

Narrative Métissage: Crafting Empathy and Understanding of Self/Other

by

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B.Ed., University of Alberta, 1990
B.A., Okanagan University College, 2000
M.A., York University, 2001

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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In the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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University of Victoria

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation documents an arts-based peace education doctoral study that employed narrative métissage as both a pedagogical and a research tool. The research question asks: *Does practicing narrative métissage in an intra-conflict society foster empathy and understanding of self/other?* This question is explored with a total of seven Arabic and Kurdish students representing both male and female genders and Muslim and Christian faiths. All the participants were in their second year of study in a two-year English preparatory program at the University of Kurdistan-Hawler, (UKH) in Erbil, Kurdistan, Iraq. The students wrote autobiographical narratives around the theme of “Boundaries,” then participated in workshop forums sharing and weaving their individual narratives together into a longer text—the métissage—and afterwards performed their métissage. The researcher has also woven her own personal narrative of living, teaching, and carrying out research at UKH in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq into the fabric of the dissertation. The participants’ and the researcher’s experiences and insights are documented through autobiographical and story-telling genres in the data representation.

The key contributions of this research are practical, theoretical, and methodological. Practically, this research contributes to peace education initiatives in intractable conflict societies, which is an under-researched and under-reported area within peace education studies. Narrative métissage has obvious application as a peace education initiative and as a curricular vehicle for teaching, discussing, and healing around social justice issues in the classroom, however it has not been explored as such. This research contributes to the dialogue of social justice pedagogy. Theoretically, this research contributes to the area of arts-based learning and the power that writing and sharing autobiographical stories has in awakening to self/other, stimulating collective knowledge construction and empowering individual and collective change. The research employs narrative métissage both as a pedagogical tool and a research tool and by doing so lays new ground in terms of methodology.

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We are all dependent on one another, every soul of us on earth.
George Bernard Shaw

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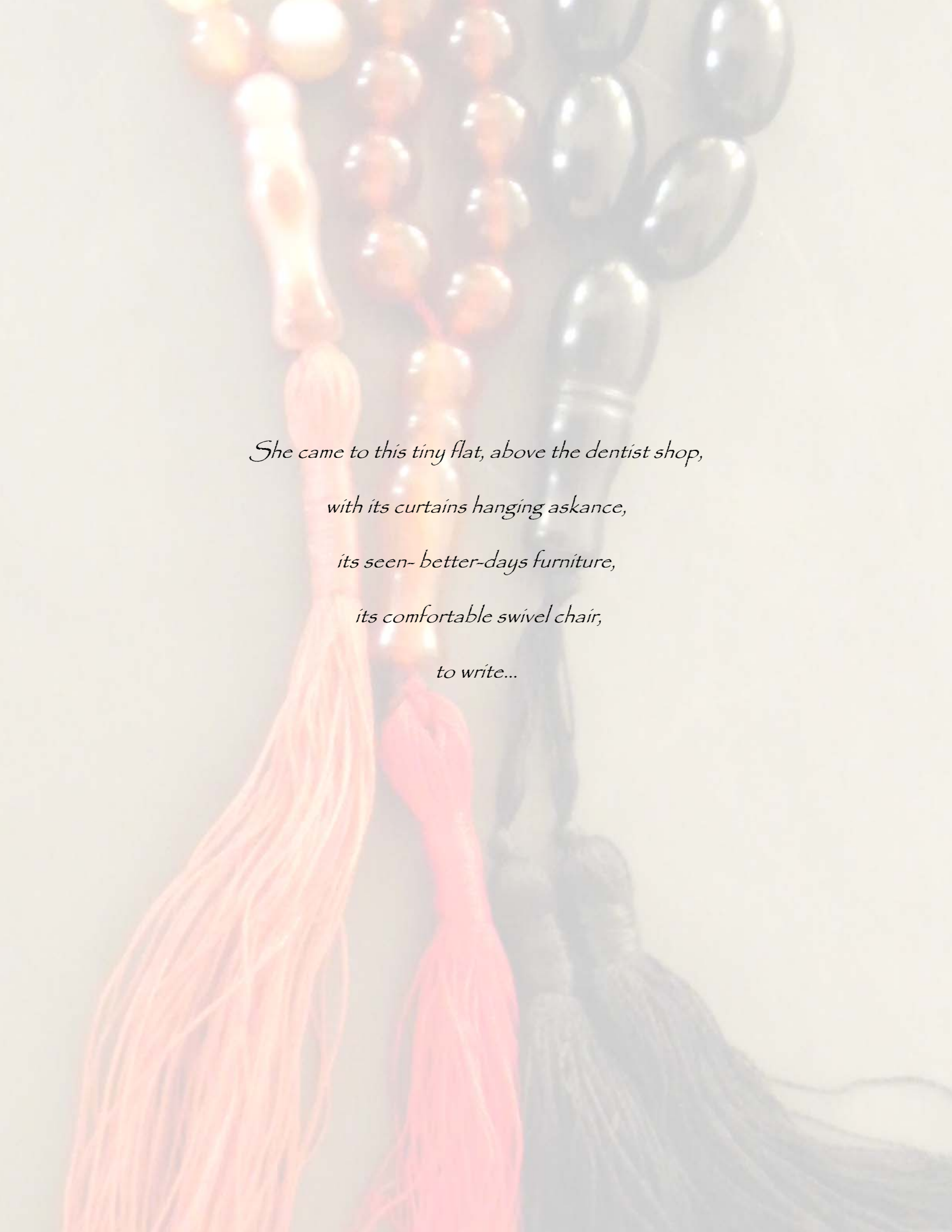
In my life away from academe:

- ♥ My much loved family; I have no words to describe how much your unfailing love and support has enabled me in not only this endeavour, but on my life’s journey. My sisters, Sharon and Karen, my children, Janelle and Reese, and the love of my life, Larry, you are the source of joy, meaning, and purpose in my life. My life is rich because of you.

Dedication
To
Mom and Dad
gone, but not forgotten



*PART ONE:
THE EXPOSITION*



*She came to this tiny flat, above the dentist shop,
with its curtains hanging askance,
its seen- better-days furniture,
its comfortable swivel chair,
to write...*

TELLING STORIES

I cringe at my ignorance, my insensitivity. Looking back and knowing what I know now. I wonder to myself “What was I thinking?” It was September of 2007. It was my first week teaching at the University of Kurdistan-Hawler (UKH) in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq.

I was teaching academic English writing and I wanted to get an idea of what the students’ writing skills were. So, I told them they could write about anything they wanted. Given the choice to write about anything they wanted was new territory, and my suggestion was met with some consternation; they were not familiar with this kind of agency. Without much thought, I suggested...write about either the happiest or the saddest day of your life. After all, I was only trying to get a sample of their writing.

That evening as I picked up the papers to see what they had written, I was intent on discovering what kind of writing skills they had, or didn’t have. What would I be teaching them in the next few months? What textbooks would I use? You know—teacher thoughts. As I sat down to read, I had no way of knowing that my life would be forever changed by the reading. In times past, when students have written about the saddest day of their lives, they might recount stories of failing important exams, of not being accepted into their preferred program of study, or of the break-up of a relationship...but that isn’t the case here in Kurdistan. Those are not the kinds of sad stories you hear about in a traditional tribal society...

I was eleven. Although Sukran was only my cousin, I loved her like a sister. She was the older sister I didn’t have. She had been over visiting and we were sitting on the floor playing taola, when her brother burst into the kitchen with a knife in his hand and stabbed Sukran to death. I remember vividly the sounds that she made and her blood being everywhere. I often dream about the stabbing, only in my dreams I see it and hear it in slow motion. Her brother said that Sukran had been planning to run away and get married. – Abbas¹

or a society in conflict...

I was living in Bagdad. I left one morning for school. Following my normal routine I stopped by my next-door neighbour’s house, where my best friend Mohammad lived, to pick him up so that we could walk to school together as we had been doing for the last eleven years of our lives. That day though, Mohammad wasn’t feeling well, and he didn’t join me for our normal walk to school. I didn’t know that I

¹ Abbas and Ahmed are pseudonyms. Their stories are recounted with permission.

would never see my friend again. I didn't know that when I walked down my street coming home from school that day, my street would have been bombed and that I would discover that in the chaos and rubble and ruin of what used to be my neighbourhood, only my house would be standing, there was a gaping hole where my best friend's house used to be. My family and I fled immediately...no time for goodbyes, no time for crying, no time for sorrow. Refugees in our own land. – Ahmed

Thoughts of teaching flew out the window, as I sat and read the stories, as my heart broke, as I wept until I was empty, as I tried to understand, but could not understand the suffering and pain that is the everyday life of my students.

The next day in class, I apologized. I explained that I was new to an intractable conflict society, that I had never experienced what they have experienced, that I was naïve. I told them that I was sorry if by asking them to write about the saddest day of their lives, I had opened wounds reminding them of pain they would prefer not to think about. I was truly sorry for such insensitivity. I was surprised when a group of students, Abbas and Ahmed among them, approached me after class to tell me, how “good” it felt to be able to write about their painful memories...how “it took away pressure that was blocked up”... how it “made my heart feel better.” Their English vocabulary was limited...they didn't know that they could express their feelings in one little word...*cathartic*.

This was my first exposure to the healing power of writing and sharing autobiographical narratives. Although it was a brief glimpse, the insight to/memory of students' stories and the power in sharing their stories would be significant. For you see, dearest reader—oh I hope you don't feel that I'm being too familiar with you, calling you dearest. It's just that...well, I know you don't know me yet. I have waited to write this introduction piece last...well, I haven't really waited; it just hasn't been possible to write it before now. Writing is a kind of inquiry, a way of discovery,² and so I knew from the outset I didn't really know where I was going, what I would discover, that I would have to wait and harness the chaos into a cohesive story for you to make sense of after the writing and the telling. And,

² Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St.Pierre, “Writing: A Method of Inquiry” in *the Sage Handbook of Qualitative Inquiry 3rd ed.* ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 2005), 911. Laurel Richardson explains that when we view writing as a method of inquiry it becomes a way of finding out about ourselves and our world. For Richardson, writing as a method of discovery is writing before you know what it is you want to say. We write because we want to find something out that we did not know before we wrote. This is counter-intuitive to what we have normally been taught about writing, academic writing in particular, where we are instructed to write when we know what we want to say; where we organize and outline our points first and then we write.

in the end, it has been a journey of discovery; it has been a journey of awakening to myself and others and the world around me, just as I hope your reading of my stories about myself, my participants, Kurdistan and its people and culture, will be a journey of awakening to yourself, and others, and the world around you—oh, I digress! As I say, I hope you don't think I'm being forward by calling you "dearest", but I feel like I have known you for years, that we are the best of old friends, on very intimate terms. In fact our friendship, to me anyway, is like a favourite sweater, warm, cozy, comfortable...oh so comfortable, for I have been writing to you for months now, telling, sharing, pouring out stories with you in mind. You see, the writing hasn't just been about my own inquiry, my own discovery. I have been writing to you, specifically to you. My text is meant to be dialogical. I have been assuming an active audience. I hope I haven't been presumptuous, but I have always imagined that there would be give and take between you and me, a kind of conversation. Maybe, as old and trusted friends do, we will argue a bit, disagree now and then, but I invite you to do so, for it is my intention that we explore together sometimes "competing visions of the context, [and content] to become immersed in and merge with new realities to comprehend"³... I suppose from what I have just shared with you, you have already ascertained that the first glimpse into the power and benefit of sharing stories has shaped and defined my research and its data/representation. My research employs narrative *métissage*,⁴ an arts-based research methodology,⁵ as a curricular vehicle to foster empathy and understanding of self/other in an

³ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, "The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research" in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed., ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, (London: Sage, 2000), 5-6.

⁴In just a short while, in a piece called "Métissage: Up Close and Personal," you will be introduced to narrative *métissage* in detail. Here I take the opportunity to give a description of how to "do" narrative *métissage*. Keep in mind there are no hard and fast rules:

- Narrative *métissage* is a mixture of oral and written traditions.
- Usually 4-6 individuals write an autobiographical text on a particular theme of the group's choosing. They do not discuss the theme, but leave it to each individual to interpret the theme.
- They write the piece in 3 to 5 segments (they can incorporate accompanying images and sounds).
- The writing takes the format of poetry, narrative, memoir, etc., or can be a mixture of these genres.
- The authors meet to purposefully mix/weave the segments together using points of affinity/difference, in a way that retains the integrity of the individual voices/texts and at the same time creates one long text—this is the *métissage* piece.
- After the weaving is done, the authors then perform/share the *métissage* with an audience (each author reads his/her segment as it appears in the longer *métissage* piece), inviting the audience to weave their own interpretations into the fabric of the *métissage*.
- The common themes and ideas—how our lives overlap and are inter-connected or don't, how we share/don't share the same emotions—these points of affinity and difference portray the human condition.

⁵ My doctoral research project employs arts-based research as both a research method and a methodology. Arts- based research is "influenced by, but not based in, the arts broadly conceived. The purpose is to enhance understanding of the human condition through alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry, and to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible."

intractable conflict society.

You are about to read a dissertation abounding in stories—my research is meant to be personal. It is polyvocal, polyphonic, a mingling of texts and genres and voices including my own. In keeping with arts-based methodology, where the presence and signature of the researcher is evident (even though the research is not specifically about me),⁶ I have woven into the fabric of my text self-reflexive pieces of thoughts and emotions and understandings and misunderstandings of living, teaching, and carrying out research in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq, a location/culture that is so very different than my own. So, the stories are autobiographical.⁷ The “I” in autobiography is instrumental in “articulating the Lebenswelt, and for better understanding, critiquing, and ultimately re-imagining that lived world.”⁸

Ardra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles, “Arts-Informed Research” in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, ed. J. Gary Knowles and Ardra

L. Cole, (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 59. Cole and Knowles also explain that arts-based research is part of a broad commitment to “shift the dominant paradigmatic view that keeps the academy and community separated; to acknowledge the multiple dimensions that constitute and form the human condition—physical, emotional, spiritual, social, cultural—and the myriad ways of engaging in the world—oral, literal, visual, embodied. That is, to connect the work of the academy with the lived lives of communities through research that is accessible, evocative, embodied, empathic, and provocative.” Cole, 60.

Arts-based research methodology sensibilities underpin the dissertation: I use narrative métissage as an arts-based research method and I also employ autobiographical writing, particularly story-telling to re/present the research data. Just as in narrative métissage I weave my stories with those of my participants and with those of Kurdistan the place, crafting the work/dissertation—the métissage—to celebrate embodied knowing.

⁶ Ibid., 61

⁷ Narrative métissage autobiographical writing requires the author/researcher to critically engage with his/her culture. It not only looks at the culture and how it has shaped and impacted the lived experience and identity, but also looks at moral ethical and political concerns and how the author/researcher has been complicit in impacting/perpetuating that culture. In this sense narrative métissage autobiography shares fundamental concepts with autoethnographical autobiographical writing and the lines between the two methods are blurred. However, what sets narrative métissage apart from autoethnography is its weaving quality; the weaving process adds to/changes the dynamics of the autobiographical concept. In my dissertation I braid the stories of Kurdistan, its people and its culture, along with the stories of my participants, and my own stories of living, working, and carrying out research in a location/culture that is very different than my own. This very important dynamic of weaving narratives together is how/why I conceive of this data/representation as narrative métissage.

⁸ Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, and Carl Leggo, *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 21-22. The “I” referred to here is that of autobiography. Although my text is autobiographical, the topic is not myself—the self is the site/sight of enquiry; the site/sight of enquiry is my individual life, but the topic is about something in society. Autobiography is the experience of the human condition that is found in this particular/individual. The “I” in narrative métissage autobiography requires the author/researcher to critically engage with their culture, to not only look at the culture and how it has shaped and impacted life experience and identity, but also look at moral, ethical and political concerns and how the author/researcher has been complicit in impacting/perpetuating that culture. Narrative métissage autobiography requires the author to look inwards to see how she herself has been implicated in the topics

Autobiographical writing and research assumes that “[i]t is not generality, but the multiplicity of particularity that accounts for the possibility of critical understanding.”⁹ And, of course, while trying to make sense of my own lived experience, I don’t want to hide from you; I don’t want to write myself into disappearance,¹⁰ as a more conventional research writing style would have me do. I want you to know me. I want you to know the biography that is filtering the stories of the lived experience of both my participants and myself. As you are reading, I want you to remember that “[a]ny gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of-and between-the observer and observed.”¹¹ I want you to remember that “I,” my biography, has structured the enquiry and the questions; “I” have chosen which stories to share and which ones to leave out; “I” tell the stories. I am very aware that as you read, you are rewriting and reinventing the text.¹² I wonder through what lens, what biography, you will read me? My participants? Kurdistan and its culture?

Why did I choose to write a dissertation/data re/presentation that is polyvocal, polyphonic, a mingling of texts and genres and voices as well as telling stories? ...well let me put it this way...

“There is a danger to privileging story as well.” I’m disappointed at the response and somewhat disgruntled. It is the response to an email asking if, for the course assignment, I can explore a different way of writing than the traditional conventional style. I justify the request by explaining that my research project involves practicing narrative *métissage* and because it “weaves disparate elements into multi-valenced, metonymic, and multi-textured forms, unraveling the

under analysis or criticism. It is in this sense that through the “I”—autobiography—we can understand and critique our world.

⁹ Lisa Jane Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 160 quoted in Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, and Carl Leggo, *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 12.

¹⁰ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993); (Philip Auslander, *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) in Ronald J. Pelias, *Writing Performance: Poeticizing the Researcher’s Body* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), xi.

¹¹ Denzin and Lincoln, *The Discipline*, 21.

¹² Laurel Richardson, “Getting personal: Writing-stories” *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14, no. 1 (2001):37

logic of linearity, hierarchy, and uniformity,”¹³ and because I am hoping to write-up my dissertation in a way that re/presents *métissage*, for this assignment I want to explore how to create a “structurally complex narrative, story, told in a temporal framework work—the curve of time.”¹⁴

I also explain that through my graduate work, I have come to understand that form and content cannot be separated; different forms convey different meanings and how we write conveys “knowing.” Different modes make available different methods of discovery and analysis; writing and representation cannot be divorced from analysis.¹⁵ Narrative *métissage* values knowing through emotion tied to memory, holistic ways of knowing, embodied attunement, and self-reflexivity. I explain that I would like to explore writing in a form that values this way of knowing.

I am given “permission” to explore along with this “There is a danger to privileging story as well” caveat. I want to respond that in the world of academia with its dominant traditional/scientific/positivistic academic research/writing paradigm, that there is little danger of story being privileged and, really, how unfortunate that is. I would like to respond that “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are,”¹⁶ “they are who we are, who we have been, and who we will become,”¹⁷ I want to say “[o]ur stories narrate our lives; our stories are personal and political...They are individual, social, and ideological acts of construction. They make us as they are made. We are

¹³ Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, Leggo, *Life Writing*, 35.

¹⁴ Arthur P. Bochner, “Criteria Against Ourselves,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 6, (2000): 271.

¹⁵ Richardson, *Writing*, 16. I am deeply indebted to Laurel Richardson. Her ground-breaking theorizing of non-traditional/non-scientific research writing informs much of my conceptualization of my data re/presentation. It is through her scholarship that I came to realize that research aims, data re/presentation and analysis are inseparable. What I want to accomplish with my dissertation—which is to foster empathy and understanding of my participants, myself, Kurdistan, and the lived experience—will not be met through reading a dissertation that is written in the impersonal third voice, devoid of any language or content that sparks the senses and that neglects embodied ways of knowing. If I want my audience to analyse my data emotionally as well intellectually, then the content and the writing styles of the dissertation need to stimulate those embodied ways of ‘knowing’—This kind of analysis is made available through artistic modes—poetry, music, narrative, drama, photography, etc..

¹⁶ Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. (Toronto: House of Anasi Press, 2003), 2.

¹⁷ Cole, *Arts-Informed*, 56.

their creators and their creation.”¹⁸ I want to say that autobiographical writing and the sharing of those stories “offers potent occasions for enlarging empathy and imagination, and expanding knowledge about self and others,”¹⁹ I would like to point out that “[s]tories are the way humans make sense of their worlds and are essential to human understanding. Given their importance, stories should be both a subject and a method of social science research.”²⁰... I want to say that...well, I could go on, however, I am sure by now you would like me to get to my point.

My point is—I have recounted this story, in order to *privilege* story and to explain why it is you will not be reading a dissertation written in a more established writing style. You see, when I came to write, I just could not write in a traditional conventional manner. Partially because of what I have already shared; the commitment to writing in a way that re/presents métissage and the appreciation of the relationship between form and content and “knowing,” but just as importantly, I have decided to write the dissertation in a narrative/autobiographical/story style that explores “creative analytic practices”²¹ to *privilege* story, and to remain true to the spirit of arts-based methodology that underpins my research.

Arts-based research gives interpretive license to the researcher to create meaning from experience²² and to convey that lived experience in representations that “privilege the sensuous, the figurative, the expressive”²³ in an effort to enlarge understanding about the world and to engender

¹⁸ Ronald J. Pelias, *Writing Performance: Poeticizing the Researcher’s Body* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 33.

¹⁹ Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, Leggo, *Life Writing*, 29.

²⁰ Karen Scott-Hoy and Carolyn Ellis, “Wording Pictures: Discovering Heartfelt Autoethnography” in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, ed. J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 127.

²¹ Laurel Richardson, “Writing: A Method of Inquiry,” in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, ed. Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, Cal: Sage Publishing, 2007), 923-948. Richardson explains that to use the words “experimental” or “alternative” to describe non-scientific/non-traditional forms of research writing only serves to re-inscribe the scientific/traditional/established forms of writing as the standard. She has coined the phrase “CAP ethnography” (creative analytic practices ethnography) to describe writing that moves outside conventional research writing and to signal that less traditional forms of writing are preferred or favoured.

²² Susan Finley, “Arts Based Research” in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, ed. J Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008),72.

²³ Pelias, *Writing*, xiii.

empathy for the lives of the people she wishes you to know.²⁴ From purpose to method to interpretation and representation, arts-based research is holistic—“a seamless relationship between purpose and method.”²⁵ And now, I am sure you understand...this *privileging* of story is a matter of principle.

Each of the pieces in the dissertation is designed to stand alone. However, the dissertation, seen as the sum of the parts, is dependent on each of the pieces. To be sure, all the constructs normally contained in a dissertation are present. However, just as in narrative *métissage*, where themes are repeated... nuanced in one story and made more explicit in another...so it is with this dissertation. I have organized the dissertation into three parts: “*The Exposition*,” “*The Setting*,” and “*Characters and Plot Lines*,” and I am confident that you will recognize the major themes of each of the pieces within the three parts.

Part One, “*The Exposition*,” is devoted to explaining all the information needed to properly understand my research project and my dissertation. “*Telling Stories*” introduces arts-based methodology, the art of story-telling, and explains how to appreciate the work as a whole. The DVD “*Curriculum: Living Well in Community*” welcomes you to Kurdistan while at the same time defines my conception of curriculum. “*Living Well With the Self/Other—Why Narrative Métissage?*” serves to tell the story of what my research is all about; it answers what my question is, it gives background into why I want to do research in Kurdistan, it conceptualizes *métissage* as curriculum and situates it into the peace education paradigm. “*Metissage: Up Close and Personal*” explains narrative *métissage* as a research methodology and discusses its underlying assumptions, values, and conceptual dynamics. “*Legitimus*” is a conversation about the ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions that are fundamental to narrative *métissage*, and my research as a whole. I am sure you will recognize “*The Third Space*” as a vehicle for introducing Bhabha’s post-colonial theoretical lens of cultural change and transformation that underpins the research project. My memories of swimming and language lessons are a reminder that although “the third space” is a generative site, it can be a problematic, uncomfortable space to inhabit. Finally, “*I”identity* discusses the theoretical assumptions of self/other formation that underlie the possibility of personal and cultural change.

²⁴ Elliot W. Eisner, “The Misunderstood Role of the Arts in Human Development” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 73, no. 8 (1992): 8.

²⁵ Cole, *Arts-Informed*, 66- 67

Part Two, “*The Setting*,” invites you into the world of Kurdistan, Northern Iraq, and its culture, as well as my world as a woman, and a Canadian-born WASP, trying to navigate in what Bhabha calls “the third space.”²⁶ These pieces also provide cultural information that allows you a richer, more informed understanding of the participants, the world they live in, their narrative métissage stories as well as their interview stories. “*Kurdistan—Land of the Kurds*” is an historical, geographical, and political background of Kurdistan. “*Wanting...Found Wanting*” is an emotional, personal accounting of my very complicated relationship with Kurdistan and its people, yet it also deals with the horrors of Kurdistan’s past. The DVD “*Dhurh: The Noon Call to Prayer; Mapping out the Lived Experience*” is an accompaniment to “*Wanting...Found Wanting*.” In “*Mapwork: Mapping With/In and Mapping Out*,” I introduce the concept of “mapwork” and explain that “*Wanting...Found Wanting*” and “*Dhurh: The Noon call to Prayer; Mapping out the Lived Experience*” are my attempts at doing “mapwork.” “*No War-No Peace*” explains Kurdistan as an intractable conflict society, as well as depicts its present day political tensions. “*Eye/I Catching*” is a performance of Orientalism and culture; by recounting events set into scenes, I examine/confront my Western cultural biases. “*Without Its Flock the Sheep Becomes the Prey of Wolves*” deals with the importance of the tribe and kinship ties in Kurdish society. In “*The Culture of “Honour”*” I try to grapple with/make sense of the importance of “honour” in Kurdish culture, and its disturbing consequence of “honour” killing.

Part Three, “*Characters and Plot Lines*,” is a métissage that introduces the University of Kurdistan as a research site, as well as the participants and their stories. It focuses on the carrying out of my research project. “*_ _it Happens*” is an essay describing the University of Kurdistan-Hawler as my research site, while describing the politics of carrying out my research at UKH. In “*Haraam*” I share the challenges and tensions of conducting research that is conceived in the West, but is carried out in a non-western society. The trials and frustrations/challenges of doing my project are depicted in “*The Best Laid Plans*.” “*Boundaries I & II*” are the participants’ narrative métissages. “*Wrapping up What Won’t Be Wrapped*” is my reflections on the research project; it also discusses ethical and moral questions of doing the research and of data re/presentation. Finally, the “*Stories*” that are woven into this last piece is the data collection—the participants’ interviews—recounted with their own words, but put into story form by me. This will give you insight as to whether the research has been successful, whether practicing narrative métissage in an intractable conflict setting has fostered understanding of and empathy for self/other? And “*Final Thoughts*” is exactly that.

²⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 53.

As you read this dissertation that “celebrates the multivocal, multilayered, and multivalent realities of everyday life,”²⁷ I ask you to keep in mind that “analysis can occur within the story,”²⁸ and that is why there is no traditional analysis. This kind of research writing invites multiple perspectives and “disregards notions of verification, reliability, and facticity for plural truths rooted in the personal,”²⁹ and by doing so the research embraces ambiguity. Clarity in writing can be seen as a kind of oppression;³⁰ it tells the capital T truth—closing down conversations to other perspectives and possibilities while ambiguity opens to newness; it is a way of advancing possibility. Ambiguity means ripe for reinvention, reconstruction, reimagining, reinterpretation of the world around us. And that—the reinvention, reconstruction, reimagining, reinterpretation of the self/other and the world around us lies at the heart of my research project, and my dissertation—for I have always envisioned that through practicing narrative métissage, the participants would awaken to themselves, each other and their society, that my experiences of interfacing with Kurdistan, its people and its culture and my writing about them would bring new understandings and discoveries about self/other and the world around me, and that these awakenings would lead both my participants and myself to reinvent, reconstruct, reimagine and reinterpret. It is also my hope that the reading will lead you to do the same.

I invite you to judge and evaluate this arts-based dissertation through a creative arts lens. Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre give an idea of how to read and evaluate this kind of research writing.³¹ While reading, ask yourself if my work contributes to a broader/deeper understanding of social life? Does it ring true—does it sound authentic, does it depict a believable experience, does it offer a convincing narrative? Judge it on its aesthetic merit. Is the work aesthetically and intellectually satisfying? Is it complex—does it encourage dialogue and leave room for

²⁷ Pelias, *Writing Performance*, x.

²⁸ Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, “Talking over Ethnography” in *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing* ed. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (California: Alta Mira Press, 1996), 276.

²⁹ Pelias, *Writing Performance*, xi.

³⁰ Minh-ha T. Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 17.

³¹ Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, “Writing: A Method of Inquiry” in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Inquiry* 3rd ed. ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 2005).

interpretative responses? Is it artistically satisfying? Critique its reflexivity: Have I shown sufficient self-reflexivity—have I been self-aware—have I learned about self/other and the world around me? Have I adequately acknowledged how I am implicated in the research so that you can make judgments about my point of view? Evaluate its impact. Does it affect you emotionally and intellectually? Does it challenge you to action? Is there potential for self/social change?³² My desire is that you be mindful of these questions as criteria for judging this creative analytic research writing endeavour.

The writing is meant to be engaging, evocative, provocative, meant to touch hearts and minds inviting you to attend to the writing with your mind, feelings and self-reflection.³³ I know that my dissertation requires a different reading than usual. Thoughts, ideas, theory, concepts, are not laid out linearly; they are sometimes hinted at here, pointed out there, expounded on now, taken up later. I thank you for your time and I appreciate your patience. I am privileged to be telling you my stories—it is my hope you will find my stories telling.³⁴

³² Ibid., 964.

³³ Corrine Glesne "That Rare Feeling: Re-presenting Research through Poetic Transcription" *Qualitative Inquiry* 3, no.2 (1997), 215.

³⁴ Pelias, *Writing Performance*, 33.

*CURRICULUM: Living Well in
Community*



**Mosaic Tile: Kalil Kayet Mosque, Erbil,
Kurdistan, Iraq, 2010. Sheila Simpkins**



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- 5 Ted Aoki, *Curriculum in a New Key: The Selected Works of Ted. T. Aoki*, edited by William Pinar and Rita Irwin, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 365
- 6 Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, and Carl Leggo, *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 35
- 7 Peter, Paul, and Mary, "Some Walls" *In These Times* Produced by Peter Yarrow and Paul Stookey (Burbank, CA:Warner Brothers Records, 2003)
- 8 All the photos in the DVD were taken in Kurdistan by Sheila Simpkins, 2010.

Living Well With the Self/Other—

Why Narrative Métissage?

*Notes: Ali and Nawar are pseudonyms.
Their stories have been recounted with
permission.*

You may choose to read this piece

- 1) all the way through by just reading the
left hand column,*
- 2) all the way through by just reading the
right hand column,*
- 3) reading both columns one page at a
time.*



In September of 2007, I found myself teaching at the University of Kurdistan-Hawler (UKH) in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq. Teaching abroad was not new to me. I had spent two and a half years teaching in China and a year in Turkey, I had also lived in places as diverse as Malta, Greece, and England, therefore, I felt quite confident that I would be able to settle into living in this new place and culture and that teaching in Kurdistan would prove to be the same challenging yet enjoyable experience that teaching abroad had been. However, Kurdistan was to impact me in ways that I could not have imagined. I had not yet experienced living in a very traditional tribal culture and, just as importantly, I had never lived in an intractable conflict society; a society lacking infrastructure to provide proper access to water and electricity, where the medical and social systems are fractured, the education system has been fragmented and where there are deep and profound memories and feelings of pain, suffering, anger, and fear.

Kurdish history starts well before the Common Era, and throughout most of that history they have been a people who have lived under the yoke of oppression. Twentieth-century history has not been particularly kind either. The Iraqi Kurds suffered horrendous atrocities under Saddam Hussein, who in the 1980s carried out systematic genocide against the Kurdish population by using chemical weapons, destroying villages and slaughtering over 50,000 rural Kurds. In the period of just over a decade this campaign led to the disappearance of over 180,000 Kurdish people. After the first Gulf War in 1991, in order to protect the Kurdish civilian population, the UN created a safe-haven in the Kurdistan area of Northern Iraq. Iraqi Kurdistan emerged as an autonomous entity inside Iraq. Since then they have been struggling to build the infrastructure to their society in the hopes of one day becoming an independent state.

I spent a year teaching in Kurdistan. I worked with the students for 2 hours a day, 4 days a week. They offered their friendship and invited me into their lives and as they began to know and trust me, they shared their stories. Some stories were funny, some endearing, some intriguing, many were just plain sad. The students, Arab and Kurdish, told stories about the “Other.” Their stories mirrored the chaos, anguish, and animosity that are a part of their everyday lives. Harmful, hurtful emotions resided just under the surface of the classroom, always the unspoken unspeakable, spilling over in subtle and not so subtle ways. The students, whether they were Arab or Kurdish, did not know how to negotiate their feelings; it was difficult to envision ideas of tolerance, social justice, or peace.

In recent years, since the War in Iraq, many Arabs have been displaced from other parts of Iraq and have taken refuge in Kurdistan. There is much animosity and mistrust between the Kurdish and Arabic populations and there continues to be violence between the two ethnic groups. At the University of Kurdistan, the student population is 85% Kurdish and 15% Arab. There was much tension between the two groups; feelings of anger and animosity, jealousy, and mistrust percolated under the surface in the classroom and the university as a whole.

Ali told me about his mom’s dad. It was the time when Saddam’s army was destroying villages and slaughtering the Kurds. The army came into his grandfather’s village and started pillaging; when his grandfather and others tried to stop them, the Iraqi soldiers shot them, but Ali’s grandfather wasn’t quite dead, so they tied him to the back of their jeep and dragged him through the streets until he was dead. Ali’s mom stood watching it all. She told him that when they finally untied his grandfather, his body was unidentifiable, there was no skin left on his bones.

Nawar was back in his home town for the holiday...He sent an email: “You know yesterday, I was in a peaceful demonstration in Kirkuk. A woman blasted herself, resulted in killing more than 30 people and 160 people injured. You know I’m so sad, because two of my friends were killed. That is my country, and you might ask why demonstrate? The answer is we want to live in peace so we ask for our rights to live in peace, but the fundamentalist Arabs do not accept it” (personal communication, July, 2008).

I wondered how, in my professional role, I could help the students learn to constructively negotiate conflict, and deal with diversity and feelings of mistrust and blame. Ted Aoki exhorts us to think of curriculum as *the lived lives of students and teachers in the classroom*. He explains that curriculum should teach us about being human...how to live well together¹. I wondered how I could, in my classroom, help the students, whom I had come to care for so very much, transform their world on an individual and a collective basis, into a world where there is understanding and empathy towards the “Other,” where there is a dwelling together in community, where there is room for laughter.

What would a curricular vehicle to foster empathy and understanding towards the “Other” look like? My graduate work has been devoted to answering this question. Let me tell you what I have *discovered*.

I began by reading conflict resolution education theory and *discovered* that it was not a fit for the Kurdish situation...*discovered* that peace education theory is a fit...*discovered* that there is very little research being reported on peace education initiatives in post/intractable conflict societies, and was appropriately shocked²...*discovered* that collective narratives play a central role in interpreting and fuelling intractable conflicts; each side’s collective narrative delegitimizes the other’s. SO...*discovered* attaining a deeper understanding and appreciation of the other side’s narrative is one of the most important factors for success³...*discovered*, from the limited literature, a research project where story-telling was used as a way to work through intractable conflicts with Palestinian and

*Curriculum is the “[l]ived space where people dwell communally, where dwelling is a dwelling with others on earth under the sky, where we find humus that nurtures humans, where humans caught up in binds sometimes chuckle, where we can hear laughter...”*⁴

*Kurdistan can be categorized as post-conflict in that the oppression of the Kurds under Saddam Hussein’s regime is over and there is a state of negative peace, which Johan Galtung defines as the absence of physical and direct violence between groups.*⁵ *However, the removal of Saddam’s regime has created a space for the three major ethnic groups, Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen (a distinct group originating from Central Asia who speak the South Azeri language and mainly reside in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq) that occupy the autonomous region, to fight over what the future of Kurdistan should be. The struggle over the future of the area is usually fought over in the political arena; however, sporadic violence between the three groups continues to erupt, making the situation intractable in nature.*

*Although many skills like anger management, social perspective taking, decision-making, social problem solving, conflict management, valuing diversity and others are taught in conflict resolution programs, and overlap with peace education initiatives; conflict resolution education is only a partial fit in an intractable conflict situation.*⁶ *It is of relevance when the conflict is over and a state of peace has already been established; therefore, conflict resolution does not deal with the major challenges particular to protracted conflicts.*

Jewish undergraduate and graduate students in Israel...discovered that story-telling “enables people who have suffered traumatic social experiences to learn to live with painful events while developing an ability to listen to the pain of the “Other.””⁷...*discovered* that story telling “has the potential for leading to the building of relationship between groups”⁸ AND...I discovered narrative métissage.

I *discovered* narrative métissage in a graduate class. A métissage piece had been part of our course readings, and my colleagues and I were intrigued. It was a very powerful and political research practice, so we decided to write a métissage for our final assignment. We had chosen the theme “teaching from a different space.” My intention was to write about my overseas experiences of teaching in China, Turkey and Kurdistan, but after struggling to write that piece, I realized that Kurdistan was still very much on my mind, as it had been only a few short months since I had returned to Canada to pursue my studies, and I was working on/through emotions and ideas and thoughts about Kurdistan that were still very raw and close to my heart. And so, I wrote only about Kurdistan. I discovered first-hand the power and healing that braiding my own autobiographical narrative with others and performing métissage can bring. In that métissage, I had written about my experiences in Kurdistan; trying to make sense of the violence, pain and suffering that I had witnessed. Practicing métissage had been *cathartic*.

Peace education theory is a better fit to the Kurdish situation. Peace education research informs us that there are major characteristics specific to intractable conflicts that peace education initiatives must respond to. First, in regions of protracted conflict the focus is not on individuals who need to acquire conflict resolution skills, although this is a part of it; the main focus is on the treatment of the collective conflict.⁹ Secondly, peace education is challenged by “the collision between two contradicting, often mutually exclusive, deeply held collective narratives.”¹⁰ This collective narrative is historically held and forms the foundation of the group’s identity and is the source of stereotypes and prejudices it holds of the “Other.” Then, there is the collectively held beliefs each side has about itself; we are right, we are victims, and those held about the adversary; they are the aggressors, they are wrong. This set of beliefs that each side holds mirrors the ones held by the other side.¹¹

Métissage comes from the Latin word “mixtus” meaning mixed and the Greek homonym meaning a figure of skill and craft as well as wisdom and intelligence. It is an arts-based research practice that draws upon both written and oral traditions. Four or five individuals write an autobiographical text on an agreed upon theme/topic; they do not discuss what they will write, but leave it to the individual author to interpret the theme. They write their text in 3 or 4 segments. The writing takes the form of narrative, poetry, memoir, story-telling, and other genres or can be a mix of these. Then the authors meet and purposefully braid/weave the segments together, using

I have discovered that métissage promises to be an effective curricular vehicle for fostering understanding and empathy of the “other.” The dialogue and the weaving /blending of individual texts/stories together to write a new text/story that is more powerful than the individual texts/stories, creates a “third space,” it is the individual’s story, yet, at the same time it is not his/her story anymore. This tensioned space where it is “and/not-and” disrupts the individual’s story; it becomes a different story, and in this way there is the possibility for newness to emerge, allowing the participants to (re)write, (re)create, (re)evaluate, (re)interpret their own stories, creating a space for new knowledge, understanding, and healing thus enabling them to (re)construct their lives.

The “third space,” the place of hybridity, where it is neither the one nor the other, enables us to avoid the “politics of polarity and cultural binarism.”¹² It allows for a displacement/replacement of the powerfully ascribed cultural identities, and challenges the two contradicting, often mutually exclusive, deeply held collective narratives that are present in intractable conflict situations. In this ‘third space’ new ways of perceiving the world emerge and along with these new perceptions comes a new way of constructing knowledge and constructing lived lives.

points of affinity and difference in a way that retains the integrity of the individual voices/texts and creates a new shared text. The weaving of the stories “creat[es] a new text that is stronger and more complex than any of the individual stories.”¹³ The common themes and ideas, how lives overlap/don’t overlap and are connected/not connected and interrelated/not interrelated, how there are shared/different experiences and emotions, these points convey truths about the human condition. The authors of this new text, or narrative métissage, then perform it in front of an audience.

“The aim of literary [narrative] métissage—through its literary and storied properties—is to make dialogue possible while the dialogue makes possible the rapprochement among disparate, unequal individuals and groups. Literary métissage leads to understanding about the self and other and generates insight about the world and our place in it.”¹⁴

Aoki explains that the lived curriculum, or living pedagogy, is a generative site. He calls this site “the third space”, “the tensioned space of both ‘and/not and’ is a space of conjoining and disrupting, indeed, a generative space of possibilities, a space wherein in tensioned ambiguity newness emerges.”¹⁵

When discussing cultural change and transformation Homi Bhabha conceives that the encounter of two social groups takes place in a “third space of enunciation.” For Bhabha there is no essence to culture because it is always being interpellated or ‘translated’. When translation occurs there is a notion of “imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced and because it can be simulated...the original is never finished

Narrative métissage's polyvocal/multi-layered property explores a theme through the individual as well as the collective, bringing to the discussion many different viewpoints and shedding light on the many different layers of a concept/s. This 'third space' enables a new understanding of events/ideas/concepts from the "other's" perspective, thus attaining a better understanding of the "Other" and facilitating new ways of being/living in the world.

Another *discovery*...

My first experience of living overseas was a lifetime ago. It was 1979, I was 21 years old, and I found myself living on the tiny, ever so quaint, island of Malta. I was not a seasoned traveller; in fact this was my first time out of Canada, and my first experience of a place/culture that seemed so different from my own. While I enjoyed the challenge and excitement of living in a different culture, there were ideas and ways of doing things that I found to be *odd* and *backwards*, like the way they made their envelopes. It was an irritant to me that the glue that enables the envelopes to be sealed was not put on the envelopes, so when I wanted to seal the envelope I had to glue it myself. I could not understand why, in 1979, the Maltese had not learned how to make *proper* envelopes. I determined that when I next visited Canada I would bring back a bundle of envelopes, which I did. I brought back a box of 100 envelopes, and was quite smug when I went to use one of my Canadian envelopes. However, much to my surprise, the glue on the envelope

and complete in itself."¹⁶The act of cultural translation "denies the essentialism of a prior original or originary culture, then we see that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity.... [T]he importance of hybridity is not to trace two original moments from which a third emerges, rather hybridity to me is 'the third space' which enables other positions to emerge." ¹⁷ Hybridity is neither one nor the other. It is a third space where newness emerges and where new ways of perceiving the world displace the old.

Curriculum "will have to be the language of humility, as the curriculum has to await the invitation of the teacher and students in the classroom." ¹⁸

"It is critical that peace education be built around and with in-depth knowledge of local realities." ¹⁹

had reacted to the very very humid Maltese climate and had sealed the envelope shut, so it could not be used! I cannot stress what an eye/I opener that experience was.

From my experience of living and teaching overseas, I have *discovered* the importance of not only acknowledging, but embracing and respecting local knowledge. Narrative métissage as a way of writing takes into consideration the lived lives of the participants. It is mindful of their social, cultural, and historical space. And, this is a significant consideration when thinking about what a curricular vehicle to foster understanding and empathy in Kurdistan would/should look like.

One more *discovery*...

I have *discovered* that the lived curriculum should celebrate or at the very least allow for difference. It must make room for a polyphonic space. *Videre*; the disembodied objective world of what the eye can see, is not the only way of knowing. Curriculum must create a space for *sonare*; embodied knowing, feeling, and emotion.²⁰ Narrative métissage's format, with its mixing of individual texts along with a mix of literary devices such as poetry, narrative, memoir, storytelling, and others, and its use of audio and video clips as well as still images, attends to the call of polyphony. The autobiographical properties of narrative métissage evoke very personal and emotional writing. The authors often expose very raw memories/feelings about both past and present and are willing to be vulnerable; this creates a space for the reader/listener to respond in a very personal and emotional way and to

“Through autobiographical research, writers attend to kin such as family, friends and students, as well as their kinship with the geo-landscape of their places/homes, the imaginary landscape of their cultural worlds, the socio-political conditions of their existence, the language which infuses their telling, and the institutions within which they live their lives.”²¹



Jalil Kayet Mosque, Erbil, Kurdistan, Iraq, 2010.
Sheila Simpkins

*“It is imperative that the world of curriculum question the primacy of *videre* and begin to make room for *sonare*.”²²*

examine the issues/concepts/themes in their own lives. Narrative métissage celebrates knowing tied to memory, feeling, and emotion and acknowledges the importance of embodied knowledge. It embraces different ways of being and knowing in the world, thus bringing a deeper meaning/understanding to the world around us, to others and to our lives. By doing so, narrative métissage answers the call of Aoki's lived curriculum.

 Notes

1 Ted Aoki. *Curriculum in a New Key: The Selected Works of Ted. T. Aoki*, edited by William Pinar and Rita Irwin, (New York: Routledge, 2005).

2 Gavriel Salomon "Does Peace Education Really Make a Difference?" *The Journal of Peace Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2004): 7. In 2000 a search was conducted for peace education studies carried out in the past 20 years in real-life settings, covering all available data bases. Of the 104 articles and chapters devoted to peace education, 79 were empirical studies, only 13 dealt with peace education rather than in-school conflict resolution, mediation and violence reduction programs. A Proquest data base search from 1986 to 2001 found 15 articles on peace education, but none of them was a research study. An ERIC search yielded 394 entries with only 15 being research reports.

3 Aoki, *Curriculum*, 300.

4 Johan J. Galtung "Twenty-five Years of Peace Research: Ten Challenges and Some Responses" *Journal of Peace Research* 22, no. 2 (1985): 141-158

5 Ian Harris. "Peace Education Theory." *Journal of Peace Education* 1, no. 1 (2004).

6 Haggai Kupermintz and Gavriel Salomon. "Lessons to be learned from research on peace education in the context of intractable conflict." *Theory into Practice* 44, no. 4 (2005): 294.

7 Dan Bar-On and Fatma Kassem. "Storytelling as a way to work through intractable conflicts: The German-Jewish experience and its relevance to the Palestinian-Israeli context." *Journal of Social Issues* 60, no. 2 (2004): 289.

8 Ibid., 304.

9 Kupermintz, *Lessons*, 294.

10 Salomon, *Does Peace*, 37.

11 Ibid., 37.

12 Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, and Carl Leggo. *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2000): 7.

13 Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 1994): 211

14 Hasebe-Ludt, *Life*, 38. The terms literary métissage and narrative métissage refer to the same process/concept and are used interchangeably.

15 Aoki, *Curriculum*, 318.

16 Bhabha, *The Location*, 210.

17 Ibid., 211.

18 Aoki, *Curriculum*, 299.

19 Monisha Bajaj. "Critical Peace Education," *Encyclopedia of Peace Education, Teachers College, Columbia University*. 2008, Internet www.tc.edu/centers/epe accessed 12 March 2009

20 Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, Leggo, *Life*, 29.

21 Aoki, *Curriculum*, 373.

22 Ibid., 373.

Métissage: Up Close and Personal

*In the political science discipline you learn very quickly that if you are to survive, you must write critically, establish authority, make your case, prove your point. Can you be more 'objective' than hyper-objective? If so, then do it. Can you show less emotion than not an iota of emotion? If so, then do it. Political science is not for the faint of heart. The personal guarantees ridicule...the margins. So, we should have known better, but the implied invitation to use the personal "I"...**unheard of**.. was so surprising...too inviting. There were five of us; we were close. We had spent the past four years studying together in a very challenging international relations program, so in the last semester of our fourth year, when as part of a paper assignment we were asked to make a prediction.. we all thought we'd take the plunge and write in the first person...not the whole paper...just the last two or three paragraphs...the part where you make the prediction. Along with the predictable caustic remarks, we were all docked a letter grade for using the personal "I". In political science...you learn...*

*My first exposure to narrative métissage was as a reader/audience of the performance of métissage in *Métissage: A Research Praxis*.¹*

In "*Métissage: A Research Praxis*," notions of place and identity are explored. Strands of "place and space, memory and history, ancestry and mixed race, language and literacy, familiar and strange are braided with strands of tradition, ambiguity, becoming, (re)creation, and renewal."² In métissage the autobiographical writing takes the form of poetry, narrative, memoir, storytelling, and others and can be a mixture of these genres. The authors in this métissage combine a number of genres/voices to explore notions of place and identity. Leggo mixes narrative and poetry, while Hurren's writing/poetry evokes an immediacy/intimacy of a face to face conversation, Oberg's voice is formal, Hasebe-Ludt writes in memoir style, and Donald and Chambers use storytelling devices.

¹ Cynthia Chambers, Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Dwayne Donald, Wanda Hurren, Carl Leggo, and Antoinette Oberg, "Métissage: A Research Praxis". In *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples and Issues*, ed. J. Garry Knowles and Adra Cole Los Angeles, (CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 141-153

² Ibid., 152.

“Métissage: A Research Praxis” assumes that truth is relative, partial and multi-faceted. The autobiographical narratives bring to light how each of us constructs our own reality, however the weaving and performing of the métissage speaks to the idea that reality is collectively constructed and that truth is constructed in an ongoing hermeneutic process of interaction with self and others.

The polyvocal property brings to the discussion many different viewpoints and sheds light on the many different layers of (a) concept/s. For example, one theme/thread that *“Métissage: A Research Praxis”* explores is colonialism. Donald explores how laws/legislation/treaties have impacted and continue to impact aboriginal people, their land, and their identities. Chambers explores how language/culture/society impacts both aboriginal and newcomer, while Hurren and Hasebe-Ludt discuss issues around immigration and place and identity. Although these topics are not particularly about colonialism in each individual text, this point of affinity that runs through the whole of the text, offers a multi-layered discussion of colonialism that disrupts binaries and facilitates new understanding and perspectives on/of the lived experience. These new perceptions and understandings create a space for new ways of being in/responding to ourselves, to the world and to those who live in it.³ It is this property that makes métissage a “political and redemptive”⁴ endeavor as well as an aesthetic practice.

The autobiographical writing in métissage is often self-reflexive, the author critically engages with his/her culture, not only to look at the culture and how it has shaped and impacted life experience and identity, but also to look at moral, ethical, and political concerns and how the author is complicit in impacting/perpetuating that culture. Narrative métissage asks the author to look inwards to see how they themselves have been implicated in the topics under analysis and criticism.⁵ For example, Chambers recounts how the Canadian post-secondary institution/society discriminates against Margaret, a talented and accomplished Métis student teacher, because of her distinct Cree accent. The last sentiment in Chamber’s piece conveys the

³ Egon G. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln, “Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research”. In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. K. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, (London: Sage, 1994), 115.

⁴ Cynthia Chambers et al., *Metissage*, 152.

⁵ Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, and Carl Leggo. *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 2.

idea of complicity; “I walked to class with Margaret. And although I didn’t ask, I wanted her to pray for me. And forgive me, too.”⁶

Due to the autobiographical nature of *métissage* there are epistemological elements of self-exposure, memory tied to emotion, and embodied attunement. In “*Métissage: A Research Praxis*,” although each author speaks to place and identity in very different ways, there is a thread of the very personal/intimate/private sharing of memories, conveying an air of vulnerability. For example, in her narrative about her mother’s death and the walnut tree that stood in her mother’s garden for over two hundred years and holds many memories, Hasebe-Ludt writes/speaks/conveys that vulnerability; “On my last visit home, I gazed into the space where once a rich canopy of leaves and branches had reigned. I mourned its loss, just as I mourned the fading of my mother’s memory.”⁷

I respond to the “Métissage: A Research Praxis” on a very personal and emotional level. The narratives draw me in: I am curious to know if Erika was able to be in Saarbrücken to say goodbye to her mom for the last time, I want to ask Wanda what it was like to discover there were five more children, I want to ask Carl why he thinks he’ll never go back to the “mysterious, enchanting” place of York Harbour, I want to rejoice with Dwayne when he will one day be able to say “I am from Papaschase,” I want to know what happened to Margaret, that sensitive, intelligent, and talented student teacher. I respond with more than curiosity though. The narrative and autobiographical voices create a space for me to think about/problematize/identify with/see in a new way, issues of colonized/colonizer, particular/universal, vernacular/literate and other issues.

The authors did not end their narratives in neatly wrapped boxes tied with pretty ribbons; the narratives did not come to conclusive findings, they were not prescriptive; instead they were generative in that they allowed for multiple interpretations and reader/audience response, attending to the assumption that knowledge reflects the multi-dimensional, intersubjective, and contextual nature of the human experience. I was not told how to respond, what knowledge I should take away with me, no one argued a thesis, no one proved a case; yet, I am compelled to examine how place and identity have shaped my own beliefs and I am confronted with examining my own stereotypes and biases. I am particularly impacted by

⁶Cynthia Chambers et al., *Métissage*, 150.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

Margaret's story of discrimination because of her Cree accent. I am angry and frustrated at my society for such discrimination, yet I am angry and ashamed of myself, for I recognize my own tendency to judge character, intelligence, and skill by such a shallow and racist measure as language register. I commit myself to actively change this stereotype. My participation in "Métissage: A Research Praxis" as reader/audience causes me to introduce an activity that addresses this stereotype and others, into my own teaching practice with my own students; creating a space for the students and myself to dialogue with each other and to confront our own stereotypes and biases, just as "Métissage: A Research Praxis" provided for me.

This first experience with narrative métissage captures my attention: The political scientist in me immediately recognizes how political the text is. I am amazed that although the text is autobiographical the topic is not the self—the self is the site/sight of enquiry; the site/sight of enquiry is the individual life, the topic is about something in society. Autobiography is the experience of the human condition that is found in this particular/individual life. We learn from and through stories, and it is exactly this, the narrative and the autobiographical voice in "Métissage: A Research Praxis" that illuminates the human condition and crafts narrative métissage as a powerful and dynamic research practice.

That first reading of "Métissage: A Research Praxis" inspires me to take up practicing narrative métissage as my own research practice. As a participant in creating narrative métissage I experience the very same emotional and personal response with new understandings and insights and questions about the themes and issues raised in my own métissage writing as I did as a reader of "Métissage : A Research Praxis." The insights come from researching themes in my own life and writing about them. The insights form when I read, hear, weave, and dialogue with my fellow métissage participants. I gain insight into my own story and lived experience when I perform my writing. As I speak the words out loud in performance I embody the memories and emotions and feelings inherent in my story. It brings understanding and often times healing to my life. The "performance is a method of understanding, bodily, located in the experience of doing, as the carpenter knows the weight of the hammer, as the sculptor feels the smoothness of the stone, as the child learns the tricks of

the tree.”⁸ In performance I gain insights about myself and others and the themes the métissage explores through discussion with the audience.

I have experienced narrative métissage as a reader, as an audience member in live performance, and as a participant in writing, weaving and performing métissage. We tend to think that the writers/weavers/performers are the participants in métissage and we judge its value as research in catalytic terms through the writers’/weavers’/performers’ lens. However, the reader/audience is participant in métissage as well. In fact, narrative métissage as a research practice is effective in enabling/empowering change in each participant position. I am proof of the power of métissage to create a space for new insight and understandings... enabling change... as a reader of métissage. I have already mentioned the impetus to challenge, confront, and change my own discriminatory practises concerning language register, as a result of reading” Métissage: A Research Praxis,” and that is a significant change in itself. However, the effect was much more than that. I am not trying to be melodramatic, but truly that night while reading “Métissage A Research Praxis”...

*the drumming...the drilling...the disciplining...of my political science days/daze
falls away with the power of the personal gaze*

Discovering narrative métissage was a watershed moment in my academic career; a change in paradigm, a change of supervisor, a change of research focus...life-changing.

I have been extremely fortunate in having discovered métissage at this time in its trajectory as research. Before the summer of 2009 it would have been very difficult to find a published métissage, even though narrative métissage as a research methodology has been practiced and performed by Canadian curriculum scholars such as Cynthia Chambers, Dwayne Donald, Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Wanda Hurren, Carl Leggo and Antoinette Oberg for over a decade. It is only recently in “Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for our Times” that Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, and Carl Leggo have published/theorized literary métissage. The book is composed of seven chapters/themes that explore the power of autobiographical writing/stories: to re/create our personal lives and the world we live in, to help understand the complex concepts of identity and subjectivity, to explore notions of childhood and identity, to explore past, present and future in shaping identity, to understand how our stories can help to make sense of who we are as people in relation to others and how stories can

⁸ Ronald, Pelias, *Writing Performance : Poeticizing the Researcher’s Body*. (Southern Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 110.

open us up to new understandings of the self/other and the world we live in. Each chapter is a métissage illustrating one way autobiographical writing becomes métissage. Therefore, each chapter provides an example of what métissage might look like in practice, and the potential each holds for curriculum, research, and pedagogy. Any of these chapters/métissages would have been an excellent exemplar of métissage as a research practice and its underlying assumptions, values and conceptual dynamics. I have chosen to highlight “*Métissage: A Research Praxis*” because it was my first experience of research that calls to me, where research resonates and invites me to visit with the authors in dialogical conversation, where research welcomes personal connections, and where I feel a sense of kinship with the authors.



Legitimus

We had just performed our narrative métissage “Too legit: Negotiating legitimacy in education”. Our individual stories spoke to the challenges of how we, as graduate students, seminar leaders and educators, struggle to achieve legitimacy in our field as we negotiate tensions between who we are/want to be and expectations of what we are “supposed to be.” We braided strands of ageism, sexism, Islamaphobia, xenophobia, homophobia and violence, superiority/inferiority of culture, of gender, of sexuality, and of ideas and knowledge, of fitting in/not fitting in, of conformity/non-conformity, of longing for understanding and longing to understand. We braided our stories together, connecting and juxtaposing our personal narratives to trouble discourses of legitimacy in our public/personal lives and curricula. By weaving our stories together we critiqued discourses of professionalism, authority, teaching and learning, and opened possibilities of disrupting and redefining legitimacy in education.

As we sat there, listening to and answering questions and participating in the discussion and dialogue around our just performed narrative métissage, I was reminded of Weinberg’s lament of the lack of academe’s appreciation for biography as an appropriate genre of history, when he referred to biography as the “bastard child of academe,”¹ however I couldn’t help thinking to myself ...hmmph ... “narrative métissage: the bastard child of social science research.”

The motivation had been to showcase narrative métissage as a community arts-based research practice and the performance had generated much discussion and many questions. We

¹ Steven Weinberg, “Biography, the Bastard Child of Academe” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 54 no. 35 (2008): B15-B17.

had anticipated/hoped for stimulating discussion and were eager to answer questions and to explain the strengths and benefits of practicing narrative métissage. However, in an ironic twist, our métissage, that had troubled ideas of legitimacy in education, had sparked a dialogue on legitimacy of métissage as a research practice and as arts-based research. *How is this research? Where is the reliability...the validity...the generalizability? How is it arts-based research?* The conversation and exchange of ideas around the answers to these questions and concerns was rich and robust.

So, you are wondering, why the “bastard child” comment? Why the frustration? Although we tried to explain the validity of narrative métissage as research, and as arts-based research, it seemed to me that for some, we were not able to answer the questions adequately, and I was left with the feeling of not having done narrative métissage justice.

We tried to explain that by illuminating common themes and ideas, how our lives overlap and are (not) connected and (not) interrelated and how we (don't) have shared experiences and emotions – points of affinity and dissonance – métissage describes the human condition. Through narrative and autobiographical voice and visual text, métissage creates a space for experiencing the human condition from different perspectives and through different voices, facilitating new understandings, knowledge and ways of being, while at the same time raising new questions and ‘wonderings.’ In these terms narrative métissage is measured by verisimilitude; the quality of appearing to be real or true. ²

² Carolyn Ellis, “Creating Criteria” in *Qualitative Inquiry*. 6 no 2 (2000): 275. In her discussion on criteria for evaluating narrative ethnography Ellis indicates that narrative ethnography should answer the call of verisimilitude; the story should ring true, it should be life like.

We explained that when people have the opportunity to share their stories they affirm their lives as places of knowledge and stimulate each other in collective knowledge construction. This in turn brings empowerment and the impetus for social change.³ So, métissage as research can be valued in terms of catalytic validity, which speaks to how effective the research process has been in actually empowering the participants and enabling them to change.⁴ And, because narrative métissage creates a space for dialogue with self, between authors, between authors and audience, and between audience members, it can also be measured by what Richardson calls crystalline validity.⁵ Depending upon each person's "situatedness," narrative métissage is experienced/responded to/taken-up differently. Thus, the research has the potential for a multiplicity of outcomes/impacts. The attempt to explain the legitimacy of métissage as research in these terms was received with confusion, skepticism and dismissal.

Narrative Métissage
unfixed progenitor
undecidable
undesirable
Destined to come from the wrong side of the tracks

³ Deborah Barndt, "Touching Minds and hearts: Community Arts as collaborative Research" in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, ed. J Gary Knowles and Adra Cole, 351-362 (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 354.

⁴ Patti Lather, "Issues of validity in openly ideological research". *Interchange*, 17 (1986): 63-84 .

⁵ Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 92. In an effort to trouble traditional ideas of validity Richardson uses the metaphor of a crystal. A crystal "combines symmetry, an infinitive variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensions, angles of approach, they grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous, are prisms, that reflect, externalities and refract themselves creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions and what we see depends on our angle of repose." Crystalline validity then speaks to multiple truths, partial understandings, and adds complexity to the topic/discussion.

It was only afterwards, in reflection, that I realized we had been conversing from two very different paradigms, underpinned by incommensurable epistemological and ontological assumptions. Since these assumptions inform qualitative and post-positivistic research inquiry in very fundamentally different ways than traditional/scientific/positivistic research, it makes no sense to use criteria used to judge traditional/scientific/positivistic research, to pass judgment on post-positivistic qualitative research.

We should have explained that narrative *métissage* is post-positivistic research. We should have pointed out that *métissage* assumes that reality is subjective and constructed. Truth is many, relative, partial, and multi-faceted, and as such *métissage* rejects metanarratives. The autobiographical narratives bring to light how each of us constructs our own reality; however the weaving and performing of the *métissage* speaks to the idea that reality is collectively constructed and that truth is constructed in an ongoing process of interaction with others. The performance of *métissage* assumes that knowledge is embodied and attuned to emotion. Narrative *métissage* assumes that research should be transformative. It should lead to a better understanding of the self and others and of the world we live in. This understanding allows a critique of the world around us and ultimately a re-imagining of our lived lives.⁶ These assumptions are in stark contrast to those of positivism, where reality is seen as objective and “out there” to be found. Truth is seen as one, universal. Positivistic research is committed to rationalism and objectivity and research is judged in terms of reliability, validity, and generalizability. The goals of narrative *métissage* are very different than traditional/scientific/positivistic research goals. It is like comparing apples and oranges. No

⁶Erika Hase-be Ludt, Cynthia M. Chambers, and Carl Leggo, *Life Writing and Literary Métissage an Ethos for our Times* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009)

wonder the ideals of verisimilitude, rightness, catalytic and crystalline validity were not acknowledged nor understood. They are not a fit with traditional research.

We should have explained all of this...then we could have said: Narrative métissage does not pretend to be traditional research and makes no apologies that it cannot/refuses to be judged with/by traditional criteria.

For those in the audience with a conventional background in the performing arts, métissage didn't seem to fit their idea of arts-based research. They seemed to think that métissage is not really performance with a "capital P" performance, and therefore isn't arts based; it's narrative inquiry. By its very definition narrative métissage defies binaries, resists fixed categories, "invites the blurring of genres, texts and identities."⁷ Métissage is undecidable; it resists the speaking/writing binary. ⁸ It is not either/or...it is narrative and performance— a mixed-up hybrid.

In order for métissage to be appreciated as arts-based research we should have addressed the process versus product debate. We should have explained that we understand that there is sometimes tension between artistic excellence and political effectiveness, particularly when the researcher/research criteria for excellence do not match those of artists of a particular art form.⁹ We should have pointed out that unlike conventional performance, where product is the goal, arts-based research/métissage assumes that the process of performing is more important than the product, as it is the method that brings empowerment

⁷Ibid., 37.

⁸Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffe, *Understanding Derrida* (London: Continuum, 2004), 46.

⁹Susan Finley. "Arts-based research" in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, ed. J Gary Knowles and Ardra Cole, 351-362 (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 72.

and consciousness and the potential for transformation.¹⁰ Performance in arts-based research is seen as a way of knowing, it sees the body as a site of knowledge.¹¹ It is through the body's action of speaking its stories that we come to know our own experience in a different way. Performativity is one of narrative métissage's enabling elements for fostering individual, collective and social change, which is the aim of arts-based research. If we had explained all of this to them, they would have agreed that métissage is surely arts-based research.

Narrative Métissage
unfixed progenitor...how newness enters the world¹²
undecidable...I love that it resists binaries
undesirable...only if you're a traditionalist
Destined to come from the wrong side of the tracks...I think not!

¹⁰Patti Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 72.

¹¹ Ronald Pelias, "Performative Inquiry: Embodiment and its Challenges" in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, ed. J Gary Knowles and Adra Cole, 351-362 (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 186.

¹²Salmon Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta, 1991) in Erika Hase-be Ludt, Cynthia M. Chambers, and Carl Leggo. *Life Writing and Literary Métissage an Ethos for our Times* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 34

“The Third Space”

Swimming Lessons

It is hot... hot and dry and arid...unbelievably hot...the thermometer reads 50°C and it's only the beginning of June...

The heat is... relentless

lung searing

body scorching

lip parching

moisture sapping

As I walk along the path beside the pool in my complex it seems idyllic—azure sky, shimmering water, the promise of a cool escape.

I can smell the water. I can almost feel the blanket of wet that it invites.

I hear pool sounds—laughter, squeals of delight, giggles of glee, splashing, the smack of bodies hitting water.

I see the pool surrounded by the wrought-iron fence, the gap in the bars allowing a peek inside.

I see men—young men, old men, and boys at play—wrestling, jumping, diving, immersed in the moment—immersed in the cool wet of water in the midst of the blistering dry heat.

I see girls—young girls, as young as 9 or 10 years old—peeking through the gap in the fence. They watch silently, look longingly. I wonder what they are thinking. I wonder what thoughts go through their heads as they watch the boys splashing and playing in the pool. I wonder who told them and how they were told and what reasons were given as to why they are not allowed in the pool. I wonder if they cried, were sad, angry, questioned. I wonder what it's like for them.

I don't know the etiquette. I don't know at what age girls can't go into the pool anymore. I have seen young girls around 6 or 7 in the pool, but exactly when the cut-off age is and how it is determined I don't know. Seeing those little girls, their faces peeking through the fence, makes me angry. I want to yell and scream and tell those men how cruel and stupid and idiotic they are. I want to berate the women for their seeming acquiescence. I want to tell them how backwards and archaic their culture is. I want to tell them...I am disgusted!

And then I remind myself that I see through my eyes and because that is so I cannot see through theirs. I remind myself that I experience the world through the lens of my culture and so I cannot

experience their world in the way that they do. I remind myself that our cultures are different—very different—in many ways incommensurable. I tell myself I must/can not judge, for who am I to even think that I should judge what is right or wrong?

And then I think to myself—this is cultural relativism. Is this some poor excuse for lack of action? Is this some poor excuse to assuage my feelings of helplessness? Does this kind of thinking lead any/no where?

I am in a bind. On the one hand, I want to rail at/take action against what I think is injustice. On the other hand, I understand that to rail against what I think is injustice is to universalize. It is to set my biography as the measuring point for all others—it is cultural arrogance.

How do I reconcile these differences? Can they be reconciled? These are important questions as they lie at the heart of my research for both myself and my participants. If my aim is to foster understanding and empathy towards the self/other, then how are cultural differences to be considered and how is identity of self/other to be accounted for? Homi Bhabha's ideas of cultural and social transformation inform my thinking on these issues. His post-colonial theorizing on culture lends hope that even in the midst of what seems to be incommensurable differences there is the possibility of change, that positions of polarity can be budged, and that cultural binarism can be avoided.

To begin with Bhabha makes a very important distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference. He explains that the idea of living with cultural diversity, which is at the heart of the liberal/pluralistic project and is seen to be a liberating concept, in reality leads to the normalization of other cultures by the dominant culture.¹ Cultural diversity ignores ethnocentric values and interests and glosses over difference. It ignores the fact that different cultures experience the world differently than the dominant culture. If we acknowledge that cultures are indeed different, then we can understand that these differences “very often set up among themselves an incommensurability...it is difficult even counterproductive, to try and fit together different forms of culture and to pretend that they can easily coexist.”² So, how does Bhabha imagine we can work through the impasse of these cultural differences? He introduces the ideas of cultural translation, hybridity and the “third space” in order to explain the possibility of cultural change and transformation.

¹Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994)

²Jonathon Rutherford, “The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha.” *In: Ders (Hg): Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 209.

To open the discussion on cultural change and transformation Bhabha introduces the linguistic term “*The Third Space of Enunciation.*” Language is never for ourselves, it is always for the other. In an utterance the I needs the You in order for there to be communication. The production of meaning requires that the You interpret what the I has said. The act of interpretation or of meaning making is “mobilized in the passage through a Third Space.”³ This creates “ambivalence in the act of interpretation...[t]he meaning of the utterance is quite literally neither the one nor the other.”⁴ He then extrapolates the “Third Space of Enunciation” of language to cultural analysis.

Bhabha argues that all cultural systems and statements are done through the “Third Space of Enunciation.” By accepting this premise we are able to understand his conception that there is no essence to culture and that claims to the inherent purity and originality of cultures are “untenable.”⁵ Culture is always being interpellated; he describes this interpellation as translation. When translation happens there is a notion of “imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced and because it can be simulated...the original is never finished and complete in itself.”⁶ Therefore, culture is forever changing. It is fluid. It is a non-fixed entity; this introduces the notion of cultural hybridity. Because the act of cultural translation

denies the essentialism of a prior original or originary culture, then we see that all forms of culture are continually a process of hybridity. But for me [Bhabha] the importance of hybridity is not to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is “the third space” which enables other positions to emerge.⁷

The translation of culture through/in the third space creates hybridity...it is neither one nor the other. “The transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation of elements that are neither one nor the other, but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both.” Embracing the hybridity of culture steers us away from the problematic binarisms that often frame our notions of culture.

³ Bhabha, *The Location*, 53.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶ Rutherford, *Third Space*, 210.

⁷ Bhabha, *The Location*, 37.

By exploring the “Third Space” we can “elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves.”⁸

This conceptual analysis can also be applied to individual identity formation. Just as there is no priori of an original culture, there is no originary individual identity; individual identity is never fixed, it too must be enunciated through the third space. On the individual level the third space of enunciation is a place of identification; it is

a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, at which point the agency of identification (the subject) is itself always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness. But the importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses.⁹

I am drawn to Bhabha’s analysis of culture because I recognize myself and my life experience in his theorizing. I understand that we are continually living in the third space, but in the everyday rhythms of our lives we may not be conscious of our passing through/living in that third space. I shared the memory of young girls standing on the outside looking in through the gaps of the wrought-iron fence. This memory, this moment in time, is wrapped up in many “gender” memories. While I lived in Kurdistan my mind was preoccupied, trying to understand/make sense of a culture that treats women so oppressively and at times with such violence; witnessing the everyday lives of Kurdish women was soul-wrenching, crazy-making...

Language lessons

Lesson #1

We are contemplating language as a purveyor of culture. I ask the students “What can we learn about a culture by looking at its language?” What I learn is, that in both Arabic and Kurdish, terms used to express family relations are more explicit than in English. In Arabic and Kurdi the English words *aunt* and *uncle* are described as “father’s sister” or “mother’s sister” ... “father’s brother” or “mother’s brother.”

⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁹ Rutherford, *Third Space*, 211.

There is no single word for the word *cousin*...there are eight terms to describe cousin... you say "son" or "daughter" and follow it up with the specific uncle or aunt—"son of my father's sister." That way you know exactly how a cousin is related to the person speaking. This certainly reflects the importance of family, which is very evident in Kurdish tribal society; however, it also emphasizes the importance of relations and relationships in the society. I begin to see how the family fits into the tribal system. I learn that with/in each of these relationships there are certain roles and duties and expectations that must be lived and carried out. I begin to understand how the family/tribal system works, how each of the members is intricately intertwined with/to each other and the daily workings of the tribal society. I begin to see how/why the survival of the tribe is dependent on each of the members carrying out their duties.

As I gain this insight...

*the niggling of an understanding stealthily creeps into my conscious ...
and while it nestles in and takes hold...
my biography is
screaming...NOOOOO!*

*It is clinging to everything it holds near and dear...
kicking and scratching and clawing
but to no avail...*

*a part of me understands...understands...is not quite the right word...I will say...
...a part of me can acknowledge
why the strict gender roles
why the oppression...*

I'm not sure what I think about that niggling of an understanding.

Lesson #2

I had been dancing around the issue for weeks, wanting to establish a relationship with the students before I told them. It was around six weeks into the first semester when I finally decided that they knew me well enough—I could share the news with my poor unsuspecting students; the teacher they liked and admired is an *atheist*: new word—new concept. For Kurdish students religion and belief in God defines them and their society. Their world-view tells them non-belief means immorality, iniquity, sinfulness. How could this be? The caring, respectful, encouraging teacher they had come to care for and respect was someone who did not believe in God!

I wonder if their biographies...

were *screaming...NOOOOO!*

clinging to everything they hold near and dear...

kicking and scratching and clawing...

as the niggling of an understanding stealthily crept in...

I was back in Canada when Balien wrote,

“I always used to tell myself that it is very difficult to compound two things, such as believing in God and not believing in God. The condition with Sheila is really different than my imagination. You are making a very unique behaviour.” (personal communication, October, 2008)

I’m not sure Balien knows what to think about that niggling of an understanding.

Narrative métissage brings theory to life. Through its weaving and its performative properties, narrative métissage provides an opportunity for dialogue. This dialogical space is “the third space.” The third space is a generative site. It is a space where I am willing to explore with my participants, believing that through the “third space of enunciation” we will encounter a place of hybridity, a place where newness emerges, a place for the possibility of generating new understandings that are neither the one nor the others’, a place of insight and of the possibility of transforming our worlds on an individual and collective basis.

“I”DENTITY

I am not a Simpson fan, but I do know about Grampa Simpson and his “go nowhere” rambling stories. He tells a story about an onion—an onion story. It goes like this...

“We can't bust heads like we used to, but we have our ways. One trick is to tell 'em stories that don't go anywhere—like the time I caught the ferry over to Shelbyville. I needed a new heel for my shoe, so I decided to go to Morganville, which is what they called Shelbyville in those days. So, I tied an onion to my belt, which was the style at the time. Now, to take the ferry cost a nickel, and in those days, nickels had pictures of bumblebees on 'em. “Give me five bees for a quarter,” you'd say.

Now where were we? Oh yeah: the important thing was I had an onion on my belt, which was the style at the time. They didn't have white onions because of the war. The only thing you could get was those big yellow ones...”¹

When my son and daughter were in their teens they used to have a ritual. If/when they thought I was taking too long to tell a story—narrate the lived experience—they would look at each other, smirk, raise their eyebrows and then in unison recite: “So I tied an onion to my belt, which was the style at the time.” I would get the hint. But, really, stories are like onions—you need to peel back the layers of nuance and context before some stories can be made sense of. Sometimes you need to know the past in order to appreciate the present—or sometimes it's not the past—it is synchronous time, or parallel events that need to be told. Life does not happen linearly! My plight here is how to do that on paper. How can I convey from the past time and synchronous time and parallel events to make sense of the present without you thinking: “So I tied an onion to my belt, which was the style at the time”?

Recently I finished writing “The Culture of Honour” and “No war, No Peace.” To write these pieces has been emotionally draining. I'm not sure how you will react to the pieces, and others that depict and deal with the turmoil that is Kurdistan. But for me, I am writing about people I know and hold dear; students and colleagues and their families, the vegetable vendor, the BBQ chicken man, the guard at the entrance to UKH. People I shall probably never see again, but still they are there; a

¹ <http://www.simpsoncrazy.com/lists/grampa-stories>

constant memory. The writing of these pieces has left me heavy-hearted; in need of a break. I apologize if you are not familiar with these two specific pieces yet, the one on honour and the one on the absence of peace. Each piece in the dissertation is designed to stand alone and I'm not sure yet in what order the pieces will be in, in the final product. So if this piece about "I" identity comes before the other two pieces, when you finally get to read them, you will understand why at this point in the writing I am looking for a little levity. If it comes in between or after the pieces, you will be glad of the change of pace.

There is an underlying assumption about identity/self/other/subjectivity within narrative *métissage* and within my research project. My research orientation is to practice narrative *métissage* as a curricular vehicle to foster empathy and understanding of the self/other and by doing so, there is the assumption of individual and social transformation. The assumption is that identity and society can and do change. For me to envision my research in Bhabha's theory of social change and transformation, of the generative site of what he calls "the third space", and to be able to say with him,

[w]hat is theoretically innovative and politically crucial is the need to think beyond the narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies for selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself,²

is to say that there is an anti-essentialist assumption that there is no integral, unified, originary identity or culture.

Somewhere in the dissertation, I must have the discussion around self/other—for theoretical grounding—and I know I need to explain how it is I have come to my assumptions. However, how to do such a thing, keeping in mind arts-based research methodology that also underpins the project—the desire to activate the senses, to personally engage, and to be accessible? I want to be able to talk about theory, in a way that "supports differences in vision and voice, by-passing the homogenized "science" writing voice; creates a welcoming space for persons who have other ways of knowing; demystifies claims to textual authority; [and] expands techniques for knowing and telling."³

² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.

³ Laurel Richardson, "Writing Sociology", *Cultural Studies <->Critical Methodologies*, 14, no. 3, (2002): 417. Internet <http://cscsagepub.com> accessed 1 February, 2010.

I think of the scholars I have read and I remember some of my favourite phrases from their works; some because they are incredibly apt for describing a very difficult concept—like Bakhtin’s “picking myself up by my own hair”, or Derrida’s “hall of mirrors”; others because they trip off the tongue so satisfyingly—like Hurren’s “bits and pieces of living along the way”, or Trinh’s “I am not i can be you and me”; others like Cixous whose words go on forever in a whirl of intensity and emotion. I want to be able to acknowledge the theorists and scholars that have informed my thinking of “I”dentity. I think maybe I can do something “poetic-ish?” Somehow have a little fun?

So I write:

*I and that which is not I⁴ have been standing here in the hall of mirrors⁵ trying to lift myself up by my own hair,⁶ when I am not i can be you and me⁷ decides that my selves must go and collect the bits and pieces of living that I have been collecting and discarding,⁸ and when I do, I find that I/she comes in, comes-in-between herself me and you, between the other me where one is always infinitely more than one and more than me, without the fear of ever reaching a limit; she thrills in our becoming;⁹ I ask myself who/**WHAT IS [THE] AUTHOR**¹⁰ of this rambling piece?—I know it is not poor old Decartes who *thought he thought therefore he was!**

⁴ I am indebted to Jonathan Scott Lee for the discussion of Lacanian theory. (Jonathan Scoot Lee, *Jacques Lacan*, (USA: G. K. Hall & Co., 1990) ; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 204-205, and to posts by Dr. Mary Klages, Associate Professor of English, University of Colorado, Boulder. Internet <http://www.colorado.edu/English/courses/ENGL2012Klages/lacan.html> accessed 13 April, 2011.

⁵ Marian Hobson, *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines*, (Canada: Routledge, 1998), 75.

⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Authors and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” in *Art and Answerability*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, translation and notes by Vadim Liapunov; supplement translated by Kenneth Brostrom, (University of Texas Slavic Series, no. 9) (Austin : University of Texas Press, 1990) 55 quoted in Peter Hitchcock, “Bakhtin Marx and Worker Representation: An Architectonics of Answerability” in *Face to Face : Bakhtin in Russia and the West*, ed. Carol Adlam, Rachel Falconer, Vitali Makhlin & Alastair Renfrew, (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 89.

⁷ Minh-ha Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 90.

⁸ Wanda Hurren , “The Convenient Portability of Words: Aesthetic Possibilities of Words on Paper/Postcards/Maps/Etc.”, in *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences*, ed. M. Prendergast, C. Leggo, and P. Sameshima (Rotterdam: Sense Publications), 229.

⁹ Helene Cixous “The Laugh of the Medusa” translated by Keith Cohen & Paula Cohen, *Signs*, 1, no. 4, (1976), 893.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” (1979) translated by Joseph Harari in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, 3d ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood, (London and New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), 281.

Hmmm...I wonder...¹¹ Do I have to spell it out? Make it very specific, using many quotes and references and such devices to show that I really have done the research, have done the reading? Or does it convey, just the way it is, why, how, I have come to understand that the “I” is a ‘site’ where language, ideology, and discourse happens;¹² that the “I” is forever becoming; that the “I” is called forth in relationship with others; that there are many “I”s. That in simple terms I reject the notion of the individual, autonomous “I” found in Cartesian individualism and ideas of the Enlightenment, where the significance of social relations, language and place in the formation of the self were/are overlooked?

And then I read (synchronous time-parallel event) Pelias’s “The Academic Tourist: A Critical Autoethnography.”¹³ He is writing about the life of academia; in his autoethnographic story/writing he recounts: “scholars do research that is supposed to look a certain way and you know that this paper isn’t one of the ways because you don’t have any quotes and a friend of yours just recently said, without meaning to be critical, that she wished she could do your kind of research because then she wouldn’t have to go to the library, but you heard it as critical,” and then in the autoethnography he begins to think about who he might quote and cleverly has an ironic discussion on quoting and in so doing begins to quote profusely—he makes me smile. But, of course, I immediately think of my own work and I decide to try to find another way of re/presenting my thoughts.

And so in the end I write:

¹¹ (Ronald J. Pelias, *A Methodology of the Heart: Evoking Academic & Daily Life*, (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2004). I think of Pelias’ ironic discussion of quoting others for the sake of the tradition of quoting “that is supposed to prove you know something.” We pick up his ideas in mid-sentence when he quotes and comments; “so you begin to think of who you might quote and you remember one of your favourite lines in “A Hippocratic Oath for the Pluralists” from Wayne C. Booth’s book *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism* that reads, “I will publish nothing, favorable or unfavorable about books or articles I have not read through at least once” (315), but you feel a little guilty using it since you’ve used it before and it is a fairly dated source-1979-but you believe it is still relevant since you know you are guilty of breaking the oath, an oath you believe in, but you wonder what does it mean to have “read” someone, such as Derrida for instance, who you’ve quoted but only read in translation, only read all of a few of his many books and parts of a few others, read some summary books on his books, and read without fully understanding everything you encountered, so you wouldn’t want to claim that you have more than a partial grasp of his work, if that...” (Pelias, 148).

¹² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 206.

¹³ Ronald J. Pelias, *A Methodology of the Heart: Evoking Academic & Daily Life*, (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2004), 146-150.

I have been reading Lacan. He says the “I” and that which is not “I.” I understand that Lacan is interested in the unconscious and how it is structured like language. This similarity forms the basis of his understanding of the formation of the self—the subject is produced through language the same way that language produces meaning. The subject “I” can speak, but it can only speak within the laws of language itself. de Saussure’s argument “that the signs that make up a language do not name a pre-existing reality but produces it through a system of differences”¹⁴ informs Lacan’s idea that the subject ‘I’ within language does not represent the presence of a pre-existing subject, but produces it “through a series of differentiations between the ‘I’ and that which is not ‘I.’”¹⁵ The subject is in a continuous process of becoming. I wonder if I would recognize the I that is not I if I met me on the street.

I have been reading Derrida. He says that consciousness is like a “hall of mirrors.” I understand that he, also, is talking about language and is concerned about the absence of presence—différance and deferral—“the relationship between words are forever transforming: new meanings are ascribed as the words move into different or new contexts...signifiers are endlessly becoming the signified, and vice versa.”¹⁶ For Derrida “subjectivity and the language that produces it constitute a process in which meaning is never fully present in any utterance but is continually deferred.”¹⁷ He invites us to look at subjectivity or the self as existing in a hall of mirrors of which it cannot escape.¹⁸ Reflections upon reflections; so many “mes” to reflect upon.

I have been reading Bakhtin. He says “I myself cannot be the author of my own value, just as I cannot lift myself by my own hair.” I understand that he is talking about language in/and dialogue and the formation of self/other through dialogic relations with others. Have you tried lifting yourself by your own hair?—not possible!

I have been reading Trinh. She says “I am not i can be you and me.” I understand that Trinh rejects the notions of pure origin and the true self. I is “infinite layers.” It is not one, not two either, but many

¹⁴ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial*, 204.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁶ Dr. A Lock and Dr. G. Miller professors of Psychology at Massey University, New Zealand, Internet <http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/miller/Doco1.htm> accessed 13 April, 2011.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ William R. Schroeder, *Continental Philosophy: A Critical Approach*, (Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 368.

presences, whose “complexity can hardly be explained through the typographic conventions as I, i or I/i”.¹⁹ She says no matter how we try to “separate, contain and mend, categories still leak...the natures of I, i, you, s/he, We, we, they, and wo/man constantly overlap.”²⁰ Hmmm—there are more “I”s to “mes” than meets the eye.

I have been reading Cixous. She concedes the importance of language to subjectivity,²¹ however she resists the patriarchal, or phallogocentric system that language is. I understand that she endeavours to undermine the structures of speech and binary oppositions that privilege the masculine that are at the center of reference for language and western culture. She encourages women to write with their bodies; to write in the “place in the between”, a space that holds no regard for binary oppositions. Cixous’ formation of the female self embraces interconnectivity and the “non-unitary self”—so she is able to say “she [woman] comes in, comes-in-between herself me and you, between the other me where one is always infinitely more than one and more than me, without the fear of ever reaching a limit; she thrills in our becoming.” I am a vessel—overflowing, running over, with voluptuous mass and matter, bone and flesh, mixed and mingled, everywhere full of all embracing women.

I have been reading Hurren. She says “that individually and collectively we are collecting and discarding bits and pieces of living along the way or continually throughout the process of understanding places and selves.” I understand that she is talking about a non-fixed self, the self that is always in process, the one that is non-essential, the one that is de-centered, the one that is multiple and changing. Myselfes imagines myselfes going through life as a suitcase packing and unpacking and repacking bits of “mes”—depending on where and when and who myselfes are visiting.

I have been reading Foucault. He asks, “what is an author?” I understand that he is talking about the importance of discourse—the historical, social and cultural systems of knowledge—in constructing/producing/forming the self. Discourse is similar to the language function of Lacan and Derrida (etc.) and the formation of subjectivity, where “discourse produces a subject equally dependent upon the rules of the system of knowledge that produces it.”²² He uses his simple question, “what is an

¹⁹ Trinh., 91.

²⁰ Ibid., 91.

²¹ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial*, 205.

²² Ibid., 205.

author?” to explain that there is no originary self, “the author function is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within society.”²³ Subjectivity is a discursive production—discourse “enables speaking persons to come into existence.”²⁴ I am a picture in a frame—I am framed—I can only know, say, think, be, what frames me; set my picture in another frame—another time and place—and I would only know, say, think, be, what frames me.

I am going to quit now. I will leave it to you to judge. From the past time and synchronous time and parallel events, have you been able to make sense of this moment in time—which is never just a moment in time—of writing my dissertation? Have I been true to the underlying goals of arts-based research? Have I successfully conveyed what is often thought as dense and hard to understand conceptual thinking in a way that is accessible and engaging, and takes into consideration different ways of knowing? Have I done it in a way without you thinking, “So I tied an onion to my belt, which was the style at the time”?

²³ Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” (1979) translated by Joseph Harari in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, 3rd ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood, (London and New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), 281.

²⁴ Chris, Barker. *Cultural Studies Theory and Practice*, 3d. (California: Sage Publications Inc., 2008), 225.

*PART TWO:
THE SETTING*



Kurdistan— “Land of the Kurd”

*“The Kurds have no friends but the mountains”
well-known Kurdish sentiment*

“I refuse to say I’m Iraqi, I say I’m Kurd first and then Iraqi.” Murad

In September, 2006, Larry and I were excited to begin teaching at a university in Izmir, Turkey. Izmir, formerly Smyrna, is Turkey's third-largest city and the “capital” of the Aegean region. It is a major port and commercial center set dramatically around a huge bay and backed by mountains. Flying in from Istanbul, at dusk on a Friday evening, our first glimpse of Izmir with its spectacular bay was stunning. We were keen to explore our surroundings and early the next morning we set off to the Kordon, a long promenade along the waterfront filled with pretty restaurants, cafés, shops, and bars providing an idyllic place to soak up the elegant scenery of the city as well as to enjoy the breathtaking views of the Aegean. Around mid-morning we stopped at a quaint little café to enjoy Turkish tea, served strong and sweet, sipped from a dainty tulip-shaped glass. The servers, discovering we were English speakers, and therefore prime candidates for practicing their English, were friendly and very chatty. I can’t remember now what it was that I asked—whatever it was, the server misunderstood me, and thought I had asked him if he was Kurdish. The shocked look on his face immediately alerted me that I had said something quite troublesome. He quickly informed us that he was Turkish and then unashamedly went on to say that while we were in Turkey we should avoid any Kurds, for they are “*dirty, lazy, dishonest, dangerous.*” This was the first of many encounters that we would experience, during our time in Turkey, of unabashed bigotry and prejudice against Kurds within Turkish society. We were stunned by the intensity of the young server’s response. We were also bewildered.

In September of 2006 my knowledge of the Kurds and the Kurdish “question” was minimal. I remembered hearing about the Kurds after the first Gulf War. I had a vague recollection of there being Kurds in Northern Iraq, that they had been terribly oppressed under Saddam Hussein’s regime, and that in order to protect the Kurdish population the UN had set up

a safe-haven in the Kurdish area of Northern Iraq and that this place was called Kurdistan. As far as I knew, that's where the Kurds lived, so why the controversy over Kurds in Turkey?



Map of Kurdish inhabited area: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kurdish-inhabited_area_by_CIA_\(1992\).jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kurdish-inhabited_area_by_CIA_(1992).jpg)

Kurdish culture was in place by the early 5th century BCE. The historians Xenophon, Strabo, and Pliny each made reference to a group living in the area and described them by using derivations of the modern identifier, Kurd.¹ Modern Kurdistan's, or land of the Kurds, political history starts early in the 16th century with the Battle of Chaldiran in northern Kurdistan, where the battle between the Ottoman and Persian empires established the first significant division of Kurdistan with east of the Zagros mountains coming under Persian control and the western part ruled by the Ottomans. A turning point in Kurdistan's history came with the fall of the Ottoman Empire during WWI, when the *Great Powers of the West*,² arbitrarily divided up the region

¹Carl Dahlman, "The Political Geography of Kurdistan," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 43, no. 4 (2002): 271-299.

² Ibid., 279. Kurdistan has often been the object of calculated diplomatic exploitation and betrayal; this is just one example of many where "great powers" have used Kurdistan as a pawn to achieve their own interest. With the end of WWI and the 1920 Treaty of Sevres, signed between the Allied and Associated Powers and Turkey,

The origin of the Kurds is uncertain. Some scholars believe they are the descendents of Indo-European tribes that settled the area over four thousand years ago. Even with the uncertainty it is agreed that the Kurds have been around since very ancient time. It is clear that an identifiable group characterizing early

according to the imperial agendas of the British and French. With the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 the conglomeration of territories and people ruled by the Ottomans were partitioned, creating and setting the boundaries of the modern Middle East and the Republic of Turkey. It was at this time that Kurdistan was divided between the states of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, with a small portion going to the former Soviet Union—now mainly Armenia and Azerbaijan. Currently, for all intents and purposes, the history of Kurdistan rests in the separate agendas of the four key states of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. The creation of the autonomous region of Kurdistan in Northern Iraq in 1991 adds to the complexity of the situation.

Kurdistan then constitutes the geographical area in the Middle East where Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria meet and where most of the people who live there are Kurds. Although Kurds are a large population in the Middle East, where there are 25 to 28 million Kurds living in the area,³ they are mere minorities in the states that they inhabit. However, they constitute a significant percentage of the population within each nation.

Current Estimates of Kurdish Population⁴

Country/region	Kurdish population, in millions	% of country's total population
Turkey	13.0	20
Iraq	4.2	19
Iran	5.7	9
Syria	1.1	8

statehood was promised to the Kurds. However, by 1923 the tenets of the treaty did not sit well with European, namely British and French, and American imperial interests; by 1923 the Treaty of Lausanne was negotiated; it made no provision for a Kurdish state and parceled up the Kurdistan region into its present configurations. The Treaty of Sevres has remained a significant roadmap for Kurdish political movements ever since.

³ Michael M. Gunter, "The Kurdish Question in Perspective," *World Affairs* 166, no. 4 (2004): 197-205.

⁴ Dahlman, *The Political*, 274.

The Kurds represent the largest ethnic⁵ group in the world without an independent state of its own.⁶ Many Kurds' desire for statehood, or at least autonomy in the nations where they reside, has led to "an almost continuous" series of Kurdish revolts in the states they live in and this constitutes "the Kurdish question".⁷ This longing and agitation for statehood or autonomy has often taken the form of armed rebellion and clearly is a threat to the nation states they inhabit. Needless to say, the relationship between the Kurds and the host countries is very tense. The Kurds in each of the respective states are culturally, socially and economically oppressed and politically persecuted by the inhospitable state governments of Turkey, Iran and Syria.⁸ As was mentioned, the Iraqi Kurds were very oppressed under the Hussein regime; however, there has been no such concern with the establishment of the autonomous region of Kurdistan in Northern Iraq. The Iraqi Kurds have been given autonomy for self-government, and since the end of their own bloody civil war (from 1994-1997) they have become a major political and economic power within Iraq itself. The 2010 Iraqi elections saw the Kurdistan regional government playing the key role in the formation of a coalition Iraqi government. This is good news for Iraqi Kurds and Iraq. However, there is fear among the Turkish, Iranian, and Syrian governments that an independent or even quasi-independent Kurdistan within Iraq provides

⁵ The Kurds consider themselves an ethnic group; however they do not constitute a monolithic group with uniform identities and preferences. For example, the Kurdish language Kurmanji is a West Iranian Indo-European language that is closely related to Persian; it is very different from Turkish and Arabic, however all three languages have influenced Kurmanji. There are two main variants of Kurmanji, Bahdinani (spoken in the north), and Sorani (spoken in the south). Yet, there are two minor dialects, Dimili (spoken in Turkish Kurdistan) and Gurani (spoken in southern Kurdistan). Linguists liken the difference between Bahdinani and Sorani as being the same as the difference between German and English, or German and Dutch, therefore the variants in language are only partially understandable between the groups. Another example of heterogeneity is in religion. Kurds do not share the same religion; they practice Sunni and Shi'a Islam as well as Zoroastrianism among other religions, and there are Jewish and Alevi Kurds as well. Therefore, the term ethnicity here is used from a non-essentialist argument which negates the idea that ethnicity is formed on universal cultural characteristics, but is a cultural concept based on the sharing of norms, values, beliefs, cultural symbols and practices. The formation of ethnicity relies on shared cultural signifiers that have been developed under specific, socio-historical and political contexts. For more on ethnicity see Chris, Barker. *Cultural Studies Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. California: Sage Publications Inc., 2008

⁶ Gunter, *The Kurdish Question*, 197.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁸ Amnesty International Report 2010: The State of the World's Human Rights.
www.thereport.amnesty.org/en/download, accessed 17 Jan. 2011.

greater encouragement for the separatist groups within their borders and there continues to be armed attacks on the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) area by both Turkey and Iran.⁹

I have been using the term Kurdistan to describe the geographical region where the majority of people are Kurds. However, you can imagine that Kurdistan is a contested term. To the international community and the laws that govern nation states, where the nation state and national security is defined by borders, there are only Turkish Kurds, Iranian Kurds, Syrian Kurds, and Iraqi Kurds; there are no Kurdistan Kurds, because there is no Kurdistan. For Turkey, Syria, and Iran, with their large Kurdish populations, it is very much in their collective interest to deny the existence of a Kurdistan—land of the Kurds. For example, Turkey carries this denial of all things Kurdish to an extreme. Due to the socio-historical context of Turkish nation building in the 20th century, the dominant discourse in Turkey is that there are not even Turkish-Kurds—if you live in Turkey you are Turkish—there is no recognition of a unique Kurdish ethnic society within Turkey’s borders, and there are laws that make it possible for academics, intellectuals, journalists and others who speak peacefully for Kurdish rights to be seen as engaging in acts of terrorism.¹⁰ But, for many Kurds there is no distinction between Turkish, Iranian, Syrian or Iraqi Kurds...they are all just Kurds.

I have a friend, Masoud. He is well educated and very articulate. He left Kurdistan to live and study in Sweden, went to the US for his graduate work and eventually settled there. He is part of the Kurdish diaspora who left and now, with the establishment of the autonomous region of Kurdistan in Northern Iraq, has returned to help build an infra-structure for what he/they hope one day will be an independent Kurdistan. He recounts an interesting story that paints a telling picture. While in Sweden he was very involved in Swedish politics and, even though he belonged to a conservative party, he worked with and was acquainted with many influential parliamentarians across the political spectrum. It happened that a very leftist-leaning Kurdish revolutionary leader from Iraq asked Masoud if he could/would arrange a meeting with one of the parliamentarians on his behalf. Masoud did just that. The woman he arranged the meeting with was an acquaintance and they had occasion to meet each other a number of times

⁹ These attacks result in killings of armed Kurdish rebels, military personnel, and civilians. Home Office: UK Border Agency, Country of Origin Information Report: Kurdistan Regional Government Area of Iraq, May 21, 2009 www.rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/iraq-kurdistan-220509.doc accessed 17 Jan. 2011.

¹⁰ Gunter, *The Kurdish Question*, 19.

before the arranged meeting. During those times, he felt that the woman wanted to say something to him, but she never did. Finally, the day before the arranged meeting was to take place, she phoned Masoud and asked if they could meet for a cup of coffee before the meeting. It was over the cup of coffee that she finally shared what was on her mind. Masoud said she looked embarrassed and even apologized for bringing the subject up, but she was just trying to understand the situation. She thought it very strange that Masoud would be helping a leftist-leaning Iraqi Kurd: after all didn't Masoud hold very different political ideas than the leftist-leaning leader? And, although she knew that his heritage was Kurdish, wasn't he a Turkish citizen? Why was he helping an Iraqi Kurd? In the telling of the story Masoud pauses to explain that he understands his friend's confusion, for being a European parliamentarian she sees the world as divided into nation states bounded by borders and he realizes that most westerners would view the situation in the same way. He then continues with his response to her questions. Masoud answered; "Yes, my hometown of Batman lies in the predominantly Kurdish area of what most people would call the southeast of Turkey, but for me and the majority of the Kurds who live there, Batman lies in Kurdistan at the foot of the Bati Raman Mountains, and the people who live on the other side of the mountains are not Iraqis, they are my sisters and brothers."



WANTING...FOUND WANTING

“People were dying. People were suffering from illness and there was no medicine for them. I know it has been a hard situation for most of Iraqi people. I lived through that.” Sarah

Here from the balcony of my 12th floor apartment I have a bird’s eye view.

*sun... golden, hugging the horizon
sky... aglow, blood red, burnt orange, deep, rich, vibrant
dust... ever-present... soft as a pillow
sounds... muted... dogs barking, cars, the rumble of generators
the slow inevitable blanket of quiet dusk*

It is a favorite time of day, and I do appreciate the beauty of the sunsets here in Erbil, the DUST (I cannot write it large enough) makes for many spectacular sunsets. As I look out at the hills in the far-off distance, I think...

the sunsets are about the only beauty Erbil has to offer. What I see, for as far as the eye can see, is a dry, drab, dreary, denuded landscape. A rare clump of trees or thicket of shrubs offers a splash of green in an otherwise monochromatic scape of reddish grey brown. Erbil...Iraq...Mesopotamia...Cradle of Civilization...it is difficult to imagine that this place was once part of a verdant, lush, thriving Fertile Crescent,¹ I think...

Kurdistan is not a pretty place in many ways. I cringe at the negativity—I feel—disloyal? But it is true...there are many things about Kurdistan I don’t like. There is such violence—structural, social, interpersonal. The violence is part of the everyday rhythms of life—taken for granted—difficult for me to witness. Yet, I feel very connected to this place. I wonder how it could be that I could care so deeply for Kurdistan. What is it that draws me to this place? What is it that makes me care? Why am I here? And then, I think...

¹ Home Office: UK Border Agency, Country of Origin Information Report: Kurdistan Regional Government Area of Iraq, May 21, 2009, Internet www.rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/iraq-kurdistan-220509.doc accessed January 24, 2011. Also see Carl Dahlman, “The Political Geography of Kurdistan,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 43, no. 4 (2002), 271-299. The KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government Area) has substantial water resources; both the Euphrates and Tigris rivers run through Kurdistan and make it possible for irrigation, so parts of Kurdistan are agriculturally rich, with tobacco being its main cash crop. Halabja in the southeast of the KRG is very agriculturally lush (producing the biggest, plumpest, juiciest, most delicious pomegranates I have ever eaten), however, in the central part, where Erbil is located, and northern/ north western parts of the region widespread deforestation and goat herding have produced a severely denuded and increasingly eroded landscape. Consequently the land is very dry and arid.

and I think...and I think...and I have no answer. I can't seem to find the words, organize my thoughts, know my feelings, and I decide from the balcony of my 12th floor apartment that I'll have to give it some more thought.

I was reading an interview with Trinh T. Minh-ha. Her description of how challenging, yet important it is to capture the richness and fullness of the human experience in a way that depicts the non-linear reality of our lives is what caught my attention. Trinh says

There's always this tendency to separate for better control and to reduce life to a storyline. History is reduced to a story line, so are the individual stories that form its fabric. The density and thickness of events, the spatial, the temporal, the historical and the social are often reduced to a question of numbers and chronology. Whereas in "documenting" for example, what seems necessary to me is precisely to address the impossibility of packaging information in linear fashion and to bring out the complexities of these encounters between realities, between cultures, or between subjectivities.²

So, I gave it some more thought...for days and days...for weeks actually...I gave it thought. And then...

*I'm standing on the corner of a small residential road, just in the back of the local mosque. I knew I'd be early, yet in my worryment of not getting here in time, I left excessively early. After all, it is only a short 10 minute walk to the local mosque, but I wanted to be here on time, prepared with recorder in hand, ready to tape the Dhuhur—the twelve o'clock call to prayer. I could have gone to Erbil's largest and grandest Jalil Khayet Mosque. Its beautiful architecture and superb colourful mosaic tiling are really exquisite. The Imam who sings (I know that "utters" is the right word, yet I think of it as "sings") the call to prayer from the Jalil Khayet is very skilled and his call is sweet and melodious, much more so than the local Imam. Even so, I am partial to the local Imam, after all it is his voice that I wake to in the wee hours of the morning and his voice that rings out in evensong before I retire. I'm leaning against a gray concrete wall. It's a glorious warm, sunny, November morning. I am trying to be inconspicuous, although it is really difficult, as it seems no matter how I dress or stand or look, or wait, I seem to be conspicuously conspicuous. A small group of school children, about 8 or 9 year olds, comes around the corner. They immediately notice me, shyly smile, jostle each other a bit. I smile back, wave, say hello. They beam their smiles again and begin to practice their English. **Hello. How are you? I am fine. Nice to meet you. My name is Dilpak. My name is Rashid. My name is Leilav. My name is Peshwar. What's your name?** They gather around, wanting to be friendly, wanting to talk, which really means*

² Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Deep Vibrancy of Silence: Interview with Trinh T. Minh-ha," Interview by Fukuko Kobayashi, in *Critics and Writers Speak: Revisioning Post-Colonial Studies*, ed. Igor Maver (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 169.

they say their simple phrases over and over again, wanting me to hear them, wanting to hear me. They crowd even closer and soon “My name is Leilav” takes off her backpack and pulls out her workbook. She pulls me down so I can see her work, they begin to recite. Oh my goodness, there really is beginning to be quite a crowd, laughing, giggling, curious. They point at pictures and say “doKtor,” “nurse,” “fireman,” “teacher,” and everyone says “chief” when “My name is Leilav” points to the picture of a chef. Soon there are too many children. They are all speaking at once, trying to catch my eye, trying to shake my hand. I take out my camera and ask if I can take their picture. This excites them and they are all quite happy to oblige, after each picture I must show them what it looks like. One little boy catches my eye...holds up a finger, signs... tries to make it clear...he’ll be back, he turns, runs down the road. “My name is Dilpak” has run home to get her little sister. Mothers begin to come out from behind the high walls, stand outside the gates, younger brothers and sisters, many barefooted, come running. A little girl brings a glass of water for me, I turn to see which mom has sent it; we make eye contact, smile. The boy has returned. He has changed out of his grey and white school uniform, into a bright orange shirt and khaki pants; he stands proudly for his picture. Time is pressing. I don’t want to miss the call to prayer! Somehow, although we don’t share a language, I tell them I must go. There are smiles, waves...even a hug from “My name is Leilav”.

Minutes later, recorder in hand, I tape the Dhuhr. I love the call to prayer. It never fails to evoke a profound sense of time and of place; of being here on this earth, sharing this space with others. There is no doubt that we are different, yet we love, we laugh, we cry, we hurt. I think of the children and their mothers and myself...wanting to communicate, to be kind, to inter/connect, to enjoy each other, and I recognize that part of the call to this place, Kurdistan, is my own wanting. Wanting to live and laugh and care with/for others, wanting to understand, wanting to co-exist, wanting to live well, wanting to be human...my wanting.

I was reading Ted T. Aoki’s “Humiliating the Cartesian Ego.” He explains that Descartes’ “I think therefore I am” logo leads to binarism and the dualism of ‘either/or’ thinking and how this mentality leads to polarization. He skillfully leads us to understand that the ambiguity of a ‘both, this and that and more’ mentality, that recognizes that ‘either/or’ is not the only way to see the world, opens up new sites of possibility. He particularly focuses on the ‘and’ in ‘both, this and that and more’ to highlight that the ‘and’ is a “place where new lines of thought can spring forth in many directions simultaneously.”³ He then exemplifies how the ambiguity of ‘and’ opens space for new understandings by re/imagining the word humiliation. His erudite re/imagining of the word humiliation from its usual pejorative connotation

³ Ted. T Aoki, “Humiliating the Cartesian Ego,” chap. 16 in *Curriculum in a New Key: The Collected Works of Ted T. Aoki*, ed. William F. Pinar and Rita L. Irwin (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 299.

to one in where humiliation is concerned with how humans dwell together is truly thought provoking. He writes:

And here, positioned at the site of one of the many *ands*, where the human centered meaning of humiliation moves in tension with a different meaning of humiliation—one where the human is no mere ego, no mere subjective “I” that thinks it thinks: Here, *humiliating* shifts its meaning, admittedly ambiguously, to one that is concerned with lived space where people dwell communally, where dwelling is a dwelling with others on earth under the sky, where we find *humus* that nurtures *humans*, where *humans* caught up in binds sometimes chuckle, where we can hear laughter at the thought of humans thinking they can master the world...*humiliation* can indeed be the sign of our humanness.⁴

Aoki inspires/challenges me to ask questions. What does it mean to dwell together ethically? What does it mean to be human? How should I live my life?

I pick up the book I had put on reserve at the local Wimbledon library here in London. When I get back to my flat I begin to give it a quick perusal. “Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History”⁵ by Susan Meiselas is a remarkable book of visual anthropology and history. It is a collection of photographs, postcards, family pictures, newspaper clippings, documents, letters—both public and private, and testimonials of foreign and Kurdish photographers, journalists, doctors, diplomats, activists etc. The visual presentation is captivating. Meiselas has superimposed the artefacts to fashion a layered effect, she uses diverse fonts, different thicknesses and colours, and italics for the print which adds texture, still she manages to compose a very unified whole. This book is wonderful research as well as a beautiful work of art. As I turn the pages I am enthralled. With each turn I find myself running my hand over the page, pausing at the pictures, touching the faces...they seem so real...I can almost hear the whisper of their stories over the span of time.

Then...I turn the page...

⁴ *Ibid.*, 300

⁵ Susan Meiselas, *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History* (New York: Random House, 1997)

My reaction is immediate, visceral...a fist in my gut...my heart-ripped out. I don't need to read the caption. I know it will tell of beyond belief horror⁶, but I read anyway. I am bereft...my sorrow cannot be contained. Humanity has been found wanting.



Mass Murder Proven: Dr. Clyde Snow, forensic anthropologist, exhumes blindfolded skull of teenager from mass grave. Erbil, Northern Iraq, December 1991. Susan Meiselas/ Magnum Photos (Photo reprinted with permission.)

⁶ The Iraqi Kurds suffered horrendous atrocities under Saddam Hussein, who in the 1980s carried out systematic genocide against the Kurdish population by using chemical weapons, destroying villages and slaughtering over 50,000 rural Kurds. In the period of just over a decade this campaign led to the disappearance of over 180,000 Kurdish people and the destruction of over 3,900 Kurdish villages. What did Hussein have to say about these allegations? "“Rumors,” said Hussein. “There is no evidence at all.”” Quote from (Nieuwe Revu, Dutch monthly magazine, January 30-February 6, 1992) in Susan Meiselas, *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History* (New York: Random House, 1997), 334.

I have been reading Edward Said's "Orientalism." His discussion on the importance of humanism⁷ is what captures my attention. For Said, humanism requires using "one's mind historically and rationally for the purposes of reflective understanding and genuine disclosure."⁸ He sought to "use humanistic critique to open up the field of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis to replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that so imprison us in labels and antagonistic debate, whose goal is a belligerent collective identity rather than understanding and intellectual exchange."⁹ Said's idea of humanism encompasses striving for genuine understanding of the other as resistance to factionalism and impending barbarism, so that we might coexist in community.¹⁰ To view humanism in this way allows Said to write: "And lastly, and most important, humanism is the "last and final resistance we have against the injustices and inhuman practices that disfigure human history."¹¹

With Trinh I feel the difficulty and desire to capture my own story in ways that depict the back and forth and sideways slip and slide fluidity of the warp of time, while understanding that to write my story is only a progress report. It will/can never be a final destination. With Aoki and Said I am interested in human relationships and the endeavour of living well with each other in community.

Why Kurdistan? What is it that draws me to this place? What is it that makes me care? Why am I here?

Humanism... found wanting... wanting mine

⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 1978: reprint, Penguin Books Ltd. 2003), xvii (page citations are to the reprint edition). For me, Said's humanism is reminiscent of Aoki's humanism—a concern with human beings living well with each other in community. On page xvii of the preface of the 2003 reprint of "Orientalism" Said says "I have called what I try to do "humanism," a word I continue to use stubbornly despite the scornful dismissal of the term by sophisticated post-modern critics." (Said, xvii (page citations are to the reprint edition). Here I take Said at his word; for him humanism is not meant as an ideology that posits universal truths and metanarratives. His writing and political endeavour was a "challenging [of] essentialized and given categories such as "culture," "the Arab mind," and "the clash of civilizations," Said sought to recuperate through careful analysis what others had left as immutable, uncontested, and forgotten." In Abraham Matthew, "Introduction: Edward Said and After: Toward a New Humanism" *Cultural Critique*, 67, (2007): 2.

⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, xvii

⁹ *Ibid*, xvii

¹⁰ Abraham Matthew, "Introduction: Edward Said and After: Toward a New Humanism" *Cultural Critique*, 67,(2007): 5

¹¹ Said, *Orientalism*, xxii

Mapwork: Mapping with/in and Mapping out

"It's interesting to be part of a process...or something like...to be heard by people who don't know about the way we live." Bobbi

"Sheila, I see that much of your work is influenced by the notions of place and identity. I wonder if you should consider doing some form of mapwork in your study. Not as a formal piece or that you have to take that up as a method, but as a way to understand the links between these two notions when you are in the place of your research site." Wanda Hurren— my doctoral supervisor—and I are sipping lattes on the patio of the Oak Bay Marina, basking in the sun of a very summery day, enjoying the sweeping views of Mt. Baker across the azure waters of the Straits of Juan De Fuca, when Wanda makes this suggestion. She has mentioned her scholarly interest in mapwork before, but only in passing, and never with regards to my work. Her suggestion is made in typical Wanda fashion—'gracious unpretentious astute insightfulness'—making a suggestion, putting it on the table, and leaving it to me to take it up or not. Her suggestions are always very thoughtful and perceptive. I value, appreciate, and trust her input. So, I confess I really only have a vague idea of what mapwork entails, and why or how I would do it. She explains that I would benefit from mapwork because it would help give me insight into my research site and my own identity within that site and it would enable my readers to gain an idea about me as well as my research site. She offers to send me a "very drafty draft"¹ (her words, not mine) of a piece about mapwork that she is working on. As it turns out, Wanda's draft is not as drafty as she makes out. It answers a lot of my questions.

As I read I learn that mapwork is an arts-based practice that values embodied ways of knowing. In an effort to make sense of a place and ourselves in that place, mapwork asks that we attend to the sensual, the emotional, physical and intellectual responses experienced in a place and then to document that data through various forms of text—expository, poetic, image, etc. Although Wanda describes the process of mapwork with regards to projects such as document analysis, collage work, and narrative or image-based inquiry, it is her site study discussion that captures my attention. She offers some concrete and practical "how to" suggestions of how to start a site study—of course there are no hard and fast rules. Her

¹ Wanda Hurren, "Atlas" document in preparation. For story telling purposes I have chosen to highlight Hurren's "Atlas" a document in preparation. However, for a more detailed discussion and exemplars of mapwork see Wanda Hurren and Erika Hasebe-Ludt, "The Terroir that We Are: Bringing Curriculum Down to Earth" *Journal of Curriculum Theory*, 27, no 2 (2011): 17-34; Wanda Hurren, "Mapwork: Atlas Interrupted" In *Companion to Research in Education* eds. A. Reid, P. Hart, M. Peters and C. Russel (New York: Springer, in press); Wanda Hurren, "The Convenient Portability of Words: Aesthetic Possibilities of Words on Paper/Postcards/Maps/Etc." In *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Science*, eds. M. Prendergast, C. Leggo, and P. Sameshima (Rotterdam: Sense Publications, 2009)229-238; Wanda Hurren, "Postc(art)ographia: A Mapwork Project about Identity and Place" *Canadian Journal of Environmental (Special Issue: Art, Literature and Place)*, 13, no 12 (2008): 43-49

suggestions are as simple as “spend an extended period of time alone, noticing things through your various senses. Make a list of things you see, feel, hear, etc. Create a web of various aspects you are noticing. Complete these frame sentences: In this place I feel ...In this place I want to...In this place I wonder...”² I note that mapwork seems like a very pleasant way of finding out about my research site, myself in that site, and a way of conveying that knowledge to my audience.

Wanda’s draft also introduces me to Edward Casey’s discussion of the four ways that any kind of mapping occurs—mapping of, mapping for, mapping with/in and mapping out. She indicates that Casey’s mapping with/in and mapping out aptly describe mapwork. Mapping with/in is concerned with “*the way one experiences certain parts of the known world...how it feels to be there, with/in that very place or region, whether the feeling itself is one of amazement or boredom, duress or ease.*”³ Mapping out is the format used to share/represent/recreate that with/in experience—so that an audience can be moved in the same way as the author/researcher/artist/mapworker has been moved with/in that place or region.⁴

“*Wanting...Found Wanting*” and the accompanying DVD “*Dhuh: Noon Call to Prayer; Mapping out the Lived Experience*,” are my attempts at mapwork, at mapping with/in and at mapping out. In keeping with arts-based research and its value of embodied ways of knowing I knew that I wanted somehow to incorporate an auditory component to my data re/presentation. However, on the day that I headed out to tape the Dhuh I had no idea how I would use the recording. I chose to record the Dhuh because, as I have indicated, I am always reminded of a sense of time and place, and experience a sense of awe of the world around me and of this planet we all share. Also, the call to prayer defines the rhythms of everyday life in Kurdistan—5 times a day—everyday at the same time the same prayer—the prayer requiring a certain, specific response, at a certain specific time. In “*Dhuh: Noon Call to Prayer; Mapping out the Lived Experience*” my intention is to map out how it felt to be in that place and at that time. I so want you to see what I saw, to hear what I heard, to feel what I felt, to be moved in the same way that I was moved on that November day, on that street, on that corner next to the local mosque in Erbil, Kurdistan, Iraq.

When I think of that gloriously warm sunny November morning what I remember most are the children. I had been pondering, “*I wonder how it could be, that I could care so deeply for Kurdistan. What is it that draws me to this place? What is it that makes me care? Why am I here?*” for weeks, trying to make sense of me. The meeting with the children and their mothers was a moment in time, a short

² *Ibid.*, 12.

³ Edward, S. Casey, *Earth-mapping: Artists reshaping landscape* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xxi. Emphasis is the author’s.

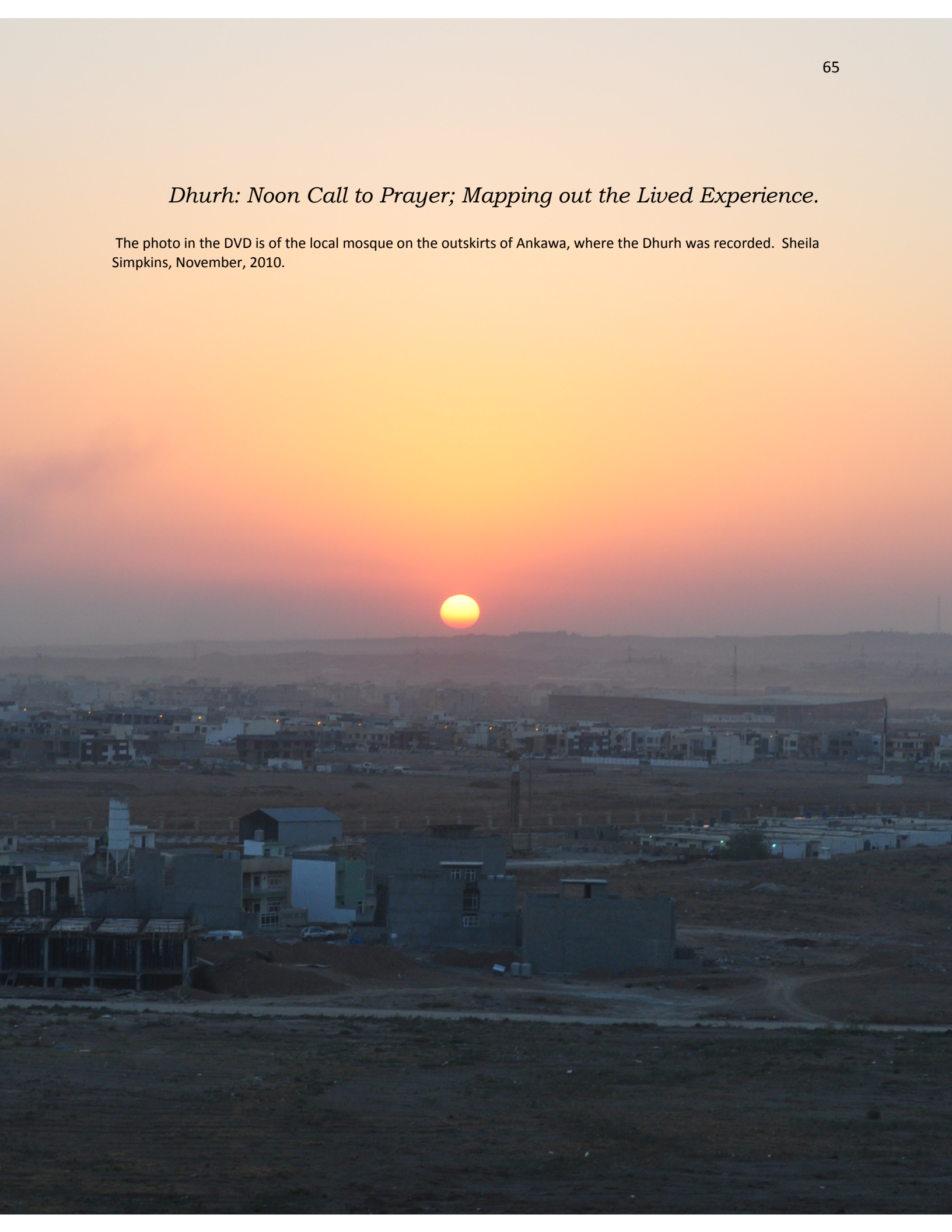
⁴ *Ibid.*, xxii.

moment, yet it was epiphanous. When I walked home that day, after taping the Dhurh, it was with a sense of understanding to the soul-searching questions that had been worrying at me. I want you to be able to see what I saw on that morning. I want to map out that mapping with/in experience, and the children are a significant factor in that time and place; I want so much to share with you the photos that I snapped of the children. However, I am aware as Sarah Pink indicates in *“Doing Visual Ethnography”* that as the pictures move from one context to another they will take on a different meaning and be taken up differently.⁵ I know that the context of where and when and why the pictures were taken—on a sunny day in Erbil in a moment of joyfully shared human connection across cultures and across generations, my own epiphanous moment of self/other, will not be viewed in this context. The conditions/context under which they are viewed will be different; however innocent my motivation to want to use the pictures, it will not sit well with western sensibilities, academia. I understand these sensibilities—after all I am a product of my culture. I cannot share with you the photos of the children; I will leave it to you to imagine those little faces; their smiles—winning, shy, sweet, sunshiny, gap-toothed, warm; their eyes—dancing, friendly, wide-eyed, earnest, curious. What I offer you are the call of the Dhurh—beautiful, evocative—and the sounds of the street, behind my local mosque, on a typical weekday in Erbil, Kurdistan.

⁵ Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 118.

Dhurh: Noon Call to Prayer; Mapping out the Lived Experience.

The photo in the DVD is of the local mosque on the outskirts of Ankawa, where the Dhurh was recorded. Sheila Simpkins, November, 2010.



No War—No Peace

Kurdistan can be categorized as post-conflict in that the oppression of the Kurds under Saddam Hussein's regime is over and the 1990's Kurdish civil war has come to an end. However, Kurdistan continues to be mired in fractious divisions within its autonomous area and it is affected by the violence/war in the broader Iraqi setting. Many of the struggles/tensions are fought over in the political arena. However, violence frequently erupts making the situation intractable in nature. There is no war in Kurdistan, yet there is no peace.

There are many areas of tension; I mention here specifically the Kirkuk referendum and Mosul Christian situations because during the time I spent doing my data collection in Kurdistan they were front and foremost in the Iraqi/Kurdish news.

The watermark is an image showing the moment that a bomb detonates on a street in Kirkuk, Iraq, February 9, 2011. "Iraqi officials say a series of explosions killed at least nine people in northern Iraq Wednesday, including seven who died in car bombings in Kirkuk. Officials say three car bombs exploded in quick succession in the ethnically divided city of Kirkuk. At least two police officers are among those killed while at least 80 people were wounded." Image and reportage from, Voice of America, Internet

<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/3-Car-Bombs-Explode-in-Northern-Iraqs-Kirkuk-115627524.html>
accessed 5 April, 2011.

Iraqi Christians hold critical meeting

Monday, November 15, 2010

Most of the Christian parties consider establishing a special governorate for Christians as a constructive shield.

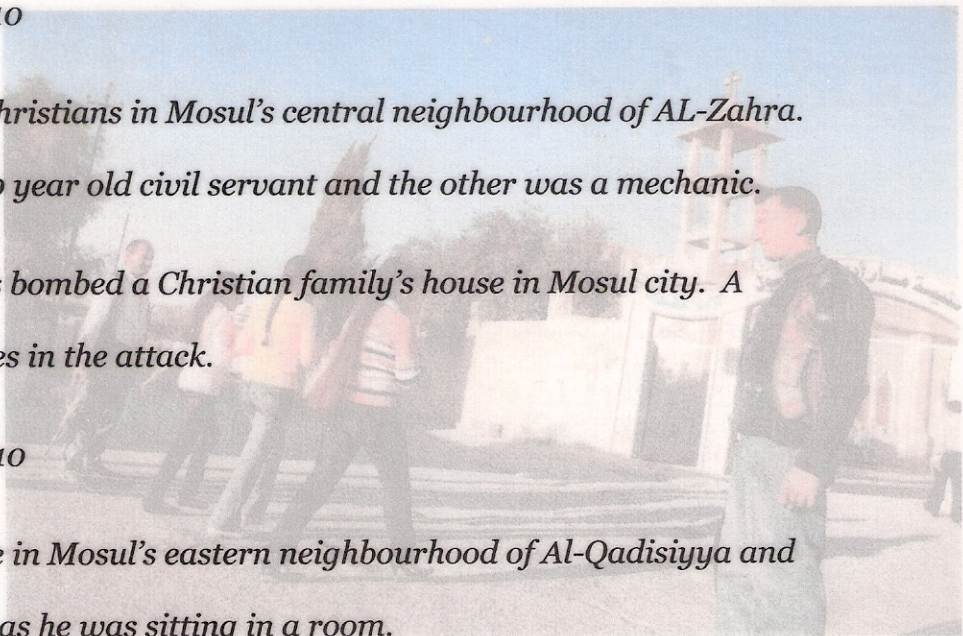
Gunmen fatally shot two Christians in Mosul's central neighbourhood of AL-Zahra.

One of the victims was a 40 year old civil servant and the other was a mechanic.

Later in the day, assailants bombed a Christian family's house in Mosul city. A bystander sustained injuries in the attack.

Tuesday, November 16, 2010

Gunmen broke into a house in Mosul's eastern neighbourhood of Al-Qadisiyya and shot dead a Christian man as he was sitting in a room.



Special security elements stand guard as worshippers enter the church in Karamles village in Nineveh Plain.

Last week, twelve Christian political groups in all over Iraq, gathered in Ankawa town in Erbil city to sign a roadmap in order to save the Iraqi Christians from threats and mass immigration. During the meeting, two initiatives were discussed; the first initiative is Christians to have an autonomous area in Nineveh plain in northern Iraq. At present, a lot of Christians are living in Nineveh plain and they proclaim that they have been living in the plain for thousands of years. The second proposal is to establish a Christian governorate in Nineveh plain; the governorate must be established and run by Christians. Initial information disclosed, which all of the Christian parties and groups at the meeting believed that the initiative (establishing a Christian governorate) is a fine solution, while four of them rejected the initiative (autonomous for Christians) they think the proposal is against the Constitution.

It was Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, first called for establishing a governorate for Christians in Nineveh Plain after a series of violent attacks,

58 Christians were killed while worshipping in a Baghdad church in late October. The majority of Christians warmly welcomed the initiative. Iraqi Kurds welcome and support establishing the Christian governorate and the governorate will border the Kurdistan Region.

Member of Iraqi Parliament, Farhad Atroushi, from Kurdish list, said Christians have the right to have an autonomous region or to have their own governorate. It is not against Iraqi Constitution for Christians to obtain this right.

Since 2003, thousands of Iraqi Christians have fled their homes. Kurdistan Region Minister of Interior, Karim Sinjari, stated that after the attack on the church in Karamles, the government has formed a high committee to welcome the Christian families. "The committee held its first meeting to discuss their studies, find a solution for them into schools and universities in Kurdistan Region."

As another step to support the Christians in Kurdistan Region, Bolani asserted that since there is an intention to choose

three vice-presidents and three deputies for prime minister in the new ministerial formation, Barzani said a Christian figure and a Turkmen minority figure, should be appointed to the vice-president post and the other one receive deputy prime minister post.

Barzani said that the governorate for Christians is a very difficult and complicated mission since most of the Iraqi Arabs (Shiite and Sunni) are against it. They think it is a move toward Iraqi splitting up.

Barzani, an Iraqi Christian website, a prominent Shiite

politician, Ahmed Chalabi, member of Iraqi ruling coalition said "we reject establishing a governorate for Christians. We cannot divide Iraq on the basis of religion." Barzani strongly against the idea because it does not fit the "Iraqi condition."

Barzani said that the government, Abbas Bayati said "we cannot operate to displace all Christian people and put them in one place in order to get a governorate of their own." Bayati said Christians are spread in all over the country. Barzani added that it is necessary for Iraqi government to

protect Christians wherever they are.

However, Christians say in order to protect the lives of Christian people, Iraqi government should bring the affairs and ministry of finance. Bolani added that all the 12 insurgents are Iraqi citizens. He said the government should disclose more information about the detained insurgents.

"We cannot put police in front of every Christian village. Government should protect the whole country from extremists," said the priest of Karamles village, a Christian village in Nineveh plain.

As attacks against Christians are increasing, Iraqi Minister of Interior, Jawad Bolani stated that

his ministry has arrested a group of insurgents who confessed that they were behind the latest attack in Baghdad church and the attacks on Iraqi ministry of finance. Bolani added that all the 12 insurgents are Iraqi citizens. He said the government should disclose more information about the detained insurgents.

Monday, November 22, 2010

Gunmen entered a shop in Mosul, owned by two Christian welders--brothers Saad Hanna 43, and Waad Hanna 40--and shot them. Saad was killed instantly and Waad died two hours later.

Police found an elderly Christian woman strangled in her Mosul home.

Qasim Khidhir
Erbil

qasim.khidhir@gmail.com

THE GLOBE PHOTO/Qasim Khidhir

Kirkuk Arabs threaten census-takers

"If necessary, we will take up arms against them."

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki says there is no excuse to postpone national census.

Kirkuk, a diverse province and city with three main ethnic groups—Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen—has been one of Iraq's most intractable problems. Controlling Kirkuk, which sits on approximately 10 per cent of Iraq's oil and gas reserves, or preventing someone else from doing so, has major resource implications.

The Iraqi government has postponed the national census four times since 2003 due to tensions over disputed areas between Arabs and Kurds, and because of security reasons. On December 5, Iraq held the highest-profile meeting yet with the council of ministers and presidency to dis-

uss the national census. "If in the past the national census was postponed due to security reasons, there is no excuse to postpone it [because security has improved in Iraq]. The census is a national issue linked to the development of Iraq in all fields. The Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation must abide by it and speed up this process."

Control of Kirkuk is also symbolically important for all three of its main ethnic groups, but especially so for Kurds who have come to see Kirkuk as 'their Jerusalem'.

He added: "There is no one among us who is against the national census. Our country

has not conducted the census since 1997. Also, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani reaffirmed the importance of conducting the national census and demanded the census be conducted as soon as possible. In the meeting, he discussed all the disagreements and obstacles. It is important to find a solution during the national reconciliation process."

agreed to form a number of committees to study the differences between Kurds and Arabs in the disputed areas located in the provinces of Kirkuk, Mosul, Diyala and Salahaddin. The committees must be formed by the council of ministries and the presidency by December 15. However, the Arab Political Council in Kirkuk issued a warning. "We are against any members of these committees or any census employee visiting the town's neighborhoods," said Abdurrah-

man Assi, spokesman of the Arab Political Council in Kirkuk, in a statement. "If necessary, we will take up arms against them," he concluded. In Kirkuk, Arabs are "absolutely" against the national census. "We are against anyone who push for the national census for several reasons. First, they want to prove that Kurds are the majority in the disputed areas; second, they want to prove to the Iraqi government that Kurdistan Region is more important than Iraq's central region. Currently, Kurdistan

Region gets 17% of Iraq's national budget according to the region's estimated population. Third, Kurds say the existence of the national census helps the implementation of some constitutional items—one of which is that all citizens must have schools in their language.

Qassim Khidhr
Erbil



Jalawla's Kurds evacuate, facing threats

Politically, the future of Kirkuk is tied up with the full implementation of Iraq's 2005 constitution, which in its article 140, stipulates normalization, (reversal of Arabization), a census, and a referendum to determine the will of its citizens—in other words, whether they are to become part of the Kurdistan Region.

Kurdish families from the multi-ethnic town of Jalawla are evacuating their homes for safer areas in the Region as threats increase. Kurdish parties and civil organizations are taking notice of the impact on the town's future.

northern Diyala province, is one of the disputed areas between the KRG and the Iraqi government. Arab families were brought to this area and Arabization process, constitutional Article 140 addresses this issue.

The future status of Kirkuk has thus become a major bone of contention between Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen in Iraq.

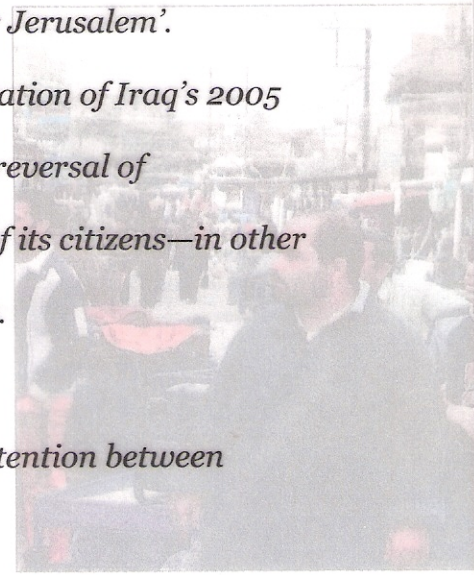
"Kurdish families in the disputed areas of Diyala province are threatened by the presence of Arab groups, and the KRG watches silently," said Andan Qurbani explaining over a letter to the Kalar mayor, who promised to forward it to KRG and

higher Iraqi authorities. Kurdish official Sherko Tofiq said they were in the area that insurgents are planning to want to control the town... this news has spread fear among the Kurds," said Tofiq speaking to Peyamner News on Tuesday. President Massoud Barzani said that no explosions occurred in the town's Kurdish areas in two days.

of Kurdish Peshmarga and American forces searched the town for insurgents believed to

be related to al-Qaeda and al-Awda (Return) Party that involves members of the KRG. Tofiq blamed local security forces and some of them help the gunmen run activities in the area," he added.

Tofiq called on the KRG to send Peshmerga troops to the town and to disperse the Iraqi army and local police in order to remove "tension between the town's ethnic components."



A crowded street in downtown Jalawla

Jalawla, located in

Eye/I Catching

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.”

Edward Said

My biography haunts me. No matter how I try to elude it, it plagues me. It is un-nerving to so often be confronted with my own taken-for-granted; I had no idea I have so many. There are times when I think I have finally conquered a taken-for-granted and have banished it to the scrap heap of modernist, reductionist, binarist, essentialist, monolithic, dehumanizing stereotyping thought, only to find it lurking—me insensitively unaware—to its molding and sculpting, pushing and pulling—directing my thoughts and actions behind the curtain of culture.

Scene 1

Curtain rises. Woman standing alone on the stage, in pensive thought, camera strung around her neck. She notices the audience, and begins to converse with them.

I am waiting to take the perfect photo. You know the one I’m talking about; it is the quintessential photograph, the one that is immediately recognizable as proof to people “back home”—a.k.a. the West—that I really have been to the remote, exotic, mysterious, Middle East. I have it in my mind’s eye...what the photo must look like: it has to be a street scene, maybe at the *qaysari*.¹ It has to depict the hustle and bustle of everyday life; it must be of women going about their daily errands wearing the black chador. But it is more than that; it has to show the ubiquity of the black *chador*. Isn’t this THE photo? Isn’t it THE one that would prove that I have been to Kurdistan? To Iraq? An Islamic country? The Middle East? In actuality, the black *chador*, although worn by some women, is far from ubiquitous, and I know this for a fact, because I have been here, witnessed it with my own eyes. Never mind that I will never be able to snap this sought after photo, **for it is not based in reality, it does not exist**, I continue to hope

¹ The name of the bazaar in Erbil, Kurdistan.

for/look for/wait for the opportunity to take it. Why? It is frightful the hold that Orientalism has on my imagination. The truth of the matter, dear audience (*leans towards the audience*) is that the combinations are endless. (*counts the options on fingers*) The chador, harsh black, softened by its flowing length; the *jilaabah*, short or long, in an array of muted pastel colours; the *abaya*, light weight and delicately embroidered; the *hijab*, place of individuality and style—the crowning glory; western style, trendy, yet always modest.² Like I say, the combinations are endless.

Scene 2

It is a warm sunny March morning in a classroom at the UKH. The classroom is not large, there is room for about 20 desks. One wall consists of a row of windows overlooking the courtyard with the Kurdish flag billowing in the wind. There is a map of the world on the back wall, and a whiteboard at the front of the room. The entrance to the classroom is to the right. Students are seated in desks that are placed in a horseshoe pattern, they face the whiteboard. The teacher is standing at the front of the room.

Teacher: So, okay, I have been wondering how it is I am never mistaken for being Kurdish? When I am out and about: in the market, at the park, getting into a taxi, walking on the street, everyone always knows I am a foreigner. What is it about me that tips them off? It can't be my outward appearance; yes, I wear western style clothes, but many women do...yes, I am taller than most, but some are just as tall...yes, I wear my hair short and it is grey...rarish, but not unheard of...yes, I do have blue eyes... not all that common, but seen more than you'd imagine. *The teacher looks down at herself, opens her hands palm upwards, looks at the students, and sincerely asks, "How do they know?"*

The students look at each other, some smile, some grin, some slightly nod their heads. Their eyes eventually fall on Karoch, the class spokesperson.

² Chador: full-length semicircle of fabric open down the front, which is thrown over the head and held closed in front; Jilaabah: long and loose-fitting outer garment/coat, also referred to as manteau; Abaya: floor length robe that drapes from the shoulder; Hijab: head scarf.

Karoch: It's the way you walk. *The students nod in unison.*

Teacher: What do you mean? The way I walk?

The students look at each other as if to say the answer is so obvious, so self-evident. They seem to have a hard time understanding why it is the teacher even has to ask, and then on being told, why it is that she still does not understand.

Scene 3

It is late afternoon in September in a teacher's third floor office at UKH. There are two sets of windows, one overlooks the mosque that is across the street, and the other overlooks the prison that is just next door. The teacher is sitting at her desk working, every once in a while she pauses her work, looks out the window down on the prison below. On seeing the prison the teacher's facial expression conveys signs of concern, distress.³ There is a chair placed conveniently close to the teacher's desk, so that it is possible for her and a student to sit side by side in order to discuss the student's work together. There is a knock on the door, and a student pokes his head through the doorway. He is wearing dark dress pants with a polyester suit jacket, both have a sheen to them, and a white grey-striped cotton shirt. His shoes are shiny black with very pointy toes.

Aso: (*Serious*) Hello, Miss Sheila. May I please come in?

Teacher : (*Smiling*) Oh hello, Aso. Yes, come on in. (*She indicates that he should sit in the chair next to her desk.*) Welcome. This is your first time to my office, the first of many tutorials together.

³Report of information gathering visit to Kurdistan region of Iraq, 27, March,2009, (Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK) 2009),4, quoted in Home Office: UK Border Agency, Country of Origin Information Report: Kurdistan Regional Government Area of Iraq, May 21, 2009, 42. Internet www.rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/iraq-kurdistan-220509.doc accessed Feb. 1, 2011. Conditions in KRG detention centers are considered to be very harsh. Prisoners are often detained arbitrarily, held incommunicado and denied access to lawyers and legal recourse. There are allegations of abuse including torture, beatings and sexual abuse.

Aso sits down on the chair, edges it a little further away from the desk. He sets his work down, twists his body slightly away from the teacher, leans back and looks down towards the floor. He seems nervous, unable to make eye contact. The teacher, seeing this, tries to put him at ease.

Teacher: How are your classes coming along? Are you enjoying them?

Aso: Unhun, yes I am. *The teacher tries to peer into his face, but he continues to face away and stare down at the floor, so she can't really see him.*

The teacher tilts her head a little to the side, furrows her brows, looks a bit puzzled, as if to say hmmmm, this is a bit strange. She takes a moment to look at his work, after a bit she begins to TRY to have a discussion with him about his writing.

Teacher: Okay, Aso, let's read this through together, shall we?

Aso: Unhun, yes. *Still his back is to her.*

Teacher: *Talking to Aso's profile/back of the head.* The anecdote you start with is very clever. It does exactly what you want it to do; it captures my attention. It draws me in and I want to continue reading.

Aso nods, but continues to be almost unresponsive, leaning back in the chair, not looking at the teacher.

Teacher: *(Makes another attempt at engagement.)* Uhhmm—let 's talk about your thesis statement. Which sentence is the thesis sentence, and can you explain to me why you placed it where you did in your paragraph?

Aso: *(points to the statement)* I wrote it as the last sentence because that's where I thought it would make the biggest impact. *Still no eye contact.*

Teacher: *(looking a bit disconcerted)* Do you think it's a strong thesis statement? *She leans around trying to make visual contact with him.*

Aso: *(shifts in his chair and begins to look out the window while he talks)* Well, I think it is. I tried to keep in mind that I'm supposed to take a stand on the issue.

Teacher: *Looks exasperated/perplexed/impatient as if to say, it is too strange having a conversation with the back of someone's head.* Aso, I am confused...I am trying to have a conversation with you, but I am finding it difficult because we never make eye contact. Is there something wrong? Have I offended you?

Aso slowly turns, quickly looks at the teacher and just as quickly looks away.

Aso: I was a student at UKH last year; it was my first experience meeting westerners. I did have a western woman instructor, and she was very nice, and she did explain that in the west it's okay for men and women who are not related and who do not know each other well, to look at each other "in the eyes." It is not considered an insult to the woman like it is here. But, I didn't know if that was just her experience, or whether that is the way it is for all western women, so I didn't want to insult you by "looking in your eyes." But it is more than not wanting to insult you. I am very much enjoying my class with you, I am learning a lot, and I like your way of teaching. For this reason I have great respect for you; I am not trying to be impolite, in my culture it is a sign of respect to a woman, if a man does not "look at her in the eyes."

Scene 4

It's a chilly January morning both outside and inside the teacher's third floor office at UKH. The teacher is sitting at her desk, and a student is sitting next to her. They are in deep conversation.

Kadir:⁴*(looking very dejected)* I just don't understand.

Teacher: Kadir, you are a wonderful student. You are very intelligent and have excellent analytical ability. Plus you are determined, willing to work hard, and have a great curiosity of

⁴ Kadir's efforts have been rewarded; he won a Fulbright Scholarship and is presently doing graduate work at an American university. Although the economic situation in the KRG area has/is improving markedly, with rising salaries and employment opportunities, due in large part to local development by the KRG government, investments made by international companies attracted by liberalized policies and the relative stability and security in the area, it is still estimated that the general unemployment in the KRG area lies between 40 and 50% and unemployment among youth between the ages of 16 and 20 is approximately 90%. (Home Office: UK Border Agency, Country of Origin Information Report: Kurdistan Regional Government Area of Iraq, May 21, 2009, 15, www.rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/iraq-kurdistan-220509.doc accessed Feb. 1, 2011 accessed Jan. 31, 2011). Winning a Fulbright scholarship itself is a significant accomplishment, however the importance of obtaining an international education and international experience in a region that holds such little opportunity for young people cannot be overly stressed.

the world around you, and that is why it really has been my pleasure to have you in my class. And we have had some very nice times in our tutorials together. I have appreciated our discussions sharing ideas about culture and society and politics.

Kadir: (*leans forward in his chair and interrupts teacher*) Exactly, that's why I don't understand! Why do I have to move? I like my classmates, they're my friends. I feel comfortable in the class. I want to keep you as my teacher.

Teacher: (*tries to look understanding, but responds firmly*) Kadir, this is a very important move for you. Your writing and analytical skills have improved so much that you're way ahead of your classmates. You need the challenge of working with other students who are at your level. It will take a bit of getting used to, but I'm sure it won't take long to settle in with your new classmates.

Kadir: I can't tell you how disappointed I am that you won't be my teacher anymore. (*He pauses, thinks for a moment.*) Can I tell you something?

Teacher: Sure, go ahead.

Kadir: Do you remember way back in September, on the first day of classes, we had an orientation assembly? *Teacher nods.* Remember they introduced the instructors to the students? *Teacher nods.* Well, when they introduced you as one of the second year writing instructors, I thought to myself, "Insha'Allah, I don't get her for my teacher. She doesn't look like she could teach me much. Insha'Allah I will get Mr. Larry." When I found out you were my writing instructor I was really disappointed.

Teacher: *trying not to show her shock*

Scene 5

It is early evening. There is a cozy living room, with sofa, chair and television set. There are large throw pillows on the floor, atop a beautiful Persian carpet. A man and woman are relaxing with their feet perched on top of a large coffee table. They each hold a drink.

Larry: So, tell me, how was your day?

Sheila: Hmm, not bad I suppose. Kadir came round my office; just as we expected he was pretty upset about moving to another class. I tried to encourage him, but...oh you know. He kind of made a confession...I guess you could say he gave me a backhanded compliment. He told me that when he found out I was his writing instructor he was really disappointed. When I asked him why, he said when he first saw me introduced on orientation day, he immediately thought he really did not want me as his teacher. I didn't look like I'd be a very good teacher, that I wouldn't have anything to teach him. He really wanted you to be his instructor (*pokes Larry in the side of his ribs*). But, he says now he's disappointed I'm not going to be his teacher.

Larry: Well, I think that is a compliment. We knew when we came here that Kurdistan is a traditional male oriented society and that there would be challenges for you as a woman to win over some of the male students. I think this certainly shows that you've gotten through to some of these guys.

Sheila: Yeah, I guess you're right. But, there's more to it than that. I was really taken by surprise, well actually shocked when he told me. Kudos to Kadir for he never let on, but the shock isn't from finding out that Kadir was disappointed. I think it has more to do with...when I heard him say "I didn't want you for my teacher," I was shocked that he would say that, not because of his own biases, but because of my own unconscious sense of privilege or maybe it's cultural arrogance...it's hard to put my finger on it, but there is a kind of sense of entitlement...who wouldn't want me? I'm a WASP from North America...of course they'd want me. Not that I go around consciously thinking it...but...that sense of entitlement...of privilege...it seems it's on the feathery edge ...vibrating on the threshold of how I live in this world...

Scene 6

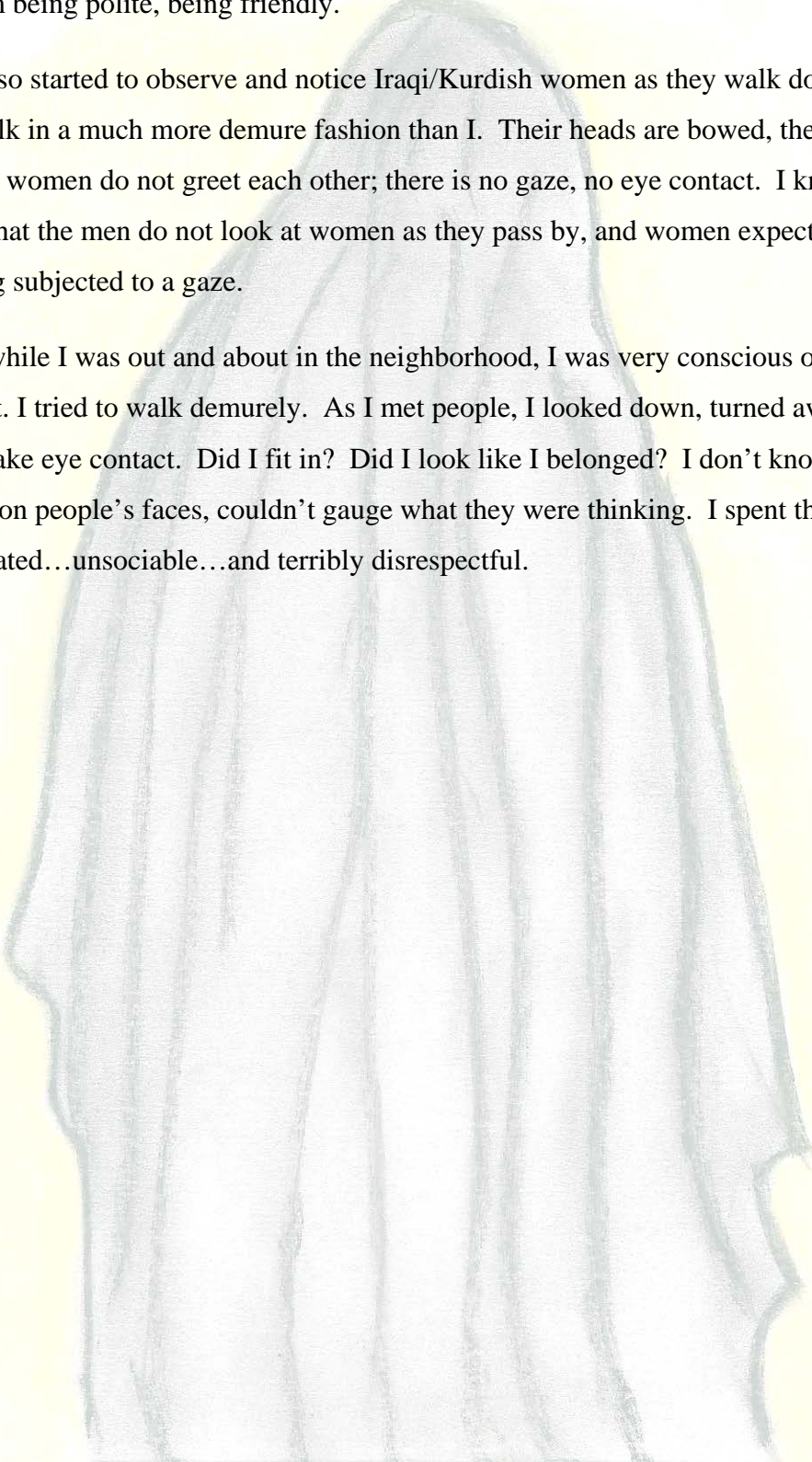
Curtain rises. Woman standing alone on the stage, in pensive thought. She notices the audience, and begins to converse with them.

So, okay, I have been trying to be aware of how I walk, paying attention to my body. I notice I walk tall, shoulders back —when I was young my mom was always reminding me to straighten-up and quit walking around with my shoulders stooped—I've worked hard for this "good posture." I hold my head up high. As I greet those I meet, maybe I don't always smile, but I

certainly give an acknowledgement; I usually make eye contact and say hello, or at least nod. I think I'm being polite, being friendly.

I have also started to observe and notice Iraqi/Kurdish women as they walk down the street. They walk in a much more demure fashion than I. Their heads are bowed, their eyes averted. Men and women do not greet each other; there is no gaze, no eye contact. I know that it is out of respect that the men do not look at women as they pass by, and women expect to be respected by not being subjected to a gaze.

Today, while I was out and about in the neighborhood, I was very conscious of how I walked on the street. I tried to walk demurely. As I met people, I looked down, turned away, making sure not to make eye contact. Did I fit in? Did I look like I belonged? I don't know. I couldn't see the look on people's faces, couldn't gauge what they were thinking. I spent the afternoon feeling ...humiliated...unsociable...and terribly disrespectful.



Without its flock the sheep becomes the prey of wolves.¹
 Kurdish idiom

“I have to worry about what the relatives think all the time, especially my father’s relatives. My father hates that also, but he can’t do anything, because he knows even if I didn’t do anything wrong; we have to think what would they—the relatives—say if they saw me?” Mary

“According to the place we live in, there are many boundaries that suffocate us. These boundaries are sometimes like a rope that is twisting around our necks.” Sarah

Although the complex is immense,— there are fourteen 13-story apartment buildings with 4 apartments to each floor, a pool complex, and a little “corner store,”— the building in which UKH houses the international faculty/staff is only a two-minute walk to the gate. The gate is guarded by armed *peshmerga* who stop every car that enters the complex. They don’t usually search the car, they ask a few questions, sometimes check ID cards, and then let it through. At least I think they’re asking questions; seeing as I don’t speak Kurdish, I have no way of knowing, maybe they’re talking about the weather, or last night’s football game? Eventually we get to know the guards, there is one who always smiles and says, “Hallo teacher.”

Anyway—just inside the gate there’s a taxi stand. There are usually 3 or 4 taxis—regulars—waiting for fares. We get to know the taxi drivers as well. There’s Mahir, a young man in his mid-twenties, who speaks very little English, but he is always trying to teach me Kurdish. He has an excellent memory, as he never forgets the last word he has taught me and if I get it right the next time I ride with him he is so pleased, but if I can’t remember he points his finger, shakes it at me, morosely says: “*Mamosta*, I tell you, but you not know.” There’s the man, about my age; he’s bossy, aggressive, constantly wanting to charge me more than the going rate. When I give him the money he puts his hand out, palm up, waves his fingers for more—I try to avoid him. There’s the older gentleman, distinguished looking in the traditional Kurdish dress he habitually wears, who doesn’t speak a word of English; he is kind. Once, even though he knew Larry didn’t have the full fare on him, drove him anyway, and when Larry tried to give him the money the next time, he refused to take it. Then there is my favorite driver; we knew him from when we were here before, and it has pleased him that we have come back. Not many

¹ The watermark reads “Ger çawdêri ew nabêt mer debêt ba xwardni gur” which is the Kurdish translation for “Without its flock the sheep becomes the prey of wolves.” Thank you to Balien Kareem for the translation.

people come back. Although he speaks pretty good English, he isn't wanting to "chat" all the time, but when he does "chat" it's particularly interesting because you hear the word on the street; the latest politics, how goes the economy; day-to-day issues from a local perspective. He is always friendly but formal, never asks or divulges anything personal. Before today, that is.

Today, he wonders where Larry is, why isn't he going to Zancoy Kurdistan with me? I explain that Larry is now at that lucky time in his life where he doesn't have to work anymore, and that he is enjoying this time of life, happy to accompany me while I am doing my research.

This causes him to say that he has noticed that we—Larry and I—enjoy each other's company.

Indeed, he goes on to say that he talks about us to his friends and family and his wife.

Hmmmmmm...I'm not so sure what this means, how I should respond. I say ohhhhhhhh...taking a few moments to wonder whether I want to know what he could possibly be saying about us!

Curiosity wins out and I ask; what **does** he say about us? He tells me...

He sees that Larry and I do many things together. He watches us walk down the long walkway to the public road, sometimes talking, sometimes laughing, sometimes in quiet friendship. He then astonishes me, by saying as he watches us he wishes he could do that with his wife—be in public together, walk down the street together, laugh freely, enjoy being with each other, outside of their home. And this is what he shares with his friends and family and wife—he tells them about us and tells them that he would like to be like us. He wishes he could be free to go out with his wife in public, without worrying about what people will say. He explains that if he is seen walking with a woman, even if it is his wife, or maybe his sister, people might not know that she is his wife or sister and then people will "think bad thoughts" and "say bad things." He says that even in the car, if his thirteen year old son and/or ten year old daughter are not with them, he is concerned about people "thinking bad thoughts". He tells me...

When he was younger, he spent five years living in the United Kingdom. He liked living abroad for a number of reasons; the excitement and adventure, the opportunity to make enough money to live a good life in the UK, a much better life than ever he could have had in Kurdistan, yet send money home to his family, and also the enjoyment of living in a more "open-minded" society. He came back to Erbil for a holiday and attended a family wedding, where he met his cousin (his father's brother's daughter), and when he "fell in love with her" while watching her

dance with the other women. He managed to spend moments with her over the next few days and found out that she had feelings for him as well. So, he talked to his dad, who talked to his uncle, and their marriage was arranged. His voice is soft and dreamy as he tells his story, and as he says “It was the luckiest day of my life, my wife is my friend and she is the mother of my children. I love her very much.” I am sitting in the back of the taxi thinking...ahhhh that’s a nice story, when he continues. He’d really like to emigrate to the UK. With the conflicts and unrest, he sees that life would be so much better, safer; his thoughts are for his children. But, a condition to his being able to marry his wife was to promise both his father and his uncle that he wouldn’t return to the UK. Over the years, he has approached his uncle, asking whether he could move his family abroad. His uncle always says, “[he] couldn’t live without [his] daughter close by.” He says his father and uncle are in agreement; he can’t go against their wishes. He can’t leave Kurdistan. So, he continues on here in Erbil, trying to do the best he can to give his family a good life and to keep them safe. He finishes the story as we pull up to the university by saying he hopes one day his father and uncle will “allow” him to move the family to the UK; it would be nice to live in a more “open-minded” society where he could spend time with his wife in public and not worry about people “thinking bad thoughts.”

I watch him drive away. I am amazed that he has shared this intimate story with me, knowing that I have been privileged to hear it, feeling honored to have been trusted to hold it; my heart wraps around it like tissue paper around a cherished gift. And yet, I can’t help thinking—ohmygod—*Why?* Why does it matter so much what people think? Why doesn’t he just walk down the street with his wife? Who cares what the neighbors will say or think? Why does he obey the wishes of his father and uncle? Why doesn’t he just tell them, *I think this is the best move for my family*, and then do it? Why is it that his father and uncle feel they can dictate his life like that? Why does he listen? *WHY?*

Of course, I appreciate that my taxi driver has learned the values, norms and ways of being that constitute a way of life that is so different than my own. He has grown up in a socio-economic, political, geographical space, where tribalism is a “valued meaningful practice.”² For

² I recognise that “culture is not best understood in terms of locations and roots” Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage, 2008) 27, and that Homi Bhabha indicates culture and identities are always a place of borders, hybridity and fluidity rather than fixed and stable (Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), yet “there remains a value in locating culture “in-place” in order

the Kurds are historically a tribal people, and tribal traditions continue to play a prominent role in both rural and urban society as well as among tribal and non-tribal Kurds.³ “Kurdish kinship terminology consists of two categories; kin relations traced by blood (consanguine) and through marriage (affinal) relations. In each category, terms are very specific for ascending and descending generations; the categories define patrilineal kin and female affine, as well as social relations. These categories clearly define social, political, and economic positions, as well as responsibilities.”⁴ In a tribal society like Kurdistan, relationships are central. Family, clan, and tribal affiliations define one’s identity and status, and prospects in life. Therefore, individuals do not assert their separateness and privacy as independent individuals; they tend to interact as members of a group, family, clan, tribe. Consequently, all personal interactions potentially have a collective dimension. Conflicts between individuals always have the potential to become conflicts between groups. Because of the primacy of the group, group norms guide individual behavior. Obligations of group members to one another are significant, powerful, paramount.⁵

to say things like “this is a valued meaningful practice in [such and such] a culture” (Barker, 28) in order to place boundaries for discussion.

³ There is no such thing as a typical Kurdish tribe; the size, nature, social structures, and complexity of organization of different tribes vary. They are usually formed upon lineage lines, meaning a group of people who descend from a common ancestor. Most are settled and have been for a considerable time. Presently large parts of many tribes are urbanized without having completely given up tribal values and tribal organization. They can consist of several hundred to several tens of thousand families with a segmentary structure. Each tribe consists of a number of segments (clans), which in turn consist of several smaller units and so on. According to the tribal ideology, brothers, father and sons are joined in a single group, creating a division within the tribe against the father’s brother and his sons. Although a tribe is segmented genealogically, all of the units are united as patrilineal kin against another tribe at times of conflict such as blood feuds. Self-defense and mutual aid are important functions of the tribe. The smaller tribal units tend to be egalitarian but the larger tribes show a distinct social hierarchy, with one or more leading families vying for control over the segments that together make up the tribe. Not all segments of the tribe can be traced to a common ancestor, some units are (often) initially formed for purely political alliance reasons. However, they turn into descent groups in a few generations because of the strong tendency towards endogamy, which means a preference for marriage with the father’s brother’s daughter. Van Bruinessen provides a historical discussion of the waxing and waning of tribalism in Kurdish society, however, he indicates that Kurdish tribes have shown great resilience, in both war and peace, and they continue to play prominent social and political roles in present day Kurdistan. Martin Van Bruinessen, “Kurds, States and Tribes” In *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, ed. Faleh A. Jabar and Hosham Dawood (London: Saqi, 2002), 165-163; see also Martin Van Bruinessen, “The Nature and Uses of Violence in the Kurdish Conflict” (paper presented at the International colloquium “Ethnic Construction and Political Violence”, organized by the Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Cortona, July 2-3, 1999.

⁴JRank www.family.irank.org/pages/1026/Kurdish-Families-Kurdish-Marriage-Patterns.html Internet accessed 17 March, 2011.

⁵The discussion on tribes and tribal culture was taken from a number of sources: <http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-I/Iraq.html#ixzz1H3avnK72> Internet accessed 17 March, 2011

Somewhere, within me, I understand why my taxi driver submits to social and familial expectations. But, for me, coming from a culture that values the individual and individual rights and freedoms, where people expect to choose how and where they want to live, what they want to believe, to determine the shape of their lives, and where independence and agency are encouraged from an early age, it is inconceivable that a grown man, one who is old enough to have a thirteen year old son, will not walk down the street with his wife for fear of what the neighbours will say. I keep asking myself why, even though I very much appreciate the positive aspects to this way of being.

The very close family ties and loyalty provide support in times of need...*My former student Sara tells me she can see why I have had such a difficult time finally finding a counselor for my research project. She explains that there is no need to have professional counselors when you have family. If she has a problem, she has her family to help her. She values her immediate family as well as extended family for advice and help in any crises she might have. Her problem is the family's problem. When I ask about private very personal problems she says "What privacy? I have none, I tell my family everything." I wonder about my own family, my children, my sisters, and the way we are scattered about the world, and how often I wish we lived closer to each other, how I miss the intimacy of being a part of each others' everyday lives, being able to give support and encouragement on a more personal level than the long-distance relationships allow for.*

Because of the profound respect for elders there is an appreciation for older people—an absence of ageism...*When I meet Tavga and Fatima giggling outside my office door, I ask them what's up? Are they here to see me? They tell me, no not really, they're just hanging around. I notice a look that passes between them, and know that something is up, they have a secret. Then Tavga smiles shyly and says she was waiting to see Mr. Larry. And then in a rush of breath confides that she thinks Mr. Larry is so handsome and smart and funny. She has a crush on Mr. Larry. She has told me this in all seriousness, so I reciprocate with a serious question, "Tavga, do I have something to worry about here?" and we both burst out laughing. Tavga does not see the fifty year age difference between herself and Larry. Larry's students, both young women and*

http://calldp.leavenworth.army.mil/eng_mr/2007112708313673/03_eisenstadt.pdf Internet accessed 17 March, 2011 <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/society.htm> Internet accessed 17 March, 2011.

young men, like to spend time with him, chatting, asking his advice, sharing their goals and dreams, talking about everyday concerns, laughing together. They truly value him as a person.

Contrast that to the feelings of invisibility, unimportance, insignificance, and not being worthy of engagement, that Larry has experienced upon his return to Canadian society.

With the emphasis on the family, and with families keeping in very close contact, there is an abundance of aunts and uncles and grandparents to help raise children. Children are dearly loved and both men and women express that love openly...I am walking around the bazaar, really just people watching, when I notice a father walking down the narrow aisle with his baby daughter held tightly in his arms. I stop to ohh and ahh and try to make known how beautiful she is. He is so proud of her, proud of me stopping to say how beautiful she is. I am struck by how ubiquitous this scene is here—fathers walking with their children, taking such obvious pleasure in them—really a sense of awe and cherishing. Contrary to what is often thought, Kurds take as much pride in their daughters as they do in their sons.

...I keep asking WHY?

This story has “gifted”⁶ me with understanding. Not the understanding in the fixed way of certainty, of expertise, of familiarity. It is more the understanding that grapples, grasps, wrestles, sits uneasily, feels like a firm hold only to dissipate into thin air. I understand why my taxi driver cares what other people think, why he obeys the wishes of his father and uncle, why they feel they can dictate his life. I also understand why it is that I will never really quite understand.

⁶I use “gifted” here in the spirit of Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers and Carl Leggo when they write “[i]n the intricate relationship between the autos and the bios, identity becomes a trickster and a teacher. In its shape-shifting appearances, identity can teach us a way to understand otherness. It can gift us with a means to face the crises that confront us, learn from them, embrace our mixed stories of relatedness, and put them to use for the common good.” (Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers and Carl Leggo, *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an ethos for Our Times*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 69.

The Culture of "Honour"¹

"What is honour?—honour is a girl." Sko

In 2009, at the University of Victoria, I taught a course on teaching English as a Second language in the classroom. As you can imagine, there was a very strong cultural component to the course. The students were not only given the opportunity to explore the different customs, beliefs, and ways of knowing and being of "other" cultures, they were also encouraged to critically examine their own culture, personal beliefs and biases, which was not always an easy exercise. During the class there was much earnest and thoughtful discussion, and the students soon acknowledged that when discussing culture there are no neat categories, no easy answers to right and wrong and good or bad.

¹ Lynn Welchman and Sara Hossain, "Honour', Rights and Wrongs." *Review of Women's Studies*, 3, (2005): 68. "Honour killing" is situated within "crimes of honour," the definition of which "encompasses a variety of manifestations of violence against women, including 'honour killings', assault, confinement or imprisonment, and interference with choice in marriage, where the publicly articulated 'justification' is attributed to a social order claimed to require the preservation of a concept of 'honour' vested in male (family and/or conjugal) control over women and specifically women's sexual conduct, actual, suspected or potential." (Welchman, 68)

R. Coomaraswamy and L. M. Kois, 'Violence Against Women' in *Women and International Human Rights Law*, Volume I ed. K.D. Askin and D.M. Koenig (New York: Transnational Publishers, 1999), 177. I address "honour killing" within an understanding of violence against women which, "accepts the fact that structures that perpetuate violence against women are socially constructed and that such violence is a product of a historical process and is not essential or time bound in its manifestations." (Coomaraswamy, 177) See also Lynn Welchman and Sara Hossain, "Honour', Rights and Wrongs." *Review of Women's Studies*, 3, (2005).

Also, to speak of "honour killing" in terms of culture is not to reduce it to an issue of culture; however, I am persuaded, with Mojab and Hassanpour, that "honour killing" is "definitely part and parcel of Kurdish culture." Sharhzrad Mojab and Amir Hassanpour, "Thoughts on the Struggle Against "Honour Killing"" *International Journal of Kurdish Studies*, (The Kurdish Library, January 2002) Internet <http://www.highbeam.com/International+Journal+of+Kurdish+Studies/publications.aspx>, accessed 28 March 2011. For further discussion on other factors contributing to honour killings see Mojab, "Thoughts on the Struggle" as well as Diane E. King, "The Personal is Patrilineal: Namus as Sovereignty," *Identities*, 15, no. 3 (2008): 317-342.

We were discussing gender roles and ways of social organization in different societies, when the subject of "honour killing" arose. Many of the students were not familiar with the term. However, when they discovered it is socially sanctioned murder, usually perpetrated against women, and that it is deemed excusable to protect a family's reputation or "honour," they were galvanized into a collective response of abhorrence, disgust and repulsion. The students could not understand how a father, brother, uncle or grandfather could murder a daughter, sister, niece, or granddaughter, just to protect the family's "honour." "Honour killing" is reprehensible and under no circumstances should it ever be tolerated or condoned. The very strong emotions and feelings of outrage triggered a sense of déjà vu...and I remembered another classroom in a far-off place.

It was September 2007, and I was in a classroom at the University of Kurdistan in Northern Iraq. The students were reading about the different types of living arrangements found in western societies, when they came across the term "common law." They had no idea what it meant and when I told them, there was a moment of silence, you could have heard a pin drop, they looked at each other in confusion...one of the students asked for confirmation...had I really said it meant a man and a woman living together without being married? When I replied, yes, that is indeed what it means...there was a loud collective gasp of horror and disbelief and then there was pandemonium ...with everyone speaking at once. How could that be? That just couldn't be right? It's unthinkable, unforgivable, unknown, unheard of! In their very traditional tribal society, having a relationship outside of wedlock is unimaginable. The

students could not believe or understand any family member...father, mother, brother, sister, aunt, uncle...or a society, that would condone this kind of living arrangement. It was a concept they could not grasp; it was completely unfathomable and absolutely reprehensible.

"[P]atriliney is central to the logic of honour killings. At the heart of the justification is a violation of what is called 'namus'... Namus is almost always translated as 'honour'² or more specifically as 'sexual honour'.³

"Namus is ultimately an attribute/possession of a lineage, upheld or diminished by individual lineage members. It can be lost through evidence or gossip-inflamed suspicion of sexual (or even flirtatious) activity outside marriage. It is deeply bound up with ideas of virtue and malignity. It can be restored by an honour killing."⁴

² Diane E. King, "The Personal is Patrilineal: Namus as Sovereignty," *Identities*, 15, no. 3 (2008):319.

³ Michael E. Meeker, "Meaning and Society in the Near East: Examples from the Black Sea and the Levantine Arabs (I)." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7 no. 2 (1976): 243-270, in E. King, "The Personal is Patrilineal: Namus as Sovereignty," *Identities*, 15, no. 3 (2008): 319.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 324

"With regards to a woman's honour the law is most strict. A woman of any social standing who mis-conducts herself, or who is suspected on reasonable grounds for misconducting herself, must surely die; and the husband, brother, or whoever is responsible for her, who fails to put her out of the way, is considered to have lost his honour, and a Kurd's 'namus' or honour is one of his most precious possessions."⁵

"Killer and community agree that without the murder, the lineage that the victim and perpetrator share would suffer irreparable harm to its reputation. With the murder, this wrong is righted and the lineage is restored to a place of respect in the community."⁶

⁵ William R. Hay, *Two Years in Kurdistan*, (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1921) in E. King, "The Personal is Patrilineal: Namus as Sovereignty," *Identities*, 15, no. 3 (2008):317.

⁶ E. King, "The Personal is Patrilineal: Namus as Sovereignty," *Identities*, 15, no. 3 (2008):318

“Long called “honor killings” in English, they are found only in cultures that reckon belonging to a kinship group agnatically. With few exceptions the killer is the victim’s brother or father. While, as Mojab and others rightly point out, these killings are a part of a wide pattern of femicide worldwide, they differ from the vast majority of domestic violence cases in that they are (in their classical form) not carried out by a current or recent intimate partner but by the agnatic kin.”⁷

“Honor killing is a tragedy in which fathers and brothers kill their most beloved, their daughters and sisters. More tragic, if that is possible, at times mothers and sisters not only consent but participate in the crime. Killing occurs in a family structure where members are closely tied in bonds of affection, compassion, and love. Here affection and brutality coexist in conflict and unity.”⁸

⁷Shahzad Mojab, ““Honour Killing”: Culture, Politics and Theory”, *Middle East Women’s Studies Review* 17(½) Internet <http://www.amews.org/review/reviewarticles/-mojabfinal.htm> in E. King, “The Personal is Patrilineal: Namus as Sovereignty,” *Identities*, 15, no. 3 (2008):318

⁸ Shahzad Mojab and Amir Hassanpour, “Thoughts on the Struggle Against Honour Killing” *Journal of Kurdish Studies*, 16, no 1& 2 (2002):83-97 Internet www.stophonourkillings.com/?q=node/1141 accessed 31 March 2011.

"In a social milieu in which honour killing is practiced, to create or nurture suspicion about a girl or woman's sexual transgression is to possibly endanger her life. To remain above this suspicion, most adolescent girls and women heavily curtail their bodily mobility."⁹

"A typical female lives with family members, never alone. Nor does she travel anywhere alone, and she is never left home alone. Her household members ensure that if she goes to school or college, she is transported there with k in or in an approved manner... Her social life revolves around her immediate household, immediate neighbors and k in."¹⁰

⁹ E. King, "The Personal is Patrilineal: Namus as Sovereignty," *Identities*, 15, no. 3 (2008): 32

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 321

Bring a bride home from the tribe—Kurdish proverb— means “a woman from the lineage would take great care of the honour of the men and herself.”¹¹

Historically, tribal endogamy—the obligation to marry within the tribe—is followed in Kurdish marriage. Although, this practice is not universal, particularly among the urban and educated, the preferred form of marriage continues to be with patrilineal cousins—father’s brother’s daughter (FBD).¹²

“A man from an elite family justified FBD marriage with his maternal grandmother’s words ‘the mother of the wife you are going to choose should be so respectable that her hands can be kissed.’ According to him, such a woman exists only in his family. The image of ‘a woman whose hands are worth kissing’ is the ideal of purity and nobility (blood and honour). While daughters are made a part of the father’s brother’s group by means of FBD marriage, it is by the same means that the blood of the family and lineage is made pure and noble.”¹³

¹¹ N. Serpil Altuntek, “Bone and Flesh, Seed and Soil: Patriliney by Father’s Brother’s Daughter Marriage”, *Ethnology* 45 no. 1 (Winter, 2006):67

¹²Jrank Internet <http://family.jrank.org/pages/1026/Kurdish-Families-Kurdish-Marriage-Patterns.html> accessed 26 March 2011.

¹³ Serpil, 67-68.

Much weight is "given to the purity of the blood and that the honour of a man depends at the same time on his mother's origin."¹⁴

"When families begin considering a marriage for one of their young men, not only the wife to be, but also her brother and mother are investigated. 'You should be careful to bring home a suitable woman, as the child will take after her,' is a statement often uttered. As a result, inquiries are made about the girl's mother, the mother's mother, and the mother's brother's reputations, and this information is regarded as a kind of reference for the girl."¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., 62

¹⁵ Ibid., 62.

Then:

I wrote this story of classroom moments when I was doing my graduate course studies, never thinking that it would find its way into my dissertation. At the time, some of my colleagues and I decided to mētissage around the theme of "legitimacy." It was September of 2009, and I had been back in Canada for a full year by then and was feeling very frustrated and distressed about the lack of discussion/awareness/debate within Canadian society around the Iraq and Afghanistan wars—the Canadian government had/has never declared war on either Iraq or Afghanistan—Canadian soldiers were/are killing and being killed, and there was/is no national debate!!!¹⁶ I had firsthand knowledge of Canadian foreign policy in Iraq; ¹⁷I had just witnessed the consequences of war, I had just learned how to respond to and teach students who have lived/are living the ravages of war. I couldn't believe there was no debate as to what

¹⁶ For discussion on Canada's role in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars see (Patrick Lennox, "The Illusion of Independence", in *An Independent Foreign Policy for Canada?: Challenges and Choices for the Future*, ed. Brian J. Bow and Patrick Lennox (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 41-61 and also Janice Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*, (Canada: Viking, 2007).

¹⁷ Although Kurdistan is an autonomous region, it is still a part of the state of Iraq. The hostilities of the war in Iraq may not take place in Kurdsitan itself, yet the consequences of the war are a major factor in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurdistan Regional Government is interconnected with that of the central Iraqi government. As a consequence of the war the central government is unable to attend to the most basic areas of infrastructure such as water and electricity. On average Kurdish households receive 4 hours of electricity per day on a rotating basis; the 4 hours may be between midnight and 4 am one day while the next day they might receive electricity between 2 pm and 6 pm. Without notice Kurdish households can go for hours without access to water. Since the 2003 war in Iraq approximately 2 million Iraqis have been internally displaced. Of the 2 million it is estimated that well over 250,000 fled to the KRG area, exacerbating the chronic shortages of electricity and water as well as taxing the already profound housing shortage and lack of employment. As importantly the refugees are traumatized by the hostilities they have escaped. It is in this sense that I claim Kurds to be Iraqi's and that they are living with the consequences of the war, in which Canadian foreign policy has played a role. The discussion of IDPs is taken from Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, Iraq Overview Report, Dec 2010, Internet [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/\(httpInfoFiles\)/3D35B6E12A391265C12577F90045B37E/\\$file/Iraq_Overview_Dec2010.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/(httpInfoFiles)/3D35B6E12A391265C12577F90045B37E/$file/Iraq_Overview_Dec2010.pdf) 1 October, 2011.

Canadian soldiers were doing in either one of those far-off countries. I wanted to ask Canadians, what gives us the right to send troops to kill and maim, wreak havoc and destruction, destroy lives, cause pain and suffering to Iraqis or Afghans? I finished my métissage piece with a simple statement/question: "It is so easy for us to understand that killing to protect a family's 'honour' is blatantly wrong...really I mean that's obvious, isn't it? But, I wonder, is there any difference killing in "honour" of western values and ideals?"

I wanted to share my life experience not only to point to our/my culture's /my complicity in acts/crimes of violence. I also wanted to "trouble" Canadian (read Western) cultural superiority and arrogance. I wrote and shared this piece because I was frustrated. I had judged my culture; it was found lacking. I wanted people to know!

Now:

To say that the "culture of honour" is a sensitive topic to discuss/write about is a gross understatement; it is to deny the knotty gnarled torturous talons of angst that clawed, ripped and tore at my insides, while I deliberated whether it should be discussed, when I finally acknowledged that not to address it would leave a gaping hole in the understanding of the lived lives of my participants. How would I approach writing about such a sensitive topic? I decided to re-share the métissage piece about classroom moments because it honestly described how I have experienced the "culture of honour"; a recognition that there is a definite cultural component to "honour killing," and a recognition that along with the students from the University of Victoria who

were in my course, I too respond to "honour killing" with abhorrence, disgust, repulsion, incomprehension. However, it is very much a different feeling...re-telling the story about classroom moments now. This time, with the re-telling, I am afraid to be caught judging, I am almost paralyzed by my fear, I want to avoid the Orientalist or neocolonialist trap of judging a culture that is not my own by the measure of my own western values, beliefs and cultural feelings of superiority. I do not want to paint Kurdish women with the brush of passivity, backwardness, victimhood, for that would be wrong.¹⁸ I do not want to associate "crimes of honour" with 'East' or with Muslim societies in particular, for that would be wrong.¹⁹ I do not want to imply that crimes of honour are only perpetuated against women, for that would be wrong.²⁰ However, I do not want to be culturally relativistic and tolerate "crimes of honour" out of respect for a traditional cultural practice, for that would be wrong.

So, I remember Edward Saïd explaining that "[it] is not to say that we cannot speak about issues of injustice and suffering, but that we need to do so always within a context that is amply situated in history, culture and socio-economic reality. Our role is to widen the field of discussion, not to set limits..."²¹ And so, I have tried to use the palimpsest and "Then and Now" as

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion on Kurdish Women's activism around the subject of "crimes of honour" see Nazand Begikhani, Aisha Gill, and Gill Hague "Final Report: Honour-Based Violence (HBV) and Honour-Based killings in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the Kurdish Diaspora" (Center for Gender Violence and Violence Research, University of Bristol, UK, Roehampton University, UK, in Partnership with Kurdish Women's Rights Watch, 2010) Internet <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/research/projects/reports/2010/rw9038reportenglish.pdf> accessed 25 March 2011.

¹⁹ Lynn Welchman and Sara Hossain, "'Honour', Rights and Wrongs." *Review of Women's Studies*, 3, (2005): 72.

²⁰ Ibid., 70.

²¹ Edward W. Saïd, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 1978: reprint, Penguin Books Ltd. 2003), xviii. (page citations are to the reprint edition)

devices to situate the culture of honour in its historical, cultural reality, and hopefully I have widened the field of discussion about "crimes of honour." A palimpsest is originally the term for a parchment on which several inscriptions have been made after earlier ones had been erased. Despite the erasures, there are always traces of previous inscriptions that have been 'overwritten.' Hence

The term has become particularly valuable for suggesting the ways in which the traces of earlier 'inscriptions' remain as a continual feature of the 'text' of culture, giving it its particular density and character. Any cultural experience is itself an accretion of many layers... While the 'layering' effect of history has been mediated by each successive period, 'erasing' what has gone before, all present experience contains ineradicable traces of the past which remain part of the constitution of the present.²²

"The concept of the palimpsest is a useful way of understanding the developing complexity of a culture, as previous inscriptions are erased and overwritten, yet remain as traces with present consciousness. This confirms the dynamic, contestatory and dialogic nature of linguistic, geographic and cultural space as it emerges in post-colonial experience."²³ It is also useful in explaining/ describing/ understanding Homi Bhabha's concept: that there is no 'originality or purity' of culture; culture is not static, it is a dynamic fluid space and that

²² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 158.

²³ *Ibid.*, 160

through the "third space," where cultures interface and converse, where it is neither the one nor the other's, newness emerges.²⁴

This brings me to two final-for-now-thoughts...very personal final-for-now-thoughts. The idea that cultures change is one that brings hope. As Kurdish women/feminists/activists struggle for their own aspirations, which are rooted in very specific socio-economic historical and political factors, they impact and influence and change their own cultures through the "third space." As a western feminist I can support them, speak out with them, I can be an ally, but I do not have to set their agenda; along with Said I "have a very high regard for the powers and gifts of the peoples of that region [Arab and Muslim contemporary societies] to struggle on for their vision of what they are and want to be."²⁵ Finally, although I have already shared the difficult decision it was to incorporate a piece about the "culture of honour" into the dissertation, in the end the palimpsest is very symbolic of my own experience of living/thinking in the "third space". Somehow...I feel...well, if we were to read my parchment...the earliest layer would admit:

I have trouble understanding how the social expectation of honour can have such a grip on someone's mind and emotions that he could actually betray a loved one in such a reprehensible manner...that he could actually kill a loved one for the sake of reputation...for the sake of what other people will think of him...Unimaginable.

²⁴ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994), 37.

²⁵ Said., xiv.

And with the following sentiments intermingling with each other and with the rest of what I have read and learned on the "culture of 'honour'":

"Sibling bonds, especially between sisters and brothers, are very strong among the Kurds. Brother-sister ties continue after her marriage. This bond guarantees the well being of the sister in her husband's household. Despite tribal ideology and the segmentary model, FBSs are usually close friends." ²⁶


Sevî is a twenty-two year old female, she is talking about her brother-in-law Mohammad when she says, "Mohammad's sister had sex with a boy before she was married. But because Mohammad is not an honorable man, he did not say anything about it. My oldest brother Jangîr—he is a good man. If I had sex with a boy, he would kill me because he is honourable. That is how bad Mohammad is—he did nothing about that horrible situation!" ²⁷

my most-top layer would reveal:


The "culture of 'honour'"... what a prison for both women and men...unimaginable.

²⁶ "Kurdish Families." International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family, Encyclopedia.com. 2003. Internet www.encyclopedia.com 1 April, 2011.

²⁷ King, 327.

The image displays three vertical tassels against a plain, light-colored background. The leftmost tassel features a long, slender, light-colored bead with a mottled pattern, a smaller round bead, and a large, rounded, light-colored bead. It is attached to a thick, orange thread that forms a large, fringed tassel. The middle tassel consists of a series of small, round, reddish-brown beads, followed by a larger, elongated, reddish-brown bead, and a smaller round bead. It is attached to a thick, red thread that forms a smaller, fringed tassel. The rightmost tassel is made of a series of large, dark, oval-shaped beads, followed by a smaller, rounded, dark bead. It is attached to a thick, dark thread that forms a large, fringed tassel.

*PART THREE:
CHARACTERS
AND
PLOT LINES*



NARRATIVE MÉTISSAGE: BOUNDARIES: I
MURAD— BOBBI, SARAH, SKO

BOUNDARIES

Murad

Dreams and boundaries would never come into the same sentence. If I limit my dreams, then my dreams will be dead. My uncle has suffered from this word, boundaries a lot. This word has killed all his dreams. "I would love to do it, Murad, I really would, but we live in a society where doing such things is almost forbidden," he told me once. I don't want to be like him, a regretful man in his 50s, a man who goes back in his memories to find nothing but shattered dreams.

Honestly, I have never felt bad for my uncle—only cowards would agree to follow the rules against their dreams. I used to tell myself whenever I thought about my uncle—If he really wanted to achieve his dreams he would do anything to do so. That's not the case with me, I hate boundaries and I would never limit myself with them.

Bobbi

I feel tight all the time when they tell me not to do things that are normal and that everyone my age should do them. The simplest things in this world are feelings and emotions. Sometimes I feel lonely in this world and that there are no guys who would fall for me and love me. They consider it normal not to date, but they fight what is normal and healthy, which is falling in love and having someone to be around to care about you and for you to do the same. Being afraid of society and what the relatives and others will say has made me a girl who's afraid of doing anything—not even talking to guys—afraid that people might talk about me and that would lead to a bad reputation and eventually no one will ever marry me and then my family would have a bad reputation amongst their relatives and the people they know. I believe that dating at the age of 18 and older is something normal and having a boyfriend or girlfriend is normal and healthy. It shouldn't be something unwanted in society. Many youth are already dating, but

without their parents knowing about it, and that isn't good, for they might do things that are not good and inappropriate without any advice from an adult, whom in this case should be their parents.

Sara

When I was little a girl, my family had to put some boundaries to me and my sister, especially when it came to finances. They were both working hard, yet they couldn't fulfill our needs. At that specific time, I knew that we had boundaries and that we couldn't cross those boundaries. For example, I couldn't purchase whatever I wanted. I had to consider what my mother and father told me and how to be careful about what I wish to have. I was at a good school with a very good reputation and many of the students were financially well off. But, my parents were always telling me that I couldn't do what other people did and not to look up to my friends who were at that point better off financially than we were. From that age, when I was a little girl I had to know what is ok to do and what is ok to wish for.

Sko

As far as I remember I was nearly five and a half years old, just a little girl. I longed to be at school, but I didn't know what school was. As I saw from my sisters and brother, I thought it's a place you can learn how to write your name and how to draw, even though I could already write my name and I knew how to draw little paintings. But, I loved the particular little dresses that my sisters were wearing. They were short to the knees, black in colour, and with a clean and shiny white shirt, and a pink bunny bag. This seemed lovely and beautiful for me, I loved the view. Every morning when they were preparing themselves for school, I was watching them in my bed with the edge of my eyes. They were complaining to my mom, saying why should we go to school, we are sleepy: "I wanna sleep leave me alone," my older sister was shouting. And I was wishing to be in their place.

Murad

When I think about boundaries I can't breathe, and I lose my imagination, creativity, and hope. I still remember when I crossed the boundaries for the first time in my life. I was afraid, but I felt free. I was only 16 years old, but I was already brave enough to face the world with my own perspectives. I left the country, while I knew that my father would know, and he would do anything to bring me back. However, I never cared. I did it for myself. He brought me back home, but I was satisfied. When I crossed the red line for the second time, I was 18 years old. I never looked back. For more than 80 days I was totally free, with no boundaries, and no limits. Crossing the boundaries for two times has reshaped my viewpoints and showed me a different way.

Bobbi.

Boundaries are something I lived with since the early days of my life—almost the day I was born as a girl, for the boys had more space to live in than the girls. When we used to live in Mosul, life was harder and we were younger. They didn't allow us to do anything because we are girls. As a girl born and raised in Mosul, my family had to put limitation on me that I could not cross. The reason they did that is because my parents were scared for me and for my safety and their safety too. There were many events that happened to girls during the war, where we were at our homes trying to protect ourselves; at the same time this was a prison for us girls. The boys were able to go out to the streets and play football and be around their friends. Unlike us "the girls" we couldn't do such things as go out of our houses just to have fun. For that I wished myself to be a boy. I even liked fighting and wanted to do everything to make me feel like I was a boy such as wearing baggy clothes that didn't show any part of my body—that would let people know I was a girl, and I used to put my hair in a pony tail with no style in it.

Sko

I loved school, but unluckily, they didn't accept me because of my age. They were saying I was still too young. I wasn't that young, it was only 5 months difference. This really depressed me because I wanted to wear those shiny shirts with the black dress and hold a pink bunny bag and have friends and go with them to school. Although the books were not that colourful, I still loved to have them. Especially the books that had pictures on them. One day, it was the beginning of the year when schools were accepting students. I was wearing a white shiny shirt with the short black dress with a bunny bag on my back, with my Mom. We went to the administration building. The head master of the school looked scary to me—her voice and appearance. With a loud scary voice she asked my Mom "how old is she?" Mom replied "5 and a half". Without thinking she said "not acceptable". My Mom wanted to talk with her, but she didn't reply. It was a really bad day; I had a bad feeling, like a very rich merchant that had lost all his fortune. I kept saying "why do they put borders to students?" I was feeling that they are putting me in between two striking lines.

Sarah

As I was growing up, there were new kinds of boundaries. I was a teenager, and I wanted to try many things. As I was living in Mosul, it was unacceptable to wear jeans, but I wanted to try it. Living in such a place exposed me to many kinds of boundaries. As a matter of fact, almost every single part of my life there was boundaries. Starting with my house where we had a garden that had no fences and only bushes, this certain thing kept me locked, for my neighbors were always watching us.

After I moved to Erbil, there were new kinds of boundaries. We had to stay away from guys and youth club centers. I was as far as I can be from those two things, yet I was dating a guy. But then I had to remember my limitations; I couldn't see him whenever I wanted to. My family put more limitations on me and cut off this relation because of boundaries and what people would say about me. The most harmful boundary was when they didn't let me decide for myself and what I really wanted to do. According to

the place we live in there are many boundaries that suffocate us. These boundaries are sometimes like a rope that is twisting around our necks.

Sko

So, every day when my sisters were preparing themselves I was looking at them, and hoping to go to school one day, but hoping and standing and looking at them, didn't remain for long! I decided to do the same as them. In the morning I was preparing myself, like them. Wearing a shiny shirt with a black dress, and I had two books, so I put them in my small pink bunny bag and went to school. I knew the way to school, so I was making my way to school, but it didn't take long for Mom to recognize that I was gone from the house, I was half way to school and she was coming to get me. Every day I kept doing that, and it didn't take a long time until I became 6 and a half years old and they accepted me. I didn't feel in between the border anymore. I was free.

Murad

Boundaries? Limits? These words have never been in my dictionary. If someone would try to limit my actions, my life or my dreams I would go crazy, and I would break all the rules. Some of my cousins think I'm nuts because I don't follow the family rules. I have never wanted to marry some girl without knowing her like they usually do, and I have never thought that money is the only way to be happy like they do. I believe in myself. I think that they feel frustrated because they never had the chance to express themselves as I did. I had many fights with most of their parents. Some of my uncles and aunts are really old fashioned, and I'm not the kind of guy who accepts what old people say to him. I choose my future, and I choose my dreams with no boundaries. I want to travel, to sing, to be filled with hope, and to achieve my dreams.



University of Kurdistan-Hawler, Erbil, Kurdistan, Iraq, November, 2010. Sheila Simpkins

_ _it Happens

I have sensed for weeks that this piece needs to go into the dissertation, that I need to talk about what is going on, after all, it is ominously brooding, continuously present, the overarching background of my research site/sight. Yet, I am very reticent to do so; somehow wanting to protect...who? what? I'm not sure. I am tempted to retreat to the established, the scientific, to pretend at the objective, invisible researcher impersonally recounting the "facts." I long to burrow in the anonymity of the Third person; free from the knowledge of othering,¹ of worlding² and of wording³the world. Free from culpability. I so want to cop-out.

¹I use "othering" with the nuances of "othering" coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, as "a process by which the empire can define itself against those it colonizes, excludes and marginalizes." Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: Key Concepts* 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 158. Also on a more personal level as "othering" via ideas of ethnocentricity; "the belief that one's own ethnic group is superior to all others and the tendency to evaluate and assign meaning to other ethnicities using yours as a standard." Jerome D. Fellmann et al., *Human Geography: Landscapes of Human Activities*. 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 179.

I am fearful that I will diminish the earnest efforts of admired colleagues, serious students, and efficient administration and staff. Fearful that the University will look like a Mickey Mouse operation, that it won't be taken seriously, that I will damage its reputation. I am fearful that a western point of view will judge harshly; as I am trying not to do. I am trying to make sense of how this could possibly be happening, why there seems to be no recourse. I am trying to understand how arbitrary decisions can be made and carried out with such heavy-handedness without repercussion. I am trying not to judge harshly...I really am.

What a lovely welcome; thoughtful and considerate. We were met at our hotel and brought to the apartment in the complex that houses the international faculty and administration at UKH. We checked it out to see what was still needed by way of groceries and necessities and then immediately set off to the shops with the driver that had been provided for us. We found ourselves comfy and cozy, a home away from home, that very same evening, with the promise of a getting to know you and getting down to the business of my research agenda meeting set for the next afternoon. The Pro-Vice Chancellor-Research and Enterprise (PVC) has obviously been through this before! Which he has...PVC is a conscientious, judicious, seasoned academic and a very kind, pleasant man.

The next afternoon, sitting in PVC's office, the secretary hands PVC a memo. The Vice-Chancellor (VC), having just met me 5 minutes before, wants to know: What are my affiliations? What are my qualifications? What is the cost to UKH of my using it as a research site?—itemized list please—down to ink and staples! Are there benefits to UKH? Please could he have

² Guyatri C. Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives," *History and Theory* no.24 (1985): 253. Guyatri Spivak indicates "A worlding narrative of a colonized space operates to inscribe colonial discourse and hegemony on that space." (Guyatri, 253) For Spivak, 'worlding,' as Ilan Kapoor indicates, is the epistemic violence of imperialism's "transformation of the 'Third World' into a sign whose production has been obfuscated to the point that Western superiority and dominance are naturalized." Ilan Kapoor, "Hyper-Self-Reflexive Development?: Spivak on Representing the Third World 'Other'," *Third World Quarterly*, 25, no. 4 (2004): 629.

³ Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St.Pierre, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry" in *the Sage Handbook of Qualitative Inquiry* ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing Inc.,2005),959-973, also in Laurel Richardson, "Getting Personal: Writing-Stories," *Qualitative Studies in Education* 14, no.1 (2001): 33-38. Language is not a neutral tool for objectively imparting knowledge of the social world or lived experiences. Language does not reflect social reality: It produces meaning and creates social reality. Form and content cannot be separated; different forms of writing convey different meanings. How we write conveys "knowing" and different modes make available different methods of discovery and analysis.

an analysis of the cost/benefit trade-off, ASAP. PVC is taken aback, after all, VC has been apprised of our discussions at every step of the way—from my initial query to use UKH as a research site to my final approval and the making of necessary arrangements. As we sit down to answer the VC's concerns, my heart is racing, my palms sweating, a million thoughts are bouncing around inside my head—it seems to me a huge boulder has just been hurled into tranquil, serene, still waters...disturbing, disquieting. __it.

I was aware that UKH had experienced some upheaval since the appointing of the new VC in July, 2009. The summary dismissal and forced eviction of the Chair of the nascent Faculty Association, the subsequent en masse (excluding one) resignation of the Sociology department, including the Chair; the effective dismantling of the whole department within eight months of his appointment, would certainly be considered an upheaval!⁴ However, on my arrival, I was incredulous to find that the VC's mission to dismantle was now been focused on the Access program—in a sense—partially my baby! The university presently describes the Access program as a “two year full time preparatory program designed to raise the level of new qualified students to the standard of students in international universities, and enable them to pursue their specialization in programs that are of high international academic standards. In addition to the high level of English language skills they receive by professionals in reading, writing, and speaking skills, Access students also take advanced courses in Mathematics, Culture, Communication, History, Literature

⁴ Problems began when the new VC planned to close down the Sociology Department within one year, even though there were five new faculty hirings all of whom had signed three year contracts. The department made attempts to attract new students by proposing a degree in Communication, Media, and Society, which was unanimously accepted by the School of Undergraduate Studies Committee, and which a survey indicated that around 1/3 of the students would have chosen as a major. The VC/administration rejected the idea. The VC's management style is authoritarian, top down and heavily high-handed, some have called it tyrannical. The academic faculty members, not only from the Sociology Department, felt that they had no place for recourse. They tried to urge reform through procedures such as proposing the inclusion of elected members on the Academic Board, but the VC resisted this. When they tried to establish a faculty association the VC/administration responded by sending an intimidating letter, effectively frightening members from meeting. The situation spiraled downwards and soon academic faculty became fearful of dismissal for expressing their opinions; one faculty member was formally threatened for doing so. When the VC/administration flouted hiring procedures for a new administration hire, the faculty members sent a petition, which the VC ignored. The Chair of the nascent Faculty Association sent a letter criticizing the VC/administration for ignoring the petition. Within a week he was summarily dismissed—no explanation was given to him, no attempt to go through academic disciplinary channels was made, and no notification was given to the Head of Department. He was given 15 days to vacate his apartment and leave the country. When the time came for him to leave, security officers, with automatic weapons, appeared at his door to evict him forcibly. He was escorted to the airport by a guard and placed on a flight out of the country. You can read the details of the crisis point at http://www.asanet.org/footnotes/apr10/images_new/Apr10_Footnotes.pdf p. 11 Internet; accessed 12 March 2011.

and other necessary knowledge and skills needed for them to become qualified for the high standard programs UKH provides.”⁵ In effect, the Access program is designed as a liberal arts program. However, it wasn’t always so.

As we sit in PVC’s office, the next afternoon, I sense his discomfort as he begins to explain the situation. VC has directed PVC to make an arrangement; Larry and I will live in the apartment rent-free and in exchange I will teach a course in Sociology. The sociology department consists of one professor, and three students, and it seems that I will add much welcomed variety to the program. Okay. I can live with that. In fact, I am overjoyed at the thought of teaching and I would have done it without remuneration. There is more though. At this point PVC is looking really distressed, he goes on to explain that VC has decided that before I can begin to carry out my research project, the matter will have to be brought to the Board of Governors for their approval. Before that happens, a committee of three will be struck to examine my ethics proposal, so that a complete report can be given to the Board of Governors. I can tell that PVC is extremely embarrassed, sitting across the table, having to tell me this. I am embarrassed for him; VC is not only micro-managing; it is a complete undermining of PVC. PVC has dealt with me in good faith, I have no doubt—this has taken him by complete surprise. PVC says that he will expedite the committee immediately and they will have the report ready to go for next week’s board meeting. In the meantime, there isn’t anything I can do but sit and twiddle my thumbs. Well, actually, there’s a lot to do; I have to plan a whole course; I have to source the readings and put together a syllabus for a course that I will start teaching a week and a half from now at a university that I am supposed to be using as a research site, where all the arrangements had been made and everything approved, but now that I am here, I may not be able to carry out the research. As I leave PVC’s office my heart is racing, my palms sweating, a million thoughts are bouncing around inside my head...my research project is hanging by a thread...everything is so tenuous, unsure...it.

In 2007, when I first taught at UKH, it was in its second year of operation. During its first year, the decision had been made that the Access program be taught in a skills-based format. However, many of the original instructors had left during and after the first year. To the instructors who were left and those of us who were new, it was apparent that the skills-based program was not working. Due to Kurdistan’s/Iraq’s recent history under Saddam Hussein’s regime, its own civil war, and then the war in Iraq, the students’

⁵ University of Kurdistan-Hawler website www.ukh.ac Internet; accessed 12 March 2011

educational experience was not only very fragmented, they had been isolated and had very little knowledge of the outside world. We decided that in addition to developing necessary academic skills, the program should emphasize the introduction of ideas and issues connected to a shared global experience. That year, although it was still a skills-based format, we initiated content-based methods and we expanded upon the subject matter presented in the texts we used by preparing materials and lessons on global issues like water resource management, GMOs, disappearing languages, human rights, social justice, environmental issues, and migration, in the hopes of broadening knowledge as a means of building a schema in which the students might contextualize not only their knowledge, but their experiences as well. It was in that second year where the idea of a “liberal arts” type Access program evolved. That year was an inspiring year, we worked together collaboratively, each staff member contributing to the vision, taking into consideration feedback from the students, developing the long term plans that would see the Access program evolve into the vibrant program it is today; I was/am proud to have been part of that genesis. The program has been very successful; it is a challenging program, yet there is a high rate of student satisfaction as well as faculty satisfaction, which is apparent by the very low rate of turnover.

I have been waiting on pins and needles to find out the outcome of tonight's board meeting. I know that no matter how late it is PVC will come by to tell me what the verdict is. I answer the door, with heart in my mouth, only to be told that there wasn't a quorum for tonight's meeting so it was cancelled. They'll meet a week from tonight. But PVC says he can tell me the gist of the report that will be made to the board next week. There are a few concerns and the committee requires some changes be made to the project; the participants must have complete anonymity; this news hits hard, as it mutilates what I have envisioned for my dissertation. Just when I think it couldn't be worse, PVC tells me, because there is no one at UKH who can counsel the participants if needed, before I can even start recruiting participants, I must find a private practitioner who is willing to be a part of the project. As PVC leaves and I contemplate the near impossibility of finding a private counselor, my heart is racing, my palms are sweating...there is only one lonely thought bouncing around my head...there is no hope...I'm not going to be able to carry out my research...I am devastated. _ _it.

There are a few new faces in the Access program, but most of the instructors are my former colleagues. I am overwhelmed at their warm welcome. They embrace me with open arms and hugs of genuine affection. It seems like I have never left, that I have seen them only yesterday. But, morale is low, extremely low. They came back from the summer break to find that the program has been demolished. There will be no more small class size of 15-20 students. There will be no more courses in Culture,

Communication, History, Literature or any others. Over the summer, without consultation with even the Head of the Access department, or notice, the VC/administration revamped the program and now it is a skills-based format with as many as 30 to 35 students per class. New students of much lower skill level and less knowledge base have been placed in second year—creating resentment with second year students. To top it off, second year students who are used to and enjoy a challenging content based program are disappointed and upset—to say the least—with the format change. It is not a happy place and the students' morale slumps as they see their instructors leave. Already, one of my former colleagues has tendered his resignation and before I leave another will be summarily dismissed for confronting the VC/administration over the changes to the program, the Head of the department will resign and leave 2 weeks before the semester is finished, while 2 more will leave at the end of the semester. An excellent program and a department that worked together in the spirit of compassionate professionalism, that was willing to work through differences and work towards consensus, and as importantly, truly enjoyed each other as individuals, have been totally destroyed leaving a wake of betrayal, grief, despair, misery, anger. What a travesty.

It is 3 weeks after my arrival when I open the apartment door to find PVC standing in the hall, with a smile on his face and an offer of a celebratory bottle of wine. The Board has met; it took only minutes to indicate that, of course, I could use UKH as a research site, and also to show surprise as to why the matter was on the agenda to begin with. It isn't all good news though; VC has made it clear, crystal clear, that I must have the project finished by the mid-December break. PVC is a well travelled, well read, worldly, man with many diverse interests. Larry and I have already come to value and enjoy his company. But, tonight, as we sit and visit, sipping our wine, in happy companionship, I find it hard to keep my mind on the conversation. My heart is racing. My palms are sweating. A million thoughts are bouncing around in my head...okay I was hoping to have 4 months to carry out my research and now I have to be done by mid-December and I've lost 3 weeks waiting around and there'll be a week break at Eid and that gives me 8 weeks from recruitment to finish—1/2 the time I was hoping for and I still haven't been able to locate a counselor! I feel...bruised, damaged, forlorn. _ _it.

NARRATIVE MÉTISSAGE: BOUNDARIES: II

TERRY, LILY, MARY



BOUNDARIES

Terry

Everybody has a dream and wants to do something he likes without any interference from any part (parents, family, and relatives). I have a talent for singing. I started singing when I was six years old. And when I was ten years old I started to arrange my primary school music band and all the parties in it. I was a singer in my music band and my parents and teachers were proud of me. That's what made me love singing.

Lily

Once in the summer, when I was 18 and finished high school, I wanted to ask my father if I could work, since I was bored from being at home and doing the same routine every day. There was nothing interesting or new for me. So, I wanted to learn more and to work and get experience. I thought about it, and I was thinking that even if I asked him, he won't accept it; he will say that first I am a girl, and then that I haven't graduated yet, and that others—I mean neighbours and relatives – would speak about that, and say how come my father let me work? And people are going to say that "They don't have money? They let their girl work!"

Mary

It was always one of my hobbies and daily training since I was 5 years old. Dance is one of my favourite things that I'm good at. But I never dance in front of anyone except for some of my friends and they are girls, of course.

Of course, I am not talking about the Eastern dance or Iraqi dance—I like it, but not as much as I like Western dance. I always dreamed that there would be a dance lesson club for only girls in my town, yet even if there was one, I was sure that my parents would prevent me from taking lessons.

Terry

Years went by. When I was 12 years old I discovered dissent to my singing from my younger brother, grandmother, and especially from the neighbours. Neighbours in our district came to my mother and told her “You are a respectable family and you do not need a singer in your family because you are a religious family.” After that, my mother told my father and younger brother and they prevented me from singing anymore.

Lily

Father said “My lovely daughter, we know that isn’t true—we don’t need money, and I don’t think you are in need of money since both your mother and I are working.” But, actually my goal wasn’t as my dad was thinking. I just wanted to learn and get experience, it wasn’t for the money. My mother, also, was saying the same as my father was. I know that my parents love me a lot and they want what’s best for me, but I also think working or finding a job for young girls like me is not bad like they think. Also, most of our society thinks of “What will others think?” For me the meaning of boundaries is not limits: it is you can’t do what you want to do since A, B, and C will speak about you in a bad way... So: “Be what you want to be not what others want to see.”

Mary

Last week one of my teachers at the university decided to open a dancing club for salsa dancing. I was so excited about it—like I’m the first one to apply to it. I started to think about the whole thing and how am I going to tell my parents about it. I saw the first lesson of the class and I was jealous of the students who don’t have any problem of dancing publicly. The reason why my parents, and also me, don’t want me to dance is that dancing is seen as some kind of seduction, and in our religion—Islam—it is prevented for a woman’s body to be a tool for seduction in public. Also, in society it is a kind of taboo. I kept thinking of these things for a week without saying anything to my parents.

Terry

After that, my attitude changed in my life, I isolated myself from my family and didn’t go out for a month. After this event I gave up singing and I never got back to it. My childhood dream finished at that

moment when my parents told me to stop singing and focus on my studies. They did not think about me, they thought about what people are going to say, and that is one of the problems that our society is suffering from.

Mary

One day I would decide to join the class without paying attention to any of these things related to society or religion. Another day I would say “What will people say if they found out about my dancing?” or “How am I going to let a boy touch my body?” At one time, I decided to join and I told my teacher I would join, but I was afraid because I hadn’t told my parents about it yet. In the end, when I went home, my final decision was to forget about the whole idea and to stay far away from problems related to society. And I am a Muslim and I should respect my religion and also respect my parents.

The best laid plans...

I did so want to use arts-based pedagogy; after all, during my graduate work I extensively researched/studied/learned about arts-based research methodology/pedagogy¹ in my course work. I also, participated in a particularly practical/hands-on course in arts-based learning where the instructor practiced many arts based experiential activities/methods. Just to make sure I was prepared, I completed a two-day workshop on creative facilitation offered by “The Power of Hope: Youth Empowerment Through the Arts.”



¹ I learned that arts-based research methodology/pedagogy can create a safe learning environment, provide a way to explore feelings and ideas, create a forum to learn about and appreciate other people and their cultures, offer a way to explore issues of difference, foster group trust, simulate creativity and self-expression, nurture self-esteem, develop group bonding and esprit de corps through encouraging the expression of shared values and concerns, move the group from individual to collective goals, and it can be a fundamental vehicle for empowerment. These insights have been garnered from the following authors/organization (Deborah Barndt, “Touching Minds and Hearts: Community Arts as Collaborative Research,” in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, ed. J Gary Knowles and Adra L. Cole Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 351-362; Ronald J. Pelias, *Writing Performance; Poeticizing the Researcher’s Body* (USA: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999); Susan Findley “Arts-Based Research” in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, ed. J Gary Knowles and Adra L. Cole Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 71-82; and The Power of Hope Society, Youth Empowerment Through the Arts Facilitation Workshop, November, 2009, Victoria, BC.

The plan: The first workshop will consist of getting to know one another and setting a tone of cooperation and trust by engaging in experiential community building activities to move the group from expressing individual to collective experiences.² I decided to use the popular theatre method “What do you see?” It is an activity where the participants form a circle, a volunteer stands inside the circle in a “frozen” position. The participants are asked: “What do you see?” They are encouraged to move around and gain different perspectives. After the group has generated responses, the facilitator explains that all the answers are correct. “In this way, people understand how subjective our interpretation of even the most straightforward of verbal and non-verbal forms of communication is.”³ I had used this method previously with students at the University of Victoria—with considerable success; however, it went over like a lead balloon with the research participants. They didn’t know what to do—why they were doing it. They seemed self-conscious—it had the opposite effect of what I had hoped, although it did facilitate a wonderful discussion on respect for others’ points of view. Other theater methods I tried were equally unsuccessful.



² Catherine Etmanski, “Unsettled- Embodying Transformative Learning and Intersectionality in Higher Education: Popular Theatre as Research with International Graduate Students” (PhD Diss., University of Victoria, BC, 2007) 160. Etmanski explains that theatre methods/activities are intended to foster trust amongst the participants and “[move] the group from expressing individual to collective experiences” (Etmanski, 160)

³ Ibid., 162

The plan: As a method for generating themes to write about, the participants will be given disposable cameras with the instruction to take pictures of people, events, places, objects, that are important or of interest to them.

Not one participant used their camera. Luckily, two participants came with pictures on their laptops. From the discussion of feelings of freedom that arose from pictures of a family cabin in the mountains, the participants generated the theme of when do we/do we not feel free, which translated into the theme “Boundaries.”

The plan: Participants will be asked to consider how they would like to respond to practicing métissage. Métissage is an arts-based research methodology. In arts-based research the role of the researcher is to provide the tools for participants to reflect on their own performance; this is done in part through the discussion that arises through the weaving process and also through the performance of métissage. However, as part of the data collection, there will be further opportunity for participants to respond to practicing métissage and how it has informed their outlook and to whether it has fostered understanding and empathy towards the “self/other” by sharing their ideas and thoughts in ways that are meaningful to them. This means that they could choose to respond by creating a work of art: photo collage, painting, poetry, prose, etc., or participate in an interview. It took less than a twinkling of



an eye for each participant to choose to respond by participating in an interview.

I felt that the choice to respond in interview form was disappointing—for both myself/my envisioned dissertation and the research participants. I was reminded of Laurel Richardson’s discussion on form and content; form and content cannot be separated. Different modes make available different methods for discovery and analysis.⁴ I had imagined photography, painting, collage, poetry, and prose would be incorporated into the dissertation not only in celebration of the oral, literal, visual, and embodied ways we humans have of engaging in the world but also to make available discovery and analysis based on embodied ways of ‘knowing’. Just as for the dissertation—it is the same for my participants. I was eager for them to respond in an arts-based form, giving them the same opportunity for a different kind of discovery and analysis of their participation in narrative métissage. I genuinely thought it would be a more self-reflexive, interesting and enjoyable experience than answering interview questions.



After all, didn't they know I was just going to ask questions like:

Are you originally from Erbil?

What religion, nationality are you?

⁴ Laurel Richardson, "Getting personal: Writing-stories" *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14, no. 1 (2001):

Why did you decide to participate in the research project?
Did you write the story you wanted? If not why? If yes why?
How did you feel sharing/weaving your story?
How did you feel while you were performing the metissage?
How did you feel after the performance?
How did you feel listening to the other's stories?
Did you identify with anyone's story?
Were you surprised at anybody's story?
Were you surprised at how you reacted?
What have you learned about yourself?
What have you learned about the others in your group?
What have you learned about your society/your everyday life?
What new insights have you come away with?
Do you feel differently about the participants, or understand them better/worse?
Will you act differently toward someone since you heard their story or what they had to say in the discussion?
If you are (Muslim, Christian, Arabic, Kurdish, woman, man, etc.) do you have more understanding of _____ after participating in méttissage?
Is there anything you'd like to say—something that we haven't talked about?



The interviews turned out to be a very pleasurable pursuit. They were conducted very informally, in a conversation/dialogical style, and it was personally satisfying to spend one-on-one time with each of the participants. Their responses were thoughtful and sincere and allowed for rich, robust data that allowed me to construct their stories. The stories are my construction. I used the words of the participant, but chose the order, placement, and spacing of the words, moving them around into story-style while trying to remain true to the sense-making process and intention of the participant. Sometimes, in order to move the story along I use some of my words that were a part of the conversation/dialogue of the interview--those words are represented in italics in the story. However, most of the words are only those of the participant. Although the participants did not choose to respond in an arts-based format, in the end, I am not disappointed. The story-telling mode has captured a rich description of the participants' world not only helping us to understand them, their world, their lived experience, and their sense-making, but, also personalizes them. This personalization and deep understanding that the story-telling mode captures, gives a holistic view of the participants while at the same time, attends to the call to share the voice of research participants in ethical and meaningful ways. Also, poststructural and postmodern thought has caused us to question the un-biased, neutral position of the researcher/author and has challenged us to find ways to indicate that the researcher's "hand" is in the research.⁵ The stories make no pretense to a disinterested, neutral,



⁵ For a discussion on postmodern and poststructural perspectives on research see Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, "The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research" In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed., ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (London: Sage, 2005), 1-32.

objective researcher. The genre makes it very explicit that I have constructed the re/presentation of the data.

Story-telling is a mode of research that values knowing through embodied attunement. It enables the reader to discover the world of the participants through both the heart and the mind. So, serendipitously, in the end the participants enabled an arts-based re/presentation of research data, allowing for discovery and analysis that embrace embodied ways of 'knowing'.

SARAH'S STORY

“My family put more limitations on me and cut off this relationship because of boundaries and what people would say about me. The most harmful boundary was when they didn't let me decide for myself and what I really wanted to do.”—Sarah

I thought I'd join the project because it seemed that it would be a good opportunity for me to see if others had the same experiences as me; to know these people better and also to know me.

*When we chose the theme boundaries at first I was thinking what do you mean by boundaries? I was thinking “come on, boundaries means limits.” Okay, how do I write about limits? How do I write about boundaries? At first I didn't have anything...what do I have to write? And then I thought to myself, *come on Sarah, you're 20 years old. You're an Assyrian Christian who lived in Mosul before you moved to Erbil four years ago, because it was too dangerous to live there anymore. You were a Christian who lived in a community that was an Islamic society...and you had to stick with their boundaries because you were living with them and if you did anything not like what they are doing ...well then they are going to talk about you...or maybe hurt your parents or something. This situation that I lived in was a boundary.**

Finances were a boundary, in the past. Most Iraqi people went through that situation, because we had economical blocks and wars, people were dying—and thank goodness we were safe at that time. People were suffering from illness and there was no medicine for them. I know it has been a hard situation for most of Iraqi people, so it's okay to talk about it...it's not something to hide. I lived in that situation. I'd feel comfortable sharing that story.

*And then I decided to write about the boundary that is most on my mind, in fact it is something that I live with every day; the family decision *that was* made for me is a boundary. I want to get rid of it. I want to live free. I want to get over it. I'm trying, but...*you see*...It wasn't up to me. I had to. We had to separate—it's family—it's family. So, I don't know how to get rid of this. I don't know how to get over it; because it was not my decision or his decision. It was the families' decision. I wish that they didn't have to get involved with things like that; because it's my life. But they say, “Oh we know it's your life, but we're your parents and we have to take care of you. You're still young”. I knew that this wasn't the perfect relationship. There were so many differences, but still maybe I would have realized that someday, and I would have decided that I can't be with him anymore, but they just—actually they...they forced both of us. I couldn't say anything. I couldn't tell him that “I can't be with you anymore”. I couldn't, I just*

couldn't; I didn't want him to get hurt. So, I let it go just like that. His family wanted that too; not his parents...but his family...it's complicated. Anyway, he told me we couldn't be together anymore...and I know that he didn't want that to happen...he wanted to be together.

I want to let it go, that happened...we're never going to be together. I want to let it go. I want to let myself be free. I'm trying to get over it. I'm trying to move on. I have a new relationship, but I feel like I am cheating or betraying him. I don't know how to deal with that. I feel like I'm in a deep hole...it's hard...it's like there is a pressure on my chest.

And so, I decided to write about this boundary and when I shared it with the group, I felt fine to share it. I liked it—to speak, to say what is hidden. To let someone to think about the story with me, then it's not like it's only a burden for me... if I shared it, people would carry that burden with me. I was fine and I wrote the things I wanted to write. The boundaries we have here ...it's society...that's the biggest boundary that we have. The family has to be with the society because they live in the society, so they have to take the ideas of the society....it's not the family's fault...it's the society's.

I wasn't surprised that there are boundaries for both Muslim and Christian religions. *If I learned to feel empathy or have more understanding about one of the other participants it would be for Mary.* When I think about Mary not being able to dance because of her traditions, religion, I feel sorry for her. I feel like why does religion have to be like a wall standing in front of her?

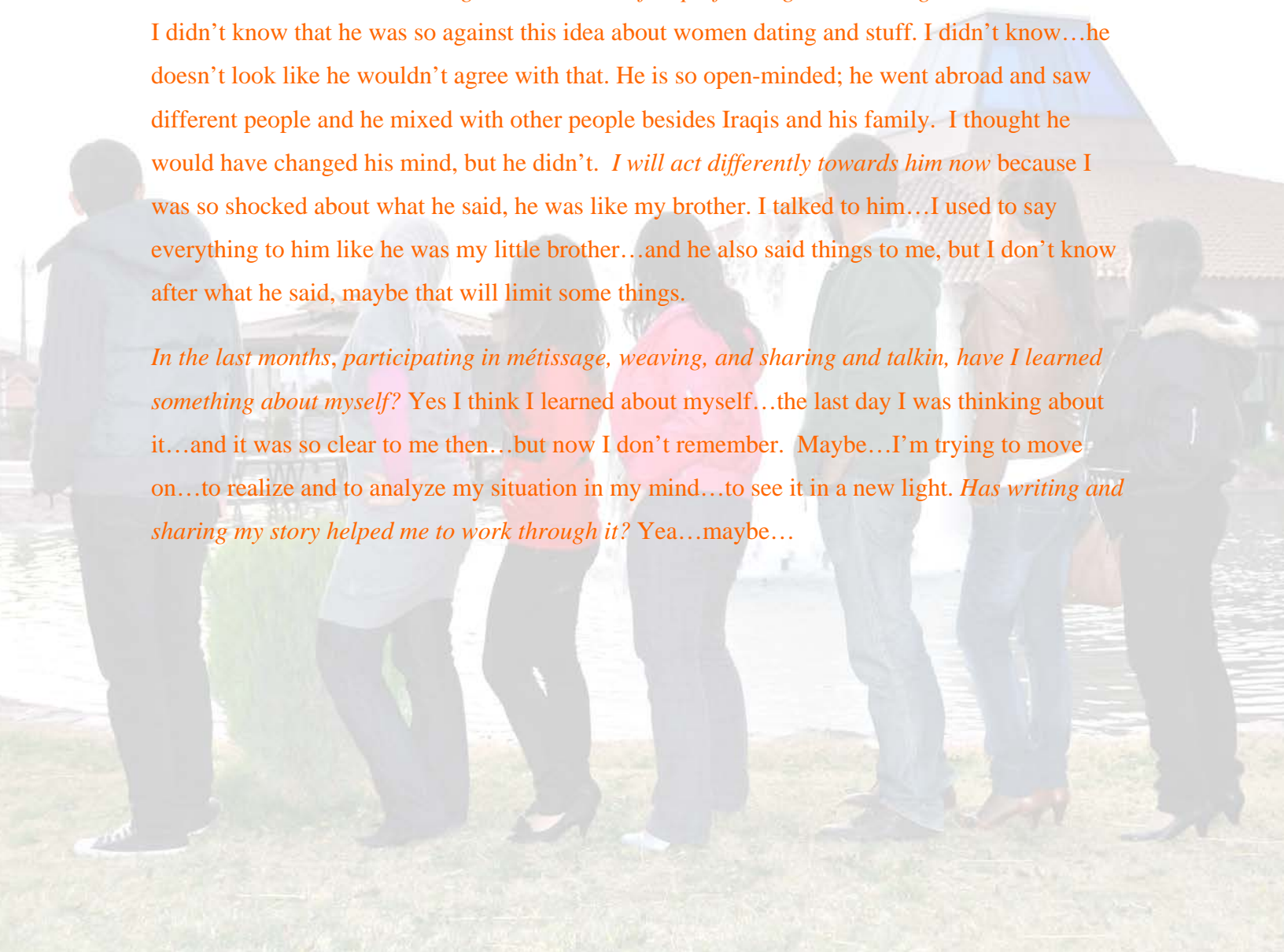
I see myself in Lily's experience. Like Lily, one summer I wanted to do work. I just didn't want to be at home and do nothing and sleep 'til noon. But they didn't...it was not okay to work. My parents were open minded about it; They said, "it's okay to go and work, but what are *the relatives* going to say?" I know... I know them. When we are sitting and talking, they often talk about other relatives. They talk about the parent...*they gossip*...“Why did she let her child go and do that thing? She's too young. It's not right.” Even though there is nothing wrong—it's just working. They talk and talk and talk. We know them and that's why we avoid being in that situation.

Performing my story was okay, but there were things that I was shocked about from other people. When I heard Terry's story, I had no idea that his family would say no to him...a guy! I was shocked because, they lived in Bagdad. Bagdad is the place where there are so many different

kinds of people; you think that they will be open-minded—No, I didn't know people in Bagdad would say no to a guy. Maybe in Mosul they would say no to a guy if he wanted to do something he likes—but *highly unlikely*—that would be strange. I was shocked because he is a guy...and it seems okay for guys to do anything. But, his family also told him he couldn't do that because—
“What will people say about you?”

I received another shock during the discussion after performing our métissage. It's about Murad. I didn't know that he was so against this idea about women dating and stuff. I didn't know...he doesn't look like he wouldn't agree with that. He is so open-minded; he went abroad and saw different people and he mixed with other people besides Iraqis and his family. I thought he would have changed his mind, but he didn't. I will act differently towards him now because I was so shocked about what he said, he was like my brother. I talked to him...I used to say everything to him like he was my little brother...and he also said things to me, but I don't know after what he said, maybe that will limit some things.

In the last months, participating in métissage, weaving, and sharing and talkin, have I learned something about myself? Yes I think I learned about myself...the last day I was thinking about it...and it was so clear to me then...but now I don't remember. Maybe...I'm trying to move on...to realize and to analyze my situation in my mind...to see it in a new light. Has writing and sharing my story helped me to work through it? Yea...maybe...



MURAD'S STORY

"I left the country, while I knew that my father would know, and he would do anything to bring me back. However, I never cared. I did it for myself."—Murad

Actually I am really not enjoying being at the university, and you can't do anything here in Erbil; there is nothing to do. I wish there was a music conservatory here, a place where I could learn to sing and play music, or try something new; anything new would be good for me. So, *that's why I was interested in doing métissage*, I just wanted to try something new!

I told the story I wanted to tell about myself, *I wasn't concerned with what people would think*, I really didn't care. *Sharing the story though was different*. I didn't like it very much, because it was something special. It's just that after knowing that people knew about something special in my life I felt uncomfortable; I am not a typical Muslim, I have this idea that this society won't accept some of my ideas and they will...I don't know...we don't have the same thinking in the same way, maybe...even my friends...my close friends think differently. No no...*I really feel* I can't trust anyone to the maximum, so I can't tell them everything.

Was I surprised by any of the stories? No, but listening to other people's stories I thought was good; it was nice to know that we have some things in common. It was really nice to sit with my friends and have the time to talk. We don't have the time to talk, to be all together and discuss something in particular (*about something serious*) and listen to each other and consider each other's opinions.

Did I gain a better understanding of my society? No, I already understood my society; I mean old people...like my father, I mean parents and relatives and friends, and friends of friends; it's like a big circle surrounding you and you cannot move your head. They want you to move in the same way, in the same path. They don't want you to explore something else, or try something else. Maybe they are afraid. Tradition and religion are important, but the theme of religion is the main thing in the country. They feel that if you do something there might be something wrong ...against our religion. Most people, both Muslim and Christian, think that if you do something little (*even if it is something very innocent*), then you will do something else, and then something else, and this will lead to you not being a Christian or a Muslim anymore. *But, how would I change this society?* I really don't know. I have no idea, and even though *I am proud to call*

myself Kurd, in fact I refuse to say I'm Iraqi, I say I'm Kurd first and then Iraqi, *I have to say* I have lost my hope in this society. They don't want to change themselves. I am 19 years old, me and my friends are young...what can we do to change society? The people who want to continue in the same traditions are way more than us.

I know that we have to talk about what I said in the discussion *after we performed the métissage. I would just like to explain myself. You are wondering how it is that someone like me who wants to break free from the limitations and who hates tradition could say that I would continue to limit my sister when it comes to dating.* It's not really me. And we are not putting limitations...it's not that word; we are just taking care of her. I mean she's happy. She doesn't want anything else. Like she works and she can go out whenever she wants, she can go out alone, she can travel alone and so, I mean she travelled before to Syria, to Lebanon, to Turkey all by herself, and that's fine with us because we trust her. But, here we won't let her to date someone and to go out with someone...only for dating; that's it—that's the only point. Dating for girls is forbidden in Islam. Yes, I know that in Islam it is equal for men and women—neither is supposed to date. Yeah...I don't know... because I'm kind of confused about that, because I want to think that ...well, I know that I want to date...and I can date and I have dated several times. She is older than me, and yet I can date...but she can't...and she is limited...and in Islam both aren't supposed to date and if she cannot date I'm not supposed to date—but I can't do that! Yea, I'm a little confused about that.

Have I learned anything about myself by participating in the project? Well actually, after talking about limitations and stuff, *I realized* that I just feel dead...and I want to do something (*exciting*) again and that's why I'm planning...so I am applying to other universities abroad. After doing the métissage I decided to apply because I learned that there is still something inside of me; I don't want to stay here and keep myself inside this society...I want to break free of these limitations!

*HARAAM*¹

Stormtide

The tide said to the fisherman
there are many reasons
why my waves are in a rage.
The most important is
that I am for the freedom of the fish
and against
the net

Sherko Bekas –Kurdish poet

The panel commends the care with which ethical issues have been presented and considered using the very thorough processes for this purpose at the home university. There are particular issues surrounding the conduct of research using students at the University of Kurdistan-Hawler, and in regard to the Kurdistan culture, which need to be addressed. Your research project at the University of Kurdistan has been approved pending the following changes:

That the complete anonymity of the participants be preserved in the publication of material from the project by using pseudonyms in any such material...As a result of these changes, the YES box in Section 17b [of the ethics application forms] need be ticked to show that participants will be anonymous in the dissemination of results.

I am shocked, dismayed...

My graduate work was something of a spiritual conversion. What wonder, what marvel, the discovery—music, poetics, narrative, photography, story-telling, drawing, drama, métissage, autoethnography...incorporating artistic modes...violating prescribed conventions...sonare re/siding with videre.² Inquiry—a sensual pleasure; how divine a revelation. I rejoiced in the

¹Haraam: adj. hä-räm: Is an Arabic term meaning forbidden. It is also used in Kurdish. *Haraam* has, over the years, accumulated additional non-traditional uses to it; haraam can mean shame.

²Ted Aoki explains “It is imperative that the world of curriculum question the primacy of videre and begin to make room for sonare.” Ted Aoki, “Sonare and Videre: A Story, Three Echoes, and a Lingering Note.” chap. 23 in *Curriculum in a New Key: The Selected Works of Ted. T. Aoki*, eds. William Pinar and Rita Irwin, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 373. Videre is the disembodied objective world of what the eye can see while sonare is embodied knowing, feeling, and emotion.

rebellion and rejection of the traditional, the positivistic, the scientific, the impersonal, the unembodied, the insensible. I have become a seeker of pleasure...seeking and finding pleasure in my research and writing. I have embraced this newness like a new religion. And like any zealous convert, I have turned my back on the old ways. The planning of my research and dissertation was a celebration of the new—a passionate endeavour.

My research involves practicing narrative métissage to foster empathy and understanding in an intra-conflict society. Métissage “weaves disparate elements into multi-valenced, metonymic, and multi-textured forms, unravelling the logic of linearity, hierarchy, and uniformity.”³ And so, I planned to write-up the dissertation in a way that re/presents métissage; it would be polyvocal, polyphonic, a mingling of texts and genres and voices. Photography, painting, collage, audio and digital recordings would be incorporated into the dissertation in celebration of the oral, literal, visual, and embodied ways we humans have of engaging in the world.

Obtaining ethics approval to use auditory and digital recording along with autobiography had required much back and forth conversation with ethics advisors... many revisions...careful wording...painstakingly...finding a way through the maze of obstacles to be able to carry out my envisioned research/dissertation.

And now this...*Complete anonymity of participants...but... that means...*

*...no audio recording⁴ ...
 ... no digital recording....
 ... no photographs...
 ... my research project is now dismantled...
 ... my carefully laid plans all for naught...
 ... painstakingly filled ethics forms null and void...
 ...the core is gutted...
 ...the dissertation has been demolished...*

And so? I can hear you ask.

³ Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, and Carl Leggo, *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 35.

⁴ I am able to record the participants' interviews for purposes of transcribing, however I cannot use any audio representation in my data/dissertation.

...I am embarrassed, chagrined, to say that I reacted quite badly...

Oh don't get me wrong...I didn't lament, didn't get angry, didn't say anything...the situation was too precarious...I felt too vulnerable...but...

What I kept thinking was, What the hell!!...and...Surely, if it's good enough for the University of Victoria's ethics committee, it's good enough for the administration at the University of Kurdistan!...and...My God, these people don't even have an ethics board...and...God knows the ethics board at UVic is very thorough...and...Who do they think they are?...

I am more than embarrassed, more than chagrined...I am shamed...for these sentiments are wrapped up in cultural superiority; western conceived research wrapped up in western values wrapped up in western ethics committees wrapped up in if it's good enough for the West it's good enough for everywhere...but...

the shame...goes deeper than that...after the dust of the umbrage, the offense, the disappointment, the devastation settles...I am aware that I have been woefully, disturbingly, caught out...I should have known better, after all I spent a year here, teaching and living in Kurdistan...

the shame is bone deep...for I begin to remember what it is I know about Kurdistan and the danger of the pen...the danger of speaking, and of writing and of naming...

I know...

that independent journalists are exposed to extreme danger in Kurdistan. Freedom to write, to speak, to opinion has boundaries. There is a culture of harassment, intimidation, physical assault, beatings, violence, hate mail, death threats and arrests carried out by police officers, government security guards and the ruling party security forces; sanctioned by the courts. Harassment in the form of law suits and defamation charges brought against editors and newspapers and journalists by influential politicians are par for the course. Newspapers and independent journalists practice self-censorship on topics that seem very benign to a westerner. There are many lines that can't be crossed, subjects that are off limits; religion, sex and/or sexual orientation, tribal/historical leaders, corruption and nepotism, critique of the Kurdistan Regional Government(KRG) are haraam...really haraam.⁵

⁵ The discussion on the lack of freedom of the press was taken from a number of sources: Committee to Protect Journalists, Internet www.cpj.org/2010/05/press-conditions-deteriorate-in-iraqi-kurdistan.php accessed Nov, 20, 2010.

I know...that to get a death threat means that sometimes it is not just a threat...

I know...about Sardasht Osman...

Sardasht was a 23 year old English language student at the University of Salahaddin in Erbil, Kurdistan. He was also an independent journalist who often wrote about public issues such as corruption and nepotism and was critical of the KRG, local politicians and the security forces. He had been “warned” on numerous occasions to stop his investigative journalism. In April, 2010, Sardasht crossed over the line...into the forbidden...when he wrote a satirical poem, “I am in love with Massoud Barzani’s [President of Kurdistan] daughter.”⁶ It was an indictment against the nepotism, elitism, and family/tribal privilege that is prevalent in Kurdish society, it cleverly critiqued high unemployment rates and lack of social services, he wondered how his life, and that of his family’s, would change if he were married to the President’s daughter. For this rhetorical wondering Sardasht began receiving death threats.

On May 4th, 2010, he was kidnapped by security soldiers outside the gate of Salahaddin University. His tortured and slain body was found two days later...

I know...

That complete anonymity of my participants is a necessary precaution. I am not experienced enough. This is not my culture. I am in over my head. My participants are too young. What would be crossing the line? What would be off limits? What would be haraam?

There is tension in/dwelling in “the space in between” two cultures...it is trying and difficult. Ted Aoki exhorts me not to try to rid myself of the tension, “for to be tensionless is to be dead

Committee to Protect Journalists, Internet www.cpj.org/2010/02/attacks-on-the-press-2009-iraq.php Accessed Nov. 27, 2010

Amnesty International, Internet www.amnesty.org/nz/news/iraq-kurdistan-authorities-must-investigate-abduction-and-murder-journalist accessed Nov. 27, 2010

Reporters Without Borders, Mission Report, Between Freedom and Abuses: The Media Paradox in Iraqi Kurdistan, Nov. 27, 2010 . Internet www.kurdistancommentary.wordpress.com/2010/11/07/between-freedom-and-abuses-the-media-paradox-in-iraqi-kurdistan/ accessed Nov. 27, 2010

United Nations Human Rights Committee, RefWorld, Ruling Party threat to freedom in Iraqi Kurdistan, Aug. 10, 2010. Internet <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,IRQ,,4c64f1271e,0.html> Accessed Nov. 27, 2010

Home Office: UK Border Agency, Country of Origin Information Report: Kurdistan Regional Government Area of Iraq, May 21, 2009. Internet www.rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/iraq-kurdistan-220509.doc Accessed Nov. 27, 2010, pp. 58-63.

⁶ Osman, S., “I am in Love with Massoud Barzani’s Daughter” Internet <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2010/5/state3816.htm> accessed Nov. 27, 2010.

like a limp violin string.” He encourages me rather, to “seek appropriately attuned tension, such that the sound of the tensioned string resounds well.”⁷

How do I re/at/tune the tension so that the string re/sounds well?

...I hear the sound of the waves crashing up against the shore, I feel the firm sand under my feet, the cold wind on my face, I taste salt in the air...and I say with Sherko Bekas...I am for the freedom of the fish.

⁷ Ted Aoki, “Taiko Drums and Sushi, Perogies and Suaerkraut: Mirroring Half-Life in Multicultural Curriculum,” chap. 24 in *Curriculum in a New Key: The Selected Works of Ted. T. Aoki*, eds. William Pinar and Rita Irwin, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 382.

thinkingthinkingthinkingthinkingthinkingthinkingthinkingthinkingthinkingthinkingthinkingthinkingthinkingthinkingthinking

I lay in bed...*thinkingthinkingthinking*...it's too difficult...this living in "the third space." I remember writing, "The "third space" is a site of insight, but it requires relationship, it requires care and concern and a willingness to listen with new ears, to see with new eyes, and the courage to open your heart to the newness." Tonight I am empty of courage, devoid of hope. I am tired of listening with new ears, seeing with new eyes. I want only to hear and see and touch and feel with the familiar of my own biography. There are too many sites of insight...I am weary of insighting.

I lay in bed...*thinkingthinkingthinking*...it's too difficult...this trying to see things through the post-colonial lens. I remember writing, "The post-colonial lens does not guarantee that I will not unconsciously perpetuate cultural imperialism; however, it enables a critical self-consciousness on my own part to live in/navigate a culture that is very different than my own in a culturally responsible way without consciously perpetuating western ways of knowing and being." Tonight I am empty of cultural sensitivity. I only want to know and be in the world in my own western way, see the world through my own western eyes. The culture is too different...I am weary of navigating.

TERRY'S STORY

"I was a singer in my music band and my parents and teachers were proud of me. That's what made me love singing."—Terry

I don't at all consider myself as Kurdish, even though my mom is Kurdish, and that's why we moved to Erbil from Bagdad because of the violence. My Dad is an Iraqi Arab Muslim, so, of course I'm an Iraqi Arab Muslim. We moved here 4 years ago when I was 16. I like it here. I get on okay, because although my first language is Arabic, I speak Kurdish, English and a little of the Christian language—Assyrian.

I'm the kind of guy who plays his cards close to his chest. I really don't like to tell anyone about my secrets. I don't share my secrets with anyone...don't want anyone to know much about me. I just don't like it. Even my friends here, I am sure they don't know much about me. I know, of course, it's an issue of trust.

So, you're thinking why would I participate in something like métissage, where I have to share something about myself? I thought I might learn a little about myself, and I thought, these people are my friends they have a right to know something about me. And the way that Bobbi reacted to my story confirms this. Even though, we have known each other since high school and we are very good friends, she was definitely surprised about me saying I wanted to sing. Why wouldn't she be surprised? Really, I assumed that she will say she is surprised, because she doesn't know many things about me. She thought that I am a strict religious man...something like that, but she doesn't know. She really doesn't know. She only knows me from the outside...not the inside me. As I said, she deserved to know things about me. Sharing my story gave Bobbi a better understanding about me. I was surprised when she said she wanted to comfort the young 12-year-old Terry.

When I performed my story, something happened in my body. At the beginning when I was telling my story, I felt like I was...there was...like there was some of the consequence in my mouth...it didn't want me to speak! It was stopping me from speaking! And when I was finished telling the story I felt—they know too much about me...is the first, and then I felt that everything was fine. It was fine because in the métissage, it is like we made an agreement to have a free conversation between us. And when you're going to have a free conversation there is a step, after that step...you can cross the line to speak anything. And so, I was able to trust the others

because I realized that all the people would speak about *boundaries*. Then I felt comfortable. It was really nice to share ideas with someone else...nice to share ideas and to know what people are thinking about...what their limitations are.

Mary's story really impacted me. I've got a lot more respect for her after hearing the story. I absolutely agreed with what she did. Because there are two aspects...one of them...religious instruction...and *the other is* society. I think the most important part is the religious instruction, because she should obey the instruction, she should respect it. Of course, I feel badly for her...but at the same time I feel trust in her because she respects her father's and religion's instructions.

I knew that there are restrictions for both Muslim and Christian girls. I wasn't surprised about that. I think though that there are more limitations for Muslim girls. But, what I really learned is that in our society there is no open-mindedness for girls, generally. There is a big open-mind for boys and there is not for girls. And if I had a sister, I would *limit her as well*. I would do the same thing, because I am a man and I should do the same as society...while I am living here I should respect my society. I know it's not okay to *put limitations on girls*...but it's because of society (*they shouldn't break society's rules*). While Erbil is too small...and everybody knows the others...they all know you. So, it's not good to be visible (*to do things that are not accepted*) because of what people think...and it affects the girl's *reputation*. *I have a new idea, a new understanding*; I think girls could be more free, but still with the limits. There is a line...they can't cross that line. *And what is that line? What things would I change if I could?* I think like going out...well you can let them go out, but not after midnight...because I am a boy and I can't come back after midnight!

By writing and sharing my story and by talking about it with others I have learned that I really want to keep secrets, but I learned I feel better if I share them with someone. I'm going to be more open...I think. *My ideas about the process and how it has affected me* carries on...I think maybe there are many things (*insights*) I still don't know about yet.

BOBBI'S STORY

"Sometimes I feel lonely in this world and that there are no guys who would fall for me and love me. They consider it normal not to date, but they fight what is normal and healthy, which is falling in love and having someone to be around to care about you and for you to do the same."—Bobbi

Okay, if I must say—my religion is Christian, I'm Assyrian Iraqi. I prefer to be called Iraqi instead of Arab, Kurd, Assyrian, or other names. But, to be honest with you, I don't want to be called Iraqi either, but that's the reality. I have to face it. *What's wrong with those names?* It's like separating people, and these are the reasons why the conflicts are happening in this country. So, that's why I hate them all, that's why I don't want to be called *anything* like that.

Unfortunately, I'm originally from Mosul, I moved here a little over 3 years ago when I was 16. Mosul had a lot of restrictions, boundaries, limits...everything that tells you not to do...not... not... not... to do anything!

I wanted to participate in the project because I wanted to be part of a new experience...to have a new experience in my life. It's interesting to be part of a process...or something like...to be heard by people who don't know about the way we live and so I'm glad to be part of this...to tell everyone that we are not just living in a war place—no we are also living in a conflict with ourselves, with the community also. So life is kind of difficult...especially for girls.

There were 2 parts to my story; one of the parts I wanted to talk about badly. I don't know why I am concerned about these things, about having relationships with the opposite sex—you know like dating—and those feelings. But these feelings and emotions are normal...these things are normal. I've been thinking why? Why does the community, the people around my family, and my relatives fight this idea of dating? This is one of the biggest restrictions or boundaries that I have because, if you go out with a guy here, you'll be afraid someone will see you, and then they will talk about you, and then your reputation will be so bad that if you don't marry that guy, then you will end up alone. Nobody will marry you—and so that's the concern that our parents live with—that people might talk about their children...might talk about the family itself. So, all they are afraid of is reputation, reputation...they are afraid all the time...that's what kills me. They are afraid...so that's the horror they are living with. I don't want to be living in such a situation.

When it came to performing my story at the beginning I didn't want to say these things in front of my colleagues because you know... maybe they won't understand me. That's why at the beginning I was hesitant. But, then, when I heard them talking, they had almost the same problems or the same restrictions that I am living in, so, then I just felt like it's okay...it's okay to tell them.

When I heard Mary's story, my reaction was—I couldn't believe that a girl who is Muslim, who's wearing hijab, would think like that. You know trying to be liberated, trying to be progressive...I thought because she is Muslim she is going to be like different—but she also has her own problems and restrictions. You know there are many girls like Mary...but most of them are not like Mary...she is one of a kind I think.

When I decided to participate in métissage honestly I didn't care about the others in this experience, I just thought like...just go for it and see what's going to happen to me. I wasn't trying to be selfish; I just thought I would hear their stories, but I'm not going to remember all their ideas, but...um... I know...the point is I know...I know now. I know how they feel. I know that they have the same thing that I have, which is trying to be liberated from this society...from these ideas. I know that I can sympathize with others. I also learned that I'm normal; I have the same ideas as my colleagues, as people my age think, the same ideas. *No matter what religion, or ethnicity* the girls are struggling the same as I do and the guys are struggling also for their aims, so we're all struggling, so we're all the same. *As a participant in the project* I was given the opportunity to see a therapist and I wondered whether I would need one...and I discovered I don't need one... I found out I'm normal.

The best laid plans...

Thursday is a day that the students have no classes, but are expected to be available in case a professor wants to call a make-up class, or a film viewing etc.; a day to wind-up loose ends. Also, it is usually a day for assignment deadlines. Thursdays, we decide, are the best days to meet.

The plan: Thursday 11th -- first workshop--10:00-12:00.

It is 10:25 when not a single soul has yet. I wonder what is happening, so I head down to the cafeteria to see if anyone is around...dread in my heart that there will not be anyone around. Oh! Yes, they are coming. They are just finishing up a homework assignment. In another five minutes, they'll be there. Oh, and it is so-and-so's birthday and we have planned to go out for lunch--can we make sure to be gone by 12:15?



arrived

The plan: Thursday the 25th --second workshop--10:00-12:00.

On Wednesday, late afternoon, I walk into the cafeteria; the students have just been told there will be a film viewing at 10 o'clock tomorrow! Thankfully, we can make arrangements to meet at 8:00, but we will only be able to meet for an hour and a half.

The plan: Thursday the 2nd—third workshop—10:00-12:00. The participants will come prepared to share and weave their autobiographical pieces.

There are no autobiographical pieces ready to be shared or woven together, just a lot of questions and nervous anxiety. The participants spend an hour of this time writing, and decide to weave next Sunday the 5th at 12:00-1:30.

The plan: Sunday the 5th—fourth workshop—12:00-1:30. The participants will weave their autobiographical narratives.

Some participants are late, quite late; there was an unexpected meeting of the Chess Club. We decide today is not a good day to work on the project and reschedule.

The plan: Tuesday the 7th—fifth workshop—12:00-1:30. The participants will weave their autobiographical narratives.

The participants work in groups sharing and weaving their autobiographical narratives.

However, they can only meet for an hour; the first meeting of the Salsa Club has been called for 1:00.

The plan: Thursday the 9th—final workshop—12:00-2:30. The groups will perform their métissage in front of each other. There will be ample time for performance, dialogue and debriefing.



The students perform and dialogue. However, there is not as much time for dialogue as hoped for and no time for debriefing; the salsa lesson has been moved ahead an hour and so the session is cut short by an hour.

The plan: Thursday the 16th—lunch—1:00.

On Monday 13th two participants, who are sisters; inform me that their uncle is visiting from England and a family lunch has just been planned for Thursday! We meet for lunch on Wednesday. It is a lovely time—just enough time to have a leisurely lunch, but not enough time to linger over tea. One of the participants is in a real time crunch!



MARY'S STORY

"Dance is one of my favourite things that I'm good at."—Mary

My dad and my mother are Kurdish, but they were both born in Bagdad. We came to Erbil in 2006, *when I was 15 years old*. I speak Arabic and English, but when I came to Erbil I didn't know how to speak Kurdish. But now I'm good; I can understand everything, *still* I don't *speak as well as I'd like*. I miss Bagdad. It's my home, our house is there, I would like to move back if things would settle. Life in Bagdad was very fine, we had a normal life—well, here it is a normal life too, but in Bagdad it was better. In Bagdad they were more open minded...much more than here...there are more educated people there, and we didn't have **relatives** there...like here.

The problem living here is my **relatives**. *It seems that* maybe half of Erbil is my **relatives** and I hate that. My father's **relatives**, I mean—not my uncles and aunts; they are close to me—but my father's aunts and uncles, I don't like them so much. I have to worry about what the **relatives** think all the time, especially my father's **relatives**. My father hates that also, but he can't do anything, because he knows even if I didn't do anything wrong; we have to think what would they—the **relatives**—say if they saw me? They would say...they would talk about me, but not the real story. They won't say the real story they will add things that didn't happen. For example, we were at a gathering in my father's aunt's house. There were both boys and girls; we were all sitting around. I was sitting between my mother and a boy; my father's cousin. I was talking to the cousin. We were just talking. Four days later I heard that some girls were talking about me; they were saying that I have something with that guy. I didn't do anything, I was just talking to him and everyone could hear me, and I was sitting beside my mother. My mother was there! And they said ...oh my god...that I have something with that guy! I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING. And they said I was talking in a low voice... they added things! And everyone was there. It was very innocent. *That kind of mentality, that kind of thinking wasn't like that in Bagdad*. There my cousins and I were singing, talking, playing together, no one would say anything about us.

That's why the story that I wrote for the métissage is not the story that I wanted to write; but I did write about one of my boundaries. The story I wanted to talk about is just too personal. I

didn't like to say it to the other students; *it's a matter of trust*. I thought they would change their minds about me...having such an experience, especially this experience. It's touchy.

Although, in the story I would have liked to write, I did not do anything wrong and it was only words that he said to me, I didn't tell my family because it would have been a BIG problem for me; especially with the **relatives**. Not a problem with my mom and dad...but with the **relatives**...if they knew about it, it would be—like I would be the bad girl! It would be my fault. It would be my fault because, it happened...*even though I did not plan it to happen, want it to happen*, and the thing is I got hurt a lot at the time, they still would say that it is MY fault. It's really touchy.

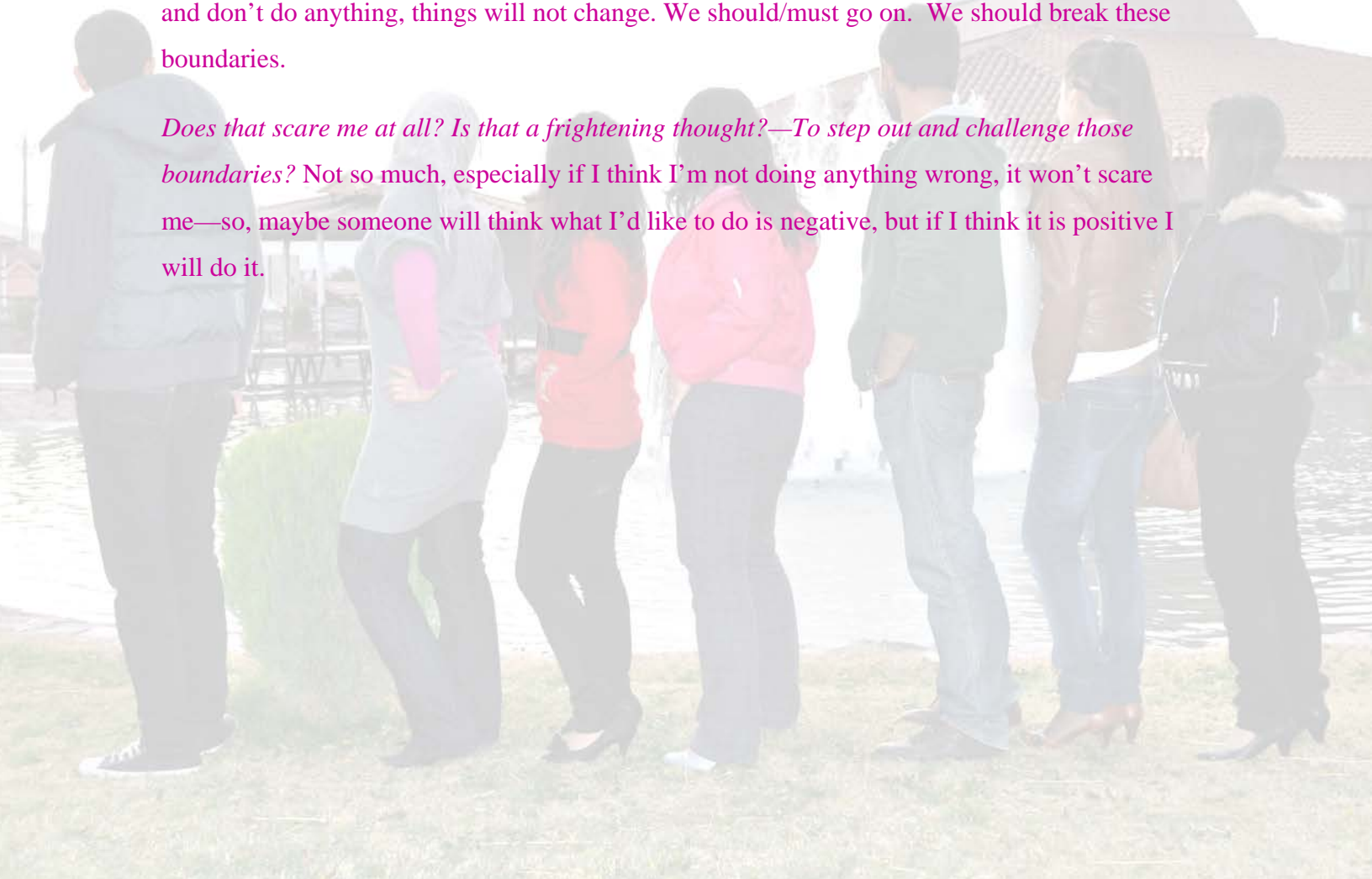
The story I did write was not private, so it was okay for me to share it.

I liked to see what people thought about my story. And I was surprised that everyone has kind of the same story. *Even though Terry is a boy and Bobbi is of a different religion* I still feel that their stories are the same as mine. We are from the same society...it's the same for all of us. I felt sad telling my story because talking about something that I would really like to do and I can't do it, *knowing that* maybe if I were in a different society I could do it, because it's not something bad or something that should be banned, made me sad. Listening to the other's stories made me sad too, their stories are like my story, our stories are all the same...I could feel how they felt...I felt sad.

I was surprised by Terry's story, because I know him, he's my friend...and he never talked about that before. He never said that he loves singing, or that he wants to sing; yeah it surprised me that he had such an experience. I thought he could do anything. I didn't think that his family, who are open minded and free, I thought he can do anything...but no. I was also surprised when Murad said that he would not let his sister date. *Especially when I know* that he did those things—that his family doesn't want, like, break rules. I was surprised when he said boys can do things rather than girls. His ideas about boys and girls—I know that, most of the boys think that girls aren't able to do anything, or they shouldn't have a relationship with a boy, but boys are able to have many relationships. I know that boys think that way. *So, it doesn't give me a better understanding of my society*, but it does give me a better understanding of Murad; I will still respect him as a friend...but I understand his ideas.

Myself—I love métissage. I have changed my mind about so many things by sharing stories...by sharing personal stories. I changed...I changed...like especially in the last 2 months. There are so many things I've changed my mind about. Sometimes I feel like I don't care about society...I don't care about what people say...so now I don't care about my **relatives** so much. It's like um like last year, if someone asked me about my hobby—I *never said—I just wouldn't say dance, because I was too concerned about –* What will they think about me dancing? Oh! She loves dancing...these kinds of things. But, now; it's okay for me to say I love dancing. I feel more confident in myself. Maybe by knowing that everyone had these experiences...everyone has boundaries related to society...*has helped me to change.* If we stay with these traditions/ideas and don't do anything, things will not change. We should/must go on. We should break these boundaries.

Does that scare me at all? Is that a frightening thought?—To step out and challenge those boundaries? Not so much, especially if I think I'm not doing anything wrong, it won't scare me—so, maybe someone will think what I'd like to do is negative, but if I think it is positive I will do it.



LILY'S STORY

"I know that my parents love me a lot and they want what's best for me, but I also think working or finding a job for young girls like me is not bad like they think."—Lily

I was born in Erbil, but now I live in Ankawa. *You might think that because Ankawa is a suburb of Erbil, they are the same*, but I think it's different; in Ankawa there are all Christians. We all know each other, I would like to say it's like we're a family. I am a Catholic, which is to say I'm Chaldean, Iraqi. At home I speak Chaldean, but with friends and in school I speak Arabic, English, Turkish and Kurdish.

I am new to UKH, and I wanted to participate in the project because I thought that there is something new to know, to learn about myself and others and to get benefit from that. And to know each other and to know what's going on. *When the time came to write my story* there were many stories that I would have *or could have written* that are about boundaries...there's not just 1, 2, 3. There are many, but the one I chose, I should feel comfortable with. There is something which I wanted to write, but I didn't feel comfortable or I didn't want others to know about it, so I couldn't write it. It was too personal.

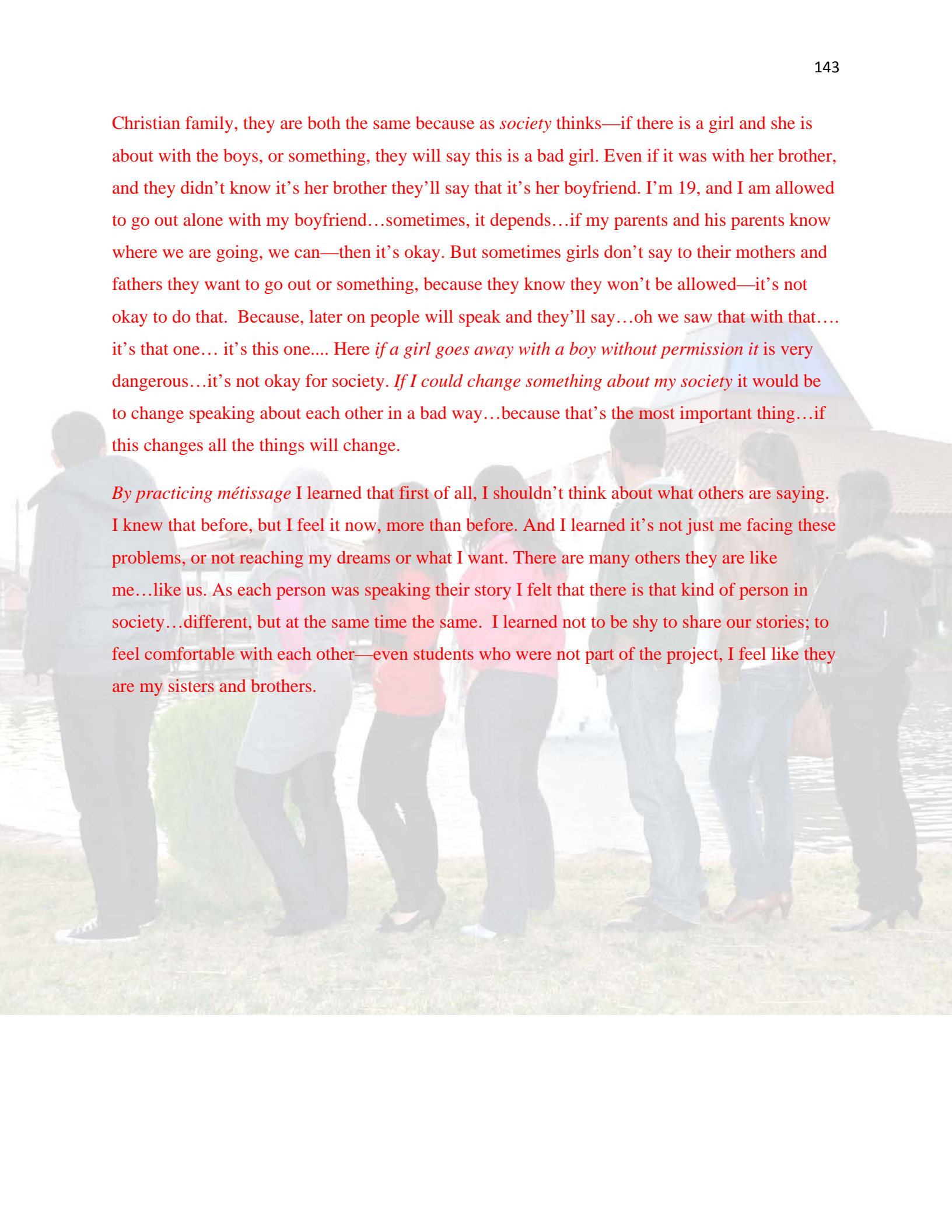
Since the others went before me, I felt comfortable to speak and to tell my story. It was good to share my story...and to see that there was almost the same boundary of "what will they think if you do that?" I felt that it's not just me. They are also like me, and they faced the same problem or the same difficulty, or there's something they wanted, but they couldn't reach it because of what others will say about it.

I wonder why what other people think is so important in my society. I think it *starts off with* the simplest things like when the students go to primary school and if they get good grades the teachers say we hope you will be a doctor in the future. And to be a doctor is more important than to be a teacher. What I mean...what I want to say is that...like my father or other fathers, they will be more proud of their children to be a doctor than to be a teacher or something lower like that...So that others will say his girl is a doctor or an engineer...so *it says something about the parents*...if the children are doing well.

When it comes to boundaries for girls I wasn't surprised because I have seen many girls that their families don't let them do what they want. It doesn't depend that this is a Muslim or this is a

Christian family, they are both the same because as *society* thinks—if there is a girl and she is about with the boys, or something, they will say this is a bad girl. Even if it was with her brother, and they didn't know it's her brother they'll say that it's her boyfriend. I'm 19, and I am allowed to go out alone with my boyfriend...sometimes, it depends...if my parents and his parents know where we are going, we can—then it's okay. But sometimes girls don't say to their mothers and fathers they want to go out or something, because they know they won't be allowed—it's not okay to do that. Because, later on people will speak and they'll say...oh we saw that with that.... it's that one... it's this one.... Here *if a girl goes away with a boy without permission* it is very dangerous...it's not okay for society. *If I could change something about my society* it would be to change speaking about each other in a bad way...because that's the most important thing...if this changes all the things will change.

By practicing métissage I learned that first of all, I shouldn't think about what others are saying. I knew that before, but I feel it now, more than before. And I learned it's not just me facing these problems, or not reaching my dreams or what I want. There are many others they are like me...like us. As each person was speaking their story I felt that there is that kind of person in society...different, but at the same time the same. I learned not to be shy to share our stories; to feel comfortable with each other—even students who were not part of the project, I feel like they are my sisters and brothers.

A group of about seven people, including men and women, are standing on a grassy area near a body of water. They are all looking towards a large building with a blue roof in the background. The scene is outdoors and appears to be a public space or a waterfront area.

The best laid plans...

Maybe...it's cultural.

Maybe...it's good manners that one never refuses a friend.

Maybe...etiquette demands a positive response.

Maybe...I knew it would be tricky.

Maybe...I knew it would catch me out.

The thing is I know what "maybe" means. It means "No--there is no hope--can't be done--not going to do it, but I can't tell you that to your face because it would be disrespectful. It would embarrass you, and culturally one of my most important values is that a person's (yours and mine) dignity, honour, and reputation should be protected at all times. That necessitates that I give a positive response, even when I know the answer is no." I know that it is called for culturally, but for me, it lends a degree of uncertainty to situations, because I never know-- do they mean maybe, as I would use it; I am not sure but I'll try, or-- do they mean maybe the way they would use it; no can't be done?



I never really knew who sincerely wanted to be a part of the project and I never knew how many participants to expect at any one workshop. I started out with seventeen participants signed up from the two orientation meetings. For the first workshop thirteen participants showed up, the next work shop there were eleven participants, but they were a different mix than from the first workshop,

and there were some who hadn't signed up at first, but had asked to join, so they came along. The same thing happened for the next workshop. If I saw any of the students, in between workshops, I would try to ascertain whether they were still interested in doing the project. When asked they would say "maybe", even if they hadn't come since the first workshop!! But then some, who didn't come to the first workshop, only came to the third workshop, but some who came to the first workshop missed the second but came to the third...and some...

I think you get the idea...maybe?



SKO'S STORY

"As far as I remember I was nearly five and a half years old, just a little girl. I longed to be at school"—Sko

When I thought about writing my autobiography and I thought about boundaries, I did think about writing other stories. But, I couldn't...like they were so really personal. I thought it might not be good for me to share it. I thought it would be too...Shameful...I'd feel bad about myself if I told someone that story. Well maybe a lot of girls had the same problem or story, but, I said no I'll keep it. So, I decided to write a safe story. One where I didn't have to worry about what they are going to say about me behind my back. I know what it's like here. Erbil is my hometown. I've lived here for 19 years...my whole life. We're not originally Kurdish. We came to Kurdistan from Turkey and settled here. My father tells me I'm Kurdish because we've been here for a long time, and we have been fighting for the Kurds and against the enemy of the Kurds and we have been living with the Kurds for a long time. Like I said, I decided to keep my story simple because people here make-up things. They hear something small and they make it bigger and bigger, and they talk about you behind your back. And that really hurts when you hear it. If I wrote what I wanted, somebody might say "Oh Sko said that" because they have proof...I wrote a story about it...it's going to be a big problem for me, so I decided to just keep it simple.

I really wanted to listen to other people's stories. When I was listening I felt like

*those are my stories,
my stories are coming out
that's inside me,
what they are saying, what they are reading...is inside me.
it's not only me...they have the same stories.*

Especially the girls, they were the same as mine...the same as inside me...the same in the way that society prevents...religion prevents...what are people going to say about you?

Both Christian and Muslim girls shared the same boundaries—we're the same thing! Exactly the same! I'm a Muslim—I didn't know—I thought that it's okay for Christians to do things, but in Islam they prevent us, but it's the same thing I saw! I learned that they have the same kinds of feelings that I have, the same story that I have. I didn't know before, but when they were sharing their stories I felt like they were reading words inside me.

I realized that if it's the same borders for Muslim and Christians then it must be society—tradition that puts these borders on us, not religion. Like here the society thinks boys and girls are different; the way they think is different the way they act is different, so the borders for each of them are different. But, at the same time, in religion borders are the same for boys and girls...but in tradition—no—it's not the same. Here people mix-up religion and tradition. In religion—it says it's taboo...it's haraam... for boys to have a girlfriend and girls to have a boyfriend. But, in tradition it's okay for boys, but it's not okay for girls. So, they say well its religion, religion said that. But the religion doesn't say that...it's tradition.

*Girls can't have boyfriends. If you have, you can't imagine what they're going to tell...what they're going to say about you...what kind of person you are. Like here they may kill a girl! They may murder her because she has a boyfriend. But, they may clap for the boy if he has a girlfriend. Tradition—it's a really big boundary. Because of tradition they think...like when they have daughters, when they have a girl, when they have a sister, it's like we are their honour. Boys here—they don't have honour if they don't have a sister...it's like that—we are their honour. So, they have to keep their honour and if we do something that is not accepted by society—by tradition—they have to bring back their honour. *What is honour?*—honour is a girl. *The responsibility* is on girls to do the things that tradition accepts. If the girls *don't break the rules*, if they listen to the traditions, then men have a really big honour.*

Is it like that in my family? Even though I am going to a western style-university, I wear very trendy western clothes, I am able to participate in many school activities, go shopping by myself—yes, of course, they think like that...because they are in this society—I'm their honour. They say we are an open minded family, but about their honour, they are not open minded.

*Doing métissage was like...I knew about our society, but it was all here... it was all in my mind. It wasn't written on a paper, it wasn't like put in order...doing métissage put it on paper... it was before my eyes, I could see it...it made things real. *What I only knew in my head* I now know it is real.*

I feel differently about my classmates because I didn't know that they have these borders. Before, métissage, I thought if I would tell this story, they're going to make fun of me, or they're going to laugh at me, but now I feel comfortable. Even if I talk about something in society they

won't take it as a weird thing. It's okay for them to hear it. Like before I was thinking, it's not okay because we are different, we have different religions, so it may be different for them. But now I know they can understand me, because they have the same feeling, they have the same stories.

Now I know we are the same, *Arab, Kurdish, Christian, Muslim*, I think about us differently. I feel different.



Wrapping-up what won't be wrapped.

I must confess I am in a dilemma—how do I bring this project to an end? Although, together we have been continually analysing and interpreting and discovering as I have been writing and you have been reading, and even though we have discussed the challenges/trials of carrying out my project in *The Best Laid Plans*, I know, dearest reader, you are still wondering what I thought about the process; was the project successful, did it meet my expectations, were there surprises, tensions, lingering doubts? My desire is to find a way to share my reflections in a manner that celebrates and values narrative métissage as an arts-based research practice that is based in postmodern/postructural sensibilities.

In *Métissage: Up Close and Personal* I remember sharing with you that the authors did not end their narratives in neatly wrapped boxes tied with pretty ribbons; the narratives did not come to conclusive findings, they were not prescriptive, instead they were generative in that they allowed for multiple interpretations and reader/audience response, attending to the assumption that knowledge reflects the multi-dimensional, intersubjective, and contextual nature of the human experience. Also, in *Telling Stories* I shared my conviction that arts-based research invites multiple perspectives and “disregards notions of verification, reliability, and facticity for plural truths rooted in the personal.”¹ This then means there is ambiguity to the research. Clarity in writing is a kind of oppression;² it tells the capital T truth—closing down conversations to other perspectives and possibilities, while ambiguity opens to newness; it is a way of advancing possibility. Ambiguity means ripe for reinvention, reconstruction, reimagining, reinterpretation of the world around us. I do not want to tell you how to respond, what knowledge to take away with you. I will not argue a thesis or prove a case. Through my writing I have tried to share with you my reflexivity, my motivations, my insights, my biases, my

¹Ronald J. Pelias, *Writing Performance: Poeticizing the Researcher's Body* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999) xi.

² Minh-ha T. Trihn, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University press, 1989) 17.

doubts—never did/do I desire my narrative to prove authority, my aim has been/is to displace/trouble authorial perspective with the intention of encouraging dialogue between you and I, dearest reader. So, pardon me please, if while wrapping-up, I leave some ends loose, dangling, seemingly unattended to—they are meant to be so—for how else dearest reader will we reinvent, reconstruct, reimagine, reinterpret? How else will we continue the conversation/s that we have begun?

Reflections:

Reflections on the absence of trust.

Murad: "No no...I really feel I can't trust anyone to the maximum, so I can't tell them everything."

Terry: "I don't share my secrets with anyone...don't want anyone to know much about me. I just don't like it. Even my friends here, I am sure they don't know much about me. I know, of course, it's an issue of trust."

She seems reticent to leave, to end the conversation, to say goodbye. I sense she has something specific to say. So, I wait while she tells me it's her boyfriend's birthday today. She is going to meet him later on and give him a shirt she has bought for him, and then they and their families are going to have dinner together. She tells me that both the families are excited about and approve of their relationship. They've been seeing each other for over a year and he and the families feel like it is time for them to be engaged, get married and have children. And this it seems is what she wants to tell me—although she loves her boyfriend and would like to get married, she doesn't want to do that now. She has dreams of graduating, of getting a job, of being independent, and then of getting married. She is feeling really pressured to give in—to give up her dreams. Then she tells me—this is the autobiographical story she would like to write for her métissage piece, but she's not going to write it. No one at the university knows she has a boyfriend and if they knew about him, if they knew the families wanted them to get married and she didn't want to get married—they

would never understand this as a limitation, because a girl in her society is supposed to want all those things. Marriage, family, the home—this is what her purpose in life is—and she doesn't want it. She would like to write these things—but she won't because she can't trust that her classmates will understand her—it will make life difficult for her. She was the first to tell me that because of trust issues she was not going to write the autobiographical story she wanted, but she certainly was not the last.

Do you remember me recounting the experience of my first week at the University of Kurdistan—when, in an attempt to ascertain the students' writing skills, I asked them to write about the happiest day or the worst day of their lives, and some of the students wrote heart-wrenching, tragic, traumatic retellings of horrific deaths, families torn apart, lives uprooted, suffering, helplessness, hopelessness, fear and anguish? When I theorized narrative métissage as a vehicle for peace education these were the kinds of stories I envisioned the participants writing. After all, these are the kinds of stories that deal with collective narratives of the "Other" that form the bases of stereotypes and prejudices held of the "Other" that peace education indicates must be confronted/resolved if it is to be successful. Aren't they?

My reaction to the autobiographical piece, you ask?

You would think that with a theme like "boundaries" there would be many weighty, pithy, meaty, rich, robust stories that could be told, particularly in an intra-conflict society like Kurdistan. It's disappointing. Some of the stories seem simplistic, unsophisticated. It doesn't seem like there has been much self-reflexivity, much engaging with the culture, analysis or criticism. I can't imagine them learning about themselves or other or the world or their place in it. I can't imagine how these stories will generate dialogue. I can't imagine how these stories can lead to personal and collective transformation. I can't imagine how these stories will deal with the collective narrative that informs stereotypes and prejudices held of the "Other."

Why is it that I feel that the autobiographical pieces need to be "horrific" for narrative métissage to generate empathy and understanding of self/other in an intra-conflict situation? Am I exoticizing/ "othering" intra-conflict societies and the people who live in them? Why did I

think, or really did I think? Is it another glaring lack on my part? After all, I had spent a year of countless hours with Kurdish, Arabic, Muslim, Christian, etc., students—where was my appreciation of the local context?—Did I really think the students would share their deepest personal stories? Would I expect that kind of trust, or vulnerability in Canada?

Why, when I first read the autobiographical pieces, did I immediately lose trust in the process of narrative métissage? Even though I understood it is the process that is important, I had to keep reminding myself—the process in the writing of the autobiographical text is important; it requires them to research their own lives, engage with their culture generating understanding about themselves and the world around them.³ The process of weaving the texts is important; it invites/encourages a hermeneutic enquiry within the author circle as well as with the audience during the métissage performance.⁴ The process of performance/discussion is important; they will use their bodies as sites of knowledge, they will engage in critical reflection imagining new ways to see/be in their world. The discussion is a site for community dialogue to critique dominant cultural assumptions. It's not the product that's important!!—it's the process that leads to understanding and empathy/the breaking down of stereotypes and prejudice—I had to keep reminding myself!

Body tipping forward, eyes brilliant with disbelief—“I had no idea that his family would say no to him...a guy! I was shocked because, they lived in Bagdad. Bagdad is the place where there are so many different kinds of people; you think that they will be open-minded—No, I didn't know people in Bagdad would say no to a guy. Maybe in Mosul they would say no to a guy if he wanted to do something he likes—but highly unlikely—that would be strange. I was shocked because he is a guy...and it seems okay for guys to do anything...but his family also told him he couldn't do that because—“what will people say about you?” Sarah

³ Erica Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, and Carl Leggo, *Literary Metissage as an Ethos for our Times*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

Forehead furrowed in earnestness—“When I heard Mary’s story, my reaction was—I couldn’t believe that a girl who is Muslim, who’s wearing hijab, would think like that. You know, trying to be liberated, trying to be progressive...I thought because she is Muslim she is going to be, like, different.” Bobbi

Voice quivering with uncontrollable excitement—“Both Christian and Muslim girls shared the same boundaries—we’re the same thing! Exactly the same! I’m a Muslim—I didn’t know—I thought that it’s okay for Christians to do things, but in Islam they prevent us, but it’s the same thing I saw! I learned that they have the same kinds of feelings, that I have, the same story that I have. I didn’t know before, but when they were sharing their stories I felt like they were reading words inside me!...I realized that if it’s the same borders for Muslim and Christians, then it must be society—tradition that puts these borders on us, not religion.”
Sko

Consternation at the awakening to a new idea—consternation at the death of old ideals—flit across his countenance, in the struggle to make sense—“Dating for girls is forbidden in Islam. Yes, I know that in Islam it is equal for men and women—neither is supposed to date. Yeah...I don’t know... because I’m kind of confused about that, because I want to think that ...well I know that I want to date. And I can date and I have dated several times. She is older than me, and yet I can date...but she can’t...and she is limited...and in Islam both aren’t supposed to date and if she cannot date I’m not supposed to date—but I can’t do that! Yea, I’m a little confused about that.” Murad

Reflections on the presence of trust.

Sko: “You made me feel like it’s okay to say things, because you will do it in a secretive (confidential) way. So, I kind of felt relieved ‘cause I know I’m not dealing with a person who is going to say “Oh! oh! oh!...she felt like that!” I know that you will accept me, you would accept my idea. That’s why I felt kind of comfortable with this.”

Mary: "Ah...I thought about telling you the story, like just you alone, but I didn't like to say it in front of the students. Um...it's about _____, so, I don't like to share it with other people. But I'd like you...if you want to? Can I say it briefly? Can I tell you?"

Lily: "It is a boundary for me, but I don't want the others to know. You're easy to talk to...um...I feel like I can trust you."

Bobbi: "These are things I can't say...I can't write about them because I don't wanna hurt my parents. And if I write about them, maybe they'll find out and I think it would hurt them. I'm glad I had the chance to talk to you."

I remember reading about the watershed moment in social science research during the mid-1980s, known as the 'crisis of representation' where issues of authorship, authenticity and responsibility were highlighted.⁵ I remember reading that researchers are now very aware that as they speak about the people they study, they also speak for them. They recognize that not only do they have a choice in how they represent their data, and in so doing re/constructing social reality, they also have an obligation to choose to represent their data in moral and ethical ways, particularly when it comes to representing the "voice of the other." I remember thinking "voice" issues are easily/obviously answered by narrative métissage. My participants will have agency in choosing the theme, interpreting the theme on a personal/individual basis, writing the story they want to tell, in the way they wish to tell it. In the written text that is created after the weaving and during the métissage performance, each individual's voice will be as important as

⁵ N.K. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, "The Discipline and practice of Qualitative Research" 1-32 in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed., eds. N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (London: Sage, 2005). The mid-1980s constituted a watershed time for many social science research/researchers. Postmodern and post-structural perspectives in research questioned the assumption that qualitative researchers can directly capture lived experiences. Denzin and Lincoln explain "Poststructuralism and postmodernism have contributed to understanding that there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of and between the observer and the observed. Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions, about what they have done and why. No single method can grasp all the subtle variations in ongoing human experience." (Ibid., 21) This growing uncertainty about the adequate means of representing social reality foreshadowed and triggered what is generally considered in social science research as a "crisis of representation." The crisis of representation arose out of ethical concerns and has had several consequences for today's qualitative researcher/inquiry.

*the others'. I remember thinking that because narrative métissage is about the telling of the stories of our lives, I would re/present my data collection by telling stories—I would tell the story of my participants and their experience of practicing métissage using their own words from their interviews, but I would choose the order, placement, and spacing of the words, moving them around into an engaging story—one that would capture their personality—make them real to the audience—while trying to remain true to the sense-making process and intention of the participant. I remember thinking this kind of data re/presentation coincides with what Andrew Sparkes' description of embodied research writing should do; it "engages the reader emotionally; uses the individual's voice in sensitive and meaningful ways; touches us where we live, in our bodies, and allows the researcher and reader to step into the shoes of the other,"⁶ just as arts-based research is intended to do. Yet it also attends to issues of "voice." I remember thinking about the responsibility of representing data in moral and ethical ways. And when I thought about it, I always envisioned that responsibility through the lens of how to go about sharing the words and the stories of the participants. What I never imagined was making ethical and moral issues about **not sharing** the words and the stories of the participants. I never imagined hearing stories that they wanted to tell...stories of import...that would lend insight and interest to both the research project and the research site. Stories, dear reader, you would find captivating and thought-provoking, as I did, never-the-less: the stories were entrusted to me.*

Reflections on practicing narrative métissage to foster empathy and understanding of/for self/other.

When I read Elliot Eisner's conviction that the arts can help us find our individual capacity to feel and imagine and that through the arts we can learn to "create a life worth living,"⁷ it became somewhat of a mantra for me—narrative métissage as arts-based research could/can enable the participants to imagine/create a life worth living. The scholarship of Erika Hasebe-Ludt,

⁶ Andrew C. Sparkes, *Telling tales in Sport and Physical Activity: A Qualitative Journey*, (Canada: Human Kinetics, 2002), 24.

⁷ Elliot W. Eisner, "The Misunderstood Role of the Arts in Human Development" *The Phi Delta Kappan* 73, no. 8 (1992): 595.

Cynthia Chambers and Carl Leggo in "Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times" encouraged me that narrative métissage can help participants to reach across boundaries of ethnicity, language, gender and religion not only fostering empathy and understanding of self-other, but to envision a better future for themselves.⁸ Connelly's and Clandinin's work emboldened me to believe that through writing and telling their stories the participants will rewrite and retell their stories and by doing so begin to transform themselves and see new possibilities.⁹ From exciting peace education initiatives like those of Dan Bar-On, Fatma Kassem, and Tal Litvak Hirsch I learned that sharing personal narratives enables empathy and builds relationships between groups.¹⁰ Yes, as idealistic as it sounds I truly believe/d that by sharing their stories the participants would/did gain insight into self/other and the world around them. It was not difficult to imagine that by practising narrative métissage the participants' lives would be transformed on both an individual and collective basis.

Mary: "I love métissage. I have changed my mind about so many things by sharing stories...by sharing personal stories. I changed...I changed...like especially in the last 2 months. There are so many things I've changed my mind about...sometimes I feel like I don't care about society...I don't care about what people say. So, now I don't care about my relatives so much. I feel more confident in myself."

Terry: "I have learned that I really want to keep secrets, but I learned I feel better if I share them with someone. I'm going to be more open...I think. My ideas about the process and how it has affected me carries on...I think maybe there are many things (insights) I still don't know about yet."

⁸ Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, and Carl Leggo, *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 29.

⁹ F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin "Telling Teaching Stories" *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 21, no. 1 (1994): 152.

¹⁰ Dan Bar-On and Fatma Kassem. "Storytelling as a Way to Work Through Intractable Conflicts: The German-Jewish experience and its relevance to the Palestinian-Israeli context." *Journal of Social Issues* 60 (2004): 289-306.

Sarah: "When I think about Mary not being able to dance because of her traditions, religion, I feel sorry for her. I feel like why does religion have to be like a wall standing in front of her?"

Bobbi: "Honestly I didn't care about the others in this experience, I just thought like...just go for it and see what's going to happen to me. I wasn't trying to be selfish; I just thought I would hear their stories, but I'm not going to remember all their ideas, but...um...I know...the point is I know...I know now. I know how they feel. I know that they have the same thing that I have, which is trying to be liberated from this society...from these ideas. I know that I can sympathize with others."

Sko: "Now I know we are the same, Arab, Kurdish, Christian, Muslim, I think about us differently. I feel different."

Murad: "After doing the métissage I decided to apply to universities abroad, because I learned that there is still something inside of me; I don't want to stay here and keep myself inside this society...I want to break free of these limitations!"

It is difficult to judge if /how these insights, revelations, new understandings transformed the participants' lives. However: *When salsa lessons continued after the Christmas break Mary joined the class—She didn't perform with the group on Valentine's Day (although she wanted to)... but it was FANTASTIC!*

Reflections on lingering doubts .

Dan Bar-On, an experienced scholar of peace education in the Israeli/Palestinian context indicates that for peace education initiatives to be long lasting, they should be carried out over a significant period of time.¹¹

"Seriously, Sheila, how much do you think you can accomplish in that amount of time?" is what I read written in the margin of my paper delineating my research project; research

¹¹ Tal Litvak Hirsch, "The Use of Stories as a Tool for Intervention and Research in the Arena of Peace Education in Conflict Areas: the Israeli–Palestinian Story," *Journal of Peace Education* 3 (2006): 251–271. Internet <http://www.tandfonline.com> accessed October, 7, 2011.

topic/question, methodology, procedures, background, etc...From the get-go, Dr. X and I have not been on the same page. And I am not surprised, because I once heard him in the photocopy room discussing—for all to hear—his very negative opinion of a dissertation incorporating autoethnography—“How can anybody take that navel-gazing seriously?” So, a few semesters later when I must take a core course with him, I already have an idea of what he is going to think of narrative métissage and arts-based research methodology. He does not understand me—calls me Mother Theresa—meant as a little inside class joke—however, I understand that he thinks what I am doing is all pie-in-the-sky—idealistic. Peace education he gets—but not the kind of research I am doing—not quantitative enough! Anyway, I read the remark in the margin—and have to admit he might have a point.

For this research project, I placed narrative métissage under the peace education umbrella. Did it deal with the collective narratives of the “other” as has been indicated by Bar-On that a successful peace education initiative must deal with in an intra-conflict society like Kurdistan’s? To answer that question, narrative métissage needs to be practiced over a sustained period of time—longer than this project allowed for. More research needs to be done. In answer to Dr. X’s question, “Seriously, Sheila, how much do you think you can accomplish in that amount of time?”—according to the participants’ stories, practising narrative métissage for “that amount of time” (7 ½ hours in workshop) created a space for fostering empathy and understanding of self/other and for confronting stereotypes and prejudices. By doing so, the participants have socially constructed knowledge about themselves and their worlds, inspiring new ways of seeing/ being in the world—life changing.

I was excited that my research had the potential to be life changing on an individual and collective basis. So, I wonder, why it is that when I hear/read...

Murad declaring “I want to break free of these limitations,” or Mary’s earnest “Sometimes I feel like I don’t care about society. If we don’t do anything, things will never change. We should/must go on. We must break these boundaries,” or Lily’s quiet voice saying “I learned,

first of all, I shouldn't think about what others are saying. I knew that before, but I feel it now, more than before."

I feel uneasy...have they awakened to self/other and their world around them and to the desire to transform their lives in a milieu/culture/society/time that will accept the change they foresee?

I feel nervous...how will this awakening play out in their everyday lives?

I feel scared...especially for the girls...will they navigate their desires for change safely?

I feel responsible...I envisioned, hoped for, personal agency to change lives and worlds—is personal agency one of my western values, one that doesn't belong here in the participants' world?

The performance of the métissage opened up a space for dialogue; they were absolutely amazed at the similarities of each of their stories. I found it interesting that they focused on the similarities of their narratives—this really was a major theme of the discussion. There was a sincere back and forth sharing of ideas. The discussion eventually turned to societal expectations of gender roles when Murad indicated that of course his sisters should not be allowed to date. This was very upsetting to the girls; at a crucial point in the discussion we ran out of time before the troubling issue could be satisfactorily talked through.

Sarah: "I was so shocked about what he said, he was like my brother. I talked to him...I used to say everything to him like he was my little brother...and he also said things to me, but I don't know after what he said, maybe that will limit some things."

Mary: "It does give me a better understanding of Murad; I will still respect him as a friend...but I understand his ideas."

Narrative métissage requires the participants to write autobiographical pieces; this involves memory work, and writing about feelings, and emotions: it is difficult to anticipate/predict what could trigger painful, emotional individual responses. As part of the University of Victoria's Application for Ethics Approval for Human Participant Research, and for my own personal

convictions, I was required to make available a trained counselor for the participants. When I left the University of Kurdistan in July of 2008, there was a nurse who was also a trained counselor. I thought that it would be as simple as being in touch with the nurse, informing her of the project and what it entailed and the possibility that some participants may desire counseling. Then I would inform the participants that the school nurse/counselor knows about the project, and she is available if they desire counseling. However, when I arrived at UKH to carry out my research, I found out that there was no longer any sort of trained counseling personnel. It was very difficult to find a trained counselor—a few of the NGOs offered counseling—of the two known licensed practitioners that they employed, one was out of the country and the other was practicing in another city. A wonderful colleague (who literally saved my research project) who has lived and worked in Erbil since 2004 and who is very involved with the Christian community, spent considerable hours/effort playing sleuth, finding the information about the NGO counseling programs, tracking down one of the licensed practitioners, calling her to ask if there was anyone who could offer counseling. The licensed counselor recommended Dunya, who is not licensed but works very closely with the licensed practitioners. Also, although she is Christian, she has significant experience counseling both Christian and Muslim populations.

Dunya graciously invited me into her home one evening, where over a cup of typical Kurdish tea—strong and very sweet—I explained the project. She was very interested and expressed a real appreciation of the benefits of participating in the project—she quickly offered to help out. We agreed that, if a participant wanted counseling, I would pay for the first session and if there was a need for further consultation then they would make arrangements on their own. To ensure privacy, we set it up that the students would have her contact information, so they did not have to go through me, and she would not mention any names if she had to be in touch with me. Our business soon concluded; we spent the rest of the evening in animated conversation, as we discovered we have a lot in common. I sometimes despaired whether I would get the project off the ground—and if truth be known, sometimes I thought, what a lot of fuss—just for the outside—long outside—chance that someone would need counseling.

Sarah: "I want to let it go, that happened...we're never going to be together. I want to let it go. I want to let myself be free. I'm trying to get over it. I'm trying to move on. I have a new relationship, but I feel like I am cheating or betraying him. I don't know how to deal with that. I feel like I'm in a deep hole...it's hard...it's like there is a pressure on my chest." is when I stopped the recorder. We spent the next half hour talking—the discussion ending with me encouraging Sarah to go and have a talk with Dunya. I never heard from Dunya that any of the participants met with her.

You may wonder at why I chose to highlight these insights, events, themes and doubts. You may or may not have chosen to focus on these aspects yourself. You might or might not agree with my interpretations. Perchance you think that I have neglected a glaringly important insight and wondered at how/why I have missed it. Laurel Richardson indicates that depending upon each person's 'situatedness' research is experienced/responded to/taken up differently. Research that attends to this kind of crystalline validity¹² has the potential for a multiplicity of outcomes and impacts, which would be a delightfully welcome outcome not only to my reflections on the research project, but to my dissertation itself.

¹² Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 92.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The writing and the telling has come to an end, dearest reader. Nostalgia abounds as I remember the moments in my life as a doctoral student—the enabling, empowering, inspiring moments, that helped envision narrative métissage as a curricular vehicle for fostering understanding and empathy, that led to the understanding of storytelling as research site and that data re/presentation could be arts-based scholarship presented in artful, sensual, empathic ways; scholarship that is satisfying both aesthetically and intellectually. I remember those moments...

I was listening to Dr. Antoinette Oberg,¹ a guest lecturer in Dr. Wanda Hurren's class. She was talking about fractal geometry and how she used the ideas of repeating patterns in nature to help her graduate students find what it is that they are interested in researching. She asked them to look at their life experiences, how they spent their time, what they loved to do, what was close to their hearts, in order to seek out patterns. These patterns would lead them to identify what kind of research they wanted to do, how they wanted to do it and what it was they were interested in studying. For a time, it seemed, she and I were the only people in the room. She was talking to me, exhorting me to look at my own life; to ask myself what have I learned, where has my life taken me, what interests me, what am I passionate about? Was it going to be as simple as looking at my own life, finding the patterns that would help me discover myself in my research project?

My first experience as a reader/audience of narrative métissage in, "Métissage: A Research Praxis"² captures my attention: The political scientist in me immediately recognizes how political the text is. I am amazed that although the text is autobiographical, the topic is not the self—the self is the site/sight of enquiry; the site/sight of enquiry is the individual life,

¹Antoinette Oberg, University of Victoria, November, 2008.

²Cynthia Chambers, Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Dwayne Donald, Wanda Hurren, Carl Leggo, and Antoinette Oberg, "Métissage: A Research Praxis". In *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples and Issues*, ed. J. Garry Knowles and Adra Cole Los Angeles, (CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 141-153.

the topic is about something in society. Autobiography is the experience of the human condition that is found in this particular/individual life. We learn from and through stories, and it is exactly this, the narrative and the autobiographical voice in narrative métissage that illuminates the human condition and crafts narrative métissage as a powerful and dynamic research practice.

A hot muggy late August afternoon in Victoria--I am desperately trying to focus on the reading for my summer course work--Larry's daughter and 3 grandchildren are visiting from Ottawa. Soooo many bodies in our big-enough-for-two people apartment--never mind, it is wonderfully chaotic! I am reading Deborah Barndt's "Touching Minds and Hearts: Community Arts as Collaborative Research,"³ I read that when people have the opportunity to share their stories they affirm their lives as places of knowledge and stimulate each other in collective knowledge construction. This in turn brings empowerment and the impetus for social change--the room goes still, quiet -- it is just me and my thoughts--as I comprehend the power/the benefit of arts-based research and narrative métissage.

Finally getting it!--"the third space"--Homi Bhabha's⁴ theory of cultural and social transformation. A theory that offers hope that even in the midst of what seems to be incommensurable differences, there is the possibility of change, that positions of polarity can be budged, and that cultural binarism can be avoided. Reading theory that fits my life like a glove--Bhabha theorizing my lived experience!

The day I first heard of Ted Aoki; I could never have imagined his curriculum theorizing would turn my conception of curriculum inside out and upside down--who knew that curriculum was not necessarily a document--or a plan of action? Curriculum is lived! Curriculum is "being concerned with dwelling aright in thoughtful living with others."⁵ It is

³ Deborah Barndt, "Touching Minds and Hearts: Community Arts as Collaborative Research". In *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples and issues*. Ed. J. Gary Knowles and Adra Cole, (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 354.

⁴ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁵ Ted Aoki, "Inspiring the Curriculum" chap. 22 in *Curriculum in a New Key: The Selected Works of Ted. T. Aoki*, edited by William Pinar and Rita Irwin, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 365.

“embodied thoughtfulness that makes possible a living as a human being.”⁶ It is being “open to the call of what it means to be deeply human and heeding the call to walk with others in life’s adventures.”⁷ It is Aoki’s theorizing that helps me understand that curriculum “is about understanding self in the world and how we make sense of the various ways to be in the world,”⁸ and that it “should compel us to move beyond what we have been and to encounter a new possibility for collective exchange,”⁹ while “work[ing] towards producing cultural understanding and actively valuing cultural diversity.”¹⁰

Those were good moments, life-changing moments, moments to cherish. It is bittersweet for me to be finishing this journey—

The flat, located on top of a dental office, isn’t big. Of course, there’s a bedroom, a tiny kitchen—just enough room to turn around, a bathroom—much tinier than the kitchen, and then there’s this room; it, also, is not big. She glances around, notices the curtains—pheasants, irises, peonies—Victorian, some of the loops and hooks are broken, they hang askance—an eyesore. The furniture; a loveseat, table and chairs, coffee table, credenza—all Ikea—all having seen better times. She takes in the books on the credenza—hard to miss—books and piles of photocopied chapters and articles; precious cargo that she has carted half-way around the world to Kurdistan and now here to London. Street traffic hums in the background as her gaze lingers on postcards of van Gogh’s “Sunflowers,” Monet’s

⁶ Ibid., 365.

⁷ Ibid., 365.

⁸ Wanda Hurren, University of Victoria, unpublished document.

⁹ Judith Butler, “Transformative Encounters”, in *Women and Social transformation*, ed. Ebeck Gernsheim, J.L. Butler, and L. Puigvert (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001) in Janet L. Miller, “Curriculum Studies and Transnational Flows and Mobilities: Feminist Autobiographical Perspectives”, *Journal of Transnational Curriculum Inquiry* 3, no. 2 (2006):31 Internet Access www.ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/tci/article/viewfile/30/48 14 May, 2011.

¹⁰ Noel Gough, “A Vision for Transnational Curriculum Inquiry”, *The Journal of Transnational Curriculum Inquiry*, 1, no. 1 (2004): 6 Internet access www.nitinat.library.ubc.ca/ojs/index.php/tci 13 May, 2011.

“Antibes,” and “Vase of Flowers” by Gauguin—reminders of the thrill of seeing the originals at the National Gallery. As she sits in her creaky, though comfortable Ikea swivel chair, it too having seen better days, and crosses the last “t”s and dots the last “i”s to her dissertation ...she is amazed that it is here, in this little non-descript flat, in this slightly shabby room that she has spent months now, writing, telling, pouring out her stories...and the stories came tumbling out, spilling over. The telling hadn’t always been easy—some stories, excruciatingly private, intimate—she felt vulnerable, exposed. Sometimes the telling was tough—stories having to be wrenched out—confronting biases and stereotypes, looking inwards and being implicated—not a pretty sight. Yet, there was satisfaction too. She thinks of her participants, of having met them, worked with them, and the privilege of sharing their stories. The crafting of the tumbled, spilled, wrenched—research—lived experience—into evocative and provocative prose, inviting the audience to live and experience vicariously, to respond emotionally, remembering and thinking about their own memories, feelings and experiences, yet prompting and encouraging back and forth conversations over what may be competing versions of interpretations, had been a wonderfully pleasurable challenge. She wrote and told and crafted, hoping the reading would be engaging—could it be too much to hope for—that as in a good novel—the audience would become immersed in the reading, lost in the culture, captivated by the participants? And just as in a good novel—not want it to end—to continue thinking about the content and context and interpretations, and the lived experience—hers, the participants, and their own? Could it be too much to hope that, through the reading, the world is seen through new eyes—she wondered, could she craft such a dissertation? She came to this tiny flat, above the dentist shop, with its curtains hanging askance, its seen-better-days furniture, its comfortable swivel chair, to write...

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