory is a remembrance often founded in trigger moments of trauma; for Nancy, it is the nascent understanding that Rachael is illustrating to her that the cake is 'home'.

The home and unhomely also parallel the notion of separation and transition; the stresses of the exiled can be heard in the voices and dialogues of the characters in I am here now. Throughout the project, I continually come back to the issues of authorship in relation to subject positionality and intention (who I am and what are my motivations as playwright). It could be argued that the concept of the 'Other' in the play is a potentially transitional space, in so much that separating migrants from their culture as well as their physical home leads to a paradoxical transition that many migrants have

experienced and often endured. This transitional space is where concepts of identity are "assimilated, reworked, re-accentuated" in the process of discerning 'voice' in the specific milieu of the new home. Similarly, I had the creative task of reworking and re-accentuating the voices of the participants into a new home through the lines and directions of the play – a separation and transition of its own.

Within the play the ideas of separation and transition, of not being entirely of *here* (new home) and no longer being entirely *there* (original home) is a foundational theme for most, if not all, of the characters. Transitions become apparent where individual characters address the unpredictability of their personal separations, until they can be sure that a semblance of stability or equilibrium exists. While writing, I found that ideas of transition/transitioning often occur through crisis, or the tension of a 'foreignness', whomever or whatever that label may apply to. Dramaturgically, Smiley defines crisis as a period of uncertainty, which can cause a reversal or shift of circumstances and often involves "dilemma, decision, and conflict" and "contains rising emotion" (2005, p. 104). The sense of dislocation can produce its own state of 'Other' – of difference, of distance, and so on – implying "a present in which loss of the certainties and a sense of security provided by family and nation, community and locality, faith and ideology, body and selfhood have resulted in a crisis of displacement and alienation" (Taylor, 2013, p. 207). In these instances, I played with how familiar certainties for any given character were undermined or destroyed, painting a picture of discontinuity and change, of things unsettled. I would suggest that after a separation there must be a transition of some kind, and any 'successful' transition is impossibly complex to definitively determine. However, there is a delicate balance between a migrant's existential being in both worlds, of the homeland within the home, and with this an inevitable fragility. In reference to continuity, Necati Polat, perceives Bhabha's "hope" that continuity as an ephemeral delay "may have the capacity to engender a temporary space of relative autonomy from which one can enunciate non-sententious, deferential politics" (2011, p. 1271). Although the participants did not speak explicitly about their home in subjective terms, the ideas of continuity and discontinuity of a home arose while considering the recordings and transcriptions of improvisations and my reflections when writing the play.

Reflecting on the play during the writing process also made me attentive to the hazard of cultural fixity. Bhabha derides this notion of cultural fixity as a retrograde Western historicism, notably

linear as a "narrative of the nation"; he views fixity as an attempt to create "holism of culture and community" and "fixed horizontal nation-space" (1994, p. 142). This applies not only to the characters, but to all the individuals, both real and fictitious, connected to and within I am here now. Cultural fixity can fashion stereotypes because it is "a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (that the negation through the 'Other' permits) constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations" (Bhabha, 1983, p. 27). This is a significant narrative to confront because it effectively presents the concept and qualities of home as an imagined projection. Home becomes a site of fiction in itself, and in turn of the unhomely. It follows then, that the concept of a homeland, indeed the concept of a 'nation' such as Australia, can equally apply to the experience of separation and transition. This leads to the construction not only of the imagined 'home' but that of *unhomeliness*, and the concept of homeland as an unsettled space of separation and transition. The idea of home as inhabited by the *unhomely* challenges the fixed concept of a *here* or *there*, a *then* and *now*, by being neither one nor the other. A challenge to cultural fixity opens the ground for the personal, national and social re-exploration of self and identity. Ironically, in the context of the characters in the play, the further they are from a connection to Africa, the more the idea of Africa as homeland manifests, related to the impact of displacement. These tensions are important in *I am here now*; the characters must confront a fragmented self and the various ways it manifests. In the play, this gives the characters a sense of being pulled in different directions by the people who surround them. *I am here now* is an interplay of all that the 'self' might confront in everyday life; connection with others: work and play; hopes and dreams; belonging and longing. Ultimately, home, nation and identity are contentious concepts with no fixed meaning in the play, and the fragmented 'self' of the 'fiction' is never entirely un-fragmented; arguably this also resonates in 'reality'.

In some ways, the play articulates what Gita Rajan and Radhika Mohanram (1995) describe as a "ghost-shadow of the familiar, [where] the unhomely stands in the place of the experience of human location and signifies the impossibility of securing a safe continuity for the self, of identifying this self's status with given cultural notions of habitation" (p. 108). This challenge to the self and identity in relation to Australia can be seen with all of the characters in the play to a greater or lesser extent, even in those characters who were absent by the final draft. To communicate this, the separation and subsequent transition from the homeland for the play's characters (as well as the participants) is

often metaphorical; this is witnessed in the dreamlike physical sequences that occur regularly throughout the play, from the prologue to the closing scene, which allow the characters to move beyond the physical boundaries of their bodies into an alternative time and space. Lois Tyson observes that unhomeliness "is an emotional state: unhomed people don't feel at home even in their own homes because they don't feel at home in any culture and, therefore, don't feel at home in themselves" (2006, p. 18). This idea of feeling unsettled on multiple levels is something that I deliberately set out to work with in many of the characters in *I am here now*. This became apparent during the writing as narrative, action and characters, all save Nancy, to varying degrees, exuded a sense of unhomeliness, a displaced sense of home. All of this required a considerable journey, literally and metaphorically, for each central character; a transition from one site to another of dramatic tension. In a dramaturgical sense, this proved useful as a pivot to reconceptualise options that otherwise may have been left undiscovered.

D. Fictionalisation

As previously mentioned, the decision to move to a fictionalisation of the writing did not begin with the first draft. However, it soon became clear during the initial writing stages that some of the material from the structuring was heavily expository, or that a story thread discontinued without an intentional resolution – quite literally, as their story thread ran out of material, a character would disappear from the script. More often than not it was that the material simply lacked dramatic tension. At the commencement of the second draft in the writing process, I decided that I would re-accentuate the writing towards a 'fiction'. This may read as somewhat of a paradox at first; the 'originals' were not 'truthful' characterisations *per se*, as they were already once or twice removed from their origin, and the processes of structuring moved the 'originals' into fictional narratives through their contextualisation to other characters they were introduced. This was a necessary step, as the 'originals' (the participants playing these originals) moved about their new settings and created opportunities for character and story threads to bloom; in this case, it stands that the first draft can be argued to already be a kind of 'fiction'.

The improvisations were documented by video, which is not without its own problems, as discussed in Chapter Two. Nonetheless, video documentation provided invaluable 'data' for the writing of the play. It permitted me to repeatedly scrutinise the improvisation if I wished, something not achievable

if I had been taking handwritten notes. The recorded improvisations allowed me to view the physicality of the participants, and explore subtext which might arise from the body language of a characterisation, and even to observe any significance in their physical communication, to prompt further investigation into their characters' inner life. From here, I began to map out the characters physical and vocal traits; their dialogue and language; a loosely overarching narrative arc; and to fashion meaningful symbols and images that would help the story threads evolve dramaturgically beyond the literalness of the improvisatory workshops, with attention given to any metaphorical aspects of the soon to be written narratives.

Documentary theatre as defined by Carol Martin (2006) is "created from a specific body of archived material: interviews, documents, hearings, records, video, film, photographs, etc." (p. 9). Even in the various documentary theatre forms – which Carol Martin identifies as "docudrama, verbatim theatre, reality-based theatre, theatre of witness, tribunal theatre, nonfiction theatre, and theatre of fact" (2010, p. 1) – the process of editing a 'real' story involves an act of 'fiction', especially when having to decide what to leave in and what to let go. In addition, Martin suggests more broadly that the capturing of 'real' "participates in the larger cultural obsession with capturing the "real" for consumption even as what we understand as real is continually revised and reinvented" (2010, p. 1), later suggesting that "what is real and what is true are not necessarily the same. A text can be fictional yet true. A text can be nonfictional yet untrue" (2006, p. 15). What was fascinating about the writing process was the extent to which I felt compelled to develop new characters that would help expand the content of the 'originals' narratives. In this way, the material generated could be used as a building block for the play, with the subsequent drafts finding ways to support and extend these initial threads and to broach issues of social justice at the margins. Despite this obvious fictionalisation during the development of new characters, traces of the origins that contributed to the makeup of the 'originals', in which inflections of personality, of body language and taste (fashion, music and so on), of the participants' own stories and ideas on belonging and community, remain.

The inclusion of new characters that allowed my 'voice' and others to resonate through them, such as that of Errick Nkomo, were important discoveries from early in the writing stage. In addition, the dialogue in the second draft developed in response to fictional issues initially raised by the 'originals', but these issues had not found their way into the structuring workshops. The writing was also influenced with 'displacement', primarily through grief (Nousiba) and forced migration (Larry

Malik). As playwright, I also had to find a way to balance the writing with the ethical treatment of the participants' contributions, both in the improvisatory work and through our anecdotal conversations. By ethical, I mean that I not only needed to uphold my role as an ethical researcher with the University, but also that I needed to act ethically by maintaining the participants' contributions as the heart of the play. This meant that what the participants offered in their interactions with me or what I observed, and what was offered in terms of story threads in the improvisatory work, would need locating in some way, and with significant purpose, in the writing of *I am here now*.

In the play, ideas of *unhomeliness* and 'fiction' are starkly exemplified in the character, Larry Malik. During the development, the participant Malikizoh was reticent to recount details of his past. As mentioned, Malikizoh kept the details of childhood close to his chest and I did not wish to probe; I was there to listen but never to push him or any of the participants to volunteer information or history that made them anxious or distressed. Malikizoh had a wonderful openness and optimism, which at times could be endearingly mischievous. Sometimes I wondered whether this behaviour was used as a mode of survival for Malikizoh. The character Larry Malik definitely emerged from Malikizoh's idiosyncrasies; however, Larry, the asylum seeker trying to reunite with his family who escapes in a river night crossing from unnamed enemies in an unnamed war zone, does not directly translate from the 'original' character developed from Malikizoh in the early stages of the research. Rather, Larry is an amalgam of the improvisatory work; his eventful road testing experience applying for a position in a fast food restaurant; what he offered casually in conversation; the anecdotes of Tich; and through his own person and the impression that he left on me when it came time to write. The final character Larry Malik was also partly inspired by my personal frustration with what I view as the inhumane treatment of asylum seekers in offshore detention, through a succession of Australian government policies. The treatment of the 65 million people displaced throughout the world, individuals who in my experience often embody the *dis*location of the *unhomely*, was very much on my mind during the project.

Subsequently, the politics and the political implications of displacement, in relation to *unhomeliness*, and the right to a safe and peaceful home, could not be left unattended in the final play. "A pragmatic working-out of responsible and differentiated power relations" as suggested by Emerson would perhaps be a better strategy in the current context (Emerson, 1997, p. 26). At the point of writing,

along with the disinformation of the Australian Government in relation to African 'gangs' in Melbourne (Ryan, 2018), the controversies of the recently abandoned offshore detention camp on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea has also brought worldwide condemnation on Australia, putting the country on notice by the international community for its failure to adhere to the human right to seek safe passage and shelter, free from persecution, as per article 31 of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Reflecting on Australia as signatory to this convention, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights spokesman, Rupert Colville, claimed in November, 2017 that Australia's offshore detention policies "are unsustainable, inhumane and contrary to its human rights obligations" (Nebehay, 2017). Some members of the conservative mainstream media in Australia (Bolt, 2016; Devine, 2015) have continuously expressed divisive views on the right to seek asylum, I would argue, contributing to fear around the 'refugee' as somehow illegal and someone to be afraid of.

In relation to theatre making, I had perhaps naively presumed that any participants displaced forcefully from their homeland and having claimed asylum in Australia would be willing to share this subject as part of the project. As mentioned, this was rarely the case in the formal parts of the process, but nevertheless the experiences did come through in conversation, albeit indirectly. I wondered if this has something to do with the idea of bearing witness and the spaces in which people who experience trauma in this way are comfortable sharing. There has always been a tension in the representation of the 'real' and the potential trauma that can be provoked from re-telling traumatic stories. In the context of this project, by sharing their story, there is also a perceived risk of putting their immigration status in their new home, in jeopardy. Wake (2013) talks of the participants of *Through the Wire* by Ros Horin as being more than "witnesses to the disappearing bodies. They are the disappearing bodies. Evidently they have not disappeared completely, or we would not be hearing their words, but tragically they are forced to witness the dissolution of their own subjectivity and identity" (p. 189). It is as though the story of re-telling the trauma of forced migration actually strips away the agency of the people whose story it belongs. At the heart of these questions is the idea of testimony. I am fascinated with the politics of testimony, having seen its power on stage, including my own production of *The Laramie Project* (Kaufman, 2001) at Curtin University in 2008, and I am certainly aware of the significance of the documentation of the 'real' for not only individuals and communities, but also in extending and contributing to theatre practice more generally.

According to Carolyn Wake (2013), much of the debate around this type of work gives "voice to the voiceless, face to the faceless" (p. 105) and verbatim theatre "can also succeed in revealing the invisibility of power" (p. 120). Wake (2013) argues that trauma has become a prevalent layer within the worldwide growth of verbatim and documentary plays, but "mimetic witnessing risks re-interrogating the always already interrogated" (p. 120) and "soliciting testimony can re-injure … either because they have never told their story or because they have told it too many times" (p. 104). This calls upon an author to address participation and ownership of story as ethical acts, and confront the reality that their involvement can sometimes do more harm than good, setting up a kind of *re-interrogation* of past traumas. Emmanuel Levinas outlines the ethical responsibility: "Positively we will say that since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him, without even having *taken on* responsibilities in his regard; his responsibility is *incumbent on me*" (Levinas, 1985, p. 96 original emphasis). In relation to the ethics of this type of performance, Tom Burvill (2008) also questions who can speak for refugees and whether it is necessary at all to have the witness or bearer of the original story (i.e. the refugee) physically present on stage, referencing Sidetrack Performance Group's *Citizen X: Letters from Refugees* (2002) and Shahein Shafaei's solo piece *Refugitive* (2003). Burvill (2008) further queries the benefits that come through representing the refugee via their letters from inside detention, or by a former refugee performing the role of a refugee, drawing on Levinas' "radical conception of ethics" (1979), which calls for a primacy of responsibility to the 'Other' as the foundation of subjectivity.

Reviewing the use of documentary and verbatim theatre, Wake (2013) detected a difference "between finding and repeating the words of the powerful, which are already on the record, and soliciting the words of the marginalised" (p. 5), and I wonder if that extends to what I have done? In *I am here now*, I appropriate the words of the participants as inspiration for a dramatic narrative rather than direct testimony. I am a 'witness' to this process, of the generation and development of material, but I cannot honestly state that what is written by me is wholly the 'truth' of the participants' experience; or at least not in the sense that their words spoken in the improvisations became the words spoken by the characters in the play. This is where I depart again from Leigh, who often takes the verbatim material of his actors in rehearsal, which after refinement becomes their working script. I did not enter the writing stage with swathes of useable material, but neither did I want to take the play in the direction of didacticism ('this is the refugee component of the play'). To do so, would reduce the aesthetic impact of the play by forcing meaning on a reader. The writing

also had to be scripted in a way that I did not risk reinforcing cultural stereotypes or contribute to a type of trauma fatigue about the experiences of asylum seekers, completely antithetical to my intentions. I then had to work out if it is possible to serve both the participant and the issues I would like to see the play confront. Upon reflection, the battle itself existed between the two aims of the research: understanding the efficacy of the methods of Leigh and subsequent questions around authorship; and the assembly of the material into a final play text that embraced a plurality of voices.

The question of home and *unhomely* and how it finds a place in the text also begs the question of how other important, recurring themes can be confronted in the play: the question of religion; age relative to other figures in the play; the notion of time (spent in Australia and the influence of time on the idea of the *unhomely*); the music and dance tastes of the Hip Hop obsessed participants and characters and associated 'Americanisation'. All of these discourses must find a home somewhere, in someone in some place, in the play. These ideas are separated from the development period, separated from the 'originals' and the participants and transitioned in to a discourse between participant, original and playwright inside the play – "assimilated, reworked and re-accentuated" in order to establish new ideas and new characterisations.

While drafting, I scrutinized the recorded footage of structuring and the 'hot seats'. I was inclined, as playwright, towards improvisational sequences that I thought contained richer dramatic material than other sequences. But of course there was less than I had anticipated. As drafting continued, the characters' narratives became gradually refocussed by decisions I made about the characters. I was deeply conflicted by a) a sense of commitment and/or obligation to honouring the creativity of the participants and b) I was increasingly aware that in this context, in particular working with non-theatre makers, that the Leigh methods had shown limitations, principally in providing enough material to produce rich and nuanced action, story and character. My sense was that a move towards fictionalising the narrative was necessary; not only because *I am here now* was a play juggling many characters at once, but both in the development process and in the writing I was juggling the discourses of many voices too, including mine. Subsequently, the choices made in the writing were influenced, and inflected, by the participants, their 'originals', and even by those participants who discontinued the process. This brings back the idea of Bakhtin's take on utterances, which according to Carlson "involve a complex layering of previous usages and current context, resulting in a plurality of voices" (2018, p. 66). As the drafting continued, over some time, the voices of other

influences – including those of my supervisors, my colleagues, of Freud, Kristeva, Bhabha, and Bakhtin – all have a place or at the least a trace in the text. However, it is important to note that the play is still ultimately informed by a collaboration with the participants. The development grounded the dramaturgy that followed, in which Leigh's methods acted as a pivot from which to proceed even if ultimately there were issues in application. The next section details the specific characters that emerged from workshop to page – Amine, Nancy, Khalid and Larry – and how they manifested and changed in the drafting process. During the playwriting, some characters were added, such as Nousiba, Errick, and Rachael. Others merged, as was the case with Kevin and Donnell: their 'originals' became one: 'Donnell'. Other characters are also discussed in what I refer to as muted and absent voices.

E. Character Analysis

To help give a sense of the characters' shifts from the origin of the research to the final play, I have included the table below, which outlines the development from their character in the play. Several of the characters in I am here now did not emerge wholly from the workshops, or merged with other characters. Reading the table, the left column lists the participants' names; the centre names the 'original'; the final column is what that 'original' was named in the final play.

Table 1. Development from participant's name to final character name in the play.

Participant's Name	Original's Name	Character in play
John	Kevin	½ MC Donnell
Jamal	Donnell	½ MC Donnell
Kirsty	Nancy Meth	Nancy Nkomo
Omar	Mitch Cooke	Character not included
Malikizoh	Larry Malik	Larry Malik
Justin	Amine Lo (aka 9)	Amine Lo
Rachael	Sarah McCarthy	Character not included
Juma	Caliph	Khalid

F. Donnell

As indicated (Table 1 above), Donnell began as two 'originals' – Kevin and Donnell – and can be viewed in their initial improvisation in Video Clip 1. In the period between development and writing, transcripts were written from the recordings of the improvisatory work; these read as they had been spoken verbatim in the workshops. An example of how this process occurred during the writing can be seen by examining an early transcription (Figure 4 below). This is from the initial meeting between the 'originals', Donnell and Kevin:

KEVIN - Remember that guy we met last time.

DONNELL - Sorry, bro, music too loud.

KEVIN - You're always listening to the music, music, music.

DONNELL - Sorry, what was it he was saying?

KEVIN - That guy from the shop.

DONNELL - Caliph.

KEVIN - He's very into religion, like a pastor.

DONNELL - I think he's cool. I could tell he was, like, a good guy. (Beat) Don't listen too much though.

KEVIN - He doesn't like Hip Hop.

DONNELL - Hey do you know that guy Lucky Dube from S Africa. That's good music.

They sing together.

DONNELL - I know that song, man. My mum's into that song.

KEVIN keeps singing.

KEVIN - I like that song, man. His songs make sense.

DONNELL - Hey, looking at this, they have dancing. This might be good. You should go too.

DONNELL holds up a flyer.

KEVIN - If it ain't Hip Hop, I ain't got it. (Beat) It says 18, man, I'm 16.

DONNELL - What about your girlfriend. She's 18. You never talk about your girlfriend.

KEVIN - I can see you enjoy reading so much (he's taking too long to read).

DONNELL - That guy from the shop, he knows a lot about God and stuff.

KEVIN - You should be a Muslim for the year.

DONNELL - 18 years I've been a Christian, why would I be a Muslim for a year. I believe in Jesus. Every single gangsta goes to church. I know this. Every gangsta was made by Jesus.

KEVIN - I trust you. So telling you this I need you to be listening.

DONNELL - Look, I'm not going to tell you he's boring or not boring. You go listen to his stories. He's not going to talk to you. He's just going to go through you.

KEVIN - I don't know. I don't know nothing.

DONNELL - You know what you believe in, you know what you believe in. Just listen to it and evaluate it.

KEVIN - That be true, that be true.

DONNELL - Momma's always cool. I used to go to a high school in Kigoma and we used to go see friends on Sunday.

KEVIN - I don't know what you're talking about, I never been to high school in Africa….

Figure 5. Transcript of improvisation between John (as Kevin) and Jamal (as Donnell).

The transcript (Figure 4) came from an early structuring improvisation. When I watch the filmed improvisation and when I read the transcription, as playwright, I can hear that the participants are trying to include as much of their 'originals' backstory as possible; though the transcript fails to reveal much about the characters, it does provide a useful overview of the 'original' profiles and how that devised material became early content for the written characters. However, when it came to scripting the play, the less dramatic the scenario, the less inclined I was as author to include the material. What was surprising, as I transcribed the dialogue, were references to spirituality and religion, along with community and connection to home. Also, the knowing or not knowing the truth of life 'before', in the homeland, due to a character never having explored their African roots or that memory being distorted and or displaced somehow. Kevin's final line is quite poignant, about having not gone to high school in Africa (Table 1), and at the time I recall a sense of loss or regret, that somehow he felt he missed out on something by not attending in Africa. These character details, like the attachment that Kirsty had with paw-paw discussed in Chapter Two, inspired a series of ideas for me as a playwright, especially around concepts of spirituality and belonging, which I had not considered at first as potential subjects, but featured prominently in the workshop content. This conflicted conversation around popular culture and religion also occurred when Kevin and Donnell talked to or about Caliph (who would become Khalid).

What the above transcript illustrates is how a seemingly inconsequential or discontinuous narrative can develop (or not develop) into text. I find the majority of the dialogue is lacklustre exposition that ultimately does not lead to any greater revelation or depth or even dramatic conflict or conclusion; instead it was an affirmation of information that was usually connected or reprised from a previous scene. In itself, this is not a bad thing; as non-theatre makers the participants (as 'originals') needed to be given space to encounter each other in their different ways. Some reasons for this include affirmation of their backstories; refocussing the direction of the current scene without losing the past

scene; or when a participant attempts to drive a scene partner in the direction that their profile suggests might be most appropriate for their own given circumstances. As a specific example, the 'original' Kevin, played by John, developed very much in the vein of an 'aspirational' businessman, pinpointing individual success via the logic of a 'business ladder' he could climb. On the other hand, Donnell (the 'original') was obsessed with artistic entrepreneurship, but his impetus was very much based in the idea that he could further the interests of the wider African Australian community. Upon reflection, the character Donnell in the final draft (an amalgam of Kevin and Donnell, the 'originals') survived the editing process because that character was aligned more to the 'original' Donnell, than to Kevin. My decision to intervene, to the extent I did in merging these characters, is powerful and 'world changing' in the context of the play, so authorial intervention was not taken in an arbitrary fashion. However, I can still hear traces of Kevin's voice resonate, in not only M.C. Donnell, but also in Errick, who absorbed parts of Kevin's capitalistic ideas. It follows then that other aspects of Kevin resonate in other characters, but are perhaps not emphasized as prominently.

It was important to consider points of difference in the story threads while writing, in order to garner the dramatic tension needed for the play – the improvisational stages did not always provide for that. The main problem dramaturgically for the characters of Kevin and Donnell was that their character arc did not appear to develop in a way which would substantially advance the narrative. However, what often happened between John and Jamal influenced how I then went on to draw from their originals to create the character of Donnell. Interestingly, John and Jamal are both from adjacent Tanzanian communities and now living in the same locality in Perth, though it would be more than likely their connection was through living in the Mirrabooka area than their time in Tanzania. The question arises as to whether having such a shared experience is a limitation for the development of narratives when using this devising process. Certainly it was difficult at times for me to determine whether these 'originals' were in fact variations of themselves. As I have already discussed I am not convinced this is too much of a problem, especially considering the slipperiness of 'truth' and 'fiction' at the best of times. Perhaps their affection for each other and their connection meant that they were told the same story or followed familiar territory which may not have happened if I had paired them with others. However, I found their inexperience with theatre making, coupled with their familiarity, limited their ability to investigate surprise or conflict. These are all useful considerations in determining the applicability of the Leigh methods in varied contexts.

I would suggest that how John and Jamal navigated space and place, in their new home, is partly how they became connected and why they gravitated toward each other. In one senses, moving to totally new and 'foreign' place would suggest more freedom to re- accentuate themselves, to make themselves anew. However, I would suggest the *unhomely* has affected that transition and I personally am able to read this in the recording and transcript and the video clip. The exchange between the characters of Kevin and Donnell about Lucky Dube, along with their impromptu duet, produces a moment that both recognise is a shared place, though not somewhere they would necessarily have found together in the homeland; the music brings them together in that moment, transcending time and space back to a point of coincidental recognition. The scene, of two young men casually talking about their lives, triggers memories of the past, opens up a point for discussion (about a girlfriend) which is ignored, of questions of culture and custom, of family and the centrality of music; rather than take this verbatim, I instead found different ways to integrate these ideas with various characters. Donnell and Kevin have an opposing moment to this at the end of the transcript, when Kevin rejects the memory offered by Donnell, of having attended school and visited friends in Kigoma. This comes as an abrupt denial, with the pair having synchronicity throughout most of the improvisation. On the surface, Kevin simply rejects this memory; he has nothing to share in this moment because he did not experience Africa at that time in his life. However, this points out to me the necessary negotiation that comes with separation, transition and the unsettling movement between the two. This is a continuation of the *unhomely*, as individuals look to discover the spaces where they might find a sense of self-identity in the old and new homes. The fluid and ongoing interactions that the *unhomely* places upon individuals is challenging and cannot help but produce an unsettled feeling to the relationships in this case and throughout the play. Helen Nicholson points to the intricate differences of the terms space and place: "Space, as an abstract concept, has been associated with movement, energy and freedom and has sometimes been perceived as a threat'; she compares this to place, which "suggests the messiness and materiality of life, implying emotional attachments, allegiances, and particular physical environments" (2005, p. 60). A shared relationship to space and place came up in the early workshops, but it was the anecdotal moments while the camera was off that revealed to me the extent of a shared knowledge. For instance, in Video Clip 1, Kevin and Donnell mention a character, "Steven White" (01:33). It turned out later that he was a 'white' man named Steven who they both knew from Mirrabooka. Kevin and Donnell both started arguing about who Steven was; it appeared that Kevin did not like Steven for reasons undisclosed in the workshop. Whoever he was, 'Steven White' had an impact on not only the characters, but also on the participants – he stood for something; more importantly, he represented a negativity both

participants understood by uttering his name. It could be said that nothing that is offered in both improvisation or in conversation is ever entirely neutral, and certainly implied in a name is a meaning of particular cultural value, a narrative for John and Jamal that runs through their own positionality. As Stuart Hall observes there "is as much constructed around what you can't see as what you can" (Hall, 1997, p. 59).

G. *Amine Lo*

Amine Lo has been in Melbourne (running from what the audience/reader imagines is an assault and robbery) and now finds himself in Perth. Amine is charming, emotionally intense, and opportunistic and, I find, incredibly sad. For me, Amine is the personification of ambivalence. Amine was generated by the participant Justin, who literally disappeared before the end of the improvisatory process. Justin was brought up in Melbourne and eager to return there; anecdotally, he spoke to me about his boredom with Western Australia which he suggested was too parochial for him. Watching Justin, he seemed permanently unsettled not only in terms of location, but in himself; this perhaps led to a tendency to push social boundaries. He would do this by boasting about run-ins with local police in conversation with me, and sometimes he would arrive late and enter an improvisation blurting out character information that ought to have been concealed from the other participants. Justin came across to me as somewhat lost, and angry, and that anger is in Amine Lo, which can also be observed in parts of Justin's original profile description (Figure 6). As mentioned, the use of 'originals' also brought up the notion of a 'truth' or 'truths', interrelated to the participants' experiences, that might be found somewhere within the improvisational development, particularly if the participant presses a matter or issue. Entering the process later than the others, and to help expedite the process, Justin and I shaped Amine's profile together. In the course of character profiling, it felt to me like Justin's input was indecisive and Amine's profile incorporated this uncertainty. The impression of Justin as a participant was one of instability, which bears resemblance to Amine, as can be seen this way by the fact that he acts on impulse, but rarely deliberates. When he does make a decision there tends to be major repercussions. He is perpetually in a quasi-existential dilemma of action without deliberation which often prevents other characters from making easy choices, leading to tension and violent consequences. While an obstructionist, Amine does prompt action in certain characters, namely Larry Malik and Nancy. In the conversation that Justin and Kirsty have prior to the improvisation, captured in Video Clip 9, Kirsty identifies as 'coloured' South

African (and later Amine suggests she is not 'African enough'); the impact is evident in the outward physical discomfort of both participants. This instability and obstruction appeared to be part-Justin, part-Amine. This certainly bled into the writing, as can be seen in the first encounter of Amine, Larry and Nancy in the burger joint, and the constant provocation of Amine towards the others.

In relation to Amine, it is interesting to analyse the degree of fiction and the use of metaphor in his original character profiling, in the improvisations that Justin was able to do and Amine's final scenes in the play. For instance, in the 'original' profile for Amine, Justin states that the 'original' is from Blacktown in Melbourne – but there is no Blacktown in Melbourne. In the written play, the character of Amine Lo, states that he is a Zulu South African, though that too is fictitious, which was my decision and I will talk to this further on. Interestingly, Amine is a name that seemed significant to Justin, but I was in two minds to ask and never found out the meaning of the name or interrogated the list to a great degree before arriving at a decision as to who would be in the 'original'. There is no doubt in my mind, as I sat with Justin that much of the development of his profile was considered – that is, it had meaning for him – but he did not want to open up or to elaborate on any details. Nor did I believe it appropriate to probe too far for fear of censoring him or making him overly self-conscious and inhibit him. What I could do, was accumulate content that seemed to reverberate as 'truthful' and vital, to a character; firstly, in the context of the workshops, then in the writing of the play. The 'original' profile of Amine Lo reads as follows:

NAME: AMINE LO AGE: 18

WHERE: KENYAN BACKGROUND (THERE WHEN HE WAS YOUNG); LIVES IN MELBOURNE; HE IS LYING LOW IN PERTH AFTER BEING CAUGHT IN POSSESSION OF WEED – HE PRETENDS HE IS ON HOLIDAY.

SOCIAL CIRCLE: HANGS OUT WITH A BUNCH OF THUGS FROM FLEMINGTON, MELBOURNE, BREAKING AND ENTERING – THEY NEED MONEY FOR 'SURVIVAL' – I.E. THEY NEED MONEY TO PAY FOR THE FINES THEY RECEIVE AT COURT FOR SKIPPING ON THE TRAIN FARE. AMINE IS ALSO FRIENDS WITH PETER FUNDI, A MATE FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL IN MELBOURNE. PETER WORKS AT A SERVICE STATION IN MELBOURNE. AMINE SEES HIM AS A FAMILY BOY.

EDUCATION: ST JOSEPH'S COLLEGE, BLACKTOWN, MELBOURNE; HAS JUST BEEN ACCEPTED INTO THE VICTORIAN COLLEGE OF THE ARTS FOR ACTING.

CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT: AMINE LIVES WITH A COUPLE OF HIS MATES: ALEX DOME (FRIEND) AND DANIEL LO (HIS BROTHER).

FAMILY: AMINE'S FAMILY HAS BROKEN UP – DANIEL AND HE DO NOT TALK TO THEIR PARENTS. THIS HAS BEEN HARD. EVERYONE WANTED 'SOMETHING DIFFERENT'.

HEALTH: GOOD. HE IS FIT.

HABITS: HE LICKS HIS LIPS A LOT WHEN TALKING, TRYING TO FIGURE OUT SOMETHING. THERE IS NOTHING EXTRAORDINARY IN HIS PHYSICALITY.

POLITICS: NO INTEREST

SPORT: LIKES ALL SPORTS – DANGEROUS EXTREME SPORTS ARE HIS FAVOURITE. TRAVEL: TRAVELS AUSTRALIA – HE WANTS TO FIND OUT HOW OTHER AFRICANS LIVE AND WHAT'S A BETTER AND SAFER PLACE TO BE (BECAUSE OF HIS EXPERIENCE WITH THE THUGS)

ASPIRATIONS: TO BE A FILM STAR.

INFLUENCES: HIS GRANDFATHER, JOSEPH, WHO STILL LIVES IN KENYA, WHO GIVES HIM ADVICE BECAUSE HE HAD A ROUGH BACKGROUND TOO; MARTIN LAWRENCE AND EDDIE MURPHY WHO LIVE LIFE WITH A CAREFREE ATTITUDE. HE HAS AN EX: IRENE WHO HE CALLS WHILE ON HIS TRAVELS.

RELIGION: CATHOLIC – PRAYS ONCE A YEAR – AT CHRISTMAS FOR GOD TO FORGIVE HIS SINS.

PHYSICALITY: FIT.

ECONOMICS: NOT MUCH TO SPARE. HE WORKED AS A SECURITY GUARD AT MELBOURNE'S CROWN CASINO FOR INCOME BEFORE GOING ON RUN.

Figure 6. 'Original' profile of Amine Lo.

The 'original' profile, as drawn up with Justin, is compelling as the source of Amine. Amine is a provocateur as is Justin. This answers to an extent what it is that drives Amine, and Justin's, impulses to destabilise and is reflective of their apparent instability. It also gives background to what compels Amine to provoke the other characters in the play, while Justin often did this in workshops, as noted in his run-in with Kirsty. It gives some motivation for outbursts and to express Amine's malevolent charm to cajole or infuriate other characters, as he does with Larry.

It could be argued that many playwrights will create 'original' profiles along similar lines to Leigh's, usually in order to remind them as they write of intricate information and detail, and to assist in creating depth of dialogue and voice, action and story. Regardless of their methodology or the origins of their characters, plot or story, my intention was to form a consistency of character through the process. However, I could not confirm that the participants' 'originals' were 'true' or had aspects of 'truth' when they divulged information about people they knew – I could only take their word, and I had no reason to doubt them. And so 'truth' (that the original is based on someone real, which may also be them) meeting 'fiction' (once removed immediately allows for a fictionalisation to occur) is established from the beginning. The 'original' profile provides the playwright with a compass that can guide the transcription of the material generated in improvisation and the writing in an appropriate direction to advance characterisations. What becomes clear, is that the participants are still present as writers in their own right, having created the foundation of their own character.

Fiction operates in so many ways – and for Amine the sense of who Justin was penetrated the character just as much as metaphor was useful for me to flesh out that character. As a boy I had seen the Zulu nation as a powerful symbol of resistance to the Apartheid system in South Africa. I had also been reminded by Juma of Zulu culture during an interview where he talks of dance (see Video Clip 7, 01:32-02:53). In this way, the creation of Amine's 'Zulu' background harnessed the danger that I sensed in Justin and the character he created and I tried to find an anchor through the image of a warrior. For me, Amine was a survivor who was also a deeply reluctant attacker. Amine could be seen as an antagonistic force. However, I would also suggest there is a great deal of space around his character for an audience to empathise with him, to ask how he got to where he did, but not to dismiss his wrongs. Amine, and ultimately my impression of Justin over the six weeks or so we worked together, provides a notion of being unsettled. This was something that I deliberately played with in the writing. As Justin's attendance to the workshops waned and eventually discontinued, the resonance of his voice impacted upon the work more than he or I might have predicted.

H. Khalid Yacean

There had always been a tension between the many different voices in the development stage of the project – voices that were stronger through personality, or because they came to workshop more often than others, or they produced more meaningful material and therefore had a dominant place in the mix. At times in the writing phase my voice seemed to be the loudest. This tension can be seen with the development of various characters' in the drafting process; Khalid (for clarity, I will use this name instead of the 'original', Caliph), developed by the participant Juma, is a good example of this. As mentioned, when I first met Juma, at the Australian Red Cross workshops prior to beginning my research, he was focused on training as a dancer. When he volunteered for the project, I was surprised when I discovered that he had instead chosen to devote himself to Islam, when he volunteered for the project. Despite the potential for any and all subjects to arise, I was further surprised when his faith began to merge with the character he had created. As discussed, this is not in any way a criticism of Juma's beliefs; rather, it is the case that I had not expected religious beliefs to become as prominent a subject as it inevitably became during the development; ultimately, this translated to the play. By the time I began to write the first draft, I found Juma's dialogue from the video recordings stimulating in developing Khalid's persona, which included Juma sometimes quoting of passages from the Qur'an. I was not sure how accurate Juma's knowledge of the religious text was, but it was confirmed that it was from the Qur'an when Jamal, who was also Muslim,

pointed it out. This occurred with Juma during a conversation, about midway through the workshops. The experience threw up a question of cultural context and what happens when specific knowledge exists outside of my experience, and how this is managed. I wanted to include passages from the Qur'an that I had begun to read passages from, principally because of its important to Juma and what he offered through the original, Khalid. However, I felt uncomfortable about whether this would be misconstrued as irreverent or arbitrary. This fear was based principally on the fact that I did not have a personal context for the Qur'an; nor any more than a rudimentary understanding of Islam as a religious faith; so I was quite torn in tackling those aspects of Khalid while writing the play.

Instances like Juma's creation of Khalid challenged my knowledge set and I was compelled to research areas I had not previously thought I would necessarily follow, but the process had taken me in a particular direction along with the participants' (mainly Juma's) instigation. I read portions of the Qur'an, I examined Islamic scholarship and I also decided to draw on texts that I already knew. In a really early draft, Khalid had also been placed into scenarios with another character, Jau, an added fictional character that helped reveal Khalid's backstory but Jau did not end up in the final play. The character Jau was a people smuggler loosely connected to Larry Malik's narrative and this tenuous connection between Malik and Jau had a strained plausibility. At the time I had been reading Guy de Maupassant's *Bel-Ami* (1885). I was intrigued by the characterisation of two soldiers of different status, one of whom exploits the other for mercenary gain similar to the way I had Jau exploit Khalid in early drafts of the play. However, Jau, as a device tired easily in the writing of the play. While a useful dramaturgical device, eventually he blended with the early character of Caliph, then disappeared altogether. Any trace of Jau remains only in the character of Khalid in the final script. However, exposure to other texts cannot help but take a role in shaping authorial voice; it is hard to avoid the overflow of artistic influences into any creative work, just as it is difficult to avoid personal experiences inspiring, intervening or interrupting with the writing process. In use with characters in the play, like Errick and his political background which was drawn from my own knowledge and initial research of neo-liberalism, intertextual 'borrowing' could be a dramaturgical opportunity allowing for the development of metaphor that, in the context of *I am here now* "transfers the meaning of home and belonging […] across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation people" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 291).While it is not uncommon for an author to build a new work around or from other literary texts – while acknowledging the fraught relationship between author, reader and subjective context - simply put, intertextuality results in a shift of meaning from original text to new text, from original author's intent to new author's intent.

I. Errick Nkomo

While the 'originals' either directly informed the play's characters, or indirectly inspired new characters, I felt Errick was needed as a central figure, as a grounding force for the other stories and characters. However, as the play developed, this became less the case, with Nancy meeting with Amine independently and Nousiba dealing directly with Martin, albeit via phone. The play opens with the coming election and he is seemingly very present in the action however as the play continues his story thread deliberately falls away. As with all drama, this runs the risk that the momentum for the play may dissipate. But in fact while in earlier drafts Errick was a dominant force and in many respects the play was too dependent on his story I realised that his dominance to the narrative was detrimental to the aim of plurality – in fact, there was a danger of monovocality in the early drafts. My desire for a cohesive narrative structure was not allowing for multiple viewpoints, multiple voices. Thus, the final draft of the play opens on the eve of the election and Errick is but one of the many interconnected stories of the African Australian characters. He is a flawed man with fraught if not fractured relationships with his mother and two daughters, which he must negotiate (or negate) in the face of his own fierce political ambition. In the first few scenes, Errick displays his blinkered focus on electioneering; however, this trait also impresses a type of privilege that Errick takes for granted, particularly in comparison with other characters in the play. This privilege manifests itself in various ways, including as the dominant family figure; his dismissal of the driver at the airport and the indifference towards Barbara, the convenor of his town hall meeting. Even in earlier drafts of the play, Errick was glib to most others around him. As the story progresses, the initial drive of the election becomes scant, almost irrelevant to Errick, as we key into other story threads. Errick is in fact a man in conflict, in grief, and he reappears with a change of heart which is never explicitly foreshadowed. Perhaps his internal conflict says as much for his ambivalence as a politician as it does about being a father and a son. Errick is never an entirely reconciled character – he never completes a cycle of action, obstacle and resolution – and this is something that I think is important in trying to capture or even 'personify' ideas of isolation and dislocation.

To come back to Errick, soon after I began writing, I realised that there was a lack of a central driving force or a central protagonist around which the play might revolve. Furthermore, there was an ambiguity to any direct discourse on social justice issues. On re-examination, the first draft

essentially consisted of an arrangement of discombobulated improvisations, without a sense of narrative continuity or significant form from one story thread to another. At this stage, research on Leigh's dramatic writing ran cold, other than what was outlined by Clements (1983). I decided to return then to the practices of playwriting that I was familiar with – of writing narrative dramatic fiction with beginning, middle and end – and at some point, between the first and second drafts, it dawned on me that new characters were needed. The most significant of these new characters was Errick, who partly represented my frustrations with what I saw as the pitch towards the political right in Australian politics and the inaction of governments, and other institutions, to deal with societal tensions related to neoliberalism (Monbiot, 2016), and to government policy around the right to seek asylum.

Several of the participants spoke of the inefficacy of foreign aid to the developing world in various states of crisis, such as Sudan and Ethiopia. In addition, several times participants would talk of a perceived lack of comprehension about Islam. In that sense, Errick is a composite of recurrent conversations and anecdotal examples of different individuals' frustrations, such as the corruption around African aid money that seemed to be something most of the participants born in Africa and recently arrived, spoke about. He is also the politically right wing, conservative and sensationalist stance on a perceived Islamisation and this led to interwoven threads throughout the play (not only taken up by Errick), including the equation of terrorism with Islam and the counter narrative to Juma and his fear of an American conspiracy behind the September 11 attacks on New York and the Pentagon. It was Juma, the devout Muslim, who in the workshops had spoken of what he saw as attacks on Islam post September 11th. He was obviously feeling defensive towards his new faith and the societal difference which his faith posed for him. This is reflected in Khalid's lines about September 11th when no-one asked what a Muslim was. Kahlid notes that after the September 11th attacks, apprehension grew and the wider community became scared of Muslims. Back to the focus on Errick, by developing him as central to the narrative this allowed scope for further exploration of politics and its impact on the social issues I was passionate about, such as social inequity and the 21st Century dilemma of 'security' in its numerous individual and societal constructions. Juma was vocal on about security and his perception of how Muslims have been viewed since September 11th, and John and Jamal often, separately, backed up his viewpoints outside the workshops. In addition, there was a general sense that aid money made the poorer nations of Africa dependent upon Western nations, preventing self-determination at an economic level. From this, I became interested in writing

a central character who actually had achieved the political representation little afforded to African Australian migrants, or many other marginalised groups in Australia.

My desire to see social justice issues discussed in the play began to go beyond the offerings of the participants. What was exciting as a playwright was to see how I might create a central character that espoused the antithesis of my views, yet was neither caricatured nor demonised. The challenge as an author was how to devise a character which can allow for complexity and depth to develop, rather than purely proselytise. If that is achieved, then my intentions for the character will be evident in the play; if not, then the character will be of limited depth. By developing this tension – a tension between who I am and who Errick is – meant that I was able to continue to develop dramatic tension as well as playing with the various 'voices' around diverse subjects through Errick. In this sense, seemingly multiple and conflicting points of views could be played out for and by him as he battled with his political party's agenda, his own values, his role as an African Australian man and what this would mean for his community, and his relationship with his family. David Lodge notes that Bakhtin refers to a 'stylisation' which "occurs when the writer borrows another's discourse and uses it for his own purposes – with the same intention as the 'original', but in the process casting a slight shadow of objectification over it" (cited in Lodge, 1990, p. 59), which to some degree captures how and why I brought Errick into the play.

As I moved into the third draft, Errick was my response to the John Howard era in Australian politics, where I saw a conservatism that was deeply flawed and continued through subsequent governments of various persuasions. I have witnessed what I understand to be a neoliberal and neoconservative political agenda from the John Howard era onwards – within both Liberal and Labor governments – that often prioritises the advancement of the individual concerns at the expense of the community. By the final draft, Errick was much less a device to politicise the play, but rather a reflection on family and responsibility. Ultimately, my desire to see social issues discussed through theatre made demands beyond the offerings of the participants. What Errick also represented was again the increasing polyvocality of the play and the nature of the many voice(s) resonating amongst the content of each scene. The challenge for me as an author is how to collaboratively devise a polyphony that is more than a device to carry the voice of the sole author but carries my voice nonetheless. By developing this tension – between my voice and who Errick was shaping up to be – I was able to continue to draw a dramatic conflict engaged with multiple and conflicting issues and

points of views. As Bakhtin (cited in Holquist, 1981) observed, polyvocality channels multiple voices at once:

> Serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author. (p. 324)

Leigh's scripts often explore an individual's relationship to self and society. Bhabha explores the divided Self and Other. Both of these ideas manifest in the characters of I am here now, and both of which I understand to be innately political. Even though the participants did not offer views about politics in Australia, the central figure Errick Nkomo allowed a wider exploration of the politics and governmentality of institutions that appealed to me as author. This 'politics', which includes issues of political representation as well as fears of social exclusion, found its way into the play through the role of Errick. To a lesser extent, this 'politics' allowed the 'voices' of the participants, but also the voices of the 'originals' (whoever they may be), and of myself, to have a place to play out.

J. Nousiba Nkomo

Along with Errick, Nousiba was another character who emerged more fully later in the writing process. Discussion of Nousiba, particularly in light of the final draft, cannot be embarked on without mention of the character of Martin, her husband. Both characters arose from events that transpired from a difficult personal relationship I was in at the time of the workshops. Until the penultimate draft, the character of Martin had been physically present in the action. Martin was Australian born, and of non-African heritage, but married into the Nkomo family, and is involved in Foreign Aid in Africa. He is filled with grief over the death of his child, and regret for not being there when the child died. I also had Martin involved in an extra marital affair in draft four. His grief was compounded by a bewilderment at his perceived inaction of Nousiba upon his return from Africa.

By the final draft, Martin had moved into a space where he was physically absent, merely a presence on the other end of the phone; this repositioned the story to focus on Nousiba. Martin became one of what I came to term the "muted" voices of the writing process. The reason why I removed Martin physically from the script was to place emphasis on his absence from Nousiba's life, from the

entirety of her grief and from her perception that she was simply incapable of moving beyond it. I was conscious of the conversations around Foreign Aid, and to do this subject justice I felt that story thread needed to be represented by someone who was not born of Africa and who was in conflict about their efforts. In the radical removal of all the non-African characters, and the other major changes that happened between the third and fifth drafts, I was able to focus on the tragedy that Nousiba was experiencing and how she is entirely alone. Her character resonates a rawness and brutal honesty that often resides in people who experience great trauma. During the drafting stages, and what led to my decision to absent Martin to merely a one-sided phone call, was when I started to consciously play with the notion that their relationship could be viewed as metaphorical, in that they could represent larger humanistic ideas that contrast with the socio-political status of the world in which they exist, either in Australia or overseas. These new fictionalised characters spoke to the unbalanced nature of the unhomely. In the final draft, Nousiba is the personification of the isolation. The final moments of the play with Nousiba reunited with her father speaks to a transition towards some sense of hope, and to the intimacy that comes from shared grief, an intimacy that was not afforded to her in marriage.

K. Rachael Nkomo

Rachael Nkomo was a fascinating character to write because as she developed it became apparent that much of her application was as a metaphor for the cultural transition from the homeland to the home; a dramaturgical opportunity allowing for the development of metaphor that, in the context of *I am here now* "transfers the meaning of home and belonging […] across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation people" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 291). As discussed previously, the participant Rachael withdrew from the devising process before it was fully completed; her 'original' at that point was too underdeveloped to shape a story thread in the larger narrative. At this point, I took Rachael's 'original', Sarah McCarthy, out of the structuring process. It then became clear that while there had been an imbalance of male to female participants, this was now further impacted by the absence of Rachael, which had the potential to disrupt some story threads. I then considered how I might take certain features of Sarah McCarthy and transcribe them into a character that I could develop during the writing phase. Without irony, the character ended up being called Rachael instead of Sarah McCarthy, somewhat in recognition of the work that the participant Rachael had done at that stage. Quickly I realised that this adjustment might become a

muddled exercise because, unlike Kevin and Donnell's merger, Sarah was a very individual entity compared with the other characters. Having to mould this new character from scratch, I felt that I needed to draw upon the characteristics that most emanated from Rachael over the time I had spent with her, in order to honour the 'truth' of her input as much as was possible. Without question, Rachael's faith and strong values set were incredibly important to her and early drafts demonstrated this religiosity. The participant Rachael had not incorporated religion into the 'original', but she had talked to me about her Christian faith extensively in conversation. She embodied a nurturing quality and while she was young, had a substance to her character, and so I created the grandmother character. From this, Rachael Nkomo emerges as a grounded figure within the narrative; even though trauma wars within and through her anxiety as her mental health deteriorates does not readily speak to this grounded quality, she nevertheless provides an equilibrium for other characters. Even though trauma wars within and through her anxiety as her mental health deteriorates does not readily speak to this grounded quality, she nevertheless provides an equilibrium for other characters.

As well as her religiosity, I reflected upon the participant Rachael's absences from workshops and began to consider this discontinuity as metaphorical. Rachael's absence became a tool for me to consider absence in other ways, such as in the character's loss of memory and frequent association with her past represented a figurative separation from security and safety. Rachael becomes a conduit for many discourses to ebb and flow, altering rhythms in the play as needed in concurrence with other characters' story threads. Rachael's early dementia is a metaphor for the process that overtakes many migrants – the sense of loss when the solidity of cultural self-identity breaks down; the *unhomeliness* in the new home, the foreignness of a homeland the longer one is absent from that place. In *I am here now*, all of the characters appear defined by their various attempts at a connection to the world of which they are now part. Sometimes this occurs in order to survive or to advance their social position. Sometimes it is due to the realisation that what has been left behind is fundamental to their identity in the new home - even to those characters who may never have spent time immersed in their origins, or are unsure of what their originary 'voice' sounds like, articulated by Donnell in Scene Four during his viewing of the community centre.

Having talked to Kirsty about her affinity with her grandmother during the creation of Nancy, I considered that a maternal character might help act as a repository of tradition and cultural knowledge, if and when that arose in the writing. This could create a historical context for the

younger women's sense of home and belonging, in relation to who they are *here* and *now*. In that way, Rachael becomes the conduit to Africa for her family – from her matriarchal guidance while cooking and singing, to the dancing, and her different experiences. But she is ultimately terrified of an unknown force, a terror that is seemingly awaiting her. To some extent this eventuates, but not in the way that she imagines. Rachael plays an important function in addressing the different experiences of migration across generations, as well as within a single family. By the end, Rachael was 'fictionalised' in order to inflect a different perspective into the narrative and to bring me, as author, a little closer to a 'truth' about existing in a world of *unhomeliness*.

L. *Nancy Nkomo*

The most complete characterisation that survived into the writing phase was Nancy, developed from the participant Kirsty's improvisatory work. When it came to writing *I am here now* it very much felt as though Kirsty's nous in story, action and dialogue set a benchmark against which it was hard not to measure the other participants, placing the character of Nancy as one of the most interesting characters for me to work with, as a facilitator and then, with the dramatic material produced, as playwright. What was remarkable was that the dialogue which emerged for other characters in collaboration with her then became shaped by what Nancy offered. This became clearer as the focus on Nancy Nkomo throughout the drafting stages of the play saw her by the final draft as pivotal to the narrative. Nancy proceeded from draft to draft as a fairly reserved individual, but by the final draft I actually returned the character to close to Kirsty's 'original'. With the removal of the two characters called Mitch and Frank, it felt as though Nancy had greater room to move as a character and her 'voice' became louder and was given more significance than in previous drafts. She is of solace to her grandmother, and certainly has other functions, but Nancy is an important foil for Amine. In their doomed relationship, Amine's tragic life choices comes to a head. Nancy is drawn to Amine and his spontaneity and presence and yet is unsettled by his presence.

M. *Larry Malik*

For the characters in *I am here now*, the home and the *unhomely* are inseparable, and this perhaps is revealed most by the character of Larry Malik who is perceptibly far from home. In *The word, dialogue and the novel* (2002), Kristeva re-searches the Bakhtinian concepts of carnival and

dialogism in relation to performance and dramatic action. She describes carnival as related to theatrical *mise en scene*, a space where "language escapes linearity (law) to live as drama in three dimensions. At a deeper level this also signifies the contrary: drama becomes located in language. A major principle thus emerges: all poetic discourse is dramatization" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 79). If poetic discourse exists in the play, it is not necessarily always in the dialogues between characters, but in the heightened imagistic and physical sequences including Larry Malik's night sky swimming, which play with a sense of dislocation from time and space. This image I had drawn from a memory many years before my research. As I floated in a North American lake one clear night, I looked at the reflection of the night sky in the water, thrown for a moment, unable to determine where the sky ended and the lake began. The memory, is not wholly representative of the character, but I continually came back to it when writing the play. Eventually, the image helped me to imagine both what it might be like to be forced to flee my home with the literal and metaphorical openness of water and sky, inside one image. Larry Malik's experience, triggers in me a sense of wonderment and a sense of my place within the infinite; but it is also a metaphor of how small and temporal life can be, as Larry discovers at the end of the play.

In Larry Malik's night sky swims, the metaphor captured in the stage directions changes tone, based on the overwhelming dread of dislocation from his family. In the play, this is captured in the moments of Larry's unsureness in the dark water, and returns again and again as the tension of reuniting his family becomes harder; with Larry, at one point in the story nearly drowning in one instance. In these ways, Kristeva's notion of a poetic discourse, in this case around separation and the *unhomely*, can be married to both my unsettled memory and Larry's dislocation to create a recurrent metaphor in the drama of the play. This place of memory is both liminal and temporal; Bhabha observes that in the experience of the migrant "the recurrent metaphor is of landscape as the inscape of national identity" (1994, p. 143). The night sky swim image suggests the internal landscape of Larry and perhaps even of all the other characters in the play in some degree, and their connection to a place that exists as both a real thing as well as memory or fantasy. Larry experiences this inscape as part of the richness of his attachment to home and family with as heightened memory. The two sustained images of Larry are vastly different in setting but are intimately interconnected; the dreamlike night swim with the at times frantic telephone calls to his family in Africa; the home and the unhomely reside simultaneously in duress and longing of his long distance calls. Much like Nousiba, from his 'exile', Larry speaks (swims) into a vacuum that contains the equal possibility of joy in reunion or unimaginable loss.

By the settings in the play being able to occupy a poetic territory, the heightened sequences envelop the characters in scenes played out across almost carnivalesque backdrops of heightened realism that breaks the conventions of an otherwise realist play. Kristeva observes that in the creation of an "omnified stage of carnival", discourse attains a "potential infinity" where "prohibitions (representation, 'monologism') and their transgression (dream, body, dialogism) coexist" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 79). This can be witnessed at the beginning of *I am here now*, as the prologue explodes into a hard-edged montage of mediated visual and audio effects, with rapid vignettes which prefigure the 'voices' that resonate in the play's polyvocal dramaturgy. This sequence presents the reader/audience with the incumbent power relationships in the play: police; political borders; military; surveillance; with accompanied spotlights and overpowering sound effects – played off coloured screens and through audio apparatus in an attempt to defy a sense of fixed space and time. The multiplicity of 'voices' in the prologue, both physical and verbal, capture the dynamism of 'flight' in various senses – what might be termed a polyvocality in action. I have attempted to play with metaphor to go part way towards evading the definitiveness of realism; in that way, metaphor encourages the reader to hear the voices in the play anew. Often this happens through the physical sequences or the highly imagistic moments. In Scene Three, when Nancy and Larry first meet in the burger joint, ideas around poverty, propriety, race, purchasing power and the extremes of financial inequality in the new home, play out. Nancy becomes the cipher to help understand the extremity of Larry's separation from home. Larry's early encounter with Nancy at the burger joint is an interesting juxtaposition to the fluorescent lights and the gaudy screens as he imagines his own music and dance and the reader is left to imagine the division of resources and wealth, intentionally representative of the inequality of modern consumerism.

Quickly it becomes clear that the dramaturgy of the play did not conform to "mainstream liberal conceptions of the self and society…according to which races do not really exist, only individuals" (Mills, 2017, p. 236). The play moved rapidly towards the Prologue montage, which allowed for a diegesis (or narrative) brought into relief by what could be termed estrangement, a defamiliarisation with what should be familiar, but is not. The playwright, Suzan Lori-Parks, notes that defamiliarisation emphasises a reimagining of other voices in her plays and declares that playwrights "have been taking realism for granted instead of rethinking it critically" (cited in Mihaylova, 2015, p. 217) in regards to the portrayal of race. To restate Mills, there is an implicit awareness that race "is a

social reality with its own ontology" (2017, pp. 235-36). In many ways, this critical rethinking of how to deliver the script has been useful to a play which now contains only African Australian characters. This notion of shaking off the strictures of realism is problematic. While the play has realism at its core, with stylised and non-representational moments, there are several presentational moments scattered throughout (prologue, dream etc.). Realism cannot entirely work as a central device throughout the structure of the play, backed up by the dramaturgical approach of playwrights like Lori-Parks, "because it has become the default representational mode for social-issue plays" (Mihaylova, 2015, p. 217). At the time of writing *I am here now*, I was not of the opinion, as Parks contends, that realism had been reduced to "bad journalism" (p. 217). Lori-Parks also vies that "playwrights should be looking for experimental modes that account for the specificity of the theatrical medium" (cited in Mihaylova, p. 217), of which metaphor lends itself, with *I am here now* delivering a balance between theatrical worlds.

Metaphor is embedded into Scene Three, in relation to the setting and props: the promise of children's toys being used for marketing; the lighting and sound effects of the neon screens and dissonant jingles. In themselves, these do not imply metaphor, but contribute to the continual repositioning of not only Nancy and Larry, but the many voices that populate the scene. For instance, the burger joint substitutes for the malnourishment of late capitalism, highlighted in gaudy décor, the limited menu of unpalatable fast food, and the patent marketing personified by the mascot that Larry dances with on the screens. These point to an expectation of consumerism that underpins the neo-liberalist philosophy. Nancy and Larry's positioning is also reworked and re-accentuated by their assimilation into this world, substituted as an attribute or adjunct for who they actually are. Metaphor is particularly conspicuous in Nancy: a woman working in a service industry that stipulates that she represent a broader idea, which embraces corporate consumerism. This hunger can also be viewed through Nancy's attempt to deny the corporate edict, through the purge of her hunger, the act of vomiting hidden offstage. Ultimately, the polyvocality arises from metaphor which forms the stylized interstices between dramaturgy and polyvocality, and also brings up notions of "otherness" that emerges from the emanating unhomeliness in the scene.

Experiments with theatrical *mise en scene*, as in these examples, was a deliberate attempt to set the play's language apart from what was initially suffused by the desire to honour the verbatim workshop material. The experiments with *mise en scene* also added to *I am here now* a dimension which pushed beyond the expectations of a literal or linear realism. The physical and imagistic

sequences function in a similar way. As Larry searches for escape from the water, his body takes on the embodiment of intention, dramaturgically implied with physical action suggestive of an escape from the confines of space and time. This is also the case for Amine Lo, for Rachael and even for Donnell. Nousiba's dalliance with suicide on her balcony, and then her dance with her father, embody this sense of escape too. In their own way, each character attempts to transcend unequal power relationships too. As mentioned, this can be seen in the prologue, and is key to understanding Larry's night sky swim, Amine Lo's pursuance by the searchlight, and the constant shifts between diverse settings that create a physical dynamism active within the language, but these moments of symbolism, physical sequences and heightened theatricality are scattered throughout the play.

N. Physical sequences

Carlson observes that in language there is a "division that performance theorists have often sought to place between language and physical action" (2018, p. 69). In *I am here now*, the term 'physical sequence' turns up several times in the stage directions. The need for what is termed 'physical sequence' in the play comes from my attempts to comprehend the physical subtext embodied within the participants' improvisations. Carlson proposes that the division of language can be broken in two: firstly, "the semiotic and linguistic, the symbolic, whose elements stand in for absent realities and whose utilisation is governed by more or less fixed abstract structures" (2018, pp. 69- 70). It is the second that is most relevant to the writing of *I am here now*. Following from Bakhtin and Kristeva, Carlson outlines the other side of the division of language, by noting the use of "the realm of physical presence, whose elements offer an accessible reality which […] can only be understood within a specific, never precisely repeated context"; where the "emphasis is not on the traditional communication of an abstract and unitary though content, but of an original movement, an effect, a force" (2018, p. 70).

The integration of physical movement in theatre is certainly not a new thing with notable companies such as *Frantic Assembly* and *Complicite* successfully merging the relationship of movement and physical sequences with dialogue and action in theatre. I had first-hand experience with the convention of 'physical sequencing' while directing *Enron* by Lucy Prebble (2012) at WAAPA. In this circumstance, Prebble becomes another important 'voice' in the discourse surrounding the creation of *I am here now*. Prebble leaves the simple term 'physical sequence' in her script,

indicating a moment of physical action to be interpreted by the director as a sensory experience, designed to stimulate the audience, but with no fixed meaning. For me, this stage direction became a device allowing for independent physical interpretation and expression to be given a place at the core of the play. 'Physical sequences' permit a broader engagement with physical creativity and subtextual suggestion that takes a reader/audience into a heightened reality. I knew that I wanted to capture the physical engagement from the workshops into the written play, whether in the action of the characters, or as a metaphor for what would otherwise be substituted for dialogue. The quality of the movement described in the script had to be something that could help reinterpret the linearity of the early drafts, in such a way that metaphor could disclose a profound meaning that might be latent in the writing, drawing it away from realism. In *Enron*, the physical sequences are used to reveal ritualised hyper-masculinity in partnership with the excesses of Capitalism. The physical sequences in *I am here now* was an opportunity for the beats, rhythms, physicality and movements that the participants spoke about, to be included. Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo look upon the body "as equally subject to multiple inscriptions, producing an unstable signifier rather than a totalised entity. It is a site of convergence for contesting discourses, even though it may be marked with the distinctive signs of a particular culture" (2002, p. 47). At various times the participants spoke about habits and customs that, for them, could be representative of an 'Africa', and suggested these could be included in the play; movement, dance and, as mentioned, the idea that 'African's don't sit still'. What is important is to marry the physical sequences with the character and the action, so that thematically there is flow and meaning. These moments are still left relatively open and free to interpretation by the cast and creative team in performance. In addition, the physical sections sometimes allude to dance sequences. Dance was definitely something that quite a few participants referred to as a connection to both African and Western culture. With some breaking into traditional dance from their origins, at other times Hip Hop style, these moments read to me as modes of expression beyond verbal language through physical dialogue.

During my acting training at NIDA, I had been taught to seek a neutral body as a catalytic point to embark on any other movement. However, Jacques Lecoq pointed out that "there is no such thing as absolute and universal neutrality" (as cited in Murray, 2003, p. 52), and that the subjective limitations of an individual's body do not allow for neutrality. In Video Clip 13, the participants interviewed advise that if I was attentive to their choices of movement, I should be able to delve further into the physical language they convey. This meant that the participants would become the

conduit to access embodied knowledge, which was new to me. Juma noted that it was important to "recognise rhythms". He expanded: "I will see a specific dance and I will know from which tribe that's from, what country" (Video Clip 13, 01:56). In many ways, the systemising of a language, whether verbal or physical through the likes of dance, games and rituals, can be viewed as creating a disjunctive effect. One of the notable observations that can made about the improvisatory work is that there are often silences as effective as the dialogues that are produced; this brings focus onto the physical performance of the participants. Neutrality, therefore, can be a "tool for analysing the quality of the body's action" (Eldredge & Huston, 1995, p. 127). In terms of writing, this raises further questions about how to convey the tensions between constructivist notions of the body in society and the physiological materiality of the individual body that contains expressive qualities of lived experience and personality. This sense of physical expressiveness was something I became very conscious of each time I met to work with the participants. It had first come to my attention, ironically, via Juma's dancing. It felt as though what I read as a unique physical subtext was what might make this play different. When dialogue can exist, but where the choice of communication does not necessarily have to rely on dialogue, something interesting happens to the meaning making process, and so much more than what is literally said can be witnessed.

O. *Muted voices*

Richard Giulianotti, in his article *Towards a critical anthropology of voice* (2005), argues from the Bakhtinian position that language can contain 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal 'forces. The first "seeks to secure hegemony for one communicative system over others"; the latter "seeks to promote linguistic plurality […] particularly evident among marginal social groups" (Giulianotti, 2005, p. 345). Beyond the centrifugal aspiration I had for the characters, I began to see certain characters as potentially metaphoric; as they had passed over from the play, so too did their voices provide a 'ghosting' over other characters. As discussed, Martin went from being a physical presence in the play with Nousiba to what I term a 'muted' voice. To elaborate on that idea, I turn to Gilbert and Tompkins (2002, p. 229) who discern that "whether signified through verbal reference, visual gesture, costume, props, or some feature of the set (such as an empty chair), the absent body occupies dramatic, if not always actual, space" (Gilbert & Tompkins, 2002, p. 229). Evidently, Martin's 'voice' still resides very much in Nousiba's story thread and the discourses within which both 'voices' exist are very much part of the final play. Nousiba, as the *embodiment* of that

relationship, is perhaps a clearer characterisation; this is partly in response to that 'ghosting' of Martin. Absence then could be described, and experienced, as "a palpable, 'embodied' presence, a paradox which allows some scope for theatrical manipulations of the text" (Gilbert and Tompkins, 2002, p. 229), which is what occurs in the scenes where Nousiba speaks to Martin on the phone. This is supported by Freud's paradoxical insights of literature and its relationship to the *uncanny*. In the penultimate draft of the play, certain voices existed that did not make the final draft, for reasons attributable to this idea of how important they were to the central concepts of the play. This led to a decision to edit or leave out entirely characters including Martin, Frank, Mitch Cooke, and the father/son duo of Peter and Joe.

In early drafts the character of Frank, was a fly-in-fly-out worker and partner of Nancy. He was there to represent the recent Australia (even more so the mining/resource sector in Western Australia) and as a white character foil to Amine. He was belligerent and judgemental, and often talked down to Nancy. As I progressed with the writing, it became apparent that Frank bordered on caricature, was potentially divisive and certainly biased towards my own disdain for what I saw in Australia as a particular kind of intolerance and misogyny. At an earlier stage, I had considered removal of the character altogether – I felt I tested the aims of the play too far by inclusion of an antagonist like Frank. To correct this imbalance and realign the character, I developed Frank further into what I saw as being a more likeable and balanced persona. Frank materialised more fully in the second and third drafts, and something changed the connection I had with the character. Interestingly, the type of caricature that Frank began as had been advanced as more of a 'truth' than a 'fiction', with the rise of far right nationalism via organisations like Pauline Hanson's One Nation and Reclaim Australia creating a malevolent discourse around race and migration. This populist voice of Australia was hard to pin down in the writing when I first began. At the time I felt so deeply enraged by this turn towards Australian populist politics in the community that I suspect that was much of the reason why Frank existed; he was not a creation of the participants. As the drafts developed, I lost sight of Frank's relevance. I also recognised a need to quieten my voice within the play. What becomes clear, is that the final draft does not miss Frank as a foil to the African Australian stories due to the fact that the dominant position in Australia is that of a 'whiteness', which exists even without it being embodied; even in its absence, I could feel its pervasiveness.

Another character absent from the final draft was Mitch Cooke, developed by Omar during the workshops. This character was present through much of the development of *I am here now*. Mitch was conceived as possibly being of an Afro-Caribbean English heritage (in the drafts, Mitch was a destabilising character and unreliable with many lies and games), which was not something within his apparent sphere of knowledge, but a characterisation that may have seemed quite striking to Omar's, as a Melburnian born of Ethiopian heritage. Omar's characterisation of Mitch gave me some creative licence to write further about marginalisation and to explore issues related to gender and sexuality inequality. Though the character Mitch emerged as a non-practicing Muslim, one of the foci of his structuring work was the exploration of sexuality and its tensions in relation to religion, specifically Islam. As a playwright, I was intrigued about where this character might go in relation to other characters and what his 'voice' might add. In answer to my curiosity, Omar took Mitch in several different directions during the workshops. Probably the most interesting of these directions emerged as a character boldly exploring his sexual identity, strikingly displayed in the improvisations Omar shared during the workshops and taken further up until the penultimate draft of *I am here now*. Mitch's clandestine identity was revealed, which introduced sexual ambiguity and took his character into different areas than the others, but also sometimes lured the other characters too. In the end, Mitch had to go; this was a shame, as it was due to the character's association to other characters' narratives, which had also been cut from the script, namely those of the 'fictional' characters, Peter and Joe. Mitch's removal from the final draft lost a certain nuance in character for Nancy, which had been cultivated in the bond she grew with Mitch, despite the way his actions unravelled her much of the time. Mitch's selfishness played out as deeply manipulative in his secret relationship with Peter, which he in turn uses to blackmail the father, giving the character a sense of danger and duplicitousness; however, this was so different from the other story threads that it was a distraction to the more interconnected final draft.

This had been a major issue in the penultimate draft: attempting to balance too many story threads. The removal of the 'fictional' father and son characters destabilised Mitch's thread, so I did not consider what remained would necessarily do justice to what Omar had offered; in that his improvised narrative addressed sexuality and that thread was no longer an option. So I determined that Mitch needed to be removed entirely. What this, and other removed characters, demonstrates is that once the edit of an individual voice occurs, traces of the character may still linger, a 'ghosting' over and through the other characters; the discontinued characters' contributions to the multiple 'voices' in the play were very much present, only quieter, by the final draft. In Mitch's case, the

duplicity and danger of Amine seemed to ratchet up – mainly due to the fact that two extreme characters may have had the effect of overly dramatic story threads vying against one another. Mitch's creative streak also plays out more in the virtuosic dancing of Nancy, which now has space in the narrative, but did not while Mitch rehearsed his lines (he aspired to be an actor in earlier drafts). While perhaps privy only to the sole author, these 'voices' remain as a trace through the final incarnation of the play, and by extension expose another way in which the artefact takes up polyvocality.

Other voices also absent from the final draft were Peter and Joe, a Greek Australian father and son, who emerged as characters' representative of different generations of immigrants who have come to Australia, and the shifts in cultural perspective that occurs between migrant waves. Post-World War II migration to Australia, while initially mainly from Britain and Eire, also contained many from southern and central Europe. Peter represents the second and Joe the third generation of post-war Greek migrants. Peter, a restauranteur, and Joe, Errick's media advisor, demonstrated generational tension with the migrant 'Other', with Joe rejecting many of his father's traditions. Joe's ability to move fluidly between conventions and to challenge migrant cultural expectations in his community comes as a surprise to his father, who while rejecting 'new ways' is paradoxically entwined in a secret sexual relationship with Mitch. The Greek Australian characters in early drafts, fictionalised as they were, were born out of a consideration that there are distinct similarities that each wave of new migrants experience, and that the 'voices' that make up each generation of migrants endure: separation and transition; a sense of dislocation; and a pursuit for a place to belong that is not unlike the notion of the *unhomely*. In retrospect, these characters were a distraction; and again, they were hallmarks of my intervention on the playwriting process, and certainly not manifestations of the development phase. While they served a purpose, removing the characters meant that other characters could develop in their absence. For example, in the third draft, Joe was often the sounding board for Errick, a place for Errick to air frustrations about the election. Without Joe, I was then free to play with Errick's internalised struggle with himself. This led to a more complex character, someone with greater inner turmoil, and so the absence of these characters enabled a richness that otherwise would not have existed.

Chapter Five: Discoveries

A. Reconciling the development

One of the significant outcomes of the project was the discovery of polyvocality and the polemic of authorship, especially in regards to the application of the methods of Mike Leigh. I chose Leigh because I was familiar with his devising methods, and I find this approach infinitely fascinating and truly an immersive and rigorous approach to story creation. However, there were numerous hurdles along the way that definitely indicated either a limitation in my approach to applying the methods or the efficacy of the application itself.

I began the research with the desire to minimise the influence of voice as a playwright and find a theatrical devising methodology that would construct parameters to reduce this influence. However, I decided that only a relatively small number of participants would be manageable for the devising phase and by deciding on a small group, I had put myself into a type of artistic bind; a handful of participants meant that there would be only a handful of characters. Having begun with no script, as Leigh does, I depended on the sustained input of a group of young African Australian participants who would collaborate with me to realise a final written play that would explore whatever situations, issues or experiences relevant to their circumstances, relevant to their lived experience. I was working at the time of the research as a teaching artist at HGCC and while my experience in developing new work had mainly been with professional or training actors and my professional experience largely in text based theatre directing, I had limited experience with working with non-actors in making a new work. I knew that it was unlikely that, at a community level, there would be many, if any, trained or professional actors or theatre makers. But this was something that I turned into a condition of the research; I wanted to explore what non-actors could offer in this setting.

As it turned out, this was a limitation at times; commitment was varied as it was unpaid and often not of interest to the participant; uncertainty of particular acting and theatre methods led to fear of repercussion, or being found to be deceitful; and lack of experience in play building meant that improvisation was foreign and common techniques such as accepting offers and 'shelving' information to be used later in a scene meant that the material generated was often stunted or meandered without focus. However, the benefits of working with participants with little or no theatre

making experience included a freshness and raw insight into the 'real' experience without pretence or performance overshadowed with technique. In addition, I gained a great deal from questioning the impact of these methods, especially the immersion in real life through the road testing technique, which for two participants in particularly really challenged their personal value sets and made me reflect on the role and relationship a maker has with their work, the participant and the rest of the world.

As I shifted from improvisatory work into the playwriting phase, the way ahead became more problematic. Soon I realised that I had imposed limitations on myself as facilitator and then as playwright. As facilitator, I wrestled to address the quality and quantity of material that the improvisational workshops had produced. While I did not have much work that I could use verbatim as dialogue or story, it did become clear over time that many 'voices' had actually been taken up during the devising, each one influencing the other and shaping new discourses that added layers to the improvisational workshops and that this would provide material to write *I am here now*. For my part, Leigh's presence persisted throughout the project because the initial process still derived from him. This speaks to the strength of his methods. In addition, with the resonances of polyvocality in mind, it is worth remarking that I had principally accessed Leigh's methods via secondary sources, including Clements (1983), Carney and Quart (2000), Cardullo (2011), and Marchand (2013). What is certainly clear is that there was no unified African Australian 'voice' that emerged during the development – and of course, I would question anyone who would suggest there is such a voice anywhere, in this project or outside – but many authorial voices, that influenced decisions and were highly influential to the finished narrative. This is evident throughout the devising period - the 'list' creation, the original profiles, and road testing. It was also observed in the structuring phase, which included group improvisation work (see Video Clips 1, 4, 5, 9, and 10) and through the informal conversations and stories of the participants. Anecdotally, this was evidenced in their interaction with me and each other: their tastes, style, dreams and passions, even the obstacles, such as participants leaving or rarely turning up to workshops, or the issues they had with certain elements of the research, in turn each has left a trace in the finished written text.

Frayling's view that in practice-led research the researcher "stands outside the artefact at the same time as standing in it" (1993, p. 1) is key to understanding the processes of my research and the particular struggles I had during the development and writing phases. In this context, practice-led

research touches not only on the positionality of the researcher, but also the issues of facilitation and authorship of creative works more generally. This is a fraught subject throughout a project such as this, when an author attempts to deal with social issues, especially that of marginalisation. I believe that my relationship with the participants, and my particular approach to understanding polyvocality, demonstrated one way to write a play with individuals at its core who had little relationship to theatre and as a group of people (as Australians with African heritage) continue to be underrepresented in Australian Theatre more broadly. The approach I took opens a complex site of tensions and sensitivities for both author and participant, and as Bolt points out, within an exegesis, or in this case a thesis, there is space in which I can ease these tensions "rather than just operating as an explanation or contextualisation of practice" (Bolt, 2007, p. 31). The tensions, particularly in regard to dialogues around the representation of the 'Other' should be continually questioned, and I would argue that in this particular theatre setting, the artist has a particular responsibility to shed light on their role in unpacking this complexity.

B. *Reconciling writing*

My attempt to write about issues of social justice in this context led to questioning of the role of a sole author: whose right to write is it anyway? The answer to that might be to ask another question: does each voice have equal rights in its world? Bakhtin's writings on the notion of polyvocality led me increasingly to question whether an originary voice dominated each draft. Experiences of *unhomeliness*, such as Rachael's dementia and Larry's dislocation from his family demonstrate an underlying relational polyvocality within *I am here now,* as defined by Bakhtin, and applied by Carlson, and Gilbert and Tompkins. The issue of polyvocality that resonates throughout the development, writing and thesis is whether as author, I might capture African Australian 'voice(s)' without falling into the trap of portraying an essentialised 'authenticity' within a discourse of cultural dominance.

Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) allude to this "vexed question of authenticity", offering that it "has special significance in heterogeneous nations where varied cultural groups vie for recognition and political representation" (p. 260). While I am not sure what nation in the world would not be considered heterogeneous, Australia is a multicultural nation and certainly issues around recognition, access and representation are active. To pursue writing that centres on 'authenticity' of voice and

experience would reduce the participants' input, essentialise the characters in the play and belie the very aims of the project. It could be argued that the artifice of the theatre can never truly represent 'truth'; 'reality' and authenticity will only ever be problematic concepts in the writing of fictional theatre works. It could be that 'truth' will always be a value dependent on the subjectivity of the author framing that reality. As playwright, it became evident to me that the fictionalisation of the voices in the play must occur, but that not only had this fiction already begun with the creation of the 'originals' from people the participants knew but also that this 'fiction' would be of overall service to the dramaturgical 'framing' of the participants' voices. Once this discovery was made, the need to 'frame' various narratives became apparent. Polyvocality is the myriad layers of voice/s, of the *consciousness* and *intentions* of all those involved, as traces left in some shape or form in in the writing of *I am here now*.

As writing continued, I recognised that where 'voices' were diminished during the drafting process, as in the case of Martin, Mitch, Sarah, Joe and Peter, this could not be amended by 'fiction' alone. Therefore, in this context, polyvocality becomes a site inclusive of the participants' 'voices' as well as the 'originals' and fictionalised characters, where "various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social 'languages' come to interact with one another" (Carlson, 2018, p. 282). It had become necessary to adopt fictionalisation to nourish the plurality of voices, to better adopt polyvocality, rather than view it as an abandonment of Leigh's methods. This applies to the characters devised from the workshops, such as Donnell and Amine, and even more so to those characters, such as Errick and Rachael, which emerged during the writing phase. This approach offers the playwright a further diversity of voices for inclusion in the play, expanding the creative rights of the participants and the playwright.

The characters and storylines of *I am here now* are as varied as the participants themselves and where the characters end up equally as varied: some tragic, some bittersweet, some hopeful. Throughout the project, I resisted the urge to have every story thread resolved, to avoid making too obvious a statement about who the characters are and what they want. This may leave the play seemingly fragmented, but it is precisely this fragmentation, this complexity of experiences, that was compelling for me as a playwright. This fragmentation is deliberate and somewhat reminiscent of the development experiences; the different stages of the research have been intercut with metaphor and intertextuality, with development material and memories of conversation and 'play' sketched into the

form and content of the play. There is potential also for the vignette quality of the piece, the quick transition to different settings and locations, and the highly imagistic moments to be adapted to film. This is a valuable finding, and the natural affinity of Leigh with film might allow for more scope through the camera lens. The polyvocal discourses about race and creed could form into a narrative that is fundamentally transitional, enticingly original and intersubjective, expressed in a multi-narrative way that suits cinematic form, experimental sound and parallel editing.

Bakhtin "saw all speech involved with citation of previous speech, but he also stressed that no citation is ever entirely faithful, because of the ever-varying context" (1986, p. 89). In this sense 'citation' includes not only the adaption/adaptation of Leigh's methods but also the words, tastes, physicalities, style, passions, personalities and stories of the participants were citations of a sort and contributed to and enhanced the overall narrative of *I am here now*. Through the concept of dialogism (which incorporates polyvocality), when the words and characters are in dialogue with other words and characters the context shifts to form a more inclusive voice that imbues the text with plurality and, ideally, complexity.

C. Migration and the unhomely

Part of the marginalisation of Africans in Australia – regardless of how they arrived in Australia – is the fact that 'they' are often conceived of as being a group by virtue of their coming from Africa, that Africa is 'one place'. From the beginning of the process through to the writing, it was clear that there was no singular or definable African community (not that I had ever presumed there was). Bhabha points out that the "social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridity which emerges in moments of historical transformation" (1994, p. 2). In Scene Three, this can be seen in the physical space of the burger joint, which underlines separation and loss. It also articulates many potential discourses around the state of contemporary Australia, corporatism, Americanisation and so on. Whereas Bhabha talks about social articulation of difference, the play offers a dramaturgical articulation of difference, in the first place for the participants, and then for their characters. Larry Malik's telephone exchanges work at a metaphorical level to illustrate difference: while the phone signifies separation, it also intersects and resonates with the *unhomely*. The use of the telephone is another dramaturgical articulation in which spatial and temporal structures intersect, a kind of dramaturgical

pivot that can destabilise as well as link characters. The location of the community centre, when first encountered, similarly articulated difference.

It was clear from the improvisatory work that social articulation from *there* to *here* was impactful in different ways to different participants; however, the discord of migration granted all of them, participants and characters, the experience of a connection to a 'new home', in part helps to re-form or re-articulate the new migrant community within the new home. Kobena Mercer (2008, p. 19) notes:

> The language of migration has an intimate connection with the lived experience of modernity because uprooting is intrinsically perspectival; the immigrant who arrives as a stranger or newcomer from the point of view of the receiving society is at the same time an emigrant from the point of view of those who are left behind or who chose not to leave.

In the case of the participants, 'leaving' and the sense of loss was often described as a significant event from their early years, migration being compelled upon them by their parents or even more powerful circumstances, such as civil war. It can be seen metaphorically in the play as a spatial and temporal experience, as previously observed in Larry Malik's night swims, which present the *unhomely* in a theatrical way. Even in the workshops, memories of trauma which might have motivated the participants to migrate were not overtly presented. Based on anecdotal conversations with Tich and others about the participants' pasts, the repression of these motives implies notions of the *uncanny* 'repressed'. How then could I capture that sense of *unhomeliness*, or the *uncanny*, which seemed so apparent to me after each workshop? Anindyo Roy (as cited in Rajan & Mohanram, 1995) notes that home "is a problematic site, since the reality of home as well as its imaginative projection are vulnerably linked to an entire network of personal, national, social and cultural identifications" (p. 104). This conforms once again to the tenuous link between the idea of home and the unsettled relationship of home to world that is the unhomely and within the play the unhomely is represented in everything from ideas of cultural fixity and any tension this expounds, whether literally or dramaturgically, to a sense of longing and to literal conflict.

D. A final note on hypervisibility

The concept of multiculturalism has not always been well received in Australia and it is only a relatively recent policy, since the 1970s. For one thing, Val Colic-Peisker and Karen Farquharson

(2011) note that "multiculturalism as a political model, geared towards the preservation of minority cultures and combating racism and social exclusion on the basis of ethnicity, remains riddled with conceptual contradictions and marred by practical difficulties in its implementation" (p. 75). Recent perceptions of racial and ethnic volatility reported in the media include 'groups' of African Australians and Pacific Islanders fighting in the streets of Melbourne in 2016, apparent evidence of a failure of multiculturalism (Bolt, 2016; Cook, Dow & Jacks; 2016; Silvester, 2017). In 2018, as the articles demonstrate, this has now seen the use of the term 'African gangs' floated by senior figures in society including the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull and Immigration Minister, Peter Dutton, which heightens this idea of hypervisibility of Australians with African heritage. However, the politicisation of African Australians primarily by the conservative elements of the current government and the media, but also by the opposition, to polarise themselves on approaches to law and order is a new facet to the recurrent examination of the African Australian community. The invalidation (and in some circles, lampooning) of the inordinate government response by police and community groups also reveals disconnect by the Australian Government to the actual perception with the situation in Melbourne. What this occasional explosion of violent tension does is lead to a particular depiction in the media representation of the African Australian (youth) as Other, that reinforces racial and ethnic differences, and frames multiculturism as a challenge to a wider (whiter) Australian sensibility; one that views the 'Other' as a threat to socio-cultural normativity (see Butler, 2018).

I was reluctant to delve too deeply into interracial tensions early in the research, preferring instead to wait to see if these ideas and issues came up for the participants. In fact, it did, to a certain degree, in the relationship between Nancy and Amine, as illustrated in their tense interchange and which I then developed in the play (see Video Clips 8 and 9). The cultural hub of Mirrabooka is a place where many African migrants have settled and is home for many of the participants in the project. The African Australian cultural community (if there can even be such a thing) is made up of the many cultures that comprise that continent – of many *Africas*. I would argue that populist and conservative media outlets equate hypervisibility (see skin colour) and cultural community (such as Mirrabooka, or Sunshine in Melbourne) with a value statement on the efficacy of immigration/migration. This commentary serves to marginalise African Australians even further than they may already be, and especially since recent media reports from Melbourne. During the research I considered how this sense of hypervisibility, of always being seen and known by cultural, ethnic and linguistic difference, how this could impact narrative creation, character arc and dramaturgy more generally. I found that

playing and somehow containing multiple voices would indelibly impact the eventual composition of *I am here now*. I suggest that it is imperative for any playwright or theatre maker working with communities outside of their own localised experience need to strive for a shared reciprocity of knowledge exchange and to endeavour as much as possible to find ways in which the art form can include the various manifestations of voice.

The renowned Australian theatre director, John Bell, expounded in a 1973 lecture (1976, p. 20) that the "diversification of theatre activity throughout the community will escalate, and with it a further fracturing of forms we recognise as 'theatre', and more blurring of the distinctions of 'amateur' and 'professional'." It is unlikely that Bell thought this diversity would take forty years before a fully-formed professional company named the National Theatre of Parramatta (NTP) would arrive, determined to provide a platform for the marginalised voices of Western Sydney. Indeed, the very naming of a 'National Theatre' in the ethnically diverse Parramatta implies a reclamation of the stage for myriad voices. What is important, in the case of the NTP is that the stories being produced come from within the boundaries of Western Sydney; more importantly, there is a receptive audience for the work, which may also reflect the hunger for new voices across Australian Theatre. It is now clear that a significant representation of marginalised voices, including the voices of African Australians, are moving incrementally away from the margins towards the centre, in order to have their voices heard. This outcome is one which can not only be good for the vitality and arguably resilient capacity of Australian Theatre but also a greater representation of the Australian population; the stories on our stages (and our screens) need to reflect the needs and wants and lived experiences of the larger population.

Chapter Six: Endings

I suspect there will always be an issue with equality of 'voice' in relation to the dynamics of theatre making. By applying British film and theatre maker Mike Leigh's unique methodology to a community setting this tension of authorship and voice/s is pulled into stark focus. I have come to realise that the participants and I were never equal, certainly in as much as we came to the project with different intentions and skill sets. To some degree there is an inequality of storying that, in a way, can never be entirely reconciled, in as much as we all have stories to tell, but we all have different histories that form these stories, with some histories more profoundly influenced by trauma, inequity and institutional barriers than others.

As the participants and I became more and more comfortable working with one another we were able to meet at a nexus point, where my *I* met with their *I*. However, the further I moved into the role of playwright, this partnership, not surprisingly shifted again with my sole authorship taking me further from our collaboration nexus to a new and different collaboration, and all the dramaturgical implications of that shift, led to me meeting, hearing and relating to other versions of the participants; traces of them, a sense of them, snippets and snatches of our time together.

The development phase provided the necessary grounding for me to explore the story threads that the actors offered and the dramatic tensions that would prove to be useful to write the narrative. The development was filled with surprises; the road testing was revelatory in regards to how some of these participants battled with the nature of deception and truth, as well as providing a space for a deep immersion that no workshop space in a community hall or hired performance venue could provide; the 'hot seat' led to some fascinating conversations, detailed insight into character and points in time where I was also improviser, which, of course, brought its own sets of challenges; the structuring phases with the solo and group improvisations led to fascinating moments that were frustrating as well as insightful and powerful. When it came time to say goodbye to the participants, and it certainly never felt right to pursue/chase them but to let them go, I turned to the writing with curiosity and an absolute certainty that the second aim of the research, to write a sole authored play with a plurality of voices, would certainly be sole authored but to what extent was largely the enormous task ahead. This is not to say that Leigh's methods failed or even that I failed in adequately adapting Leigh's methods, and reducing the process to 'non-success' radically

underestimates what I learnt from the process. To recall Werry and O'Gorman, challenges in applying Leigh in this context was a "natural condition of collaboration […] In any collective project, some level of failure is inevitable" (2012, p. 110). The main issues were the inexperience of the participants in theatre making and devising techniques in particular improvisation. I must admit that I was arguably inexperienced in working in community settings with non-actors (other than in education settings) and so the limitations of myself as a devisor working with non-actors also inhibited this process. Another issue was sustaining the commitment and focus of the participants and quite naturally several of the participants left the process earlier than the three-month development period. I had to adjust and adapt Leigh's techniques to suit the sometimes fluid parameters of the project. Over the course of the writing and drafting period, I eventually lost contact with most of the participants, save two or three. Today I have contact only with Jamal, John and Kirsty. Not having Leigh's benefit of working with full-time professional actors, the time constraints on the group and unquestionably my unfamiliarity with certain cultural knowledge meant that the process was challenging. However, Leigh's methods did prove to be influential to my writing on many levels, including the building of action from devising character, the constant invention of new given circumstances of character and the objective analysis of the structuring by myself and the participants after each improvisation.

Ultimately, Leigh ends with a working script that has largely been crafted by the improvisations of his actors, of which he claims sole authorship. Aside from the obvious point that the development process could not go on forever, I needed to reflect and assemble what I had captured in the workshops in order to develop a sole authored play that imbedded a plurality of voices. There was no defining moment that ended the development phase, but more a sense that the participants could no longer commit to an ongoing process. The story threads of the group improvisations were wrapping up and I had to choose a moment to move on to the writing phase. Once this stage was over, and goodbyes were said, I was left with sketches and segments of a narrative, informal conversations and the body language, the dress, the physicality, and so on, which I moulded into several drafts of the play – *I am here now*. I cannot state enough how the anecdotal data of being a participant observer influenced the final play, of when the camera was switched off, or when we were relaxing between sessions and simply chatting. A Bakhtinian vocality existed in all areas of data collection including in the writing stages where I was continually hearing tone and intonation of their (literal) voices in my head, coming into discourse with my voice, and the inevitable individual specificities of our personalities and our lived experience influencing what it is that we all, as a group of people that

came together for a while, said and did. I wonder if there is something interesting in Leigh claiming authorship even when he in a way is far closer to scripting the verbatim dialogue of his actors than I ever was. His voice and the voice of his actors (and hence their own lived experiences) are just as much at play as their originals, in the final text, begging the question can he, or me, ever be entirely the sole author. However, my claim to authorship comes with the clause that I am author of a text that has multiple points of origin and a polyvocality resonating within each aspect, and at every angle, of the text.

My research has shown that the participants, who identify as African Australians, from their own separation and transition around ideas of cultural, ethnic and linguistic origins, stepped forward to engage with areas of life that they believed were important to their 'originals', and it follows that these areas may also be important to them. They showed a commitment to and a connection with their characters' and invariably their personal experience. There were many times during the writing when I reflected on anecdotal conversations in addition to the improvisatory work to flesh out what otherwise might have been discovered if I had allowed the project more time, or if the participants had been interested in pursuing these story threads. How efficacious that would have been can only be speculated on at this stage. However, it is worth noting that the challenges that the participants and I faced often led to an interesting opportunity in form and content; to resist didacticism I developed the dream-like sequences of Larry travelling through water representing his tumultuous journey in seeking asylum for him and his family; the value based quandary about truth and deception that Rachel confronted in her road test and later her absence, led me to develop a character that was not based on her original but instead captured the longing that comes from the dislocation of the unhomely and the loss of memory as a representation of absence and displacement.

I did keep in touch with some of the participants and have got to know them a little more since the workshops. Kirsty went on to graduate from Curtin University and then pursued her dream of studying acting at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts and works professionally in Sydney. Jamal has become a young community leader in Mirrabooka, setting up his own company From Nothing To Something (FNTS), and still acts and DJs regularly. John moved to the east coast of Australia to pursue a career in real estate, but has been making short films and music videos which he often features in. Thinking upon why I have kept in touch with only these participants and not others, I can only point to life changes that occur for all of us. At a later stage during the period of

research in which I was writing the thesis I was fortunate enough to be able to have Kirsty and John come in to read a section of the play for a research colloquium held at Edith Cowan University; their voices enlivened the work. Yet it was not only their literal voice but their visibility. In a room mainly full of non-African descent academics, their presence added to the sense that we were listening and viewing something connected to an actual experience, even if it was something that had gone through several iterative translations of sorts. So, in this sense, I felt an affirmation that the polyvocality of the play continued to challenge and ask for interrogation and that the potential for development might one day see these voices taken up again.

The research questions asked at the beginning of the thesis were addressed, if not entirely answered, throughout the stages of the research journey. The strengths and limitations of Mike Leigh's devising techniques in terms of how it might assist in the writing of a play were linked to the inexperience of the participants in theatre making which was a struggle but also delivered a richness and spontaneity, and it challenged my skills as a performance maker, which may not have been as present if I had worked with professional actors. I would also suggest that in the literature about Leigh and his techniques there is not enough discussion on the contested space of authorship. I think this is something that needs to be addressed. Which leads me to the second question; to what extent do the 'truth' origins of the improvisations and improvisational beginnings have a place in a finished play text? According to the literature on Leigh he translates almost verbatim the material his actors generate in improvisation. This was certainly not the case in this research but to a large extent I need to acknowledge the participants for the inspiration of the text – in improvisation material as well as the flavour and feel of the participants which ghosts the finished play in so many important ways.

I am here now is hugely indebted to the participants and literally could not be written without what they offered of themselves, formally and informally. Which leads to the final question of how might the artefact – the play – take up polyvocality. Bakhtin reminds us that a literary text can contain a "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices […] a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (1984, p. 6). *I am here now* contains traces of a multiplicity of interconnected voices; of my voice, of the participants' voices and the originals and all those people and life events that shape who we all are. In many ways, what Leigh's methods allowed me to ask – which I certainly was not asking at the very outset of the research – were even

deeper questions about the nature of the authorial voice within collaborative devising processes and what right do I have in telling and sharing stories that involve others, especially those individuals who are often rendered Other. In future, it is essential I ask not only "where am I in the work?" but "how loud is my voice?" My voice is present at all times, as observed quite literally in the video clips – which are in a way a significant captured 'memory' of the project and underpin the writing about the process – and less explicitly in characters such as Errick and Donnell. While it may seem contrary to the aims, I realised during the development that I had become my own participant in the process, and later still while writing that I was a participant in the final text by virtue of my authorial voice. This is not to say that this was a simple or easily reconciled realisation. This meant that, in terms of authorship, I had to begin to listen to the many voices that existed in the play, and also to uncover where my influence was theoretically, creatively and culturally influential, even impeding on other voices from being heard.

What became clear, initially in the development stage and then later in the writing phases, and further clarified in the analytical stage of writing the thesis, was that the notion of an African or Australian or an African Australian identity can be found in the memories that the participants and characters create around what became a fictional experience of home. How much the participants were reacting to their own lived experience, their personal unhomeliness – more so than as 'originals' in the improvisations – is difficult to answer. This is partly because of my implementation of the improvised material and partly because of a lack of insight into the specificities and particularities of each participant's cultural knowledge(s). However, the relationship of an imagined home as separate from the world, of the unhomely were not only useful thematic points for the play but also conceptually rich areas for analysis and reflection.

Looking objectively at *I am here now*, we meet a group of characters with different lives, social standings, beliefs and varied conceptions of their identity as migrants and 'new' Australians and the fragmented nature of some of the story threads, the incompleteness of certain character journeys, represent something of the unresolved nature of separation and transition, of unhomeliness, that, I would argue, is experienced by so many migrants. While acknowledging that my approach to the process did not intuitively grasp the magnitude of 'African Australian' cultural complexity, as if there can even be considered such a thing, there is enormous potential in developing a new work in and through the perspectives of individuals like those of my participants giving greater

representation to a diversity of voices. The question arises: is there a place for the stories of African Australians in new Australian Theatre? The answer is a resounding yes. How we are to address the challenges that the research highlighted, and the more complex questions that follow from it, is another story. While this research did not set out to stage a fully realised production, it sought to create a play that could sit comfortably in an Australian Theatre context. *I am here now* demonstrates that the methods of Leigh, a devisor who produces plays, is another of several ways to explore collaborative processes, including how this might apply to a group of individuals who by virtue of their cultural and ethnic heritage are often not represented in commercial theatre (and film and television) in Australia. There is enormous potential in developing a new work in and through the perspectives of individuals like that of the participants, to give greater representation to a diversity of voices. For there to be a greater representation of marginal voices in Australian theatre the dominant culture must not only actively advocate its creation, but must also look to fashion its own separation and transition from Australian theatre practices that disadvantage or disallow these voices from being heard. I would hope that this research can contribute to an argument for further inclusivity and participation. It is certainly my hope that as yet unseen and unheard performance makers, and their audiences, will venture out and swell the spaces, beyond those that have already, and are continuing to do so.

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