

**Islam, Arts And Renewal Of Thought: An Integral
Approach To Art Advocacy, Visual Literacy And
Engagement In The Muslim Communities Of Cape
Town, South Africa**

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I declare that the research project, **Islam, Arts and Renewal of Thought: An Integral Approach to Art Advocacy, Visual Literacy and Engagement in the Muslim Communities of Cape Town, South Africa**, is my work and that each source of information used has been acknowledged using a complete reference. This dissertation has not been submitted before for any other research project, degree, or examination at any university.



.....
Sara Bint Moneer Khan

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29th, October 2023

Cape Town,
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DEDICATION

This body of work is dedicated to the Muslim Community in Cape Town who graciously welcomed me and provided me with the opportunity to live, learn and develop amongst them and to future creatives. I would also like to dedicate this to my Grandparents, who in their lifetime instilled the sense of purpose that bore the foundations of this Doctorate Journey. In their memory and imparted wisdom, I was able to complete this work.

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ABSTRACT

This Doctoral journey delved into the rich tapestry of art within the Muslim context, particularly in Cape Town, South Africa, where faith, culture, identity, politics, and art intersect to shape a more inclusive and vibrant future. The central question of this research was how to enhance Art Advocacy, Visual Literacy, and Engagement within Cape Town's Muslim communities to increase their participation in the local art scene. This question emerged from a personal experience in 2015, highlighting the lack of Muslim voices in the city's artistic narrative due to socio-economic challenges, political issues, religious intolerance, and limited understanding of Islam in the South African art world.

To address this underrepresentation, the study aimed to boost Art Advocacy, Visual Literacy, and Engagement among Cape Town's Muslim residents, fostering a dynamic dialogue with the local art scene. The research focused on three key aspects: 1) Art Advocacy to support artists in Cape Town, especially within the Muslim community, recognizing the vital role of advocacy in nurturing artistic talent and cultural expression. 2) Visual Literacy to explore the unique perspectives and interpretations of the Muslim community regarding art, reflecting their culture and beliefs. 3) Engagement to investigate how these communities actively participate in and contribute to the local art scene.

The research delved into the influence of Islam on artistic expression and the evolving definition of 'Islamic art.' It also sought to understand how art originating from Muslim communities is perceived by non-Muslim audiences, including galleries, curators, art fairs, and art foundations.

The study was guided by the Process of Holistic Development (PHD) within the Integral Research framework, aiming for tangible transformation through the MASHŪRAH process and the MASHŪRAH Arts initiative. Integral Research follows a Mode 2 approach to social research, focusing on social innovation and impact. It addresses imbalances within various aspects of society.

During the research, a framework comprising four key levels was developed: Call, Context, Co-Creation, and Contribution, providing a roadmap from research to innovation. The study utilized a diverse range of research methodologies, including Hermeneutic-Phenomenology, Critical Theory, and Feminist Theories. As a result of this endeavour, MASHŪRAH Arts was established, an organization committed to orchestrating exhibitions and implementing practical initiatives

aimed at elevating Advocacy, Visual Literacy, and Engagement. Coupled with the organization's inaugural exhibition 'MASHŪRAH,' hosted at Greatmore Studios, this initiative yielded a substantial Social Return on Investment (SROI) for the community. It cultivated a profound sense of belonging, heightened awareness, facilitated storytelling, encouraged consultation, spurred innovation, fostered knowledge exchange, and promoted inclusivity within Muslim art communities.

Keywords: Muslim Art, Identity, Art-Community, Art Advocacy, Culture, Inclusivity, Religious Intolerance, Integral Research, Hermeneutic-Phenomenology, Critical Theory

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS (Foreign language)

- MASHŪRAH - To seek consultation and advice
- PBUH - Peace Be Upon Him, honorific for the Prophet Muhammed
- SWT - Subhana Wa Taala -The most glorified, the most high, Muslim honorific for God
- Khudi - Self, Selfhood
- Assalam Alaikum - Peace be upon you, a Muslim greeting
- Jihad - Internal war
- Ehsas - Feeling
- Wajdan - Intuiting
- Ilm - Knowing
- Sha'oor - Sensing
- Haya - Modesty
- Waqf - Charitable endowment
- Halaqah - Circles of learning'

Tarbiyah - Development and training

Hiqmah - Dialoguing and seeking wisdom

Fussara – “To raise the veil” or “to make apparent”.

Mufassir - Scholars or exegesis

Deen - Islamic way of life

Adab - Etiquette

Ijtihad - Process of legal reasoning and hermeneutics

Tafsir - The science of explanation of the Qur’ān Ma’rifat al-Islam wa’l-Imn

Tasawwuf - Or Sufism, is a method for achieving closeness with God through ethical and spiritual ideals

Ma’rifatullah - Divine

Qalb - Heart

Aql - Knowledge

Rūḥ - Spirit/Soul

Nafs - Ego

Shiqwa' - complaint

Jawaab e-shiqwa - The answer to the complaint

Batin - Inner hidden world

Zahir - Outer external world

Karamat - Shrine

Basirah - Spiritual insight

Husn - Excellence, beauty

Zeenah - Adornment, beauty

Jamal - Attraction, beauty

Baheej - Beautiful, delightful

ACRONYMS

4Cs - Call, Context, Cocreation, Contribution

CARE - Community Activation, Awakening Consciousness, Transformative Research,
Transformative Enterprise & Education

GENE - Grounding, Emergence, Navigation, Effecting

PHD - Process of Holistic Development

SAFIA - South African Foundation For Islamic Art

IRA - Irish Republican Army

STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths

SAFIA - South African Foundation for Islamic Arts

ACSA (Arabic Calligraphers South Africa),

Zeitz Mocaa -Zeitz museum of contemporary African arts

ANC - African National Congress

SOAS - School of Oriental and African Studies

UNISA - The University of South Africa

WOW - Women of Waqf

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO MY RESEARCH - TO - INNOVATION JOURNEY

1.1 The Research Problem And Purpose Of Research

This research endeavour is dedicated to a comprehensive enhancement of Art Advocacy, Visual Literacy, and Engagement within Cape Town's Muslim communities, aimed at fostering a deeper understanding and active participation in the local art ecosystem. The central inquiry propelling this research is both profound and timely: "How can we enrich Art Advocacy, Visual Literacy, and Engagement within Cape Town's Muslim communities to deepen their involvement in the local art ecosystem?" This pivotal question was sparked by my personal immersion in Cape Town in 2015, which unveiled the deficiency of Muslim voices, artists, and audiences in the city's artistic narrative, but also by extension in the South African art ecology. In this introductory chapter, we will provide an overview of the doctoral journey and the Process of Holistic Development (PHD) which unfolded within two main trajectories of theory along with practice.

This thesis centres on three essential dimensions: First, Art Advocacy, which focuses on reinforcing support for artists in Cape Town, particularly within the Muslim community, acknowledging the pivotal role of advocacy in nurturing artistic talent and promoting cultural expression. Second, Visual Literacy, which delves into the intricate relationship between the Muslim community and art, seeking to understand the unique perspectives and interpretations that this community holds regarding art, reflecting the rich tapestry of their culture and beliefs. Lastly, Engagement, which explores the dynamic interactions between the Muslim community and the broader art ecology, going beyond mere observation to unveil how these communities actively participate in and contribute to the local art scene.

This multi-faceted exploration serves as the cornerstone of a dynamic and all-encompassing research-to-innovation journey. It is crucial to emphasize that 'engagement' is a two-way process: This is not solely about how the art ecology engages with the community, but equally vital is

understanding how the community engages with the art ecology. This interaction occurs within a co-evolutionary space, where both entities mutually influence and shape each other's development. This concept of co-evolution underscores the intricate and interdependent relationship between the Muslim communities and the broader art ecosystem in Cape Town; a dynamic interplay that will be closely examined throughout this research journey.

Grounded in a set of core principles, this project is fuelled by my fervent love for the arts and art history, motivating a deeper exploration of its potential for societal transformation. An unwavering commitment to equitable knowledge ensures that knowledge is accessible to all, fostering opportunities for cultural exchange and the democratisation of art. Furthermore, this research project is driven by an aspiration for societal change, seeking to contribute to society's broader transformation and promote cross-cultural dialogue. This endeavour represents the culmination of personal experiences, educational background, and a career in the arts, underpinned by a steadfast belief in the transformative power of the arts, with a particular focus on its potential to advance society and cultivate fresh perspectives.

Key inquiries encompass whether Islam influences artistic expression and the definition of 'Islamic art.' Furthermore, this research delves into the perceptions of art produced by artists from Muslim communities among non-Muslim audiences, including galleries, curators, art fairs, and art foundations.

Chapter One lays the foundational framework for this thesis. It commences with a comprehensive exploration of the fundamental principles of the Integral Development Model (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010). This introduction delineates the four distinct levels which will guide our journey from research to innovation, characterized by the **4 C's: Call, Context, Co-Creation, and Contribution** (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010) which will be detailed in subsequent sections of this chapter. Each phase will be further explored in dedicated chapters, with one devoted to the individual, another to the collective, and subsequent chapters delving into the intricacies of the **CARE model**, which encompasses **Community** Activation, **Awakening** Consciousness, Transformative **Research**, as well as Transformative Education and Transformative **Enterprise** (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010).

1.2 Introducing The Integral Research Framework

This Process of Holistic Development (PHD) draws inspiration from Lessem and Schieffer's Integral Development Model and the Integral Worlds Approach, a Mode 2 Research process (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010). The Integral Development doctoral programme is built upon a novel approach to conducting social research, yielding tangible social innovations. This approach is a holistic method for comprehending and consciously evolving human systems, addressing imbalances within the self, community, organization, and society, particularly in fields of economics, education, and enterprise (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010).

The process commences with the individual, organization, communal call to action, and society, with the aim of addressing a social issue within a specific social context. It then evolves towards collectively fostering holistic social innovation within the community to tackle that issue. This inner calling is interlinked with the 4Rs of the Integral Worlds: **Realities, Realms, Rhythms, and Rounds**. Schieffer and Lessem (2010), connect these four realities to the four cardinal directions namely South, East, North, and West (also called Integral Worlds or Four Worlds) symbolizing distinct cultural perspectives rather than literal geographic translations.

1.2.1 Introducing Reality Perspectives, Realms And Rounds

These four directions or paths represent the following four **reality perspectives** (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010):

1. **The "Southern" perspective:** Focusing on relationships with oneself, nature, and others.
2. **The "Eastern" perspective:** An inner cultural and spiritual viewpoint delving into the profound meaning of human existence and our holistic connection with the world.
3. **The "Northern" perspective:** A scientific, rational outlook aiming to identify patterns and structures and translate them into concepts and systems.
4. **The "Western" perspective:** Concentrating on action, practical experimentation, and real-world solutions.

When applying the Integral Worlds Approach to research, researchers are encouraged to choose the research path that aligns most with their values and thought processes from the perspectives

mentioned above. Nevertheless, it is expected that the researcher will traverse the four perspectives to attain social innovation.

According to the Integral Research approach, the four reality perspectives were further developed into **realms** articulating the specific knowledge fields and disciplines underlying each world (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010).

1. Southern Relational: Nature and Community
2. Eastern Renewal: Culture and Consciousness
3. Northern Knowledge: Technology and Sciences
4. Western Practical: Enterprise and Economics

The four integral **Rounds** show that each human is interdependent on other human beings and ecosystems. Therefore, holistic development needs to synchronously embed all these systems for real transformation to take place. The four integral rounds are:

1. **Round 1:** Individual/self-perspective
2. **Round 2:** Organisational perspective
3. **Round 3:** Societal perspective
4. **Round 4:** Global/world perspective

1.2.2 Introducing The GENE Rhythm

Along with the reality perspectives, realms, and rounds, is a fundamental principle termed the **GENE rhythm**. This principle embodies the facets of **G**rounding, **E**merging, **N**avigating, **E**ffecting (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010). This dynamic framework operates in a cyclic fashion, mirroring the fourfold rhythm inherent in the integral approach. Each of these four elements aligns with corresponding levels of the 4C's and CARE trajectories (to be explained in the next sub-section), collectively fostering a transformative process:

1. **Grounding:** This phase involves the researcher immersing oneself in a particular environment, community, and embracing a specific life experience.
2. **Emergence:** It encompasses an in-depth exploration of the issue at hand, gaining profound insights through a dialectical process and creating collaborative ecosystem of co-researchers.
3. **Navigation:** Here, novel concepts and knowledge are developed, guiding the way forward.
4. **Effecting:** In this final stage, these fresh concepts and knowledge are translated into practical innovations, actively affecting change.

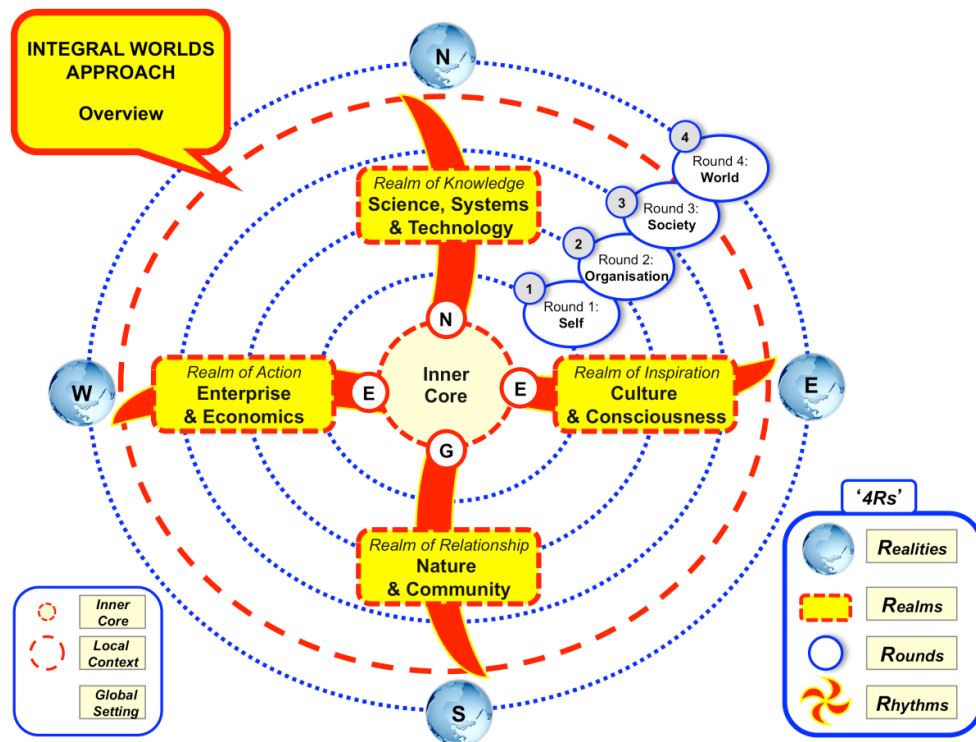


Figure 1.1: Integral Worlds approach

Source: Adapted from Schieffer and Lessem (2010)

1.2.3 4C'S And CARE Process – Call, Context, Co-Creation, Contribution

My research journey unfolds across four distinct levels known as the 4C's – Call, Context, Co-Creation and Contribution. These research methods supplant traditional quantitative and

qualitative approaches to research by embracing a comprehensive set of methodologies aligned with their respective paths (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010). By this, I (the researcher), embarked on an exploration of my **Call to undertake emancipatory socio-economic research and the Calling** to do this with the Cape Town Muslim community, artists, and the South African art ecology. I delved deep into the intricacies of imbalances and opportunities within myself and the collective **Context**. Collaboratively, I engaged with my innovation ecosystem (who functioned as co-researchers) to **Co-create** novel emancipatory frameworks. In **Contribution**, I assumed the role of a facilitator of the research process (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010).

Shifting from the research phase to the realm of innovation, I seek to unite theory and practical application, the 4C's operate in synergy with the CARE trajectory. CARE, denoting **Community** Activation, **Awakening** Integral Consciousness, Institutionalised **Research-to-Innovation**, and **Embodying** Integral Development, embodies a holistic strategy of practical and intentional care to emancipate a social context via this innovative research (Lessem, 2017). In tangible terms, this entails a voyage of introspection and outward exploration, coupled with community mobilization, all geared toward realizing a shared vision.

The analysis of the context goes hand in hand with a collective effort known as "Awakening Integral Consciousness;" (Lessem, 2017). The purpose of which is to cultivate innovation ecosystems that can effectively address the imbalances and opportunities discovered within that social context. The collaborative generation of theories and conceptual models is mirrored by the "institutionalization of research to innovation," (Lessem, 2017). which serves to establish the necessary structures for ensuring the enduring progress of social innovation. Finally, the introduction and social impact of the fresh initiatives are fortified through a process termed "Embodying Integral Development (Lessem, 2017)." illustrated below:

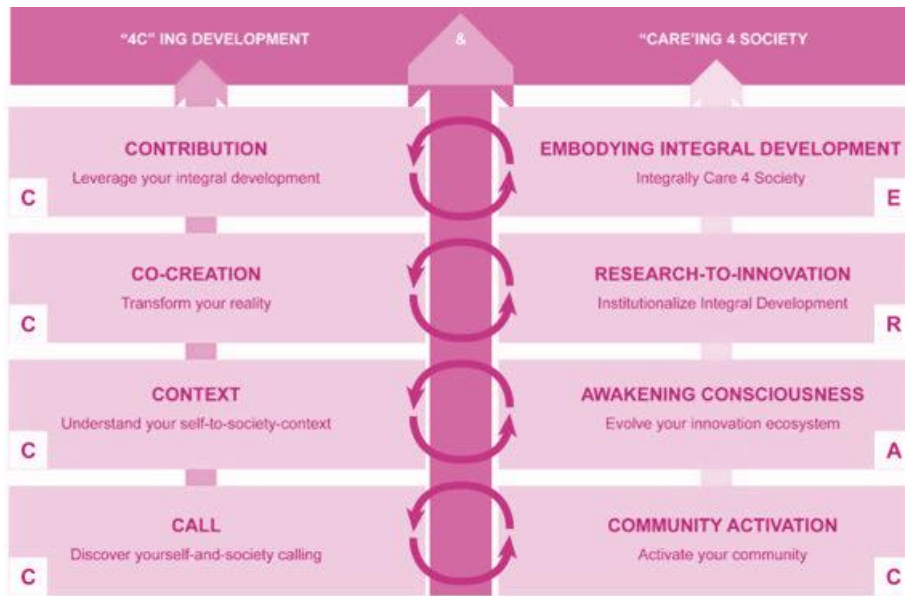


Figure 1.2: 4Cs and CARE dual trajectory

Source: Adapted from Laila Majeed (2020); Lessem and Schieffer (2010)

1.3 My Integral Research Path

The research process seamlessly intertwines theory with practice. Within Integral research, there exist four distinct research pathways, each progressing through four levels encompassing a specialised Research Method, Methodology, Research Critique, and Action Research. These components serve as the guiding tools employed by the researcher to navigate their journey, as exemplified in the table provided below (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010).

Research Paths	Level One Research Method	Level Two Research Methodology	Level Three Research Critique	Level Four Action Research
Southern Path	Descriptive Methods	Phenomenology	Feminism	Participatory Action Research
Eastern Path	Narrative Methods	Hermeneutics	Critical Theory	Co-operative Inquiry
Northern Path	Methods of Theorizing	Critical Rationalism	Postmodernism	Socio-technical Design
Western Path	Experimental and survey Methods	Empiricism	Critical Realism	Action Research

Figure 1.3: Research Paths Adapted from Lessem and Schieffer (2010)

At the outset of my doctoral journey, I embarked on a path illuminated by the Integral Research inventory, which led me to identify the Eastern Path of Renewal as my research direction. However, my explorations eventually guided me into a dual journey, where I harmoniously combined aspects of both the Eastern and Southern Relational paths, an evolution that unfolded through Levels 2 and 3 of my research.

The Eastern path is characterized by a perpetual cycle of rejuvenation, firmly rooted in the embrace of nature and culture. It posits that grounding one's essence in the wellspring is the gateway to self-discovery and spiritual awakening. This path fosters an unbroken continuum spanning the realms of the past, present, and future, where meaning transcends the confines of words and sounds, dwelling in the interstices, of the ethereal realm (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010). Here, the acknowledgement that the immeasurable holds equal significance in unearthing one's authentic self as the measurable is where the Eastern Path of Renewal flourishes. This path resonates deeply with my Pakistani heritage and faith in Islam, which I view as a wisdom tradition. This duality became apparent as I transitioned to Cape Town, South Africa, and nurtured new connections, where the embrace of the Southern path - nature and community - felt entirely intuitive.

The Southern realm of relationships encompasses distinct characteristics (Schieffer & Lessem, 2014):

1. Core values: Centralising the importance of harmonious and participatory coexistence.
2. Symbol: Depicted as a web of life encircled within a circle, symbolising the interconnectedness of all life, framed within an expansive web. The circle emblemizes the original unity of all life, underpinning the entirety of creation.
3. Human attribute: Spotlighting qualities such as the heart, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences.
4. Sound/music: Echoing the heartbeat, robust earthy rhythms, and indigenous melodies.
5. Instrument: Exemplified by drums and the human body.

My path initiates with my inner calling and the relevant collective calling of the Cape Town Muslim community, artists, and the South African art scene, serving as the research's point of origin. The next step involves the examination of the context, its imbalances, and opportunities as the foundational theory. Subsequently, it proceeds to the third level of research critique to investigate relevant emancipatory theories and introduce theoretical models to address the previously identified imbalances and opportunities. The final layer entails collaboration with artists and the community and art ecology in Cape Town to apply the presented theory through action research, thus effecting transformation.

While my primary focus has remained rooted in the Eastern Path of Renewal, integrating aspects of both the Southern and Eastern paths at Levels 2 and 3, my research journey unfolded across the four distinct levels (4C's). The central tenets of the Eastern and Southern paths translated into methodologies spanning the following four levels for me:

Level 1: I embarked on an exploration of my **Calling and the Calling** of the Cape Town Muslim community, artists, and the South African art ecology using the **Eastern Path's Narrative Method**. This approach allowed me to unravel both my personal narrative and theirs.

Level 2: I delved deep into the intricacies of imbalances and opportunities within my **Context** through the combined application of **Hermeneutics and Phenomenology**. These methodologies

served as the foundational underpinning, encapsulating elements of both the **Eastern and Southern paths**.

Level 3: Collaboratively, I engaged with my innovation ecosystem to **Co-create** novel conceptual frameworks, drawing upon insights from **Critical Theory and Feminism** as joint emancipatory critiques, aligning with both the **Eastern and Southern paths**.

Level 4: In **Contribution** I assumed the role of a facilitator in the **Eastern path** in **Cooperative Inquiry** research, implementing these conceptual frameworks into practice.

This research journey commenced with the Eastern path, ventured into the relational Southern path, and ultimately returned to the Eastern path. The subsequent table encapsulates the dynamic essence of my journey:

Table 1.1: The 4Cs, research levels, research paths and methodologies applied to my innovative research journey

Levels of the 4C's	Research Level	Research Path	Methodology
Level 1: Call	Method	Eastern	Narrative
Level 2: Context	Methodology	Eastern and Southern	Phenomenology and Hermeneutics
Level 3: Co-creation	Emancipatory Critique	Eastern and Southern	Critical Theory and Feminism
Level 4: Contribution	Action Research	Eastern	Cooperative Inquiry

1.3.1 Trans4m And Da Vinci: Mode 2 Research

This doctoral program collaboration between the Trans4m Centre for Integral Development in Geneva and the Da Vinci Institute for Technology and Innovation in South Africa is a testament to the principles advocated by Da Vinci Institute. It operates as a Mode 2 university, emphasising the production of knowledge that creates positive social impacts within communities. The institute stands on five foundational principles outlined by (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994).

1. **Application-based:** Research is not detached from practice but is deeply intertwined and complementary.
2. **Transdisciplinary:** It eschews the division between disciplines, favouring an integrated approach that combines various knowledge systems and fields.
3. **Heterogeneous:** Embracing individuals from diverse backgrounds, skill sets, and specialisations.
4. **Reflexive and accountable:** This approach involves continuous contemplation and reflection concerning the research's impact on individuals, communities, and society.
5. **Committed to quality control:** Ensuring that the work maintains both cognitive and social dimensions, with quality criteria highly contextual.

In the next section, I will provide the chapter flow and a brief overview of each chapter, to provide a deeper understanding of the exploration into social innovation along the two-fold path of the 4Cs and CARE. Each level corresponds to a chapter dedicated to the individual, the collective, and the subsequent chapter delving into the CARE model (Community Activation, Awakening Consciousness, Transformative Research, Transformative Education, and Transformative Enterprise).

1.4 Chapter Focus Outline

This section outlines and highlights what the reader is to expect in subsequent chapters according to the levels and layers of the 4C's and CARE trajectories. A summarised table flow has also been provided in the annex:

Level One: Origination

Inner Calling: This signifies my personal passion and motivation for this research, stemming from my unique story, capacities, and talents.

Outer Calling: Collective motivation directed toward addressing a challenge within a specific context.

Community Activation: Actively grounding the research within my community and specific locale, setting the stage for the activation of the research.

1.4.2 Chapter 2: An Exploration Of My Inner Calling: A Search For An Integral And Creatively Aligned Purpose

This chapter focuses on exploring my inner calling through narrating a personal story, which finds its origins in my culture and life experiences, my life choices, challenges, triumphs, adventures, and lessons and, my family's challenges, joys and evolution which have defined my history and the person I am. The intersections between my relationship with my family, Islam and the art world are deeply delved into. By reviewing the various paths, I have travelled to arrive at this doctoral research, this chapter details the wisdom gained.

Chapter 2 applies the Eastern Path of Renewal's Narrative Method, a foundational research approach. This method guides the researcher on a transformative journey, both individually allowing me to release the past and embrace a new perspective.

The narrative method, as articulated by (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010) is grounded in four fundamental principles:

1. The ongoing evolution of personal and shared narratives.
2. Unfolding stories imbued with captivating drama and creative inception.
3. The intertwining of potential and possibility stemming from our unique beginnings.
4. The artful crafting of a narrative influenced by the broader stories that envelop us.

These principles underpin the emergence of my Inner Calling as I decipher the meaning embedded within my personal narrative.

1.4.3 Chapter 3: Outer Calling - Retrospections Leading To Responding To The Outer Call Of The Muslim Community And Artist Community In Cape Town

In this chapter, I as a researcher move from my inner calling to respond to the outer need for community and institutional engagement in the transformation of visual literacy, arts access, and advocacy in the Muslim communities of Cape Town, South Africa. This is to examine how art at the intersections of faith, tradition, politics, and the art ecosystem, can play a transformative role in Muslim communities in Cape Town - and how I can contribute to this as a curator. As with chapter 2, I have employed the tenets of the Narrative Method to bring out the interconnection of my story, the community story, the art sector, and the larger story of educational transformation.

The burning concerns of the South African Muslim community and its artists, the South African art industry, and how it supports the arts in the Muslim community will be the focus points of this chapter. This will be followed by chapter 4 on community activation.

1.4.4 Chapter 4: CARE-Ing For Art Advocacy In The Community - Community Activation Through MASHŪRAH Circles As An Integral, Transformative Innovation Dialogue Process

This chapter, titled "Community Activation" or "C," is the first step on the CARE path of Integral Research (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010). The CARE path moves alongside the 4C trajectory of Call, Context, Co-Creation, and Contribution, focusing on the progressive actualization and manifestation of research-to-innovation.

It is effectively a "practical mirror" of the parallel C step (of the 4C trajectory) and how I concretely activate my research community and introduces the activation methods I applied to mirror the inner and outside calling, culminating in my research objectives. The goal of community activation includes conducting conversations, discussions, and dialogue around burning issues facing Muslim artists and the Muslim community in Cape Town, addressing the condition of visual literacy and advocacy in Cape Town, and how the country's political, racial, and socioeconomic issues influence its people and the art spaces. The chapter illustrated the

creation of study circles based on inspiration from existing models such as the Swedish study circle, World Cafe, and Islamic models of dialogue to create MASHŪRAH circles.

Level Two: Foundation

Context: This stage entails an analysis of imbalances and potentials within the research's surrounding context, considering factors within the realms of activity, organization, and society, and in connection to both the inner and outer calling.

Awakening Integral Consciousness: It involves the creation of innovation ecosystems or networks within my community, fostering the exploration and engagement with emerging possibilities that expand individual and collective consciousness and creativity.

1.4.5 Chapter 5: (Part 1) Methodological Contextualisation

In Chapter 5, the 4C trajectory moves from Call to Context and the GENE rhythm moves from Grounding to Emerging. Hermeneutics is the Methodology that underpins the contextual framework of the Eastern Path of Renewal in Chapter 5 and 6. However, I also identified a synergy with Phenomenology from the Southern relational path and thus both methods remain interwoven and complimentary through 'Hermeneutic Phenomenology'.

Chapter 5 outlines the Methodological Contextualisation of my research approach and framework. Thus, it serves as introduction to the primary context analysis in Chapter 6. Because my research is situated in the arts sector and Islamic theology, and my phenomenological engagement as a curator is in the lives of Muslim artists in Cape Town and South Africa, it made sense to devote two separate chapters to the context, which complement chapters 7 in the CARE process. This way enabling for a deeper and more extensive exploration of the mix of methodologies I am applying to context analysis.

Additionally due to South Africa's long colonial past and the resulting mixed-race of the Muslim community in Cape Town, I believed it was vital to understand the ideas of European, African, and Muslim thinkers, as they took part in forming contemporary South African culture and particularly in our context - Cape Town.

The combined purpose of chapters 5, 6 and 7 on level 2 is to examine the art ecology of South Africa in relation to the imbalances that hinder the better access, engagement, and advocacy for the Muslim communities in Cape Town and to explore the potential remedies.

The core tenets of Hermeneutics are (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010):

1. Understand how the world is ‘constructed’
2. Give the ‘other’ a voice
3. Interpret reality indirectly
4. Reconstruct self and society
5. Move from spectator to active agent
6. Evolve from interpretive to transformative
7. Reconnect with the source

Along with the core tenets of Phenomenology which include: (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010):

1. To concentrate on Illuminating the ‘Inner World’ of one’s origins.
2. To immerse oneself in the context of one’s immediately perceived essences.
3. To go beyond surface traits and empirical “facts” to underlying moral values
4. To locate what is unique in the local context to what one authentically is.

1.4.6 Chapter 6 - Activation Of Matrix Towards A Regenerative Context – Understanding The Context Of Self, The Cape Town Muslim Community And The South African Art Ecosystem

Chapter 5 served as a comprehensive introduction to my contextual and methodological framework, providing an elaborate description of the tools that will be utilised in Chapter 6. This 6th chapter, constituting the second part of our contextual exploration from chapter 5, will delve into the examination of the intersection between Muslim identity and artistic practice in Cape Town.

The research context will serve to unpack the burning issues, which were identified in Level 1 of this thesis titled “Call” and explored in Chapters 2 and 3. This chapter will provide essential ideas and considerations to provide a thorough understanding of the issues and formulates a synthesis to provide recommendations for how to proceed. It is not about presenting an exhaustive context

analysis, but rather a focus on critical concerns, and I will offer a framework and approach for people who may conduct similar context analysis in the future. While feedback from MASHŪRAH circles and various dialogues informs Chapters 5 to 7, combined with relevant literature to develop links within that framework of analysis, it is crucial to underscore my expertise as an art professional within the art industry. This expertise is pivotal because I have firsthand experience with many of the themes emphasised in this thesis, and the project's originality is deeply rooted in this practical involvement.

This chapter will continue with Hermeneutic Phenomenology introduced in Chapter 5 to grasp the various opportunities and obstacles within the many layers of the ecology (individual, organisation, and society) and using an evolved Integral Context Analysis paradigm and question matrix, the imbalances, possibilities, and potentials will be studied from four complementary perspectives: Transpersonal, Transcultural, Transdisciplinary, and Transformational.

1.4.7 Chapter 7 - Care Chapter - Awakening Integral Consciousness Through Halaqart As An Innovative Ecosystem

This chapter aims to cultivate sustainable 'Innovation Ecosystems' capable of addressing disparities and seizing opportunities, as expounded upon in context chapters 5 and 6. In Chapter 4, we initiated the CARE trajectory with MASHŪRAH dialogue circles aimed at activating community for the increased visibility of Muslim artists and creatives within the South African art ecosystem and enhanced advocacy for artistic growth and more meaningful engagement with Muslim communities in the region.

These MASHŪRAH circles served as our initial step in building the foundation for our ecosystem and communities of practice, united by shared values and a collective vision. As we progress into the next phase of the CARE trajectory, termed 'Awakening Integral Consciousness', we underscore the critical importance of collaboration and collective action. In Chapter 7, you will be guided through our (co-creators/co-researchers) process of designing this research ecosystem, focusing on two distinct levels: the inner or personal level and the collective level.

This chapter delves into the intricacies of my own internal ecosystem and consciousness 'Khudi', which guides my curatorial endeavours and personal growth. The emerging collective ecosystem 'HalaqArt' plays a significant role in shaping the questions we posed to uncover imbalances and

opportunities in our exploration within Chapter 6. Subsequently, the narrative expands to encompass the Muslim community in Cape Town, Muslim artists in South Africa, and the broader South African art industry.

Level Three: Emancipation

Co-Creation: Addressing the imbalances and potentials identified within the context, drawing from diverse sources of knowledge, and engaging with emancipatory literature. The aim is to collaboratively present an alternative integral concept or theory that responds to the pressing issue.

Institutionalized Research to Innovation: Here, the focus is on establishing structures that ensure the long-term sustainability of social innovation and research-to-innovation.

1.4.8 Chapter 8 - New Emancipatory Approach To Integral Curatorship Lending To Enhanced Access Engagement And Advocacy To Muslim Communities And Artists In Cape Town

This is a literature review chapter. It will explore the depths of Critical theory and Feminism as theoretical underpinnings guiding the co-creation efforts of my research-to-innovation. The combination of Critical Theory and Feminism for the development of a theoretical model to respond to the imbalances and potentials explored in chapter 6 is the unique perspective of this chapter.

1.4.9 Chapter 9 – Care Chapter - Institutionalised Research-To Innovation Through MASHŪRAH Arts Initiative

Chapter 9 represents a crucial third phase in the CARE trajectory "Research to Innovation, Institutionalised," a concept that runs in parallel with my exploration of Co-Creation which culminated into my new Emancipatory Theory in Chapter 8. As this chapter forms part of the co creation level 3 it builds upon the foundational principles of emancipatory theory with the applied methodologies of Critical Theory and Feminism. It also builds on the journey of CARE which commenced in Chapter Four with Community Activation through MASHŪRAH circles.

Subsequently, in chapter 9, I transition into the realm of transformative research-to-innovation where we concentrate on collaboratively building or improving structures to establish Research-

to-Innovation in a sustainable manner. Within the confines of this chapter, I elaborate on the pivotal role of exhibitions and the importance of institutions as custodians. Unlike the conventional approach of formalising research within a centre or academy, my focus is on establishing a new art platform called MASHŪRAH Arts that spearheaded these exhibitions. This section of the narrative is dedicated to the incorporation of the MASHŪRAH Arts into a practical tool that serves to fully actualise and advance the new conceptual approach outlined in Chapter 8.

Level Four: Contribution and Transformative Education

Contribution: The emphasis is on applying new concepts and theories in a specific context, employing action research methodologies, and actively working toward realizing social innovation.

Embodiment: This section delves into how social innovation can be fully actualized and how it can continue to exert influence within individual, organisational, communal, and societal spheres.

1.4.10 Chapter 10 Cooperative Inquiry To Actualising The MASHŪRAH Exhibition

In this 4th and final level of the 4C's, we turn from Narrative Methods, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Critical theory, and Feminism to John Heron's Co-operative Inquiry (CI) (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2001) which is the Action Research methodology actualizing the contribution on the Eastern Path of Renewal.

The five key tenets of CI according to Lessem and Schieffer (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010) are:

1. You engage in a politically oriented process, in a participative form of inquiry.
2. You are involved in a knowledge-oriented process epistemic in nature and scope.
3. You engage in an alternating current of informative and transformative inquiry.
4. You undertake your research in successive action-reflection cycles.
5. The validity you seek for your research is goodness, trustworthiness, and authenticity.

This chapter serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it endeavours to put the MASHŪRAH process, which has been developed in preceding chapters, to the test through its first exhibition as a participative form of inquiry at the same time launching MASHŪRAH Arts to the public. This exhibition not

only aims to draw out fresh insights and discoveries for various stakeholders, including the ecosystem, the CI groups, and myself, but also sheds light on its alignment with the future trajectory of MASHŪRAH ARTS including empowering the marginalised Muslim voice within the South African art scene, using Cape Town as a crucible for experimentation.

Throughout, CI will be intentionally integrated into the framework of the MASHŪRAH process, serving as both a methodology and a tool for perpetual enhancement and transformation. The next section will serve as an introduction to cooperative inquiry.

The results of the CI process will be provided using Heron's four inquiry methods portraying the four modes of knowledge (Heron J, 1996; Heron J and Reason, 2001):

1. Experiential or Empathetic Knowledge
2. Presentational or imaginal knowledge
3. Propositional or Conceptual knowledge
4. Practical Knowledge

1.4.11 Chapter 11 Embodiment Of The Integral MASHŪRAH Process And The Future Of MASHŪRAH Arts

In this 4th and concluding chapter of the CARE trajectory, I aim to bring together and actualize the key components that have been explored throughout the journey by applying the MASHŪRAH process as a self-reflective tool. These components encompass community activation, the awakening of integral consciousness, institutionalised research, and embodied transformative education and organization. My intention is to focus on both individual and collective aspects to underline my commitment to perpetually renew the MASHŪRAH model and framework. The goal is to adapt it into relevant and concrete learning and educational programmes for MASHŪRAH Arts.

In this holistic approach, the GENE remains a guiding light, embodying self-leadership, organisational development, and societal progress in a perpetual cycle of renewal. Integral development provides the framework and processes to realise transformative potential at all levels, connecting individuals, organisations, societal development, and global development in an intertwined, holistic system. This chapter will delve into the complete embodiment of social

innovation within three core dimensions: the self, organisations, and societies. The concept of embodiment serves as the culmination of the CARE trajectory, signifying the fulfilment of this research-to-innovation process.

1.4.12 Chapter 12 – Distillation And Conclusion

Chapter 12 provides a summary and a distillation of the process of social innovation, describing how the 4C's and CARE trajectories unfolded within this journey. Furthermore, the chapter includes a reflection on the process as well as the outcomes of this journey highlighting key lessons and ways to move forward.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have laid the foundational groundwork for the concept of social innovation, which we also refer to as a 'Process for Holistic Development' (PHD). We began by introducing the research's overarching purpose and delved into the central question concerning the dynamic between educational institutions and communities. Subsequently, we provided an overview of our research design, highlighting the dual trajectories of 4C's and CARE as interconnected pathways within this doctoral/PHD journey. To further illuminate the forthcoming chapters, we offered a brief glimpse into the content of each chapter, which collectively spans four distinct levels: origination, foundation, emancipation, contribution, and transformative education.

Chapter 2

AN EXPLORATION OF MY INNER CALLING A SEARCH FOR AN INTEGRAL AND CREATIVELY ALIGNED PURPOSE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on exploring my inner calling through narrating a personal story, which finds its origins in my culture and life experiences, my life choices, my family’s struggles and joys and adventures which have defined my history, and the intersections between my relationship with my family and the art world. By reviewing the paths, I traversed in arriving at this Doctorate, this chapter details the wisdom and direction gained. As William Randall (1995) so precisely explains, “storytelling is a multi-faceted and intertwining road. There are key players, passers-by, temporary hitchhikers, stories within stories and the overall picture. There is their version, your version, and everyone else’s version. I was able to understand the bigger picture and acknowledged the many interconnected stories in my life and how they had shaped me and how they connected me to my calling for arts. I was able to tie together the potentials and possibilities that I revisited during this process to understand the catalytic moments of creative potential in my unfolding story.

This chapter explains how all this sparked an urge within me to challenge aspects of the Muslim culture and community in which I was born and the one in South Africa which I became a part of. My appreciation for history and aesthetics led me into the Art discipline, where I began to discover, evaluate, and fully comprehend and challenge different perspectives and ways of thinking. My experience of the regenerative power of art first-hand and more specifically, the arts of Muslim culture and civilization led me to discover and connect with my call to explore new approaches to strengthen the access, engagement, and advocacy for Muslim art communities through my role as a curator and arts management professional. My personal and collective calling was to establish an integral initiative with a strong holistic local-global orientation that is motivated by intention, imagination, and integrity. In this chapter and the next, I will describe and detail this personal story and the focus of my research-to-innovation journey that my inner

calling responded to using the narrative research method and in chapter 4, I will discuss how this was manifested. The following sections will unfold how I arrived at this discovery using the Narrative method (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010).

2.1.1 Beginning With The Narrative Method

At the heart of the Narrative method is the researcher's personal story, and the notion that experiences are embedded in one's origin and thus the link to one's cultural context, thus providing the idea for social innovation. This is often achieved through storytelling, to reflect our individual and collective experiences, with a plot that we create ourselves that is tied to the larger stories within which it is set (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010).

Following the Eastern research path of renewal, I began this doctoral research-to-innovation journey by returning to the beginning of my life and deconstructing my foundations, experiences, and defining moments. Through this confronting process of holistic development, I have been able to explore the seeds of my calling, and what I was fundamentally motivated to address in my research-to-innovation.

While I am on this path to uncover my calling, I ask myself, "What gives me meaning and what is it that keeps me going? What creative forces inside and around me may aid my development, and where can I get knowledge, both within myself and from others?" (Schieffer & Lessem, 2014). In embarking on this adventure, I am determined to find my purpose and to build a life for myself that is rich in meaning, passion, integrity, and creativity.

According to Lessem and Schieffer (2010), there are four tenets which guide the narrative method. These must be applied from the very outset to touch one's deepest motivations, which in return reveal one's call.

They are as follows:

1. Your stories unfold and you are called to become.
2. Your stories lead to gripping drama and creative origination.
3. You tie together the many potentials and possibilities of your respective beginnings.
4. You come to understand the bigger picture as you see your own life shaped by many of the larger stories within which it exists.

Lessem and Schieffer (2010) explains these tenets stating that many of our stories are unfolding through which we are called to become; this implies we have many answers yet to be revealed. As the unfolding process of our incomplete lives and stories takes shape, we begin to receive the answers to questions we left unanswered in our past (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010). The deepest of all the patterns in the human spirit is that of departure and return (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010). Often this leads to a gripping drama and creative origination, as we work towards rising what was dark and inferior within ourselves, to the same honourable state as what is light and superior, without any sacrifice to the illuminated values. Suddenly we can tie together the many potentials and possibilities of our respective beginnings. We begin to understand the bigger picture and we see our own lives shaped by many of the larger stories within which it exists. Here we understand the interconnectedness between the personal and exogenous, and we are compelled to hear and recognize our call, both the inner within us and the outer need it answers to (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010).

The process of telling your own story requires a high level of self-awareness, leading to the emergence of creative potential. The flexibility that we have in the way we story ourselves, is inspiring, as it allows us to rearrange and reorganise our life history in a way that each event represents a different meaning when told. By narrating our lives, we understand that human beings are incomplete creatures unlike other creatures in the universe and we are driven to complete ourselves (Randall, 2014).

Randall suggests four separate story-levels. The first level is the outer story, which means what happened in one's life, the basic facts of what, when, and where. The second level is the inner story, which is how I experienced what, when and where. The third level is the inside-out story that reflects what I convey to others about my experience of what, when and where. The fourth level is the out-of-the-box story that reflects how others believe I've experienced what, where, and when. By telling my story through the four levels, I can see my story from different angles and find different ways to shape a plot that inspired me to live my story that is still unfolding (Randall 2014).

My inner calling will be established by how I express my outer narrative, inside story, inside-out story, and outside-in story (Randall, 2014). As I comb through my inside-out story from memory

it comes together to create my "inner story." I have realised that different individuals in my life convey and interpret me in very different ways than I do myself and my experiences with them. My outside-in story will be an adjunct to how I express myself. I will investigate self-perception including how I am perceived and how my perspectives differ from those of individuals around me. I believe that I am an honest person who contributes value and views life with a unique perspective. This journey of personal growth and exploration will likely prove to be both challenging and rewarding as I learn to reconcile my personal views with those of others.

Building on the above, Randall (2014) explains that we have three different roles to play in our own stories. First, we play the role of protagonist where we get immersed in the action and what's going on in our lives. Second, we also take on the role of narrator, where we become active in telling others about our experiences. Third, we take on the role of a reader who reflects on the story and sees many possibilities for it to be re-enacted and the possibilities for it to unfold leading us back to the role of protagonist again (Randall, 2014).

In making sense of my journey there was a lot of detours and return that took place, not only through memory but physically between places. I returned to this chapter many times as certain realisations occurred much later. It was revealing and cathartic to relive the memories of my departure from my home in my early childhood to live in different homes. During the later stages of this thesis, I moved between South Africa, Northern Ireland, London and back to South Africa. I recognised, as I wrote the chapter, that there were pivotal phases that evolved me, some of which are still unravelling to me. I, therefore, begin by recounting my childhood/youth and then moving through adolescence to arrive at the stage of adulthood. This is intertwined with the households I lived in – my parents' home, my grandparents' home, my father's home, my own home, and my marital home in South Africa. By discussing key figures and events the reader can see what influenced, inspired, or shaped me as I weave between the different plots within plots. I will recollect the multilayered experience of childhood in the next section.

2.2 The Respective Beginning Of My Childhood In London

I am the eldest of three daughters born in London to British immigrant parents from Rawalpindi, Pakistan. In writing this chapter, recollecting, and penning down memories about my parents and our family life was painfully difficult, yet a healing experience. My complicated relationship with them, as well as the relationship between themselves, was a confounding energy in my life, and I worked hard to free myself from it. I eventually accepted that without those moments, I would not be the person I am today, and accepting our mistakes and hurtful pasts is just as vital as celebrating our victories. In the Quran there is a profound verse that says 'Verily. With hardship comes ease.' (Quran, 94:5). Growing up I misunderstood this ayah (verse). I used to think it meant: 'after hardship comes ease'. In other words, I thought life was made up of good times and bad times meaning after the bad times, comes the good times. But the verse is saying 'with' hardship comes ease, so the ease takes place at the same time as the hardship. This can be understood as meaning that nothing in this life is ever all bad (or all good). In every bad situation, we are in, there is always something to be grateful for. With hardship, God also gives us the strength and patience to bear it (Mogahed, 2017).

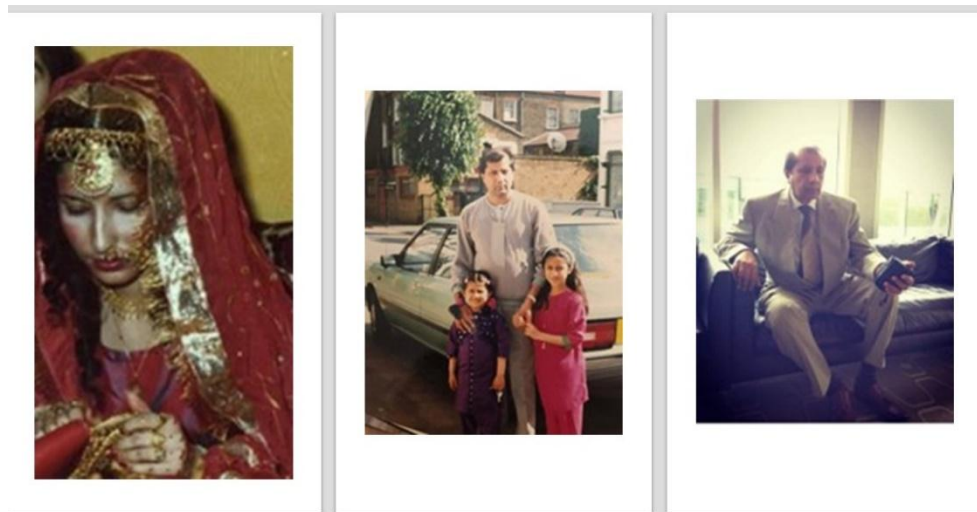


Figure 2.1: From anticlockwise: My mother, my sister, father and I, my father

Source: Family archive



Figure 2.2: My sisters and I

Source: Family archive

I think my parents accepted this wisdom about life's ups and downs more naturally due to their respective beginnings. For example, my father who was born into a middle-class family of 12 siblings, had worked as a bank clerk in Pakistan before moving to Libya and then settled in London in the 1970s where he met my mother. My mother moved to the East End of London from Pakistan with her family when she was 14 years old and completed her high school O'level education there. She did not go to university at the time due to a lack of confidence in her English language skills. Her father suggested she take up employment instead and save some money. She was able to save enough from working in a factory to buy her first home. The significance of this house would really show itself much later in her personal unfolding story. My parents married in an arranged marriage in London in 1981 when my mother was in her early twenties and my father was in his thirties. Arranged marriages were common back then, and family relations were the bedrock of society and as such my parents' families were previously acquainted. My father's quiet and calm demeanour appealed to my grandfather, and he felt this would make him an ideal partner for his favourite child. My mother was acknowledged as a beauty, she is petite with long raven hair and chiselled features like her father, as well as intense dark eyes and creamy fair skin. She has always been strong-willed, with an unwavering loyalty to her parents. My parents seemed a good match, and their newlywed studio pictures show a glowing and handsome couple – my mother adorned in a silk sari and jewellery with her ebony hair flowing and my father dashing.



Figure 2.3: My mother; my mother and I

Source: Family archive

My parents went on to set up a home in London, and our family seemed to be ordinary from the outside. When I think back on which of my parents, I may have adopted the creative seed from, I believe it was my mother. My father enjoyed music and I often listen to songs I heard him playing during my childhood, but I never saw him engage in other creative arts or discuss them. He often struck me as the more conservative and traditional of the two parents, but non-domineering in his presence. My mother was more of a disciplinarian, but somewhat more liberal in her thinking in some respects while being traditional in others. She was creative and was forever making clothes for us and reading and she encouraged my sketching and drawing, even framing some of it. Unfortunately, they were not compatible as a couple, and as such the marriage began to crack.

2.2.1. The Gripping Drama Leads To Turbulence

I cannot pinpoint exactly when my parents' marriage became turbulent as I was too young, but it was falling apart as far back as I can recall. I have more vivid memories of their fighting and I have very few scattered memories of them together as a happy couple. With reference to Randall (2014), I tried to recall how I felt as that little girl in the middle of it all, and how I processed the events through various periods in life. My outlook shifted with each vantage point, and our family life influenced the relationships I later developed. Reflecting on my upbringing, I cannot say I was an unhappy child, I have many fond memories. I seemed a happy child who loved going to

school, never had a problem making friends, and had an imaginary place of escape. In retrospect, I see that there was a detachment from things around me I did not understand, that helped me cope at least until the age of 10. Our childhood was also filled with tension and trauma that was only to be really faced later.

As I grew a little older, I lived with the consciousness that my parents' bond was unlike the marriages of my uncles, aunts, and grandparents. I did not understand the meaning of love or why my mother was so angry and upset most of the time, but I recognised what might set her off. As children, we witnessed my mother experience extended bouts of depression. This reality dominated our childhood and affected us through adulthood as my sisters and I carry a lot of those painful memories. Even as I write this chapter, I have many unanswered questions. It took a long time for me to truly understand. I would say this was in part due to my mother's denial that anything was wrong. I understand now that she could not face admitting she struggled with her mental health. It was one of her life's biggest tests as she pushed so many people away and developed an intense anger for the world. It was also my biggest test until this day. Those who loved her, distanced themselves and she felt deeply betrayed by her siblings for this.



Figure 2.4: Me at age 6

2.2.2 My Love For Education Begins To Shape

While emotionally detaching to protect myself, I was observing the chaos at home. Some of which are now memories that I cannot recall because they were deliberately blocked. As an adult, I dealt with those unresolved emotions through therapy and deep introspection and still do. Despite her challenges, my mother was a very involved parent who was hands-on and educated. Mother ensured we had the foundations for a university education as she was unable to achieve the same. My sisters and I were taught to be well-behaved girls with an enthusiasm for learning which is attributable to my mother. Unlike many of my friends' mothers, she never left our entire education as the school's responsibility. My mother was proficient in English enough to give us after-school tutoring. She ensured we had a well-rounded education in academics and our indigenous culture and religion; thus, we learnt Urdu and were sent to madrasa (mosque) every day for Quran studies. My father was often busy with work and was a more lenient but would take us shopping and theme parks and fairs which are vivid memories for me.

My commitment and drive for education came from my mother and our circumstances. I learnt the true value of this education as I grew older, especially understanding that she wanted the best for us. As a child, I grasped on to the safety of escaping into my imagination by burying my head into history books and stories of empires and people and spent hours in my room drawing from magazine posters. I quickly discovered the emancipating power and opportunities education could give me. The fragility of our home life made my sisters and I determined to gain control and stability within ourselves. Education proved to be a key tool in achieving this and has thus been a grounding factor in my life.

2.2.3 Age 13 And The Becoming Of A Non-Nuclear Family And New Possibilities With My Grandparents

There were things we got used to, but when I reflect on our family dynamics, I see that my parents were already separated before they were officially separated. For example, we did not take family holidays overseas besides one to the Netherlands in the 90s, but when my father would take my sisters and I to amusement parks my mother would not join, so there are no shared memories. When they were going through their periods of discord we would eat with our mother and my father would not join us but eat much later alone. As such I sadly do not have many memories of

us eating together as a family. We would sneak into his room and sit with him for Saturday night television, as we knew my mother would be upset. All of this made it incredibly difficult to bond as a family. I believe it taught me the true value of family later and the importance of cultivating genuine relationships and safety nets. The nuclear family was not the only family, and family could be formed from friendships and community.

It was in my late 20s that I discovered that my father knew my mother was struggling with depression. He persevered through the marriage; I believe he loved her enough to do so. He admitted to offering her to see a doctor which she refused because mental health matters in the 1980s and 1990s could lead to mental asylums. We came from a community where being depressed was gossiped about, shunned, and deemed as a human weakness that required more prayers. My grandparents and her siblings also knew something was wrong as she fell from a building in Pakistan when she was younger, but there was never an admission of it to my sisters and I until we were adults. We felt let down by all of this.

I relished the periods my parents would temporarily separate, and my mother would pack our belongings so we could stay with my grandparents for some months. It has been a lifelong challenge for me to heal from and bond fully with my mother, as she never allowed my sisters and I to get close enough emotionally, which has had a great impact on us. We battled to help her let go of the things that weighed on her mind and it made us feel guilty and helpless. I think growing up we feared her and misunderstood her and eventually we forgave and learnt to love and understand her. Due to these experiences, I felt the Pakistani Muslim community structure appeared to have a system of values based on a very narrow collection of rules and customs that were cherry-picked from Islam. I thought this was due to a misunderstanding of the culture of faith and morality on which it was based. Islam is a compassionate religion, but I do not think the community was compassionate towards my family. I can really see that I felt stifled by these things and art provided a much needed breathing space for me,

At the age of about 13, my parents finally separated indefinitely against the wishes of my father as he objected to a divorce with 3 daughters. It was the 1990s, and it was rare for a divorce to occur in Muslim families. We were a fragmented household, and there was a negative expectation from our community and extended family regarding what path my sisters and I would take. I think it pushed me to prove the community wrong and to change the narrative. I hid the divorce

from other children at school and we began to understand what it was like to be on the fringes of something. My father would secretly come and visit me at school and eventually I decided to go and live with him, but this made me feel even more guilty for leaving my mother.

Within months of my father leaving, I made my next life-changing decision to move in with my maternal grandparents for the duration of my high schooling. I was mature beyond my age and remember the moment I recognised my father's limits in taking care of me and knew I could do something to change my reality. I knew I would be in a better environment with my grandparents. The journey with my mother completely changed my outlook on life and created a more compassionate approach towards others. I struggled to speak about her for a long time; I think I was protective of any judgements towards her. It made me distance myself from these cultural frameworks and societal expectations for some time and be more honest in living authentically. Living with my maternal grandparents gave me the foundation that would help in years to come, the love and support from them was the most valuable gift they gave me. It helped me to understand the power of love and stability.

I will now go a bit further back into my family history and walk you through the traditions and roots of both my extended family in the next section, beginning with my paternal grandparents.

2.2.4 My Paternal Grandparents And Their Deep-Rooted Traditions

Before one is born, one's identity begins to shape, through the race, nationality, faith, parenthood, and privilege which one will be born into. During a lifetime, some aspects will stay constant, and others will change. When the traditional family structure of my household fell apart, I began asking questions about identity, which is a theme that continues through this thesis. It is therefore important for me to share the origins of both the paternal and maternal sides of my family at this stage of the story. These influences played a huge part in understanding the bigger picture and provided the seeds of who I am, and who my parents were. In reviewing this it helped me understand my value system better and why I became the person and curator I am today.

My paternal grandparents were from Rawalpindi in Pakistan. I never met my paternal grandfather, as he passed away whilst I was a toddler. My father seldom spoke about him, so I knew little about him aside from seeing a few pictures and hearing the occasional family tale. He was a

Lieutenant in the British Army and served in World War II. From those exchanges, I deduced he was a handsome, well-presented, well-known, respected, honourable man who enjoyed polo.

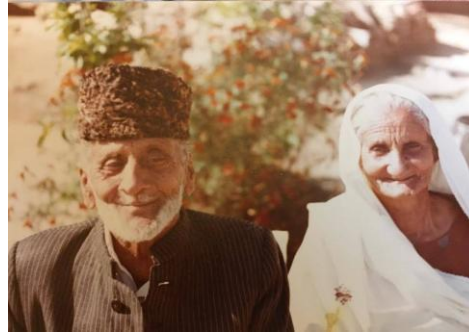


Figure 2.5: My paternal grandparents

Source: Family archive

I met my paternal grandmother only once when I was 18 on a visit to Pakistan and was able to spend a few weeks with her. She was born in a village in the district of Rawalpindi and was my grandfather's second wife. By the time I made her acquaintance, she was frail with a poor sight, but still mentally sharp. She had born and raised 12 children and would converse in a local dialect of Punjabi and she repeatedly told me my father was born in Multan, a city in Pakistan.

From my observations, she was a resilient ex-army officer's wife, who was tough and stubborn. Like my maternal grandmother who came from a generation of women able to raise large families and face adversity. Male and female roles seemed quite defined in the family back then, women took care of the household and the children, and the men provided for the financial needs. Although many of the women in my father's and mother's family were mostly educated, it only really occurred in the generation after my grandparents. My grandmothers' lived experience of being empowered and strong looked different to ours; they possessed a different type of wisdom.

My experience was that being guarded and dismissing your emotions and issues was normalised in Pakistani culture. The culture placed a high value on community reputation, dignity, and self-image. I grew up hearing of 'honour,' constantly and my father would tell my sisters and I that we had to be careful of any actions that could bring dishonour to my grandfather's name – which was a long list of things. That God favoured modesty, or '*Haya*' in Arabic, and piety. By this they

meant as an unmarried lady, you should not laugh too much, be conspicuous, or wear too much makeup; simplicity was best, and you defended your chastity with your life. As a result, I understand why I was drawn to the freedom, fluidity, and truth in art expression.

I have a wonderful example of this idea of preserving honour playing out one hot summer evening whilst visiting Pakistan in 2001. My paternal grandma shuffled her way up a flight of stairs to gently persuade me from sitting on the rooftop of the house alone. She considered it improper for a young woman, and that the neighbours might notice me. My grandmother's actual concern was that men could see me. I was staying at my auntie's house in Rawalpindi at the time and my grandmother had requested that she stay with me for those few weeks as a guardian. She was traditional and protective. These were my only memories of her. Another example of an act of protecting my honour occurred when I would visit the bazaar (marketplace) with my father. He would advise me to look down and not wide-eyed and around, although countless men were ogling in my direction it was infuriating that it was me that had to divert my sight. I was irritated at witnessing the freedom granted to the men to stare, and be seen, and heard as loudly as they wanted, while the same was not granted to women.

This had a profound effect on me as I struggled to unpack my own feelings in fully interacting with who I was, until much later in life. I understand the basis of what we did as a family led back to our culture and religious interpretation, and it makes it difficult to refute, even when it does not make sense. Most of our life lessons were passed to us by our elders who always referenced the Quran, even though it was not written in their first language. I can attest that none of my grandmothers could read or write and learnt what they did through a process of memorisation and recitation.

I did not travel to Pakistan until I was 18 years old and learnt quickly that Pakistani culture in Pakistan differed from that of the Pakistani Diaspora. My father's parents were a lot more traditional and guided by the local Pakistani culture as well as Islam. My maternal grandparents felt a strong connection towards their country of birth they had left but had integrated into British culture also. The next section looks at their story.

2.2.5 The Unfolding Story Of My Maternal Grandparents

Moving in with my maternal grandparents after my parents' divorce was life-changing, marked by an era of growth. I developed a deep relationship with them; thus, they became significant figures in my life. Together, they engrained some of their wisdom in me, and the potential and possibilities were not apparent until much later in my life.

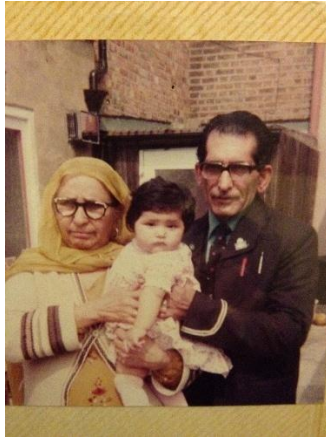


Figure 2.6: My grandparents and I

During their lifetime, they had 3 children together and adopted one. Mother was the youngest of their biological children. My grandfather's enlistment in the army during World War II, and later in the fire brigade and British Rail when he moved to the UK, provided a comfortable life, however as a family, they understood and had encountered poverty at some stage on the journey. As a result, my grandparents were uncomfortable having anything beyond their means if others did not have it.



Figure 2.7: My maternal grandmother with my mother and siblings, my great grandparents in Pakistan

Source: Family archive

They, like my father's ancestors, were Muslims born in villages in Rawalpindi in the Punjab, prior to the partition of India and Pakistan. Rawalpindi became a part of founder Mohammed Ali Jinnah's new Pakistan after the partition, and they became Pakistanis. Their love story was very divisive for the society and period because they had eloped and had one of the best life-long relationships I have ever witnessed. While I am not privy to the specifics about what happened, their elopement was symbolic. I thought the act was incredibly brave and emancipating for society and time. Knowing this part of their journey helped to bridge a large generational gap particularly when I lived with them, because I thought they could relate with me better because of their open-mindedness. The next stage of their lives took them to England, where they would lay the groundwork for their families and their life together.

2.2.6. Building Foundations In The Diaspora And The Potentials In A New Country

British Pakistanis are the UK's second-largest ethnic minority group (Shankley, Hannemann & Simpson, 2020). Since the 1950s, when the first Pakistanis began to immigrate to the UK, they have come a long way in terms of social and economic class, education, and political standing. These developments are attributed, in large part, to the progressive incorporation of Pakistanis

into British society. As the children of immigrants, my sisters and I benefited from our grandparents' hard work.



Figure 2.8: My maternal great grandfather with my grandfather and other family

Source: Family archive

My parents were immigrants with a strong connection to Pakistan but to a much lesser extent than their parents. As the first generation to be born in the UK, I view myself as primarily British and this forms a strong part of my identity. I still have a psychological association with Pakistan, but I have never regarded or felt it to be home. For my sisters and I, it has been a conflict of identities in trying to embody British, Pakistani, and Muslim culture all in one.

Integration into the British way of life for my family took time and racism was rife in the 1960s. My aunts would tell us stories of how they all pulled together to build a life in England for us. Large families lived together and sometimes only the male members immigrated initially and rented beds and rooms until they could eventually afford to rent a whole house and eventually buy one. Close-knit communities were formed through the strong links with one another from the country they had left. Due to their journey, my grandparents instilled a sense of community in me very early on, and the importance of building foundations together. I think this helped me connect to others and later in life on my travels as I was drawn to places where the sense of community was integral like South Africa.

Many family friends had been in the same class at school in Pakistan with my uncle or my mother and these bonds and support systems would continue in their new country. My mother at 15 was young enough to continue her education and completed her O-Levels at senior high until age 18, but for many the linguistic skills were not sufficient for the UK system immediately, so the women utilised all their other skills. In my own family, my mum and aunts worked as seamstresses from home or in garment factories. It was the mindset of hard work they brought with them, and my grandmother was at the helm of it for the women in our family. The next section will draw focus to her.



Figure 2.9: Mum with my maternal grandmother, her cousins and siblings

Source: Family archive

2.2.7 My Maternal Grandmother's Love And Wisdom

My grandmother was a small and fair-skinned woman, who always dressed in traditional Pakistani clothes with a sheer veil loosely draped on her head when she left the house. She would dye her hair with henna as she grew older, and her copper/ginger colour became her trademark. My maternal grandmother was a special person to me, and her energy was powerful, grounded, and fiercely loving. One of my fondest memories of her is watching the old classical Hindi film *Mughal-e-Azam* as a young girl.

Her childhood was tragic. Her father died when she was young, leaving her mother to support her and her siblings. After marrying my grandfather, my grandmother devoted her entire life to raising a family with him. She had a willingness and ability to be both forward-thinking and conservative,

as well as a force to be reckoned with. She was illiterate but was one of the wisest and most well-rounded women I have known in my lifetime. She was a devout and virtuous woman who put her family first and was a rock for my grandfather, who referred to her as his Queen. I believe they both accomplished what they did because of their profound love for one another and their genuine relationship and selflessness. She was a loving soul with a desire to embrace others and welcome them into her family. Her final years were marred with illness when she suffered a stroke sometime in 2001 that she never recovered from. I think it was such a pivotal moment, for a woman so independent and strong to need 24 hours of care. This was the same year her beloved husband, my grandfather passed away. She only survived him by a few years and became so very child-like in her final years which was heartbreaking to witness. Her passing away impacted my mother so deeply that I am not certain she ever recovered. I feel fortunate for the decision I made to live with her because I benefited greatly from her nurturing and groundedness.



Figure 2.10: Grandmother

Source: Family archive

In the next section, we will look at my grandfather's life in detail.

2.2.8 My Grandfather's Gripping Drama To Liberating Struggle

It is difficult to say who had a greater impact on me among my grandparents. I adored them both and only realised the importance of all their lessons after they passed on. In retrospect, my grandfather's death may have affected me the most because it was the first time, I experienced grief at the age of 18.

Even though they were both progressive in their own ways, he was the more outwardly liberal of the two. He found himself enlisted in the army at a young age, as India furnished the British with the world's largest volunteer army during World War II. He was a member of the 14th Punjab Regiment, which lost four battalions in Singapore and Hong Kong to the Japanese. He along with other soldiers was taken as Japanese prisoner of war and held captive for 4 years in Burma.



Figure 2.11: My grandfather and I, on my birthday, my grandfather

Source: Family archive

He shared how his mother advised him on the day he left for battle, to never take a bullet in the back, but always in the chest, and his father told him to never run from the battlefield.

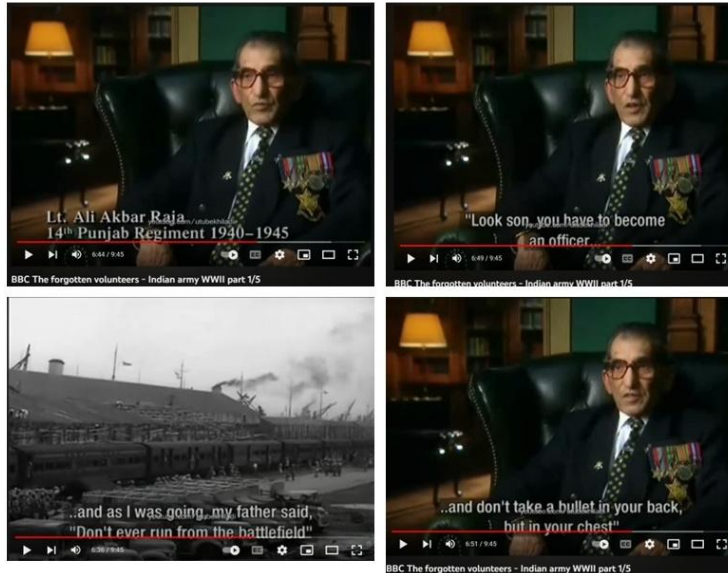


Figure 2.12: Stills of my grandfather’s interview from BBC documentary ‘on the Volunteer army

Source: Youtube, BBC archive

I recall a story he regularly told us about his time as a prisoner of war in Burma. He explained what happened to cause the scar on his wrist (which he liked to show us with some pride). He was lined up with other soldiers blindfolded and used as target practice. He awoke in the early hours, shot, and entangled in the dead bodies of his comrades, and was saved by a passing couple who heard him. I will never forget this story, since his survival provided my family with the life we enjoy today.

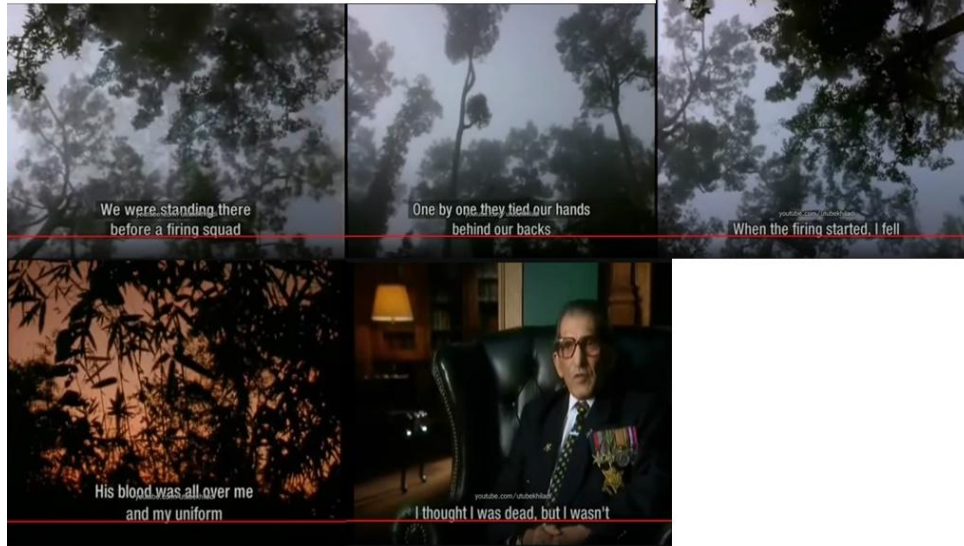


Figure 2.13: Stills from BBC documentary ‘on the Volunteer army

Source: Youtube, BBC archive

His appearance in the BBC series “The Forgotten Volunteers” which aimed to recognize the volunteers who fought with the British was a proud moment for us all. You would be forgiven for picturing him as a strict, broad, military man - but he was quite the opposite. With a slim frame that could be described as petite and ideally proportioned and around 5’9, he was impeccably groomed and always well dressed. He was a beautiful man with sculptured features, olive complexion, high cheekbones, and extraordinarily deep black eyes that twinkled with amusement or kindness or mischief. I always felt he resembled Pakistan’s founder, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, and as a child I mistook Jinnah’s painting in my uncle’s house for my grandfather.

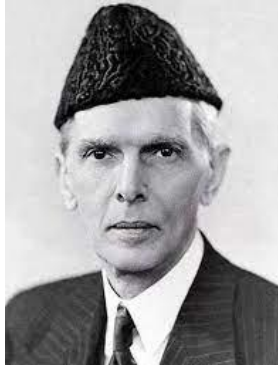


Figure 2.14: Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's founder

Source: (Umerabbasi, 2018)

I emphasise my grandfather's appearance because aside from being influenced by his stance on grooming well, I seldom saw him dressed in traditional Pakistani attire. He always left the house wearing a black trilby, dark three-piece suit, cashmere coat, polished shoes, and a wooden walking stick and smelt of cigarettes and old spice cologne. I am not sure whether he was especially devout, but my grandmother would chastise him for playing the television while she prayed. He had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, but he was also dismissive of the dogmatism and self-righteousness the faith engendered. From the way he spoke to the way he looked; he was a logical thinker with a good sense of self.

If he was a storyteller like me, then there were a lot about him that remained a mystery, and I wish I had longer probed conversations with him. I have many unanswered questions, but I frequently look at myself and wonder if the answers lie within who I have become. He was grateful for the new beginnings offered to him and his family and viewed England as his home. He was kind and open-minded, and he was proud to be British. He frequently stated that he sought more than what Pakistan had to offer after the war, which led to his choice to migrate to London.

I know so little about my grandfather's upbringing, except that his father had also been enlisted in the army. His personal experiences in the army shaped who he became, and he was undoubtedly influenced by his exposure to other nations, camaraderie, and the sacrifices and benefits of the difficulties he encountered. I know he stayed committed to his time and service in the military

because his stories were rich and comprehensive, and he shared them to keep some of his memories alive and frequently and proudly attend army veteran commemoration events.



Figure 2.15: Grandfather with his father

Source: Family archive

He seemed to have no confusion about who he was, and the 18 years of life spent with him will always have me confidently say, he was a man for the poor, the defeated and the marginalised. Of course, he was a war hero, but there were many aspects that he remained an unsung hero for. I believe he would have encouraged my journey and experiences in South Africa and many of my life choices have been silently guided with his presence and examples in my heart.

I now see why I wanted to be a human rights lawyer when I was younger. However, after my grandfather's death, I was not in the right frame of mind to pursue law; instead, I was drawn to the arts after feeling their healing, the freedom and ability to affect social change. I believe that my desire to engage in the contemporary art scene with artists whose work may induce shifts in thinking was a liberating and genuinely important decision and directly linked to the life I had led. Much of this was influenced by the political events that were unfolding around me at the age of 16, as well as a spiritual quest that was taking shape within me. I will address this in the next section.

2.2.9 Seeking God – The Many Possibilities Of A Teenage Awakening

As a teenager, I was drawn to Islam during a period of spiritual exploration. It was the late 1990s, and there was a revival among young British Muslims like me who wanted to reconnect with their faith and religious identity besides their ethnic identity. For those of us who were struggling with the trappings of being British, Pakistani, and Muslim, this was a significant response. This new approach to Islam was not a 'new' way of approaching Islam per se, but a resurrection of what Islam has always entailed, which was free of nationalistic conceptions of identity – that is, caste and colour were irrelevant. Interracial marriage was accepted, which upset many South Asian families because culturally they preferred to marry within their race and caste.

Traditions brought to England from Pakistani villages were being questioned by British Muslim youth. Marriage was not the only cultural tradition or ritual under attack. Attire no longer required Pakistani clothing; instead, the '*Hijab*' or complete head coverings for ladies became fashionable again. Young women could incorporate modest fashion into their wardrobes, and British Muslim identity was gaining traction. At 16 years old, I followed in the footsteps of several of my relatives who were becoming active in Islamic activity on university campuses. I wore a *Hijab* and *Abaya* (veil and long garment) and attended Islamic discussions and lectures. My grandfather and mother opposed my participation in this, perceiving it as brainwashing.

There was no incitement of violence at these gatherings, but the young people who attended were rapidly drawn to a vision of Islamic utopia reminiscent of the ancient Golden Age of Islam. At some point, my bookshelf was jammed full of pamphlets on a range of topics linked to the "*Deen*" (Islamic way of life), and I saw that my attitudes towards individuals around me were evolving. I began to distance myself from my non-Muslim friends, avoided listening to music, and read as much as possible. At times, I became uneasy with myself, and there are a few factors that I believe led to my dissatisfaction. I began to realise the lectures were dogmatic, political, and at times anti-western. The goal was to attract people to Islam to establish a *Caliphate* (Islamic State), but this felt far-fetched in a Western country with a Christian head of state.

Because I had witnessed so much conflict in my youth, I realised that harmony was innately essential to me. I was drawn to Islam because of the serenity and balance it provided. The salutation "*Assalam Alaikum*" means "peace be upon you." and the Qur'an is quite specific about

an individual being at peace with himself. I was told that it was *haram* for me to practice western law to become a human rights lawyer. I think this finally pushed me to stop attending the Islamic lectures and I stopped veiling to the relief of my grandparents and immersed myself into college life.

I did not abandon Islam but rather made the decision to develop a deeper emotional relationship with it. Muslims refer to the "great *jihad*" as the effort to conquer basic passions such as greed, desire, and cruelty and to achieve spiritual purity. It is a person's most crucial internal conflict, and I saw a spiritual mismatch in the content of the lectures I was attending with my cousins. Perhaps this shift in my thinking came at the right time shortly after my grandfather passed away which threw my life into a new turmoil, the next section will narrate this.

2.3 My Grandfather Passed Away Leading to More Gripping Drama

The year 2001 was a year I will never forget. My grandfather died on April 2, 2001, when I was 18 years old, and it was a pivotal point in my life. I previously shared that my loving grandma suffered a massive stroke the same year he died, demanding 24-hour special care nursing. It was the end of an era, and I had no idea the road ahead would be so painful. With my grandfather's death arose discussions about who would be responsible for me now; my extended family was ready to return me to my parents. My grandmother could not communicate and needed close care and I was so detached from the realities of life with my parents. I believed there was no one I could trust or rely on and went to the Dean of my college to request for rehousing. I was accommodated at Centre Point, a young people's homeless shelter in Berwick Street, Central London.

The months I spent in a youth hostel with other young people shaped my perspective on life, and I became more street conscious. Most of the young people were exiles from countries I had never visited before, but we all had one thing in common: none of us belonged to a nuclear family. During this time, I did a lot of introspection, and being away from the family environment was a new type of learning for me. However, after a few months, my mind returned to my parents, and I realised I wanted to reconnect with my father by returning to live with him. I reflected upon never getting to know him as much as I should have, which gave me hope for a better future. I think I also felt misfitted having lived within a family life as a young Muslim girl to living in the

hostel. Leaving home unless for university or if you were married, was unnatural to the culture I was raised in. However, things were not going to turn out how I expected and 2001 unfolded into the most pivotal year of my life. When I moved back in with my father, he planned a summer trip to Pakistan for us, and I was thrilled at the possibility of meeting a new family. The events that occurred a few weeks into my vacation were another watershed moment. My father returned to London and left me to continue my holiday, which included a prearranged marriage to my cousin in Pakistan.

2.3.1 2001 – An Arrangement In Pakistan And The Bombing Of The Twin Towers In New York

I could not have been more unprepared for this marriage and most of it is a blur. I went through the ceremonial motions of dressing up as a bride and being married in a culture that was mostly foreign to me. I return to my childhood self here because I felt at the time like I stepped out of myself to some extent to deal with this as a spectator of my own life unfolding.

I had been in Pakistan for a few months when, on September 11, 2001, another major tragedy occurred in front of the world's eyes and on my TV screen in Rawalpindi - the Twin Towers were blown up in New York. Perhaps it was no coincidence that so many life-altering and crash-and-burn tragedies occurred in 2001. As I reflect on the various challenges I have faced in my life, it becomes clear that they are all interconnected. The divorce of my parents, my mother's illness, the aftermath of my grandfather's death, and my new marriage all point to a larger societal issue. These experiences have taught me that there is a global sickness that needs to be addressed that stem from a lack of empathy and understanding for one another - the way religion has been used to justify it only reinforces this idea. We need a rise, rebirth, or renewal of our collective humanity.

On returning to the UK from Pakistan, I pushed for a divorce much to my father's displeasure, who had worked hard to keep me married. I was up against an entire family that was putting pressure on me to stay married to a stranger. Arranged marriages were a longstanding tradition in South Asian culture, but this was not arranged by me. I stood against the social pressures that were stripping me of my civic freedoms to make a choice for myself. By releasing myself, I sought to make sense of my existence and the causes of the distressing and disruptive events that occurred around me. I was constantly questioning myself about my place in British Muslim culture as well.

Much has changed in the world since 9/11, and I have been often asked if I considered myself to be British first or Muslim first. Racism seemed out of place in the new millennium to my 20-something self, but there seemed to be a profound illness within British society. We had seen 9/11, but the naiveté of believing that it would not affect British Muslims and Muslims around the world for a long time was mistaken.

2.3.2 2004 - My Grandmother Passed Away Leading To Creative Origination In Syria And My Awakening To Art

Terrorist attacks continued from 2001 around the world and young Muslims were often implicated in them. After leaving the rigid Islamic groups of the late 1990s, the death of my grandfather and my encounter in Pakistan, I found myself at a crossroads in my self-exploration. I was having a new kind of identity crisis; I was born a Muslim and knew it in my heart but nothing I had seen in the name of Islam from the Islamic lectures I was attending at 16, from personal events to political events, matched the peace, unity, and justice that I was seeking.

Around this time, whilst living with my father, my 2 younger sisters eventually moved in with us. My parents owned properties on the same street, and they were struggling to live with my mum's post-divorce moods. So, they moved in with my father and I, thus from there on it was the 4 of us, with my mother living close by. I was in my early 20s and my sisters were teenagers. My father was mostly at work and life fell into a noisy routine as we bonded and were living together for the first time since we were children.

The political events around me undoubtedly influenced my decision to pursue a career in the creative space and I began working in the London financial district in advertising to gain a sense of independence. After grandmother passed away when I was 21, I was frustrated, angry and confused with my life and the society I lived in. The grief drove me to accept an invitation to visit an old friend Rana in Syria that winter. The trip opened a new gateway to a rich cultural heritage unlike anything I had been exposed to during my early education. I learned about the important shared heritage of Muslims, Christians, and Jews and other faiths when I visited sites in Aleppo and Damascus. I started to uncover how religions and civilizations were connected by material culture. One night on an overnight bus travelling between Aleppo to Damascus I woke up as the

sun was rising with an unforgettable feeling of being able to breathe again after many years and a deep spiritual connection with that moment.



Figure 2.16: My trip to Syria. Aleppo

Source: Personal archive

Shortly after I returned from Syria to London a terrorist attack occurred in July 2005, when suicide bombers killed over 50 people by blowing up public transport. They were on their way to work on the routes I had often taken. In the months that followed there was a rise in targeted racial violence against ethnic minorities. Muslims were pushed into distancing, defending, and apologising that we were not like the terrorists and that we were ordinary Muslims, whatever ordinary meant. Even though Islam is not a race, Islam and Muslims became ‘racialised,’ and faced the prejudices that come with racism.

Enthralled by Syria and focusing on this experience, as well as the dynamics that had emerged in Britain and globally for Muslims. I recognized the restorative nature that I had discovered in the arts. I kept circling back, being immersed and embracing art and it would help me to dissect, accept, reject, or heal from what was happening around me as well as the trauma I had encountered in my family life. A few months later, with my newfound source of inspiration, I started a bachelor’s degree in curating, communications and critiquing for art and design at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London.

2.3.3 Channelling My Life Experiences Into Art

At university I was soaking up huge quantities of information about Europe's wonderful artistic legacy, both past and present. Despite enjoying it, I felt something was missing and it was only when I decided to write a critique about a Fulham, London-based gallery run by Iraqi artist Maysaloun Faraj, did I fully understand what I was experiencing within me. I did not feel seen in the art history or the narrative which I was studying as a person of mixed heritage. There was no mention of art from any of the regions that connected to my family's heritage. Maysaloun's art fascinated me and the clarity of the context within which she worked. She encouraged me to explore curating as there were only few Muslim curators. I could see it made sense to communicate, curate, and expand my knowledge of art made by Muslim artists or that discussed its culture, so that I could share it with others.



Figure 2.17: Iraqi artist Maysaloun Faraj

Source: Maysaloun Faraj social media

Meeting Maysaloun inspired me to take a step into seeking art narratives and art history that spoke of legacies that might help me make sense of myself. My interest was piqued by Wijdan Ali's work as a Jordanian commentator, art historian, and educator. After several years as a diplomat, she established the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts and the Royal Society of Fine Arts. With so few female Muslim cultural critics, I learned much from her ethos and considered her to be a role model. She explained, "Consequently, I wanted to establish a venue for Arab and Islamic artists where they could show their work and be evaluated according to their own aesthetics,

without having to shed their skin”(Haupt and Pat Binder, 2003). This statement struck a chord within me, and I kept it in mind as I embarked on my journey into the art world.

2.3.4 A Global Moment And Movement For Art From The MENA

With the establishment of Art Dubai in 2005, an exponential interest in arts from the MENA region took shape over the following years. International art markets were exploding, and the ruling monarchy of Qatar the Al-Thani family were purchasing for the new Museum of Islamic Art in Doha. Years later whilst I was an intern in the Islamic and Indian department at Bonhams auction house we would frequently consult them. Contemporary artists inspired by the arts of the Near and Middle East, or the Islamic world were eventually given a forum to prosper in the United Kingdom at exhibitions such as "Word into Art" at the British Museum in 2006 and "Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East" in 2009. Spurred by this momentum, in my twenties, I travelled throughout the MENA region to learn about the region's arts and people. I visited artists' studios and cultural centres in Jordan and Syria, where artists discussed their personal life experiences, political instability, and everything in between. I found it difficult to classify all such artistic practices and discussion points as Islamic or religious art or, conversely, to remove such art practices as non-Islamic art – so I sought clarity in defining them for myself.



Figure 2.18: With The former Director of the Jordan Museum of Fine Art; me visited art studios in Syria in 2009

Source: Personal archive

I have always been fascinated with the idea of 'La Convivencia' from Islam's "Golden Age." It provided an insight into how people before us handled things. I was sceptical about its full potential being achieved in the twenty-first century. Since humans have the capacity to romanticise the past, I came across a plethora of opinions and scholarship, and I found myself deconstructing the whole idea of 'conviviality.' I spent considerable time in Southern Spain in 2007 studying this for my undergraduate dissertation, 'Alhambra Palace, 21st century preconceptions and reception'.



Figure 2.19: In Granada at a spiritual and research retreat in 2007

Source: Personal archive

My travels instilled a desire to deepen my knowledge of the Muslim past, particularly in relation to other societies and civilisations, and the contemporary art practice. But my personal life kept pulling me back to the gripping drama of my family every time I was at a point of discovering the next step.

2.3.5 The Gripping Drama Of My Father's Second Marriage

While I was writing this chapter, one pattern that came to my mind was how my path into the arts was often interspersed with turbulence in my personal life. It makes sense that I found peace in being surrounded by creativity and beauty with as much intensity as everything else came. One year after starting art school, I went on another trip to Syria with my friend Rana and her family. This time whilst visiting the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus I received a phone call from my sister Sanaa informing me that my father, who we were living with at the time had remarried in Pakistan and his new wife was coming to live with us in a few months. The news was a shock to

the system for all 3 of us, and a few months later she moved into our home. It was a huge rearrangement, up until then my sisters and I had been living with our father in a bubble, and we were responsible for running the house - our home. That was to change dramatically after a year of her living with us, she struggled to accept us and essentially did not want us to live there. There was conflict in the house every day, with me always at the frontline, standing up for my sisters and my father.

Eventually, the arguments led to an altercation that left my father to choose between his new wife or his daughters living under his roof. My sisters and I left his house one morning in August 2008 packing some belongings in bin liners, numbed by his betrayal of loyalty towards us. With the help of a friend, I found us somewhere to rent, and heartbroken we processed what our father had become. Some months later my younger sisters were able to return to his house to live, but my stepmother pushed my father to an ultimatum, and it would be either her or I in that house. I never returned to live there and as I write this; I still understand that I was a scapegoat, and my father was too scared of a second divorce. It was the most traumatic feeling of betrayal I had to overcome. It hit deeply and I could never understand why my sisters could still live at home, and I could not. I struggled with understanding why I was being punished for defending my family against what felt like a threat in the shape of my stepmother bullying and taunting us when my father was at work and so a fresh period of grief began – this time for a life I felt snatched from me.

2.3.6 Grieving My Old Life And Adapting To My New Realities

In the period that followed, I grieved my former home, and my life without my sisters and struggled to face the deep loneliness that came with living outside of my father's home. I could have embraced it sooner, but it was not a voluntary move, it felt like being banished or sent into exile.

Despite all my family trauma, I wanted to move forward with my life and in 2009 I took trip to Palestine in 2009 to work as volunteer in refugee camp. During my trip to Palestine, I was taken in by the beautiful architecture: Jerusalem fascinated me as I walked back in time through the structures of 3 major feuding religions that stood side by side. Shortly after I started my master's degree in the history of art/archaeology and architecture of the Near and Middle East at the School

of Oriental and African Studies in London and my research interests quickly directed towards the cultural interactions between Islam and the West. The knowledge transfer through material culture; an investigation of cultural hybridity and how it manifested artistically enthralled me. My perceptions were profoundly influenced and expanded because of this exposure to cultural collaboration and related shared history. I was very excited by my discoveries and wanted to share as much of it as possible with everyone around me.

I was astonished that this significant knowledge gap had not been addressed throughout my early schooling. Still, I was hesitant because our university's bibliographies were dominated by white Europeans. In our whole Department of Art History, there was not a single Muslim art historian. It seems reductive to teach 'Islamic' art history purely from a secularised standpoint.

Learning how others respond and interpret art was a crucial aspect of my master's degree. I started to question the way my British Muslim community engaged with art compared to how historically Muslims did. My findings and ongoing experiences have shown me that there is still a divide between Muslim traditions and artistic experimentation. Another flaw in this plot is the tendency for institutes to educate certain subjects and to portray artists and Muslim culture from a narrow perspective.



Figures 2.20: Jerusalem and the West Bank

Source: Personal archive



Figure 2.21: At the Hagia Sofia in Istanbul

Source: Personal archive

The emotional pain of the gripping family drama pushed me deeper into my studies and finding new purpose. Relationships failed because I felt disconnected and would fall short every time, I met a Muslim boy I liked, as living alone as an unmarried woman was frowned upon. I resented my father for putting me in this situation because South Asian Muslim culture generally requires you to leave your parents' home when you are married and not before. I had been through this when I was 18 and it felt so much harder this time - and more difficult questions to face.



Figure 2.22: Visiting architectural sites In Marrakesh and Cairo

Source: Personal archive

Things took a toll on me in 2010 and I was forced to confront a lot of the pain that I had been burying, and I entered therapy for the first time in my life. I had just turned 28 and the path toward profound spiritual, emotional, and bodily recovery started. It allowed me to truly see myself and the restrictive self-beliefs I had been holding. I would not have been able to write this chapter with the clarity I do today if I had not made this decision and completely committed to a path of deep healing. Whilst on this evolution, I completed my master's degree in 2012 and took one trip to Cairo and another to the Yorkshire Dales, England. On this trip I met my dear friend Zak, whom I lost to cancer on May 15, 2023, whilst I was writing the final chapters of my thesis. I have a lot to thank Zak for and the next section is dedicated to him.

2.3.7 Spiritual And Deep Meaningful Friendships - Dear Zak

I was in Ireland and received a message on the 9th of April 2023 from my dear friend Zak Khan, asking if he could see me in person. He then informed me that his cancer had returned for the 3rd time, and he decided to refuse treatment and therefore had only 2 months to live. I was numb at the news, and disbelief followed, why would Zak voluntarily want to face death? Why did he not want to try and fight for his life? He explained his purpose had been fulfilled earthside and it was time to prepare for the afterlife.

On the 23rd of April, I embarked on a 4-hour train journey from London to Blackburn to say goodbye on what would be the last time I saw him. We spent the day together, with Zak imparting his nuggets of wisdom, ensuring I had enough guidance to keep me going after he left this world. On the 15th of May 2023, Zak took his final breath and peacefully returned to his creator, he had been in a deep meditative state, surrounded by his friends and family. The following account is a reflection on the impact Zak had on my life:

“On the day I met Zak in 2012 on a hike to Helvellyn - a mountain in the English Lake District, it did not occur to me that it was the start of a beautiful friendship. Zak and I became friends shortly after the hike when we sat next to each other at a charity event, and he recounted his story of confronting death after being diagnosed with cancer in 2009. He experienced a spiritual awakening and realised he had more life to live with a purpose to assist others in dealing with their fears, so he became a life coach and mentor. As I got to know him, I realised he had worked through the painful state of recuperating from ill health, the harrowing debilitation of weakened

buckling legs leading to a physical gradual deterioration. He did some incredible hikes whilst in discomfort to help himself heal in nature. I have several anecdotes about Zak, but one stands out. We were at the Cairngorm Mountain range in Scotland with some friends and we spent the weekend exploring Loch Ness and the various beautiful woodlands.

Whilst walking through a beautiful forest, Zak sensed there was something I wanted to divulge but was afraid to open because of the pains I carried with it. The pain behind the weight that I needed to let go was towards my mother, and Zak's understanding and companionship allowed me to verbalise a deeply entrenched turmoil within me: how could I make my mother happy and eliminate the despair she felt? Over the years Zak and I became firm friends and completed many more hikes, and he walked me through the journey of understanding my relationship with myself and the one I had with my mother. Everyone in Zak's life possessed a unique gift that often went unnoticed by those closest to them. However, Zak not only recognised their gifts but also collected and nurtured them with a special connection, free from attachment.

Throughout all my years of knowing him, one thing he always noticed when hiking was that I always picked the tougher pathway when there was an easy option just in front of me. I ascribed this to my life's constant challenges, which had made me more comfortable in turbulent seas.

Zak had firsthand experience with both emotional and physical pain, and he was the first person I could trust to work through my challenges with my mother and to help me acknowledge that I could not save her or control the happiness she chose to let into her life. He showed me that I could however be present and kind and hold space for her. That I could surrender control and accept life's natural course to provide calm and freedom. It was a valuable lesson I needed in learning to love and accept people completely for who they were, and it was Zak who taught me that it was only with love that any heart can turn. In the next section, I will return to my relationship with art and the transformation within me that was taking shape.



Figure 2.23: Zak, my sisters, and I

Source: Personal archive

2.3.8 The Trans4mation Within Me Taking Shape

I was fortunate to have had a thorough arts education, and travel and it was through this experience that I was able to measure the true notion of co-creating and coexisting with people of various beliefs and religions. Changing my habits and behaviours to increase my conscious awareness was central to this. I consider the arts as an entry point into the inner realm of personal and cultural regeneration, rather than as an outward entity like a commodity, amusement, or an externalised object; and I see education as a catalytic force to bring about such renewal and I could action this through my role as an arts practitioner.

The realisation came that art should be accessible to everyone but with the present reality, the arts can often serve as an elitist and inaccessible realm, locking many out. I decided I wanted to be a part of some change to this culture, but I was not sure how to make this happen. During a trip to Switzerland in 2014, a colleague Aneeqa invited me to contact Prof Alexander Schieffer, Co-Founder of Trans4M Centre for Integral Research. We met in Geneva airport in 2014 and a conversation about a world we would like to see from our individual perspectives and industries took place. I was encouraged to share my passion for the arts and my view on the imbalance in my Muslim community participating in the environment and how Muslim artists were represented in the industry.

Later through Professor Alexander, I met with Professor Ronnie Lessem Co-Founder of Trans4M Centre for Integral Research in London, who encouraged me to write a proposal that explained my vision under the heading of *'Islam, Arts and Renewal of Thought – New Approaches to Social and Cultural Integration in the United Kingdom.'* The exercise allowed me to realise the potential of my vision and I signed up for the doctoral programme after which, a year later I received my calling to South Africa.

On January 7, 2015, two Muslim twins, Sad and Chérif Kouachi, stormed the Paris offices of the satirical weekly newspaper Charlie Hebdo. They killed 12 people and wounded 11 others, while armed with rifles and other firearms (BBC News, 2015). The attack was in response to a magazine publishing cartoon mocking the Prophet Mohammad (Peace be Upon Him), whom Muslims around the world revere. It felt like the right time to leave Europe for a while, and I headed to South Africa.

2.3.9 My Call To South Africa And The Mother City

In 2015, one of our doctoral/PhD modules had to be completed in Johannesburg, South Africa at the Davinci Institute, and the city's significantly sizable mosques and Muslim community piqued my curiosity. As I wanted my study to include a transcultural component, I had been conducting research on Muslim communities outside of the United Kingdom prior to this. I decided to spend some time in South Africa and incorporate this into my doctoral research. I received a job offer in Cape Town, Western Cape Province later in 2015, and relocated for a year to study, work, and conduct research.



Figure 2.24: Nizamiye Mosque in Midrand, Johannesburg

Source: Nizamiye Mosque Facebook page

I always wondered why, of all places, I felt summoned to South Africa. My spiritual self-reminded me that I had made an intention and should proceed when the urge first manifested. As a result, I committed to a path of self-discovery, healing, and rebirth. Throughout this, I acquired insight into my own life, and being an outsider in a new environment pushed me to seek more for my own well-being. As a curator and arts practitioner, I looked for new methods to embody this mandate.

Apartheid has left a significant societal and psychological scar on the country, and it will take a long time to recover and repair. My first three years in Cape Town were spent as an Executive Assistant to the CEO of a financial institution. The headquarters was in the central Cape Town neighbourhood of Walmer Estate, near District Six, which was formerly subject to enforced removal under the Group Areas Act. With a workforce of over 400 local employees, it was run by a Muslim family of Indian ancestry and was my first introduction to South African society.

The work canteen is an excellent space for discovering company cliques which holds up a mirror to society. I observed there was no racial friction on the floor among the Cape Malay, Coloured, Xhosa, Afrikaner, White English-speaking employees and foreigners from Mauritius, Zimbabwe, India, and Pakistan. Few white employees ate in the canteen, and even fewer worked in the BEE-certified firm. BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) is a system created by the African National Congress(ANC)South Africa's leading governmental party, to redistribute the resources and

income lost to non-whites during the apartheid era, requiring non-whites to be given precedence when hiring in the new Republic of South Africa.

Working at the firm allowed me to form acquaintances and learn about South Africa through my coworkers. It took some time to integrate and grasp cultural subtleties, but numerous conversations and observations helped me realise the tremendous differences between affluent and poor, as well as the current urban divide and urban planning of Cape Town. I truly felt myself maturing over these years, and I am uncertain that I grasped the full scale of local challenges until I was confronted with them in my daily routines and settings. Going through the emotions of being confronted and feeling uncomfortable, compelled me to take a deeper look at myself and reconsider the privileges I had grown up with.

2.4 The Invisible Walls Within the City

The neighbourhoods where I have lived and worked in Cape Town helped me traverse the city. The mix of cultures is not integrated, with the poorest residing on the outskirts and the richer class, largely foreigners and white South Africans, occupying the city centre and Atlantic Seaboard. Driving out of Cape Town International Airport, the miles of shacks can be viewed from your window and stand in stark contrast to the docks and modern suburbs along the Southern suburbs and the Atlantic seaboard. Cape Town is well-known for its sights and natural beauty and hosted the Soccer World Cup in 2010, but this has not prevented it from being one of the world's most dangerous cities.

Such poor and under-resourced areas are farther away from the city centre, with crowded taxis and trains providing much-needed transport to work every day for most people. Commuter train services run along Cape Town's central line, which runs between the Cape Town CBD and through some of the city's poorest communities Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plain. These areas are prone to crime and repeated vandalism, resulting in total loss of rail infrastructure essential to run trains safely, making the route unsuitable to use. This is the terrible reality of many young people's lives, including the lives of artists and those employed in the South African art industry. Corruption, from government to industry, perpetuates the situation, in addition to the misery and injustice that it brings. The high cost of living, the Covid 19-pandemic, and the country's crippling power shortages have presented an existential threat to the nation's economic and social fabric.

With a desire to return to the art world, I left the finance industry in 2018 and began working for ART AFRICA, a contemporary art journal based in Salt River, an east-side neighbourhood of Cape Town. My daily bus and a public taxi ride from the city centre to work provided a close-up glimpse at society. Every day, I walked from my workplace to my bus stop on the main Victoria Road, which is home to the renowned Groote Schuur Teaching Hospital, where Christian Barnard performed the world's first human-to-human heart transplant. Notably, throughout a two-year period of travelling this route to and from work, I never shared a public taxi with a white person, nor did I see any waiting in the long lines for the Golden Arrow public bus. Workers from Khayelitsha, Mitchell's Plain, Nyanga, Gugulethu, Langa, Hanover Park, and Mannenberg townships on the 'Cape Flats' primarily use public transportation.



Figure 2.25: At FNB art fair with Art Africa magazine

Source: Personal archive

Apartheid is still visible in the places where I worked and visited, and most Western Cape nannies and domestic workers are black women who work in the homes of upper - and middle-class mostly white families. I became friends with some of these women. They show much perseverance, patience, and strength in striving to care and nurture their children via these vocations. I recollect an incident whilst working at an employer's home during a project: I noticed the housekeeper Mary would never accept an invitation to eat at the table with our team and the boss. It was only brought to my attention whilst alone with Mary with whom I had formed a bond – that she and the maintenance staff did not eat at the table with us because it was not permitted in the household. They were not allowed to use any of the same dishes as their employers, and

the ‘madam’ would yell at them if they did. I forbade Monica from calling me ‘madam’ when on occasion she did, and I reminded her she is my colleague, and we are the same. These uncomfortable social norms are not the case for every household. Many of these women are pillars for their community, although, in the non-black homes in which they worked, they were still looked down upon – the clear distinction of social and colour classes is implemented in many microenvironments including the art industry. This is depicted so well in the work of artist Mary Sibande.



Figure 2.26: Mary Sibande, Sofia

Source: Nair, 2020

Racist language is not tolerated in South Africa, but the passive hostility, supercilious attitude, stifling of voices, rewriting of history, and city division all remain. All of this has manifested itself in the art world, and I was able to recognise it by the time I began working in the field in South African art industry which I will discuss next.

2.4.1 Discovering South Africa And Its Art Ecology

Now in my new environment I went about the complex process of understanding South Africa, Cape Town and its arts landscape deeper and the Cape Town Muslim community. To guide my understanding, I sought to answer the following questions:

1. What was the history and dynamics of the communities?
2. What did the South African contemporary art industry look like?
3. Were the arts playing a role in the Muslim community in Cape Town and if so where and how?
4. Were there representations of this creativity in the arts institutions and how?

I observed a lack of presence of Muslim artists despite the country's boast of four to six major art fairs and a sizable Muslim population. The Muslim community's engagement with the art world appeared non-existent and they also felt excluded. I was curious to know the root cause of this. I wanted the Muslim community to be a part of the conversation on art. I wanted to understand the art consciousness of the Muslim community in Cape Town in a similar way to what I had started out doing in London. It led me to recognise my calling to develop and strengthen relationships between the art sectors and the artistic community, the Muslim community in Cape Town, and the larger South African society. Through integral research and integral development, I intend to engage in a transformative and co-operative process to produce a new emancipatory and integral approach to serve as a bridge for the communities to the art world and partner organisations.

Amid this shift, I met my husband, Yaseen, who is of Cape Malay descent and has a long family history in the Western Cape, in 2018. This appeared to me to be a confirmation that my time in Cape Town had gone beyond a transcultural year of study and that I was more intimately grounded in my local setting, as such, the project took on new relevance for me. I moved to Cape Town with the intention of staying for 1-2 years, but I ended up staying beyond 5 years, and considered it home. One of the most significant developments for me was the freedom with which I could practise or even exist as a Muslim. I could easily go to the Mosque on my lunch break or any other time as there were so many mosques. Religious practice is encouraged in South Africa and respected, so being Muslim was without difficulty. How this has not translated into the art world

is what I have been uncovering. I noticed quickly one would seldom hear of terrorist attacks in which a South African was involved, neither did religious sermons focus on inciting anger or hatred.



Figure 2.27: Yaseen and I on our wedding

Source: Personal Archive

I still followed the international news, although being further away gave me a better perspective of what I left behind in Europe. An example was the beheading of a French schoolteacher for using cartoons from the satirical publication Charlie Hebdo in a class on free expression in October 2020, and a list of other occurrences (BBC News, 2020).

I now understood why South Africa had called me and specifically Cape Town the Mother City, and the events leading up to that point gave me much clarity. I was not fighting to justify my role as a Muslim in South African society, but obviously, the art world was influenced by the international reputation of Islam and Muslims. The next section provides my introspection and retrospection of chapter 2 by tying together the potentials and possibilities that came to the fore through the narrative process and demonstrated in the following chapter 3.

2.4.2 Moving From Introspection To Retrospection

2.5 Conclusion

Before leaving for South Africa to begin my doctoral journey in 2015, I wrote the first draft of this chapter. I experienced many significant and troubling events in my life, which made revisiting them to write this chapter challenging. But with perseverance, resilience, and optimism, I completed it.

My experience of the regenerative power of art first-hand and more specifically, the arts of Muslim culture and civilization led me to discover my call to explore new approaches to strengthen art access, engagement, and advocacy for Muslim communities in Cape Town through my role as a curator and arts management professional.

This Doctorate and PHD (Process of Holistic Development) process, reveals the individual and collective tale about community development which continues to unfold for me beyond the completion of this innovative research journey. In the next chapter, I will detail my outer calling in South Africa's art ecosystem and Cape Town's Muslim community and artists, connecting it with my inner call which I have shared in this chapter.

Chapter 3

RETROSPECTIONS LEADING TO RESPONDING TO THE OUTER CALL OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY AND ARTIST COMMUNITY IN CAPE TOWN

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter unearthed my burning desire for art engagement and inclusivity which led me to discover my call to explore new approaches to strengthen art access, engagement, and advocacy for Muslim communities in Cape Town through my role as a curator and arts management professional. This chapter details the path that eventually led me to South Africa where my call responded to a need in South African society and more specifically within the Cape Muslim community, its artists, and the South African art industry. By drawing a spotlight to my ‘beginning’ in my birth country the United Kingdom, I reflected on my upbringing, family history and dynamics as well as the primary influencers, social factors and global events that ignited my lifelong passion for art, social justice, and social responsibility. I discovered that by gaining a deeper understanding of myself and the environment, I could open myself up to a better understanding of the world. Chapter 2 ended with an overview of my call to South Africa and my burning desire to use my experience of the regenerative power of art first-hand. More specifically, the arts of Muslim culture and civilization to explore new approaches to strengthen art access, engagement, and advocacy for Muslim communities.

In this chapter, I move from my inner calling to respond to the outer need for community and institutional engagement in the transformation of visual literacy, arts access, and inclusion in the Muslim communities of Cape Town, South Africa. I would like to know how art at the intersections of faith, tradition, politics, and the art ecosystem, can play a transforming role in Muslim communities in Cape Town - and as a curator how can I contribute to this?

In this chapter South African society is discussed with a view to understand the collective calling of the Muslim art community in Cape Town, where I have resided since 2015. The burning concerns of the Cape Town Muslim community and its artists, the South African art industry, and how it supports the arts in the Muslim community will be the focus points of this chapter. The issues that my burning desires in Chapter 2 respond to will be pushed to the forefront of this

process, which will then be linked with my personal narrative as an art professional. I have discovered and analysed the link between my inner calling and that of Cape Town's community and examined the narratives and how they overlapped and intermingled with my story, leading me to re-story my purpose and contribution in life. What is this expanded story, and what is the contribution of my purpose based on this expanded story?

The issue of inequality has persisted to dominate the post-apartheid landscape of this country, which is still repairing itself, leaving it socio-economically stratified by race. By highlighting my personal and professional background and tapping into my own knowledge and experiences I aim art to break the barriers disenfranchised communities face. I believe in the importance of using art as a key process for educating not only the youth but the broader society and reducing the gaps that currently exist.

Writing Chapter 2 brought to the fore key themes that I was able to integrate and explore further in the doctoral process. The first theme is the role of cultural frameworks and traditions, namely Islamic religion and culture, and its relation to the social reality of Muslim communities and their artists in Cape Town. Then comes the theme of education and innovation to build resilience, empowerment, and instil humanism. Then the advancement of the arts and visual literacy through access and engagement. Finally, my passion for philanthropy draws me towards social justice and social responsibility sparked by my desire to share the knowledge I had gained in my own journey and thus the inception of this doctoral research journey.

As with Chapter 2 I have employed the tenets of the Narrative Method to bring out the interconnection of my story, the community story, the art sector, and the larger story of educational transformation. The next section describes some of my difficulties in developing the chapter plot.

3.2 Shaping the Plot: The Stories We Are Told Versus The Stories We Experience

The stories we are told, the stories we experience and how stories are re-storied at different junctions in our lives have different outcomes. In Chapter 2, I disclosed events from which I had evolved, events I had been through personally and by proxy. When I moved to South Africa it was a different story, someone else's story, a country's story - one that I had not experienced personally but had heard of growing up in the United Kingdom.

When Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990, I was 8 years old and only 12 years old when Apartheid officially ended in 1994 (The Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2019). Our schools celebrated Nelson Mandela with the same fervour as Mother Theresa and Gandhi, with the encouragement that he was the hero we should want to meet when we are older – like a preapproved bucket list that includes ‘must climb Kilimanjaro’. I had no idea that decades later I would be living in Cape Town, a stone’s throw away from where these historical events had taken place. In retrospect, at the age of 8, whilst sitting in a multicultural classroom being educated on apartheid and forced relocation based on skin colour, I did not fully grasp its impact and the damage caused to those who lived through it.

From my experience, I recognise there to be an ‘otherness’ that is instilled in students in British education. We learn about world poverty, violent crime, war, natural disasters, and social inequality. But we learn that they occur in ‘other’ places in the developing world somewhere far-removed from Britain. We learn to support the poor and vulnerable at a safe distance and are reminded we are fortunate not to face the same degree of hardship. For example, growing up my awareness about adversities around the world was informed by charitable advertising campaigns run by Oxfam, Red Cross, World Aid, UNICEF and events such as Live Aid organised by Bob Geldof in the 1980s. By default, of the privileges that exist in much of the West, it is safe to say that many of us cannot fully grasp or feel developing world problems. In that sense my parents and grandparents were different – giving to and being connected to the disadvantaged was natural to them and charity was an integral part of their daily life.

In this chapter, as I recount the story of South Africa, and Cape Town, the process of learning and understanding context meant that I had to unlearn some of my worldviews before I moved here in 2015. There were two stages in this process, and it took me almost two years to feel more of a member of the Cape Town community and wider South African society within myself. It required a lot of grounding, and I was more of an observer and listener. When I moved to a country with a deep-rooted history of racial inequality, my first realisation of the plot was, that although apartheid officially ended more than 30 years ago, the inequalities generated by it were still quite visibly rooted in the fabric of society.

One of the personal difficulties I faced in writing this chapter was that I was a foreigner/outsider in Cape Town exploring this subject. Understandably there are still huge sensitivities post-

apartheid and most of the many communities are tight-knit and can be mistaken as insular. I am a person of colour, and until I speak aloud, I blend in unnoticed, sometimes mistaken as Cape Malay, coloured or Indian. However, I am still treated with an element of foreignness by South Africans regardless of how I view myself, and this has its advantages and disadvantages. I have been careful of overstepping the mark with my curiosity or ignorance. From our privileged position, we frequently believe it is our obligation to solve problems in cultures we know little about, even if we have not lived in or immersed ourselves in them.

The universality of being human has been my greatest lesson, and where I lack any knowledge, I have encouraged myself to listen to hear. This chapter tells the story of society and the community, and how I integrate the various elements is an intricate challenge. With a complex history of segregation and post-apartheid, certain wounds are still fresh for many. I did not experience apartheid nor endured post-apartheid oppression or a loss of wealth and reputation due to it. Thus, I asked myself how I could understand this society and its story from my viewpoint, as well as from its cultural and societal viewpoint.

I had to think carefully about how to match my energies with those of the South African society, the Cape Muslim community, and the South African arts industry. My voice, the choice of words and the examples I used while writing the plot were important. I was once told by the founder of a Cape Town-based heritage society that South Africans needed to take ownership of their stories and histories before others decided they found them interesting, and they became another case study. I wondered if he was referring to me.

I am familiar with the notion of 'white gaze' and have studied Edward Said's 'Orientalism,' throughout my life (Park and Wilkins, 2005). I never considered myself a 'gazer' as a person of colour but for the first time, I questioned my own perception of this society and vice versa considering my own privilege. A British Muslim person of colour living in Cape Town is uncommon, and I am often received with a curiousness and uncertainty. After a while, however, I found myself embracing my unique position as a foreigner of colour, because I could comfortably connect with different ethnic groups. This helped me to develop a micro-awareness of culture. I am also not immune to anything unjust that has been normalised in South African society. When raising my concerns about overstepping the line with Bongani Mkhonza, curator of the UNISA Gallery, he pointed out that my 'outsider' voice could be my strength in this

process. He underlined that being able to instantly see the post-apartheid abnormalities that have been normalised in South Africa and vocalising them was my contribution. There is danger in a single story, and this reintroduces the necessity of Randall's theory for multilayers, directions, and vantage points of storytelling (1995). It was also a reminder that I had to ensure co-creation, partnership, cooperation, and consideration always while recounting this story.

Being on the Eastern path and using the narrative method, countless interviews, discussions, and interactions have been curated with the intention of manifesting the change through our vision creation - these narratives continue to unfold daily. The very act of sitting and hearing the life story of individuals like my husband's grandparents who lived through apartheid, has deepened my comprehension. I am often reminded of my own grandfather's stories and wish I had written them down and recorded his astounding life. Contrarily to British society, where people do not share their personal life too freely, people in Cape Town are living history and story books and want to share the experiences. As traumatic as certain memories are, being heard is an important part of restoring this country.

Many of my current family members have been part of the fight for independence, and many of the friends I made have had their lives impacted. Colonialism drowned voices and stripped away people's stories and cultures, and this is increasingly being reclaimed. Knowing this helped me appreciate the act of listening and analysing these narratives first-hand and documenting them in this doctoral research during a time in history when the country was renewing itself. We will now look closer at the narrative that forms part of the larger plot, beginning with the issues in the paradoxical story of Islam in the Western Cape Province which helps to understand its capital city.

3.2.1 The Paradoxical Story of Islam In The Western Cape

In Chapter 2, I mentioned that I was fascinated by the visual presence of Islam and Muslims when I first came to South Africa. It was also quite a refreshing contrast to Europe where there was such religious tension. Over time, I learned that Islam is quite a paradox in the country. While Muslims make up less than 2 % of the population of South Africa and between 5-10% of Cape Town's population (Jacobs, n.d) they are an integral part of the post-apartheid nation and are reflected in politics, education, industry, and the media. Despite such a high public profile, the Islamic history of the country is not as well known by non-Muslims. The paradox of having

"disproportionate visibility but strangely ignored" creates "visible ambiguity" laments South African author and poet Gabea Baderoon (2014).

The San people were the original indigenous tribes of South Africa, while the Khoi arrived later. The Coloured community, a classification from the apartheid era, can trace their roots back to the Khoi and San people (Secorun, 2018). Subsequently, Bantu groups migrated to the region. European settlers began arriving in the 15th century, introducing Muslim slave populations from the Indonesian archipelago. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) established a permanent settlement at the Cape in 1652 (da Costa, 1994).

Being a Muslim in Cape Town is a plot influenced by many of the larger tales in which it is set and the people who have entered this land to make it home. Apartheid, the most dominant narrative of South Africa was the culmination of all that had come before it. We can bridge the complex potentials and possible outcomes of Cape Town and its future by considering the issues pertaining to the identity of Islam in Cape Town as we know it today. In the Western Cape province, where Cape Town serves as the capital, contemporary Muslims with diverse backgrounds often self-identify as Cape Malay, Cape Muslim or Coloured (Kader, 2021).

Despite the ongoing disputes and socially constructed nature of these terms 'Cape Malay' is typically employed to describe the descendants of slaves who were brought to Cape Town, primarily from South and Southeast Asia. Significant portion of Cape Malay people can trace their ancestry to Europe, South Asia, Madagascar, and various other African locales (da Costa, 1994). Although the roots of Cape Malay identity can be traced back to the era of slavery, post-slavery South Africa classified the Cape Malay community as 'coloured', leading to the forced relocation of many Cape Malay people to areas like Bo-Kaap under the Group Areas Act. In this dissertation, the terms 'Cape Malay,' 'Muslim,' or 'Cape Muslim,' and at times, 'coloured,' even though not all coloured individuals are Muslim, are often employed interchangeably in to describe the Cape Muslim experience, owing to the dominant Islamic influence within the Cape Malay community" (Baderoon, 2014).

To bridge the past and the present, I can consider my husband, Yaseen Matthews, who is of mixed ancestry, and his family identifies as 'Cape Malay and Muslim,'. Originally from Bo-Kaap, a neighbourhood at the foot of Signal Hill, on the fringe of Cape Town's city centre, it was formerly known as the 'Malay Quarter'. Bo-Kaap's origins date back to the 1760s when rental houses were

built for and leased to slaves, the descendants of Indonesian exiles and enslaved individuals from Asia and Africa brought to South Africa by Dutch colonizers starting in the 16th Century (Cozien, 2017). My husband's family tree includes more than one of the various ethnic groups that inhabited the Western Cape. Like many others with slave ancestry, we have had conversations where he has attempted to trace back his ancestry and the knowledge stops with his great grandparents. On the maternal side, his grandfather, Mogammed Sedick Fakier, had a coloured mother and a Javanese father, while his maternal grandmother had a European father with mother with Malay heritage. On the paternal side, Yaseen's grandmother, with the surname Amlay, Polynesian background. His paternal grandfather, with the surname Matthews, had Javanese and Malaysian roots. This rich tapestry of heritage reflects the multicultural influences in Yaseen's family history.



Figure 3.2: Clockwise from top - Bo-kaap street, Historic painting of bo-kaap Old Malay quarter by Leonie van Loggerenberg; Painting by Willie Strydom, view of Bo-Kaap

Source: Beyond; South African artists; Singulart

Slavery and Islam are closely linked in South Africa. Most slaves were practicing Muslims who played a key role in establishing Islam in the Cape. Initially, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) imported Dutch settlers when trade with the Khoikhoi declined (Dye and Croix, 2020).

These settlers included people of Dutch ancestry, ex-VOC soldiers, and gardeners who were unable to return to Holland after their VOC contracts ended. (The Cape Malay | South African History Online, n.d). As the VOC were unable to enslave indigenous communities, they brought in slaves from Dutch colonies in Indonesia, India, East Africa, Mauritius, and Madagascar. These slaves, including political prisoners and royalty, had a significant impact on Cape Religion and culture and language and played a crucial role in the growth of Islam.

Under Dutch colonial rule in the Cape Colony, Muslim slaves were barred from publicly practicing their faith until 1795 (Tayob, 2004). Nevertheless, they continued their religious practices within their homes, strengthening family and community ties. Religion served as a source of comfort for those enduring the difficulties of slavery. Their shared Muslim identity brought them together, fostering resilience and close-knit bonds within the community. Islam provided a newfound sense of belonging and identity for displaced individuals, exiles, refugees, and marginalized members of society (Tayob, 2004).

A considerable gap in public awareness regarding the history of Muslims in South Africa parallels a broader lack of understanding of the profound impact of slavery in the country (Baderoon, 2014). Baderoon (2014) delves into South Africa's historical economic reliance on slavery and the unique position of Muslims in the early social fabric of the Cape. These initial social structures wielded considerable influence over racial dynamics throughout the history of colonial and apartheid South Africa (Baderoon, 2014). During this historical period, the intricate relationship between Islam and the institution of slavery led to the term 'Malay,' initially associated with the Bahasa Melayu language spoken by enslaved individuals at the Cape, becoming synonymous with 'Muslims' (Baderoon, 2014). Consequently, the impact of slavery still lingers within the essence of Islam, even in modern South Africa, particularly within the Western Cape Province, which houses a significant Muslim community.

Baderoon (2014) discerns a recurring theme in the depiction of Muslims and Islam in South Africa, spanning from the era of slavery to the contemporary context. They are often portrayed as either submissive slaves or catalysts of subversive violence (Kozain, 2014). This theme is further explored in Chapter 6, which delves into the historical and political aspects of how Islam and its followers are misrepresented and self-represented in Cape Town. Over the course of three centuries, Muslims and Islam have left a profound imprint on the history of Cape Town.

The introduction of Islam to the Western Cape unfolded within the framework of a slave society, where female slaves endured systematic sexual exploitation, including forced prostitution in the slave lodge (Baderoon, 2014). This historical complexity arises from the racial diversity within the Muslim community, stemming from the legacy of sexual abuse during slavery and the promotion of conversion (Baderoon, 2014). Consequently, the term "Muslim" embraced a diverse range of people, encompassing slave-owners, free individuals, individuals of different racial backgrounds, such as black and white, as well as those from various nationalities like Dutch, British, Africans, Asians, and Europeans. This complexity surrounding the identity of "Who is a Muslim?" highlights the racial conundrum present in modern South Africa (Baderoon, 2014).

Furthermore, as Baderoon emphasizes, relegating the institution of slavery, which once dominated colonial South Africa, to the periphery has turned slavery into a distant and romanticized facet of history (Baderoon, 2014). This portrayal transforms slaves into exotic and timeless figures, instead of recognizing them as the first civilized people in Southern Africa. Presently, South African Muslims are actively engaged in reclaiming, preserving, and documenting their heritage and identities, with artists playing a substantial role in these creative endeavours.

3.2.2 The Paradoxical Gripping Drama of The Rainbow Nation

"We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity - a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world (South African Government news agency, 1994)

I have come across these lines from Nelson Mandela's inaugural presidential speech a few times. On reading it again recently, I noticed the mention of 'black and white' South Africans and the lack of 'coloured' and other communities. This may have been a real slip in speech writing, but the dynamics of identity politics are central to the comprehension of Cape Town and the many complications that derive from its early inhabitants and the slave trade as mentioned earlier.

Coloured culture in the context of Cape Town is as ambiguous as understanding who and what a Muslim should look like. In the previous sections, I highlighted the early settlers and the integral role of the slave communities. This helps to better understand where Apartheid picked up from,

to create its laws. Apartheid architects coined the term 'Coloured' as a derogatory label to disparage those of mixed ancestry (Nilsson, 2016). Understanding what precisely constituted a 'Coloured' identity proved perplexing upon my arrival in South Africa. This identity dwells in a world that hovers between arbitrary apartheid racial categories, an ambiguous status. According to a 1985 article in *The Times*, being 'Coloured' meant existing outside the clear black-white racial divide of apartheid, with more privileges than blacks but fewer than whites (Cowell, 1985). It was a label born of convenience, lumping together those who defied the rigid apartheid divisions.

In apartheid-era South Africa, racial classifications were rigid, and mixed-race individuals occasionally shifted between categories based on their perceived resemblance to government-defined racial groups. Those who could pass as white were often classified as such, while some white individuals lacking stereotypical white characteristics were excluded and placed elsewhere (Nilsson, 1985).

Forced relocations, especially in Cape Town, significantly shaped the identities of Coloured citizens. The Apartheid Community Areas Act empowered authorities to forcibly displace communities, upending entire neighbourhoods and tearing families apart (Nilsson, 1985). This practice confined them to segregated suburbs, isolating them from economic opportunities and wealth. The marginalization of Coloured communities, with their histories condensed into fragments, deeply influenced their social and political identities (Nilsson, 1985).

The forced migration from neighbourhoods like District Six in Cape Town, city centre to racially designated townships, such as the Cape Flats left the community facing emotional upheaval and an uncertain future (Jethro, 2009). These displaced residents forged bonds of trust and mutual support and found solace in sharing memories of their now-vanished communities; a practice limited to fellow Coloured individuals (Jethro, 2009). Over time, the exchange of these nostalgic narratives wove a collective story among the Coloured people.



Figure 3.3: 8 Photographs of the old neighbourhood of District Six before forced removals by George Hallett and courtesy of the District Six Museum

Source: District Six Museum archive

This evokes memories of my family's migrant experiences, where they clung steadfastly to their traditions, especially while living far from their homeland. Migrant communities often coexisted, sharing narratives and connections from their places of origin, which served as a continuous link throughout their lives. This recalls the sculptures of Namibian/South African artist Stephane Conradie. Her work delves into the colonial histories and creolization woven into domestic material culture, prompting us to question how identity is encoded within the private sphere (Conradie, 2017). While these items may appear purely aesthetic or mundane, Conradie posits that they offer a valuable perspective for examining the placement of worth and the creation of meaning.



Figure 3.4: Stephane Conradie artwork

Source: Stephane Conradie

It is noteworthy that I met many coloured families in Cape Town who have a mix of Christian and Muslim members. Many family names, like my husband's (Matthews), have European origins, stemming from the practice of slave owners renaming individuals upon their arrival in Cape, under Dutch rule. The renaming was often after the months of the year (Cape Town Museum, n.d).

My friend Farzhana, a gracious and articulate host to my inquiries, elucidated that "Coloured individuals constitute a multiethnic group with rich and diverse origins. Their ancestry is a blend of Khoi, San, Black, and Asian communities brought to the region through voyages from Madagascar, Equatorial Guinea, and Indonesia. Consequently, our skin hues, hair types, and accents exhibit significant variations based on our immediate forebears and the regions of our upbringing. Consequently, Coloured culture varies from one person to another." (Personal conversation 2018).

My exploration of 'colouredness' in the Cape Town context has evoked varied responses. Some individuals approach my inquiries with caution, while others eagerly share their ancestral knowledge with pride. I came to see the 'coloured' label as both limiting and potent. It is limiting

in that it erases significant historical depth, consolidating diverse identities for colonial convenience. Yet, it's potent in the way it connects the heritage of coloured people across South Africa and the world, a heritage that is being reclaimed and refined. Amid the whitewashing of history and the silencing of marginalized voices, I've uncovered the threads that unite humanity.

Each day, I stumble upon fresh stories and uncover family histories passed down through generations. Much of this knowledge has been transmitted orally, and as the community has grown, some information has been lost, distorted, or inaccurately conveyed to subsequent generations (Julius, 2007). Revisiting, sharing, interpreting, and preserving these histories, narratives, and experiences is crucial and Museums such as the District Six Museum are a testament to this effort (Julius, 2007). However, the freedom with which these stories are shared through art is not always guaranteed. Art engagement does not consistently provide the fairness and autonomy one might desire, making access to these narratives complex. The following section will underscore the challenges and issues that emerged as I delved into art advocacy and the Muslim communities, beginning with my work in the South African art industry, a vital part of which is in Cape Town.

3.2.3 The South African Art Landscape - Burning Issues And Concerns

3.2.4 Tying Together Different Potentials and Possibilities For Muslims In South African Art History

This section delves into the realm of Muslim modern and contemporary art in South Africa, with a specific focus on Cape Town and its surrounding areas within the Western Cape Province. When we discuss Cape Town, it is essential to place it within the broader South African context. The South African art industry forms the primary ecosystem encompassing the entire country. However, our attention is directed towards the Cape Muslim community and the artists based in Cape Town who operate within the parameters of this broader South African industry.

Although Cape Town has no separate art industry, it has a unique historical and contemporary political, racial, and cultural backdrop intricately interwoven with the broader South African historical context. Furthermore, the historical, cultural, and political context of the Cape Muslim and Cape Malay communities in Cape Town is distinctive and set apart from other regions in

South Africa. For further clarity, in this thesis, I refer to ‘Muslim artist’ to mean an artist whose work informs, embodies, or speaks to the experiences of those raised within a Muslim/Islamic culture and epistemologies. I do not place the prerequisite on the religiousness or the piety of the mentioned artists throughout this thesis.

This chapter explores the complex background of identity and history, to understand the role of art in the Muslim community of Cape Town. In the earlier section, we looked at some of the issues that I encountered in the South African art industry, and at this juncture, I will turn to examine different perspectives.

To probe deeper I began by asking myself the following questions:

1. To what extent has Muslim epistemology been included in South African art history, and to what extent will it be in the future?
2. What is the Cape Town Muslim community’s perception and engagement of art and the art world?
3. What is Islam’s relationship with art in Cape Town? For example, what is understood of the term ‘Islamic Art’?
4. Is the Muslim/Islamic art narrative accepted on its own terms whilst forming part of the larger African narrative?
5. What does it mean to be a Muslim artist in the current South African art world framework – what is expected?

It is critical to distinguish between Islam as a religion and a Muslim as a follower of Islam, which can potentially include a non-orthodox Muslim. In Chapter 5 and 6, we will explore both phenomena. Until now, there have been several inconclusive misunderstandings in both the art industry and the community realms. The tendency of art institutions to teach subjects and promote artists and Muslim culture in a one-dimensional manner is a long-standing concern. Although the arts have always been present in public places, the school system, and Muslim cultural history, they are not completely understood, embodied, or accessible in South Africa. This is the pressing need we address in this chapter.

When I started my research in Cape Town, I wanted to investigate what coverage of Muslim cultural arts was accessible. In the previous section, I discussed my experience with significant

collections and art fairs. But an exciting discovery for me was the Sheikh Yusuf Tri-Centenary Celebration, at which the South African National Gallery hosted an exhibition titled 'Muslim Artists of the Western Cape' in 1994 (Berji, 2021). This successful event recognised Muslim artists' contributions to South Africa and drew a significant number of Muslim people into the National Gallery, but this was over 26 years ago. I wanted to understand why there has not been another event of this scale because I was keen to curate one.

I recalled at this point that whilst I was at SOAS studying for my masters, my South African colleague Phoebe was busy with her doctoral research on mosques of Cape Town which has since been published. She documents 66 masjids (mosques) and 12 Karamats (mausoleums) of the one hundred and fifty that exist in the Cape (Hirsch, 2014). I noted from her thesis *'Islamic architecture in the Cape, South Africa 1794-2013'* that many of the Muslim slave people were skilled artisans, but there is no recorded account of them. Whilst studying the History of Islamic art and architecture, the latter formed a key component in my detailed understanding of how artistic production and styles developed across other mediums. These histories and narratives form a part of art history yet have been neglected for South African Muslims.

Cape Muslims may not have been represented for their artistic endeavours in the art history books, but they were featured as subjects fairly frequently by European painters of the 20th century most notably Irma Stern, a South African Jewish painter of German origin. In pursuit of the ideal, Stern was drawn to the Muslim world, where she created numerous portraits that captured appearances, delved into cultures, contemplated identity, and examined the human condition (Agnew, 2019). Artists such as Stern who is no doubt a master, have been celebrated abundantly, but by the privilege that afforded her to paint her figures from a problematic white gaze. Who do young Muslim people refer to in their history for inspiration that links directly to their own heritage? Where are the Muslim South African Irma Sterns?



Figure 3.6: Cape Malay Women and Child by South African artist Irma Stern dated 1939, 1941 and 1962 respectively.

Source: Artnet; Strauss & Co; Artsy



Figure 3.7: Malay priest and his wife by English painter George French Angas

Source: National Library of Australia

This leads us back to the current moment and the contemporary art world, where there is room for new art histories to be created, new patrons to be encouraged, and autonomy to be granted to artists and subjects from within the Muslim community. The next section will address this.

3.2.5 Muslim Artists Reclaiming History

Cape Town artist Thania Peterson can trace her Cape Malay family lineage back to the 18th-century political exile, Imam 'Abdullah ibn Kadi Abdus Salaam, famously known as Tuan Guru, who was born in 1712 as the son of an Imam and a prince from Tidore in the Ternate Islands of Indonesia. Tuan Guru was brought to the Cape as a state prisoner on April 6, 1780 (Willemse, 2020). While incarcerated, he wrote the entire Quran from memory in Dutch Afrikaans but in Arabic script, a manuscript displayed at Auwal Mosque, the first mosque constructed in the Western Cape (Willemse, 2020). Thania's art series, titled "I am Royal," delves into her family history, asserting her royal heritage and inspiring herself and her sons to break free from the 'slave' identity. She suggests that "Black African people have a spiritual connection to the land, with their rituals and ceremonies tied to it. Meanwhile, white people own most of the land, giving them a financial stake and a sense of entitlement. We, on the other hand, find ourselves caught in between" (Allison, 2017).



Figure 3.8: Rendition of Tuan Guru with students; Rendition of Tuan Guru with students
Auwal mosque, first mosque built in Cape Town

Source: Al-Qalam; Boorhaanol Islam movement; Personal archive



Figure 3.9: “I am royal” series by Thania Peterson

Source: Mutual Art; Whatiftheword

Peterson, among other artist, is reclaiming her history and telling her own story her way. Often when I have put a call out for Muslim artists to come forward for any exhibition I have in mind, I am inundated with submissions that are mostly Arabic calligraphy – mostly Quranic. Due to its religious foundations, this is often a misunderstood or minimally appreciated art genre within the fine art and contemporary sector in South Africa and is alienated from the mainstream. However, it is a sacred and safe space for members of the Cape Town Muslim community to express their artistic compulsions and is deeply rooted in their cultural heritage.

I came across SAFIA, The South African Foundation of Islami Art tucked away in a far corner of the Investec Cape Town Art Fair in 2018. SAFIA’s vision is to create and promote awareness of Islamic arts and preserve its legacy on a national and international level. Established in 1989 as a forum for Muslim artists, who needed to unite their passion for this genre of art and find common ground for their activities (SAFIA, n.d). It was spearheaded by South African artist Achmat Soni. Soni, who founded the Soni Art Studio, has adorned the inside of over 80 mosques and private homes in South Africa with his calligraphic art (Thebus, 2023). The foundation wants to share its art with a much wider viewership including non-Muslim audiences. They realise their art heritage has been excluded from South Africa’s art history. However, from my conversations with Soni

he is adamant about preserving this art strictly within its traditional frameworks for it to be appreciated and understood on its own terms and without losing its essence, which I believe is the core of what makes it unique – Islam and spirituality.

Faheem Rhoda Jackson, affectionately known as Abang meaning teacher, is a celebrated calligrapher and educator from Bo-Kaap. His extensive journey includes becoming a Hafizul Qur'an, memorizing the Quran, and dedicating more than two decades to the study of Arabic calligraphy. After his studies in Syria in the early 2000s, he returned to Cape Town and continued his tutelage under the late Dr. Sulaiman Nordien (Atiyyah Khan, 2020).

Jackson brings to light the profound connection between tradition and the future of Cape Town's historical reclamation. He co-founded the groundbreaking Arabic Calligraphers South Africa, marking the region's first guild of its kind. Reflecting on his Bo-Kaap roots, he observes that tourists exhibit a keen interest in local history, while local youth and communities seem less engaged (Atiyyah Khan, 2020).

Faheem's research centres on the handwritten scripts of Tuan Guru, the same Imam explored in Thania Peterson's heritage. His objective is to create a unique local calligraphic style that resonates with South African Islam, providing a sense of belonging and identity. Jackson stresses, "My purpose is to establish a connection between this writing style, used by Muslims upon their arrival, and our history, thereby reviving the calligraphic culture that was integral" (Atiyyah Khan, 2020).

Apartheid's oversimplified classification of Cape's Muslim community as exclusively Cape Malay has obscured rich identities. Examining and interpreting these manuscripts promises valuable insights into these recently unveiled identities (Atiyyah Khan, 2020).

Yet, there are few patrons in the South African art ecosystem, notably in Cape Town, to facilitate collaboration between traditional techniques and the contemporary sector, and they continue to exist as separate domains. The next section will look at the issues in art advocacy.



Figure 3.10: Faheem Rhoda Jackson in studio and Tuan Gurus Qurans and Kitaabs in Arabic-Afrikaans

Source: Taalmonument, (2022)

3.2.6 Muslim Advocacy Of South African Modern And Contemporary Arts

Patrons and art spaces play a crucial role in fostering artistic development and enabling artists to create meaningful works. While there are curators and gallery owners like Aisha Waja, Igsaan Martins, Shamiela Tyer, and Shafina Jaffer, as well as art critic Ashraf Jamal, who support artists, there are still challenges in fully supporting Muslim artists. Gallery focuses often tend to be on global artists, including those from North Africa, rather than local Muslim artists. The art market's limitations also make it challenging to create spaces that can wholly support these artists.

A decade ago, Hasan and Husain Essop, hailing from Cape Town, emerged as talented artists with deep roots in the Indian Muslim community. Both graduates of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Art, they were discovered by the renowned art patron and activist, Linda Givon, the visionary founder of the Goodman Gallery. These unapologetically devout Muslim twins have become significant post-apartheid artists, with international acclaim, largely due to their staged photography (Toole, 2010). In their images, they take on various roles, from street gang members to mosque attendees, offering a unique perspective on South African society.

Under Linda's guidance, they were encouraged to stay true to their own voices and express their truths through their art. However, a change in ownership at the Goodman Gallery stirred controversy around their politically charged work, leading to its exclusion from international exhibitions due to concerns about its perceived provocativeness or being 'Islamic' they shared with me. Their images are intricate stories that challenge conventional beauty ideals. According to Husain, their primary aim is to educate the public about a religion that has been distorted by media portrayals, countering these narratives with their art (Toole, 2010). Their art often takes an ironic, satirical, or sardonic tone, especially in its portrayal of institutionalized religion (Toole, 2010).

Despite challenges, the brothers remain committed to their creative journey, viewing their art as an embodiment of their life stories, serving as their alter ego. They've also taken on roles as mentors and Husain is driven by a desire to enhance the lives of less privileged children, recognizing the stark disparities in living conditions. Having spent time with the brothers I learnt that this work holds deep spiritual significance for them, beyond financial gain. They firmly believe in the afterlife and being accountable for one's actions.



Figure 3.11: Essop brothers and self-portrait artworks

Source: Essop archive

In the art community, we encounter a significant challenge regarding the evaluation of explicitly religious or political art, which exposes the presence of double standards. In my role as a curator, I wrestled with this matter while striving to establish a platform and recognition for emerging Muslim artists. I distinctly recall a critique from a fellow curator, suggesting that we should be more discreet in using religion as a starting point in our art. This prompts the question: Is it the open display of faith that is considered unconventional in this context? While religious-themed arts are not entirely absent from Cape Town's galleries, it is relatively rare. Contemporary art primarily explores facets of human identity, such as race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, with religion being just one element within this broader spectrum.

Similarly, other artists embrace performativity and artistic playfulness in their work, exemplified by Thania Peterson's artistry. Meanwhile, some artists adopt a more understated and unobtrusive approach in their tangible creations, such as Igshaan Adams, a queer Muslim born in apartheid-era South Africa. Adams finds inspiration in the intricate interplay between his identity and his faith, weaving together a diverse array of materials to produce subtly religious tapestries and suspended abstractions (Adams and Folkerts, 2022). His creative muse derives from a spiritual 'Sufi' teacher he affectionately calls 'ma.' Whom I also went through a process of spiritual teaching with between 2018 and 2019.



Figure 3.12: Igshaan Adams hand-woven artwork

Source: Stellenbosch Visio; Blank Projects

Despite the profound influence of religion on many individuals and communities, the dialogue within the arts and culture, especially in academic discourse globally, has overlooked the active integration of contemporary faith communities into these spaces (Grant, 2017). This raises questions about whether these institutions unintentionally or intentionally maintain a secular nature, excluding certain perspectives and discussions. It urges us to seek innovative approaches to artistic exploration in this context and consider the potential evolution of arts and cultural venues in their engagement with modern religious communities. Since the 1960s, contemporary art has been viewed primarily in opposition to prevailing power structures, with a strong emphasis on criticality in art schools (Grant, 2017). Consequently, my many conversations with Muslim artists in Cape Town revealed that religious art that fails to position itself as critical of the faiths it references, is often considered to miss the more intriguing currents within Postmodern and Contemporary artistic practice (Grant, 2017). The next section will consolidate the outer call to action that my inner call responded to.

3.2.7 The Outer Calling To Action

Working within the South African contemporary arts sector, I noticed a significant underrepresentation of Muslim artists in both the commercial art scene and art history. This lack of representation can be attributed, in part, to socio-economic and political challenges in the country, coupled with religious intolerance and a limited understanding of Islam in the South African art world. Moreover, the Muslim community faces a notable shortage of patronage. A comparison of the resources, residencies, programs, and art awards available to support black artists highlighted a substantial gap for Muslim artists.

My exploration of the art world unveiled a rich Muslim art heritage specific to Cape Town, yet it remains marginalized within mainstream South African art history. The relationship between the Muslim community and the art world is often fraught with misunderstandings and ambiguities, creating tensions for Muslim artists working within or outside traditional art frameworks. This raises questions about the extent of agency Muslim artists truly have in their practice.

On one end, there are limited art platforms for Muslim artists that offer formal training and support, and when they do exist, they often impose religious restrictions on artistic expression.

This can isolate artists who seek to push the boundaries of these restrictions, prompting a deeper examination of their agency. Conversely, the secular commercial art world struggles to fully comprehend the complexity of Muslim artists, sometimes leading to stereotyping, typecasting, or expectations that they avoid discussing aspects of their Muslim identity unrelated to faith criticism.

The contemporary art world, in general, has long grappled with issues related to religion, making it a broader challenge not exclusive to Muslim artists. As a female Muslim curator, I recognized the need to bridge these gaps for artists caught between these polarizations. This realization motivated me to focus on nurturing the art consciousness of the Muslim community in Cape Town, supporting local Muslim artists in the contemporary art scene, and providing them with a welcoming artistic home. This endeavour underscored the importance of enhancing the relationship between the art world, educational institutions, and the community.

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I transitioned from my inner calling to address the pressing external demand for community and institutional engagement in the transformation of visual literacy and arts access in Cape Town's Muslim communities, along with enhancing the representation and sustainable growth of Muslim artists. My exploration aimed to understand how art could play a transformative role within these communities, where faith, tradition, and the art ecosystem intersect. A fundamental question arises: Can this transformation be achieved?

Evidence of this achievement can be seen in the works of a few contemporary artists I have discussed in this chapter. Each piece carries a unique narrative, reflecting their individual experiences and identities. Their art is not limited to their birth or exposure to Muslim culture; it extends to encompass the broader context of society, politics, inequality, poverty, and injustice, which have impacted both them and their communities.

Yet, challenges persist due to a lack of understanding about Islam and Muslims, constraints on religious art, and the lasting legacies of slavery and apartheid. These factors have contributed to paradigms of exclusion, rather than inclusion, for this community and its artists. As I embarked

on this journey, responding to the broader societal call while aligning with my inner calling, I came to recognize my unique position at the crossroads of tradition, religion, critical art discourse, and contemporary art practice. This realization fuelled my determination to contribute to addressing these challenges through my role as a Muslim contemporary art practitioner and curator. The next chapter focused on activating community in the first of CARE chapters.

Chapter 4

CARE-ING FOR ART ADVOCACY IN THE COMMUNITY:

COMMUNITY ACTIVATION THROUGH MASHŪRAH CIRCLES AS AN INTEGRAL, TRANSFORMATIVE INNOVATION DIALOGUE PROCESS

*"I am not afraid that it will be said to me (on the Day of Judgment): 'What have you learnt?'
But I am more afraid that it will be said to me: 'what have you done with what you have
learnt?'"*

-The Holy Quran

4.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter with a narration from our Prophet to serve as a reminder that, as Muslims and as people, we are constantly obligated to put the knowledge we gain into practice. In chapter 2, I uncovered my inner calling by applying the narrative method from the Eastern path of renewal. I aligned it with the Cape Town Muslim community's and arts community's outer calling in chapter 3, which required community and institutional engagement in the transformation of visual literacy and arts access and advocacy in Cape Town's Muslim communities. This chapter will continue with the Narrative method and demonstrate how I have used the knowledge acquired so far to activate a community on this research to innovation journey with me. The goal of the community activation included conducting conversations, discussions, and dialogue around burning issues facing South African Muslim artists and their communities in Cape Town and to address the associated problems in visual literacy and advocacy in Cape Town, as well as how the country's political, racial, and socioeconomic issues influence its people and the art space. Second, we looked at how the community attempted to redress the disparities that emerged.

This chapter "Community Activation" or "C", is the first step on the CARE path of Integral Research (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). The CARE path moves alongside the 4C trajectory of Call, Context, Co-Creation and Contribution, and focuses on the progressive actualization and

manifestation of research-to-innovation. It is effectively a practical mirror of the parallel C step (of the 4C trajectory) (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). This chapter therefore shows how I concretely activate my community and introduces the activation methods I use to mirror the inner and outside calling, culminating in my research objectives. The community activation demonstrated in this chapter is crystallised in Chapter 7 as the second stage of the CARE process “A” or “Awakening of Integral Consciousness” (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). This is a tangible ecosystem that will actively working with me. This "manifestation" of an awakened research ecosystem proceeds into a Research Institutionalization process or the R chapter, which is the third in the CARE process, chapter 9, where I demonstrate the co-creation of an Initiative (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). Finally, in the E (Embodiment) chapter, and fourth of the CARE process, will show how the Institute is actively embodying the holistic development and innovation produced, as well as the continuation and full-fledged long-term embodiment of my work (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010).

Here, I attempt to clarify some of the activation strategies I employed in engaging the community. My method is built on a simple process of engagement that fosters deep and meaningful discourse while also combining ideas and resources to co-create and implement significant solutions for transformation. Creating study circles or similar sorts of platforms to engage and stimulate active debate is one way of engaging communities. I sought inspiration from existing models such as the Swedish study circle, World Café and Islamic models of dialogue to create learning circles called MASHŪRAH circles, which will be expatiated in subsequent sections.

The following section will begin by understanding the essence of community.

4.2 Tying Together the Different Potential And Possibilities For Caring For Community

Community activation in this chapter aims to parallel the inner and outer call with a formation of a core community who will emerge and navigate to influence society (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). More specifically, community activation means to “activate community around your inner research-to-innovation, around one’s inner and outer calling”.

Engaging in discussions and establish connections with individuals who can serve as your collaborators and mentors, helping you shape the trajectory and purpose of your research-to-

innovation journey. Offer your network a comprehensive understanding of the entire research-to-innovation process, complete with specific milestones and a timeline (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010).

Throughout my doctoral journey, I have dug deep into my personal and the Cape Town's sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts to discover what is at the core of the matter. The rich legacy and significance of the community can be found in both African and Islamic civilizations.

The importance of caring for the '*Ummah*' (the whole community of Muslims) bound together by ties of religion is integral to Islam (Yousuf Ali and Ali, 2011). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) conveyed that believers are akin to a single body in their affection, kindness, and empathy for one another. Just as when one part of the body suffers, the entire body experiences discomfort and fever, so do believers share in each other's joys and sorrows (Chebli, 2019).

The Abrahamic religions Islam, Judaism and Christianity share and recognize that all their Prophets were sent to earth to establish a new community or nations. Some were sent to lead and guide a community or nation that was already established but were facing difficulties. Thus, whilst some prophets founded entirely new communities, other prophets tried to preserve, develop, and advance existing ones (Yousuf Ali & Ali, 2011). As a Muslim, I was raised with these concepts of the importance of community and caring for it and the common good of society was a shared responsibility. I highlighted this in both my inner and outer calling chapters with examples of my grandparents and parents who always gave zakat or compulsory charity and *Sadaqah* (voluntary charity) (Merriam-Webster., n.d.).

Although I grew up in a community-oriented society with my family and extended friends and relatives, British culture, particularly in London, can be quite the opposite. I had become accustomed to surviving in the rat race, where independence and self-sufficiency took precedence. Although our grandparents and parents instilled a sense of community in us, my sisters, cousins, and I do not have the same connection or burdens of responsibilities they did. Our parents and grandparents had family members and extended family to support in Pakistan.

Thus, when I moved to South Africa the concept of Ubuntu, or the African philosophy of community was beautiful to learn about and really felt familiar in its essence. Ubuntu states "I am

because we are, and since we are, therefore I am” (Adeate, 2023). Everything and everyone are connected and bound together. In South African culture, the community always comes first and the notion of *ubuntu* and *communalism* is of immense importance in African philosophical discourse. *Ubuntu* is a philosophy that promotes the common good of society and includes humanness as an essential element of human growth. The individual is born out of and into the community, therefore will always be part of the community. Interdependence, communalism, sensitivity towards others and caring for others are all aspects of *ubuntu* as a philosophy of life (Roux, 2000).

Understanding that Ubuntu and the community are at the fabric of how the South African society functions, helped me in integrating into Cape Town. The community value systems that I experienced and learnt from my family, enabled me to appreciate and adapt to the context in my new surroundings. Firstly, I had personally not experienced harsh poverty growing up, but my grandparents and grandmothers had been exposed to it and I could empathise from this perspective because of the awareness they had instilled in me. Second, when I went to South Africa, I was alone, and I naturally wanted to be a part of something, of people and familiarity. I was having trouble integrating, and so I contacted my father one day, upset about the relocation. He advised me to go to the mosque and join the community there. Connecting through faith was a fantastic place for me to start since it allowed me to establish common ground. As I said in previous chapters, South Africa exhibits a more open and welcoming attitude towards all religions than many places in my experience. This was one of the appeals of moving to the country.

Following my father’s advice, I began attending the Jumua Mosque in Cape Town, which was founded by Sheikh Abdul Qadir Alsufi, a Scottish convert to Islam and Sufi. The congregation, which included British, Spanish, native South Africans, and African Muslims amongst others, was hospitable. It supported me in learning about Islam in Cape Town from a variety of views, expanding my network and preparing for some of the challenges ahead as I immersed further into the dialogue. Hearing so many variations of history I needed to be aware of my sources and remind myself there were many outcomes to these narratives.



Figure 4.1: Jumu'a Mosque and Congratulatory; Shakyh Dr Abdalqadir Sufi

Source: Jumu'a Mosque Facebook page

4.2.1 The Gripping Drama In Unravelling The Right Story

Knowing the outer calling and needs of the community were imperative when navigating who I should connect with and how to proceed. In the earlier two chapters, I mentioned the challenges faced with being an outsider coming into a community hoping to offer solutions to existing issues. The Cape Town Muslim community can be sensitive and protective of what they have left of their heritage, and rightly so. It was important for me to build trust within the Muslim community and the Muslim art community. I needed to understand what was lacking or misaligned, but also what they wanted for themselves, and what I could contribute to achieving this. This was a key objective in activating the community: to listen to what was needed and not force what was not. What I was able to establish through connecting with the community is that they keep many of their histories and truths guarded in their heads, hearts, and homes. Thus, storytelling has been a key research method through this entire thesis and not only in the earlier chapters.

It helped me realize that history books were rife with propaganda, making it exceptionally challenging to have confidence in the information they contained. For instance, in his book 'The Lie of 1652,' author Patrik Tariq Mellett offers a radical critique of established pre-colonial and colonial history. Mellett contends that the Khoi and San peoples are the true founders of Southern Africa, with their heritage intricately intertwined with the identity of all black South Africans. He

defines 'The Lie of 1652' as the belief that when European settlers arrived at the Cape, Southern Africa was a 'country without people,' as asserted by colonial historians (Mellet, 2020). Not being aware of the diverse perspectives discussed could complicate navigating this terrain, and I often worried about inadvertently saying something insensitive. There were numerous challenges on the horizon at this early stage, both within the Muslim community, as discussed here, and the arts community, which will be covered in the next section."

4.3 Overcoming Challenges In Activating Institutional Collaboration

I encountered challenges in rooting the research-to-innovation process in a single organisation or institution, which frequently resulted in only a subset of concerns being addressed while others were ignored. As I noted in Chapter 2, the State provides minimal assistance for the development of art in general in South Africa, and none for the Muslim arts industry. Individual patrons and benefactors fund the art industry, both of which are scarce in the Muslim community. It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain resources to grow the arts in a society that lacks fundamental requirements, and it is crucial to be realistic about these obstacles.

After failing to collaborate with individual South African institutions, I discovered a few important possibilities behind this:

1. There was a lack of time and resources to allow for fully committed partnerships to form.
2. Organisations were often running to staff capacity.
3. Stakeholders, board members, or directors frequently determined the organisation's operational directions.
4. It is often difficult to create partnerships when there is little financial gain for the organisation, particularly in Cape Town, with its high unemployment rates, high levels of poverty, and high cost of living.
5. The Corona Virus pandemic further weakened an already fragile economy, and the South African art industry, among others, suffered greatly.

When I spoke with each organisation and individual, it became evident that cross-institutional community collaboration was the best way to go since it distributed the burden. Working for an organisation that was not expressly aligned with the direction I intended to pursue using the

integral research methodologies of my Doctorate research program proved to be initially difficult. My Trans4m colleagues, Dr Premie Naicker (Greenskills) and Dr Loshnee Naidoo (Sansara), however, encouraged me. They had each laid the groundwork for their respective organisations by expanding on their Doctorate core research.

I understand that bringing diverse aspects, networks, and individuals together was one of my strengths. Collaborations with practitioners and organisations outside of South Africa were also vital to activate in this context since they create possibilities and can boost growth and development. My primary concentration was on defining the tactics I would use to initiate and sustain this discourse. The next section will go through the approaches I used for discussion including study circles.

4.3.1 Circles Of Learning - Islamic Tools For Community Dialogue And Consultation

I turned to Islam for reference on the notion of dialoguing and seeking answers to issues of internal and external importance. I was inspired by the following individual processes that work in harmony with one another and combined to create what I conceptualized as ‘MASHŪRAH circles’:



Figure 4.2: Community activation process and the Gene

1. South - Grounding (*Halaqah*) 'circles of learning' - The Exchange of knowledge
2. East - Emerging (*Tarbiyah*): Development and training - The Training
3. North - Navigating (*MASHŪRAH*): Consultation and seeking guidance - The Consultation
4. West – Emancipation (*Hiqmah*): Dialoguing and seeking wisdom - The Wisdom.

Historically and in the modern contemporary period, studying in small discussion circles is known as *Halaqah* in Arabic (USULI 2018). The purpose is to nurture and grow individuals, organisations, and civilizations in Islamic education. My earliest memories of something similar are those of my mother teaching my sisters and me Islamic stories and explaining Islamic values and principles in this way. *Halaqah* was developed by Prophet Muhammad(saw) as a *Tarbiyah* method which linguistically means, to develop, nourish, grow, and increase, through training and development people in a variety of aspects related to Islam (Rosidin, n.d.). It may be defined as the ideal approach to developing human nature, both directly through verbal or visual communication or indirectly through role models (Rosidin, n.d.). The *Tarbiyah* process goes beyond the level of individuals, to the level of the group, trying to establish the elements of team spirit such as love, brotherhood, and mutual trust.

Although traditional *Halaqah* circles include prayers and supplications, I wanted the MASHŪRAH (learning) circles of this research-to-innovation to be established on the core idea of *Tarbiyah* and on MASHŪRAH or *shura*, which means "consultation" or "seeking direction in a non-hierarchical and democratic and fair way(Walker, 2018)making it a cooperative learning process. In certain cultures, such as Morocco, *Halaqah* is also a gathering place for public storytellers. The *Jemaa el-Fnaa* Square in Marrakech, Morocco, is an example of a prominent cultural exchange, with stories and epic poetry performed at the square's centre (Beardslee, 2014). As a curator, understanding the relationship between performance and knowledge production allows me to gain a better understanding of how history is formed, preserved, and passed on and I wanted to extract from this in developing the ‘MASHŪRAH circles.



Figure 4.3: Storytellers in Jemaa el Fna

Source: Thomas Barone Beardslee, MA

MASHŪRAH is a custom dating back to the pre-Islamic era when the Arabs had an institution called the assembly (Athamina, 1999). It was a tribal council composed of elders and matters such as peace, war, and security, were decided by mutual consultation. Activating the community was aimed at embodying the following values in the learning/community circles:

1. Everyone should sit in the MASHŪRAH circles with an open heart and ask their higher source to lead them properly.
2. The leader of the circle should not be the first to share their thoughts. Harmony and peace arise from selecting from all voiced viewpoints.
3. The leader of the circle is not asking for permission to have a lesson or lecture; rather, they are consulting the gathering to gain feedback.

Through this process, I hoped that people would engage, ask questions, voice their concerns, share perspectives, and collaborate to seek answers together. In the next section, I will discuss the essence of community and how I began my caring and community activation journey.

4.4 Activating The Unfolding Story Of The Muslim Art Community

In this doctoral journey, we analysed the development of visual arts and literacy of the Muslim community and not ‘Islamic art’ per se. This is because there are different views held by scholars

and historians with respect to establishing what Islamic art is and what it is not. Not all artwork produced by Muslims is religious, and there are differences in opinion held by scholars, historians and Muslims regarding which art is permissible (according to Islamic teachings and scriptures) and which is not. Permissibility is one of the most crucial factors to unpack when addressing this question. The context of Islamic art is delved into deeper in Chapter 5/6, however universally, in institutions and in general, by the communities I have lived, and engaged within the UK and South Africa, globally, Islamic art is recognized as the art of the Muslim civilization based on the Islamic religion.

The term 'Islamic art' can alienate and exclude many art forms and expressions and so for easier understanding, I have stipulated my categorization below; sometimes these terms are used interchangeably, highlighting the subjectivity of the matter at times.

1. When referring to or presenting 'Islamic art' (IA) also referred to as 'contemporary traditional arts' (CTA) in this chapter, I mean works of art explicitly recognized as sacred in their subject matter and techniques. Either due to the use of verses and script from the Quran, or direct themes and techniques from Islamic art tradition, such as geometry illumination, poetry or architecture.
2. When I refer to '*Contemporary Muslim Art*' (CMA) or '*Contemporary Art*' (CA), I am including works of art with broader themes of Muslim epistemologies like religion, political and personal identity, and experience.

Some Muslim artists may not publicly consider their work to be Islamic art, while others who do, may not be practising Muslims. Yet, their work, like that of Iranian Cape Town-based artists Kamyar Bineshtarigh and Sepideh Mehrehban, with whom I have collaborated, has been affected by Muslim epistemologies. My first step was to reach out to the art world that I worked in, starting with artists. In 2018, I started serving as Chief Operating Officer and writer for Art Africa Magazine, an international art magazine. Being one of South Africa's only leading art publications, the role allowed me to connect and better understand the South African art ecosystem within the context of the international world. What proceeded was a process of purposeful 'conversations. I remember during the Egyptian revolution in 2012, artists played critical and interesting roles in contributing to the revolution and protests. They asked themselves what they could do to mobilise the cause and make it sustainable. Their photography skills,

documenting, equipment, all came into critical use. South African artists often fall within activism and their artworks and photography have shaped how we view events in history, images often remaining as markers of the event. Regarded as the single most important photo of the apartheid struggle the image of pupil Hector Pieterse shot during the Soweto riots in 1976 caused an international call to action that led to the eventual end of apartheid (Simbao, 2007).



Figure 4.4: Student Hector Petersen during the Soweto riots

Source: Guardian Newspaper

Durant Sihlali, a South African artist, captured the life of black workers and township existence in the 20th century, offering an intimate view of segregated daily life. His watercolor paintings, often likened to photographs, focus on themes of grief. Sihlali felt pressured by commercial galleries to depict the socio-economic conditions of his surroundings for survival, creating a dichotomy between his forced work and spontaneous artistic expression (Masuku, 2018).

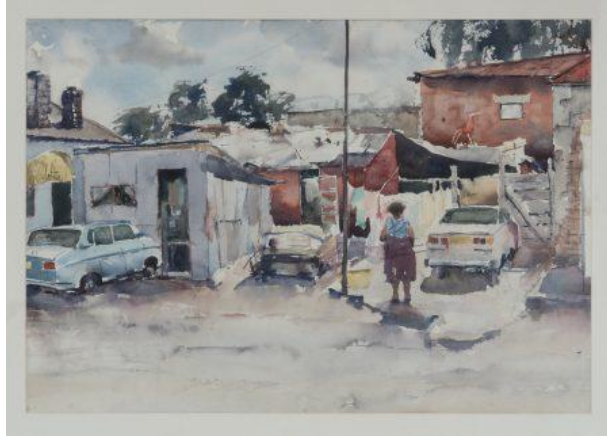


Figure 4.5: artwork by Durant Sihlali

Source: Artthrob

In 2018 I put an initial artists' call out for Muslim contemporary artists to come forward for an exhibition I was to curate. I was contacted by South African artists and twins, Hasan and Husain Essop who expressed their interest and invited me to explore their practice. Since 2018, the brothers who are also teachers themselves and graduates from the prestigious Michaelis Art School in Cape Town, have shared their experiences in the art world with me through various exchanges and dialogues. Born and raised in Athlone, Cape Town, they are well versed in community dynamics as well as in the South African art ecosystem. Their work pushed boundaries, and they have been a driving force in the art world and are aware of the disparities within the art institutes. They concur that we, as Muslims in the art world, have a role to play in trying to assist others to mobilise along the way. Hasan Essop advised me to contact SAFIA and Achmat Soni, an organisation he believed needed some guidance in crossing into the wider contemporary scene.

During this doctoral research when I connected with artists and creatives, I did so with the objective of collaboration and co-creation. It is often more difficult for artists to express their concerns to the industry while they are contractually tied to them. I was aware of this and thought it was important to have a space where artists could connect with other Muslim artists and share their ideas, thoughts and experiences and establish a support network. I still believe that artist-led initiatives are where real change can occur. Artists and art are catalysts of change, unfortunately,

they are often restricted due to the entanglement they have with the art business that often provide them with resources critical to their career.

Over a period beginning from 2018, I engaged with many artists across South Africa and connected to the Cape town art ecosystem. Many of the following artists became integral to my research-to-innovation dialogue and journey as co-researchers and are referred to throughout this thesis:

1. Kamyar Binestarigh: An Iranian artist living and working in Cape Town
2. Abdus Salaam: A Cape Town native and fine art photographer
3. Hasan and Husain Essop: Contemporary artists from Cape Town
4. Shameelah Khan: A filmmaker from Johannesburg based in Cape Town
5. Adiel Jacobs: A Cape Town graffiti artist and calligrapher
6. Igshaan Adams: A Cape Town native and international artist
7. Sahlah Davids: A Cape Town emerging artist
8. Nabeeha Mohamed: A Cape Town artist
9. Hanna Noor Mahomed: A Cape Town emerging artist from Durban
10. Mishkhaah Amien: A Cape Town emerging artist
11. Faheem Rhoda Jackson: A Cape Town native and emerging artist
12. Rushda Deaney: A Cape Town native and emerging artist
13. Laylaa Jacobs: A Cape Town native and artist
14. Mahmudah Jaffer: A Cape Town native and emerging artist
15. Faheem Rhoda Jackson: An Arabic calligrapher and Cape Town native
16. Achmat Soni: A Cape Town native and artist
17. Atiyah Khan: A journalist, dj and zine producer from Johannesburg and based in Cape Town

18. Haroon Gunn Salie: Activist and international Cape Town based artist
19. Shukry Adams: A Cape Town native and emerging artist
20. Gulshan Khan: South Africa Photographer based in Johannesburg
21. Sepideh Mehraban: An Iranian artist living and working in Cape Town
22. Nyambo Masa Mara: Rwandan fashion designer and artist based in Cape Town
23. Rahimah Ismail Rajiwate: A Cape Town native and emerging artist



Figure 4.6: Zoom call with artist Shukry Adams



Figure 4.7: Cape Town-based Muslim artists in MASHŪRAH learning circle

In addition to artists, I met with art advocates and patrons, such as gallery owner Shamiela Tyer, with whom I met every two weeks to discuss our points of view on the industry. Shamiela is a well-known collector and the proprietor of the Cape Town-based modern and contemporary art gallery Eclectica. Shamiela shared early on in our discussions that engaging the Muslim community with the larger contemporary art world was tough, but vital. She also recommended that I contact SAFIA The South Africa Foundation for Islamic art and its founder, Achmat Soni, whom she described as having an innovative mindset. At this moment, I desired a collaboration between more traditional art practices and less traditional artists taking place, relative to my background and interest in both these spaces. It is critical to contextualise contemporary art within the historical narrative since objects can only belong in context. Summaya Vally emphasizes the necessity of establishing a lineage for modern art while safeguarding the preservation of historical and traditional art for the future (Vally, 2023). The next section explores the traditional art spaces in more detail.

4.5 Activating The Traditional Art Spaces In The Muslim Community

The Muslim artistic community in Cape Town is small but with individuals in various corners making important work. I discovered a strong connection between the Muslim population in Cape Town and the traditional art space. Yet, art practice in the core of the Muslim community is far removed from the mainstream art world. Exclusion from galleries and significant collections that are unable to interpret or place sacred art within contemporary art discourses is a challenge they face. This has discouraged and alienated the Muslim community, who are led to believe that their art is not of high enough quality for galleries, or that it is literally religious in character.

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the work of Faheem Jackson Rhoda and calligrapher and arts facilitator Adiel Jacobs is deeply engaged with the communities they are from. Adiel's 'calligraffiti' draws upon street art as well as traditional Arabic calligraphy. Largely self-taught he has fused these two genres and created an educational tool for interactive play and learning for children through running graffiti sessions. I was introduced to Adiel by Ukhona the director at the Greatmore Studios in Cape Town whilst working as a curator at Gallery MOMO. Greatmore Studios Trust is a non-profit arts and culture organisation and along with Thupelo, Cape Town, it forms part of the Triangle Arts Trust, an international network that initiates artist-led residencies

and workshops. Greatmore and Thupelo follow the Triangle model of providing studio space and residencies, facilitating arts and culture workshops, and supporting outreach programs to raise awareness of art.

What is interesting about this introduction is that Ukhona and I were talking about the absence of Muslim artists in Cape Town prior to this and it catalysed the introduction. She had met Adiel at a Greatmore event and had been captivated by his calligraphy, which he had shown her. Despite having no experience or comprehension of Arabic calligraphy, she admired the composition and beauty of it standing on its own. Ukhona led me to Adiel's workshop, which was few houses away from Greatmore Studios. Meeting Adiel led to the discovery of an entire Arabic calligraphy culture that existed and was thriving in Cape Town. My introduction to calligrapher Faheem Rhoda Jackson who runs the first calligraphy guild in South Africa occurred as a result.

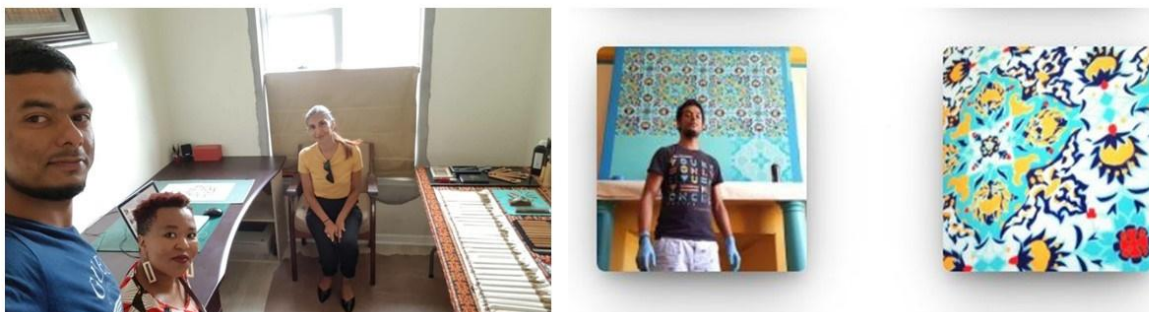


Figure 4.8: Adiel Jacobs, Ukhona Ntsali and I, Adiel Jacobs

Source: Personal Archive

Through Faheem I met Mahmudah Jaffer, an artist who is collaborating with Faheem on the Tuan Guru scripts which I mentioned in chapter 3 and will detail in chapter 6. Mahmudah Jaffer is highly respected in the community and an extremely innovative-minded woman who has been practising as an artist for almost 30 years. She has played an important role in my efforts to engage people in the community. The most fascinating individual that Mahmudah introduced me to was Dr Mogamet Fadiel Arnold. As a retired educator from the Bo-Kaap, Dr Arnold is a trailblazer in producing holistic education for Muslim communities in Cape Town and had been advocating for the inclusion of Islamic arts in the education system in South Africa for many years. Dr Arnold,

himself a vessel of knowledge, understood my journey and connected with the process of this doctoral research immediately and we have been engaging closely on ways forward ever since.

I observed that all the relationships and networks I had made, led back to SAFIA, which seemed to be a space where many Muslims began their artistic journey. Having been engaged with SAFIA since late 2019 while researching, I was approached by the organisation to offer a workshop on contemporary art to its students. They had become concerned about the lack of representation in the mainstream and global art scene. They wanted their works of art to be enjoyed by broader audiences and not only Muslims. The students were struggling to incorporate Islamic best practices with contemporary art techniques and storytelling.

I was informed before the workshop that the material must remain in accordance with the Islamic teachings and not promote the use of figurative art as it was frowned upon in South Africa. I was able to deliver a workshop linking Islamic, western, and contemporary art movements and practices. By presenting examples of modern European masters such as Picasso and Frank Stella, students could draw parallels to the ideals of Islamic art. They were exposed to the works of modern Muslim masters such as Mohammed Melehi and Dia Azzawl. These artists demonstrate the ultimate accomplishment of Muslim artists in reconciling Islam and the art of projecting their deepest emotions and authentic experiences. The workshop served to teach students that Islamic art was not only for Muslims, but also for humanity and should remain inclusive, and accessible. Furthermore, there were numerous approaches to art practice that worked in harmony with Islamic values and principles. The next section reveals how the local art industry was activated.

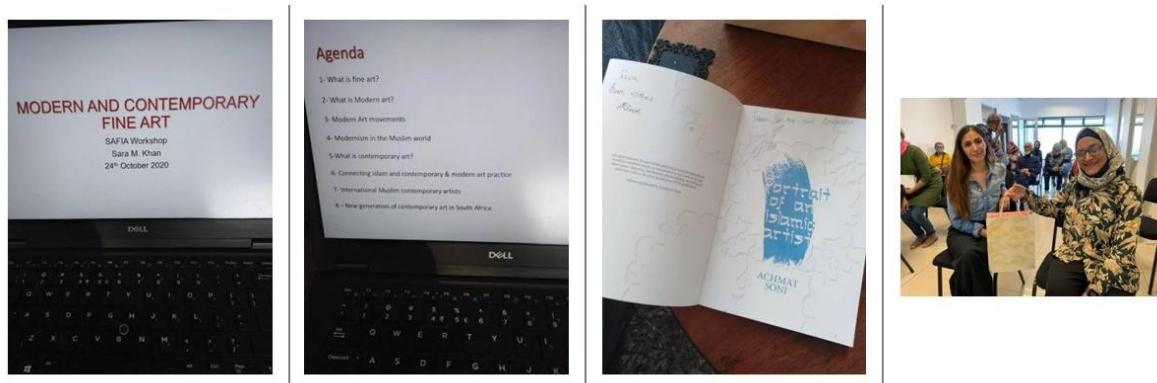


Figure 4.9: Presentation and agenda for SAFIA workshop, Achmat Soni book and Facilitator Mrs Soni

Source: Personal archive

4.6 Activating The Local South African Art Industry

I needed to activate the South African arts sector once I had activated the Muslim artists community. The Covid-19 global pandemic has been one of the most difficult challenges, causing organisations to close, art fairs all over the world to cancel, and the whole art community to transfer their programmes online digitally. Augmented reality and Zoom shows followed for most of 2020 and much of 2021, changing the way the art industry functioned previously but providing so many new opportunities to pay attention to what was not functioning. As I continued to immerse in art collections and dialogue, I was put in touch with the late Marilyn Martin, the retired ex-director of the South African National Gallery. Marilyn was very pleased that I was researching the Muslim community and was very willing to assist where she could. She informed me of the 1994 exhibition she curated at the SANG entitled ‘300 years of Muslim art from the Western Cape’ which I mentioned in the previous chapter.

It was the first and last of its type of exhibition at the dawn of a new South Africa. Sadly, no print catalogue was produced for it at the time and the photographic archives of the artworks were destroyed during an expansion except for a modest pamphlet of the programme.

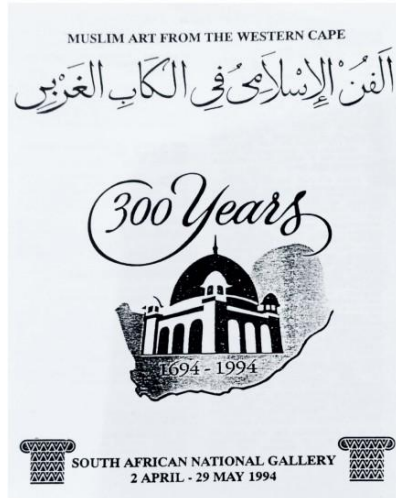


Figure 4.10: Exhibition programme from Iziko exhibition in 1994

Source: Iziko library archive

I was able to however retrieve a list of all the artists who took part, and proceeded to uncover what I could with thoughts of reviving this seminal event. On this exploration, I connected with Faatima February, Shafiq Morton and Dr Cassiem D'arcy. All who had been involved in the exhibition and who still hold important community roles. Faatima suggested a revival of the exhibition at the IZIKO National Gallery of South Africa, where she has worked as an educator since the early 1990s.

As things progressed, I contacted Bongani Mkhonza, curator of the UNISA Gallery in Pretoria, sometime in 2020. Bongani and I had previously collaborated at Art Africa magazine. We had similar perspectives and were interested in the decolonization of art spaces and institutions. Our chat sowed the seeds of a future partnership for an exhibition concentrating on the Muslim community. I was delighted that there were so many possibilities to demonstrate Muslim visual culture, and that beginning this dialogue had triggered something; this was genuinely a paradigm of organisations and individuals working to boost visual literacy in the Muslim community or advocating for the arts in creative ways.

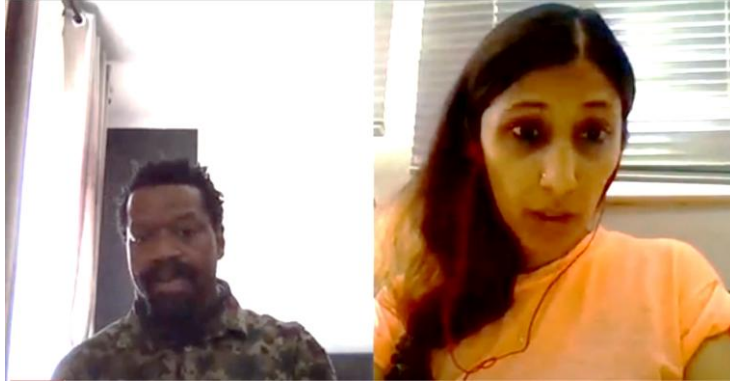


Figure 4.11: Zoom Session with Bongani Mkhonza, Curator at UNISA Gallery

Source: Personal archive

Art publications are always a strong forum, frequently disseminating information and catalysing tough dialogues. Both ODD and Hiqayaat are South African founded cultural publications, and although neither is focused on the visual arts, they are platforms for cultural conversation and have served as valuable platforms for me to write for and engage additional community members. I was able to mobilise individuals and communities on a wider social level through ODD. Shameela Khan, the editor of ODD magazine at the time of writing this, also operated an organisation named WOW ('women of waqf'). Through an ethos of social transformation, problem solving, skill development, and creative dialogue, the women of waqf envisage a world in which women are empowered to actively engage in their communities. WOW's mission is to do this by establishing a WAQF Community Centre (Patel, 2018). After months of discussion with Shameelah, I was invited to attend a WOW conference in October 2020 to give a presentation on my Doctorate as part of the 'activism and art' section. Activating the vision on a large scale and sharing this platform with many outstanding women was a great turning point.



Figure 4.12: WOW conference poster

Source: WOW

Following that, my discussions with Ukhona progressed, and Greatmore initiated a project with local artists called "Whose Heritage Matters?" in partnership with the British Council, University of Cape Town and Greatmore (Jacobs *et al.*, 2021). The 2-year project was focused on understanding whether, and if so how, cultural heritage could be mobilised to support more sustainable and just urban futures in Cape Town and Kisumu, Kenya. Adiel Jacobs was one of the artists chosen, and Ukhona invited me to participate in the discussion circle with the artists, community, and members of the art industry in 2021.

Being invited to the discussion allowed for an open dialogue about complexities of heritage and identity, and to challenge dominant narratives that exclude marginalised voices. The project fostered a sense of community engagement and encouraged participants to reflect on their own cultural heritage. It was a beneficial opportunity to hear what artists from outside the Muslim community were facing.

I realised that the timing of everything was not a coincidence and that a shift was taking place. I began to see how all these individuals and components were working towards a shared goal:

reclaiming their voices and effecting significant, long-term change in the society from which they emerged. I discussed with Ukhona the idea for an exhibition I had been manifesting since 2016, the seed of which had grown bigger during my doctoral research journey. As a response to all the perceived inequities, I wanted to collaborate with spaces that would allow artists to have autonomy. Ukhona proposed Greatmore a not-for-profit art residency and space in Woodstock to consider collaborating with. Greatmore has a long history of serving as a non-profit, non-commercial alternative platform on the Cape Town art scene, a community-oriented neighbourhood that has a long and deeply embedded Muslim community.

Through my community activations and dialogues what was transpiring was the need for a sense-making, awareness building, educational, and conversational platform. So, it would feed into the ethos of Greatmore and perhaps draw in new audiences to a space that was at the time suffering grave financial and political hardship as a non-profit organisation. At this point, I wanted to take a step back to gain perspective and activate dialogue from an international perspective as well. It was important to work together and create a connection between the Cape Town artist community and the global environment. The following section discusses this further.

4.7 International Institutional Activations

Activating the international arts community also brought awareness and attention to the artists here as well as provided me with perspective and sound boards. I think these exchanges are mutually beneficial because there was a lot to learn from the Cape Town artists. The fact that resources are scarce is not unavoidable, and if residency partnerships could be formed, local artists could gain visibility and thrive. Just like a chain effect, the more members of one's community one is teaching, the more of society they are educating.

International engagements such as connecting with Hassan Mahmadoulli an artist, playwright, theatre director, writer and specialist in diversity and the arts. Additionally, as a senior policymaker and consultant from the British Arts Council and the director of the Muslim Institute our interactions were insightful. I engaged with Hassan closely through zoom and first met him in London as part of an inquiry group I was invited to in 2014, for the cultural dialogue centre at Oxford. He has worked on diversity and inclusion of people of colour and underprivileged backgrounds in the arts for many years. His insights on the art world dynamics struck a chord of

similarity with me. We discussed the importance of representation and visibility in the arts, as well as how structural reforms are needed to guarantee that different views are heard and acknowledged. We also discussed the role of education in encouraging diversity and inclusion, particularly in the arts. We reviewed ~~ed~~ ways to increase access to arts education and training programs for underrepresented populations. Overall, it was a worthwhile dialogue that demonstrated the need for cross-cultural discourse and collaboration in community and institutional advancement.

I also established a connection with Salma Tuqan, former director of the Delfina Foundation, during her visit to Cape Town in 2019. I admired her work and have been following her career journey, from her role as Curator of the Middle Eastern contemporary galleries at the V&A Museum in London to her involvement in project development at Art Dubai. The Delfina Foundation, an independent non-profit organization dedicated to promoting artistic exchange and fostering creative practices through residencies, partnerships, and public programs, has played a pivotal role in nurturing emerging artists. During Salma's visit to Cape Town in 2019, I engaged in a meaningful dialogue with her, sharing insights into the dynamics of Cape Town and the remarkable growth of Islamic and Near and Middle East art that we had both witnessed in our respective careers. She offered valuable advice and encouragement for my vision of creating a platform or initiative to support the development of Muslim artists and enhance their connection with the Muslim community.

I then connected with Wendy K Shaw, a professor of the Art History of Islamic Cultures at the Free University, Berlin. She works on the art and thought of Turkey and the postcolonial Middle East, particularly in its relationship with historical remembrance. She is the author of the book 'What is 'Islamic' Art? Between Religion and Perception' which was a much-needed analysis of this problematic classification of arts (Shaw, 2019). In her book, Dr. Shaw challenges the traditional notion of Islamic art taught by scholars and its classification in Museums. She argues that this approach is limiting and incorrect. Instead, she proposes a new framework for understanding Islamic art based on its function and purpose in society and spirituality (James, 2021).

In 2020 I learnt of the Salaam festival, planned to take place in Manchester in the UK in 2022. Its founder Rizwan and I spoke at length on a South African collaboration. Salaam Festival's aim

was to design and produce pioneering work through visual and performing arts. Working with diverse artists and creatives from Manchester and the rest of the world to showcase alternative narratives, identities and representation of Islamic art and Muslim culture. However, barely weeks before its opening, the festival was cancelled with partnerships pulling out and logistical challenges proving too much. Despite this setback, the team behind the festival remained determined to bring their vision to life in the future. They worked tirelessly to secure new partnerships and find innovative solutions to the logistical challenges they faced. Speaking to Rizwan brought to life the challenges that can be encountered when setting up such initiatives. The future of innovation lies apparently in the hands of those who are willing to take risks, think outside the box, and embrace new ideas. As we move forward into an increasingly complex and interconnected world, it is crucial that we continue to foster these qualities in ourselves and others.

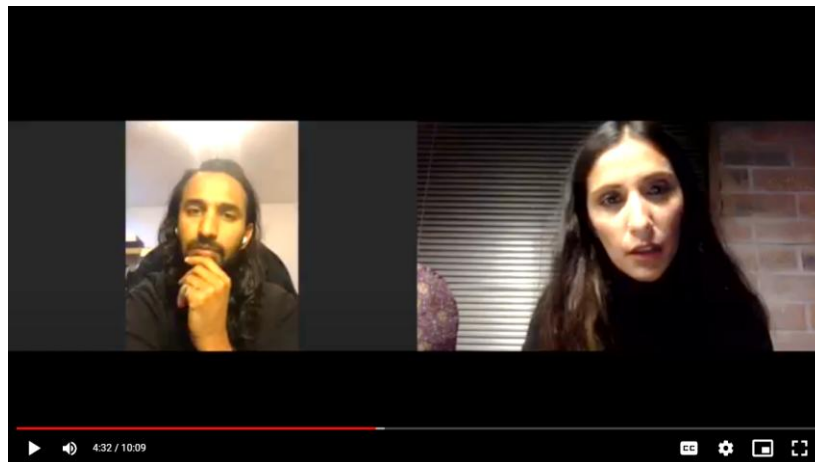


Figure 4.13: Zoom call with Rizwan creative director of Salaam festival

Source: Personal archive

I connected and took part in a workshop and dialogue circles with Cindy Sissoko, a UK based Senegalese curator, and later Art Meets a network organisation of independent curators. By building on my findings and gaining insight into their perspectives from their various geographical and professional vantage points I could expand my own research. As a curator, I am always seeking to push boundaries and challenge traditional notions of art. Through my interactions with artists and scholars from across the African continent, I have come to appreciate the diversity and richness of the context within which the South African art world and Muslim artists sit.

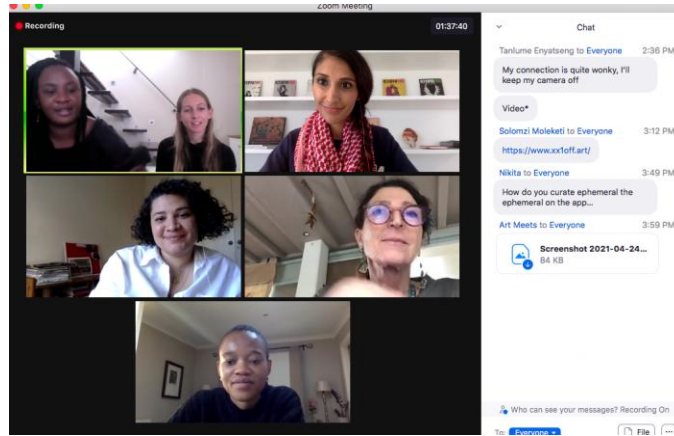


Figure 4.14: Art meets zoom dialogue.

Source: Personal archive

My research has led me to explore themes such as identity, history, and politics; the use of new media and technology in artmaking, and the role of museums and galleries in shaping public perceptions of art to the Muslim community and art from the Muslim community. My goal is to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of art by Muslim artists that goes beyond stereotypes and clichés. By engaging with artists and scholars from diverse backgrounds, I hope to create a platform for dialogue and exchange that can help promote a more inclusive and dynamic vision of South African Muslim art in the global arena. Ultimately, my aim is to foster greater appreciation for the creativity, innovation, and resilience of artists who are shaping the cultural landscape of this space today.

In addition, I remained connected to my Trans4m colleagues Chipso Ndudzo, Sister Esther Shebi, Premie Naicker, Laila Majeed, Sameer Al Abadi who have been a part of this process from the outset and formed part of my ongoing support system. Others who played a crucial role from connecting to sharing and to listening enabled this innovative research ecosystem to evolve, and this is demonstrated in the subsequent chapters.

In my work as a curator, I continued to actively participate in these discussions, and this was maybe where I encountered the most difficulties. Catalysing open and honest discussions in commercial venues was indeed controversial but vital. I understood that uncomfortable dialogues had to happen with art audiences, so I was thrilled when the Jaffer family, an Indian/Pakistani, Ismaili/Muslim Tanzanian family, approached me to take up a post as curator at the Jaffer Modern

Art Gallery in Cape Town. This was notable since Mrs. Shafina Jaffer oversaw the gallery, making her one of only two female Muslim gallery owners in South Africa and the one who was financially secure. I was able to activate a buy-in from her to lead the exhibition programme in the direction that I wanted, and I was able to introduce the possibility of including more Muslim artists in our programme. This was a turning point in activating the community and drawing institutional interest in issues I wanted to highlight and address.

4.8 Conclusion

The activities and conversations that took place with the individuals named above were organic yet intentional. I was fortunate to have spent many years in an art environment that highlighted inaccuracies, and I sought out role models and change agents. As a result, I reached out to individuals who were most aligned in a variety of sectors, advocating for the arts in unique ways.

I explored the concept of circles of knowledge and continued to dialogue with artists who were as enthusiastic as I was. It was encouraging for me when Hasan Essop noted that often it took an outsider of a community to observe imbalances with fresh perspectives and spark a flame for the broader society. As the activations of communities in this chapter happened, movements were taking place, collaborations were emerging, and initiatives were taking shape. Although this process remains ongoing, a group of artists has been assembled, and the possibility of an exhibition was considered. Most importantly, the artists are banding together and cooperating to make it a reality. Whether they are from traditional or modern practices, Hassan Essop says, "it feels like a revolution. It is time for Muslim artists to flourish."

As demonstrated, various types of community activation tools led to the creation of the MASHŪRAH circles, a modern version of an inclusive, integrated, and locally designed tool for community engagement. I was able to co-create and apply 'MASHŪRAH circles' as a dialectical process to further support me in navigating the complex multi-layered nature of analysing context for the following in chapters 5 and 6. I wanted my study and dialogue circles to be established on the core idea of Tarbiyah, which is to develop, nourish, grow (Rosidin, n.d.), and increase, and on MASHŪRAH or *shura*, which means "consultation" or "seeking direction in a non-hierarchical but democratic way" (Walker, 2018) to arrive at a '*Hiqmah*' (Khalifa, 2000) or wisdom. My hope at the time of writing this chapter is that participants would engage in dialogues,

ask questions, voice their concerns, share perspectives, and collaborate to seek answers together.

The idea was for the discourse to serve as a precursor for a later call to action of which one was to curate a unique exhibition. All the people indicated in the preceding paragraph agreed to meet in person and online as needed. This chapter demonstrates how I am actively constructing a research ecosystem, a community of artists and a learning circle of MASHŪRAH, by collaborating with a core group of individuals and organisations dedicated to making a difference in the South African art landscape through a collective vision.

Chapter 5

(PART 1): METHODOLOGICAL CONTEXTUALISATION

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, the 4C trajectory moves from Call to Context and the GENE rhythm moves from Grounding to Emerging. Hermeneutics is the Methodology that underpins the contextual framework of the Eastern Path of Renewal in Chapter 5 and 6. However, I also identified a synergy with Phenomenology from the Southern relational path and thus both methods remain interwoven and complimentary through Hermeneutics and Phenomenology (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010b).

Chapter 5 outlines the methodological contextualisation of my research approach and framework. Thus, it serves as introduction to the primary context analysis in Chapter 6. Because my research is situated in the arts sector, and my phenomenological engagement as a curator in the lives of Muslim artists in Cape Town and South Africa, it made sense to devote two separate chapters to this analysis, which complement chapters 7 in the CARE process. This way enabling for a deeper and more extensive exploration of the mix of methodologies I am applying to context analysis.

The combined purpose of chapters 5, 6 and 7 is to examine the historical context of Muslims in Cape Town, South Africa, as well as the current challenges they encounter and their existing networks and activity in the South African art industry, along with the potentials to create a vital transformative framework for access, engagement, advocacy, and curating in general.

The next section will briefly recap the journey so far then proceed to highlight the integral research path of my doctoral research journey and then detail my research methodologies.

5.2 Recaps And Reflections On The Journey So Far

In Chapter 2, I explored my inner calling and strong desire to help strengthen communities via the use of art, just as it had empowered me in mine. I felt obligated to use my personal experiences, education, and professional skills to collaborate with the Cape Town Muslim communities, and hence the South African art ecosystem overall. With a strong humanistic local-global involvement

approach, I hoped to construct developmental art spaces and exhibitions that appropriately empower and incorporate the communities in which they are based. In Chapter 3, I matched my inner calling with the outer calling of the South African Muslim and art communities, both of which call for comprehensive transformation in art engagement, advocacy, and development.

In chapter 4, I illustrated how I had activated a community on this research to innovation journey. This was achieved through “C – Community Activation”, as the first step of the CARE path. The CARE path moves alongside the 4C trajectory of Call, Context, Co-Creation and Contribution, and focuses on the gradual actualization and manifestation of research-to-innovation in practice (Lessem, 2017).

My Islamic faith sustains and supports me both inside and outside of the creative industry, and rather than writing about *faith*, I attempt to think and create naturally *through* it. Throughout the thesis, I have looked for inspiration and linkages in Islam's teachings while also assessing the current and contemporary world in which I and the individuals I deal with live. In Chapter 4, I mobilised the community around the research-to-innovation path by hosting initial dialogues, conversations, and discourse on urgent challenges impacting South Africa, with focus on Cape Town, the art community, and the country. These took place amongst artists, members of the community, institutions and art industry specialists. I have used the MASHŪRAH circles a dialogical learning process, which I introduced in Chapter 4, to help me navigate the complex, multi-layered nature of analysing context. This process combines the Islamic concept of MASHŪRAH (consultation, council, seeking advice or a suggestion) with inspiration from the ‘global world café idea’ (Schieffer, 2004) and the more Islamic imbedded '*Halaqah*' a gathering used to learn about Islamic knowledge philosophy (Halaqa: The Meaning, Purpose and Effect of Prayer) (The Usuli Institute, n.d) as well as drawing from Tarbiyyah (Rosidin, n.d) in an endeavour to arrive at *Hiqmah* or wisdom, both individually and as a community (Lokman and Ibrahim, 2017). The dialogue was intended to serve as a warm-up for a later call to action. This knowledge sharing tool was particularly useful for the MASHŪRAH which is a consultation process between those that partake in it.

Additionally, this thesis connects with the lived experience of complicated, ambiguous, and emotionally charged postcolonial and apartheid history, as well as the religious feeling and

scripture that guide the Muslim community, providing several sources of interpretation. My roles as a curator, researcher and participant are continuously evolving from my own input, experiences, and observations from new knowledge. I develop close ties with the artists I work with, and there is a constant discussion that occurs during the development of an exhibition. Part of my responsibility as a curator is to interpret the concepts presented by the artist or the work through my lens for the contemplation and involvement of a new audience. As a result, the story's culmination is a constant back and forth and changing process that develops whole new narratives through the exchange that takes place. Acting as a curator necessitates the capacity to analyse and comprehend an artist's vision, as well as the ability to transform this vision into an engaging experience for visitors. The subsection will investigate my integral path.

5.2.1 My Integral Path

In Hermeneutics applies for me when delving further into Islam and the scriptures that govern it, while I lean towards Phenomenology to investigate the experience of visual aesthetics, lived experience of religion, apartheid, and colonial histories.

Using hermeneutics-phenomenology as the fundamental methodology to grasp the various opportunities and obstacles within the many layers of the ecology (individual, organisation, and society), and using Schieffer and Lessem's Integral Context Analysis paradigm the imbalances, possibilities, and potentials will be studied from four complementary perspectives: Transpersonal, Transcultural, Transdisciplinary, and Transformational. Context analysis is an integral part of the research-to-innovation journey. It discovers and surfaces imbalances and possibilities to refresh and restore potential through Transcultural Realities, a Transformative Rhythm, Transdisciplinary Realms and Transpersonal Rounds (Schieffer and Lessem, 2014) Moreover, engaging deeply with the context helps not only the self but also the energies of the collective environment to be seen, affirmed, and transformed.

Hermeneutic-Phenomenology constitutes a phenomenological approach centred on the comprehension and interpretation of an individual's personal, subjective encounters. The generation of meaning unfolds within a hermeneutic cycle, wherein the researcher and the participants' unique perspectives merge harmoniously to cultivate a deeper insight into the phenomena under investigation (Lavery, 2003). This methodology strives to unveil the world as

perceived by the subject. Hermeneutic Phenomenology acknowledges the distinctive interpretations each participant brings to their lived experiences, along with the researcher's distinct interpretation of those experiences (Laverty, 2003)

Due to South Africa's long colonial past and the resulting mixed-race of the Muslim community in Cape Town, I believed it was vital to understand the ideas of European, African, and Muslim thinkers, since they all had a role in forming contemporary South African culture and particularly in our context - Cape Town. Ideas are constantly travelling across the Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western hemispheres, and therefore, I believe that none of the following notions arose in isolation, but rather because of similarities, overlaps, interactions, and conflicts with cultures from all over the world.

The following sections and sub-sections, details the application of Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in my innovative research; the key philosophers and ideas are then presented. Introduction of the evolved tenets, question matrix, and four trans-perspectives follows as a later sub-section, and finally an introduction to the newly developed analytical framework is given before it is applied to the main body of Chapter 6.

5.3 Introduction To Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation and the discipline of comprehending texts, as well as a tool for understanding others' viewpoints, and plays a role in linking individuals and civilizations to their own source. (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010. p180). Comprehending a text is not a linear process; rather, it hinges on our grasp of each constituent part and how each component connects to the overall text. Applying this to the reality of my thesis, to understand the relationship between the development of Muslim artists and the art spaces in Cape Town, we need to understand variables such as socio economic, theological, cultural and political, that play a part in how this relationship is shaped in a back-and-forth process.

Lessem and Schieffer (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010c) propose that Hermeneutics has principal beliefs referred to as 'core tenets' in integral research theory. These key tenets are as follows:

1. You understand how the world is ‘constructed’.
2. You reconstruct self and society.
3. You move from spectator to active agent.
4. You evolve from interpretive to transformative.
5. You reconnect with the source.

Hermeneutic inquiry holds that all understanding is interpretation, and interpretation is created through language (Chang, 2010). However, the hermeneutic comprehension can be extended to incorporate the interpretation of art which is a visual language. During the MASHŪRAH’ circles we unpacked the relationship between an artwork/artist and the social, historical, and traditional contexts, as well as the dialectical relationship between an artwork/artist and the community, an artwork/artist and history, and an artwork/artist and the essence of the specific audience in a back-and-forth process amongst one another (Nazar, 2017).

Hermeneutics asserts that texts and text-analogues separated by time and culture, or veiled in ideology and false consciousness, appear chaotic, fractured, contradictory, and distorted, and they must be extensively studied to reveal their underlying coherence or meaning (Demeterio, nd). This is extremely pertinent to our work, and during my circles with artists, we examined the context of Islam against the backdrop of apartheid, colonial, and postcolonial history, which have made historical context inconsistent, subjective, and skewed with gaping holes. Following my study of hermeneutic methodological tools, I was left to evaluate which of these important ideas aided in the reshaping and shifting of my thinking towards Islam, Cape Town and the art world which I will introduce in the following sections. The next section will begin with religious texts.

5.3.1 How The Interpretation Of Religious Texts Arose

Hermeneutics arose as an interpretative approach relatively early in history. Greeks, Jews, Christians, and Muslims studied and re-examined their sacred works in late antiquity, most notably the Homeric epics, the Torah, Talmud, the Holy Bible, and Quran (Bauman, 2010; Lessem and Schieffer, 2010a). The first known appearance of hermeneutics was from the 13 hermeneutical principles applied to the interpretation of laws in the Torah by Rabbi Ben Elisha during the Amoraic era(Lessem and Schieffer, 2010c). Islam's most important hermeneutical tradition is *Tafsir* - the body of knowledge that tries to illuminate the true meaning of the Holy

Quran. Its core phrase, *fussara*, literally means "to raise the veil" or "to make apparent" (Gafoordeen, 2017). Scholars or exegesis known as *Mufassir* were striving to explicate the genuine meaning of the Quran and its rules as early as the seventh century (Gafoordeen, 2017). This hermeneutical tradition is the one followed in Cape Town and important to comprehend because it is the foundation of all Sunni Islam.

Next, we unpack the critical ideas that relate to our inquiry in modern and contemporary European hermeneutics.

5.3.2 Theories Of Meaning Making Among European Hermeneutic Philosophers From 19th To 20th Century

This thesis centres on the advancement of meaning making through the medium of artistic practice, fostering creative discourse, promoting inclusivity, and strengthening the presence of Muslim communities within South Africa's vibrant art industry. Cape Town serves as our starting point for this exploration. Nonetheless, we encounter challenges when the religious doctrines that guide society or communities become ambiguous and detached from the very individuals they are intended to benefit. Within the context of Islam and among the Muslim community in Cape Town, there exists a noteworthy tension when it comes to artistic expression. To put it simply, the connection to art often encounters obstacles or is closely intertwined with narratives that revolve around the principles and regulations of the Islamic faith.

From my perspective, both as an arts practitioner and as a Muslim, I believe that art is an immersive experience, while Islam represents a 'Deen,' signifying a complete way of life where every facet of our daily existence is integrated into our humanistic being, essentially making most of our daily activities acts of worship. We perpetually exist within the spirit of Islam, and therefore, the act of creating art or engaging with art can exist within this Islamic spirit without being condemned as un-Islamic. Moreover, it is essential to recognize that art need not conflict with Islam or the Islamic faith.

While I acknowledge the pervasive issue of Eurocentrism in shaping our knowledge, I have chosen to reference certain philosophers in this section. I believe their theories on interpreting artistic experiences can be practically applied within the context of the Muslim community.

For instance, Friedrich Schleiermacher posits that the removal of ancient religious literature from its historical and cultural context lies at the core of modern society's confusion and ambiguity. He contends that a return to this original context is imperative (Demeterio, n.d). One of the significant challenges faced by non-Arabic-speaking Muslims, including myself, pertains to the fact that the Quran was originally written and transmitted in Arabic, a language not primarily spoken by the majority of Capetonians. For instance, within the MASHŪRAH circles, only one artist possessed a comprehensive understanding of modern spoken Arabic. Across centuries, various interpretations of the Quran have aimed to extract meaning from its intricate language, leading to numerous misconceptions concerning the fundamental definitions of words and the precise directives within verses.

Despite my conviction that art should serve to express religious sentiments, I diverge from Schleiermacher's viewpoint, which suggests that the sole purpose of art is to collectively convey religious emotions (Demeterio, n.d). Essentially, he contends that art is authentic only when it serves religion. Nevertheless, the myriad ways individuals express their religious feelings cast doubt on this perspective.

I hold a strong belief that art should undergo critical engagement, but this engagement necessitates a preliminary experience with the art form. Wilhelm Dilthey, in his scholarly work, argued that our interactions with art rarely maintain objectivity (Hansen, 2014). He introduced an innovative framework for interpreting these artistic experiences, one that amalgamates emotion, thought, and sensation. Dilthey's perspective contends that art possesses the transformative power to unveil the inherent value within ordinary life experiences through creative expression and describes art as a metamorphosis of life (Hansen, 2014).

As we examine Dilthey's perspective in contrast to Schleiermacher's assertion that art should primarily serve religion, we shift our focus to the contextual framework of Islam. Elaborating on an earlier point, within Islam, often referred to as a 'Deen' or a comprehensive way of life (Denny, 2015), everyday behaviours such as our interactions with others (known as Adab)(Denny, 2015), our manner of sitting and eating, and our daily conduct are considered individual acts of spiritual worship. This prompts us to contemplate whether art can be viewed as a creative extension of

these daily activities -a form of worship. This perspective gains significance when we apply it to the art world's reluctance to embrace overtly Islamic symbolism in artworks and the thematic constraints imposed on Muslim artists, driven by concerns that their work may appear too religious. At this juncture, Nietzsche's concept becomes relevant. Nietzsche argues that the interpretation of text is subject to a myriad of subjective readings, influenced by the observer and their unique decoding process (Demeterio, n.d). In essence, this raises the question "is artwork classified as religious simply because the viewers themselves hold religious beliefs?" I bring up this point due to my role as a curator, where I have frequently encountered caution against including too many Muslim artists in exhibitions. The rationale behind this caution often hinges on the concern that their work might be perceived as excessively religious, leading to the exclusion of certain pieces from being showcased. The underlying reasons behind this art world reaction towards religion have long been a source of intrigue for me.

On the other hand, Gadamer argues that art transcends mere objects; it is an immersive experience that has the power to transform those who engage with it, almost like a hypnotic encounter (Demeterio, n.d). His horizon theory posits that an individual's subjective lifeworld is profoundly shaped by their personal biases, presuppositions, experiences, knowledge, and emotions. (Demeterio, n.d). In the context of the MASHŪRAH learning circle, this concept gives us an opportunity to recalibrate our perspectives. We have embraced hermeneutic and phenomenological thinking to broaden our understanding and appreciation of lived experiences alongside the religious scriptures we were raised with. To comprehend the foundation of the Cape Town Muslim community's culture, it is crucial to delve into the European viewpoint on interpretation as well. Moreover, a comprehensive understanding of the religion that underpins this culture is essential. Equally important is grasping the context of the community's relationship with art, its cultural expressions, and its identity. In the next section, I will delve into the Islamic approach to Hermeneutics in the following section.

5.3.3 Ijtihad - An Islamic Approach To Hermeneutics

"And we have sent down to you as an explanation for everything, a guidance a mercy and glad tidings for Muslims" ('The Holy Quran ', Surah 16:89 n.d.)

"We have sent down unto thee (also) the messenger; that thou mayest explain clearly to men

what is a sent for them and they may give thought ('The Holy Quran ', 16:44 n.d)

These verses emphasize the significance of Islam and the holy scriptures bestowed upon Muslims by God (SWT). They also highlight Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the Messenger, guide, and mentor for attaining clarity from the Quran ('The Holy Quran', n.d). To grasp the context of the Cape Town Muslim community's engagement with art, culture, and identity, it is imperative to first delve into the foundations of their faith. Islam, with its unique principles and perspectives on the appropriate use and practice of art, necessitates a certain level of religious literacy for curators and gallerists when dealing with this subject matter.

As our research expands to explore the South African art world's perception of the Muslim faith and culture in Cape Town and whether it impacts the inclusion of Muslim artists in the industry, thus influencing engagement with Muslim audiences, it becomes essential to gain insight into the sources shaping this faith. The Sunnah comprises the actions and practices of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that Sunni Muslims faithfully adheres to (Denny, 2015). These practices were observed during the Prophet's lifetime and subsequently transmitted to future generations. They are meticulously recorded in the Hadith, which encompasses the verbally transmitted accounts of his sayings, actions, or tacit approvals. When combined with the Holy Quran, divinely revealed to the Prophet, they collectively form the foundational framework that guides the lives of Muslims (Denny, 2015) Given that the Sunni sect, followers of the Sunnah, predominates in Cape Town, among the participants of MASHŪRAH' circles, most artists involved in my work, and my own perspective, this thesis predominantly adopts a Sunni standpoint in reference to Islam. It is worth noting that the Shia sect holds its distinct views on art and permissibility, which fall outside the scope of this thesis.

There are four main philosophical schools of thought that exist within the Sunni sect, and it is recommended to follow one (Makdisi, 1979). While my Sunni family adheres to the Hanafi philosophical school of thought, my husband, in-laws, and the majority of Capetonians are Sunni followers of the Shafi'i school of thought. Most participants in the MASHŪRAH' circles also belong to the Shafi'i and Hanafi schools of thought. The next section will examine the revelation of the Quran to mankind and its impact on the evolution of Islam and modern Muslims.

5.3.3.1 The Revelation Of The Quran And Subsequent Developments In Understanding

At the heart of Islam lies the central concept of 'revelation,' which represents the precise word of God. This divine message was conveyed orally to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the chosen messenger of Allah (swt), in classical Arabic during the 7th century over a period spanning two decades. The meticulous preservation of this sacred communication is enshrined in the Quran, a term that translates literally to 'the recitation' (Hasan, n.d).

Muhammad (PBUH), historically known to have engaged in seclusion and contemplation within a cave near Mecca, was largely illiterate. Nevertheless, he was entrusted with the profound responsibility of disseminating this divine message to all of humanity. It is worth noting that Muhammad (PBUH) grew up in a milieu that held poetic expression in high regard (Navid Kermani, 2009). Additionally, the 14th-century scholar Ibn Khaldun underscored the significance of poetry in Arab culture, stating, "Arabs held poetry in high esteem as a form of expression" (Khaldun and Rosenthal, 2009).

However, the language in which the Quran was revealed exhibited a marked superiority over the Arabic of the 7th century and even surpasses modern-day Arabic. Its linguistic sophistication was so exceptional that the Arabs of that era found themselves unable to produce an Arabic text that could rival the Quran's grammatical and literary excellence (Tzortzis, 2014). In our contemporary world, the language of the Quran remains a significant hurdle for many in fully comprehending the faith, necessitating a heavy reliance on translations.

Dr. N. Gafoordeen (2017) explains that during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the transmission of knowledge involved him reciting the revealed verses to his companions, known as the Sahaba. Additionally, he would often elucidate the meanings of these verses to provide guidance (Gafoordeen, 2017). After the Prophet's passing, the need for commentaries became evident. This need stemmed from the absence of historical context in the verse arrangement and the complexities of language and content in the Quran. Gafoordeen explains skilled scholars called *Mufassir* emerged to address this need, tasked with accurately interpreting the Quran into Tafsir, representing Islam's primary hermeneutical tradition (Gafoordeen, 2017). The initial exegesis was composed by the first generation of Sahaba (companions of the Prophet PBUH), who passed on their knowledge and Quranic understanding

to later generations of Muslims (Gafoordeen, 2017). Consequently, for South African Sunni Muslims, the exegesis from the first three generations, collectively known as the Salaf, holds paramount importance. It forms the bedrock of traditional Islamic hermeneutics, serving as the basis for all critical analysis and discourse. The next section will look at how modern development have shaped Islamic Hermeneutics.

5.3.3.2 Modern Developments In Islamic Interpretation

Within our MASHŪRAH learning circles there was a recurring theme of discussing varying interpretations of Quranic verses and Hadith, along with the influence of cultural conventions. These debates were integral to our gatherings. We fostered an environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds, regardless of their level of proficiency in the Arabic language or their religious dedication, were welcomed. Our goal was to facilitate open dialogues in which both positive and negative experiences could be shared, and questions freely asked. This approach allowed us to explore a genuine understanding of ourselves in relation to one another, encompassing the acceptance of our shadow selves alongside our religious identity.

One notable advantage of our MASHŪRAH gatherings was the exchange of fresh ideas, diverse perspectives, and insights from various philosophical thinkers. Fortunately, contemporary hermeneutic techniques have adapted to the reality that many Muslims, including individuals like us, do not have Arabic as their first language. This adaptation ensures accessibility to the rich Islamic tradition for todays and future generations. Since the nineteenth century, philosophers have disputed the modern concept of *tafsir* which the science of explaining the Quran (Brown, 2013) and how it may be applied to the circumstances and experiences of contemporary Muslims like my colleagues and me.

Thinkers such as Nasr Abu Zayd and Fazlur Rahman made significant efforts to strike a balance between Western and Eastern modes of thought (Sukidi, 2009). For example, Abu Zayd advocated for a fresh approach to interpreting the holy book, employing a "humanistic hermeneutics" perspective (Sukidi, 2009). In his view, the Quran is regarded as a living reality and discourse. Zayd saw the Quran as a collection of literary narratives from seventh-century Arabia, serving ethical and spiritual purposes of that era.

On the contrary, Rahman argued that the Prophet's psyche played a crucial role in shaping the universal message (Wadud *et al.*, 2020). What particularly intrigues me is Rahman's assertion that the revealed verses were a direct response to the conditions and worldview of early Muslims. While Rahman acknowledges the text's theistic foundation, he also posits that if the Quran were indeed the direct message of God, it served a dual purpose as both the words of a moral educator and a guiding compass for the entirety of human society (Wadud *et al.*, 2020).

In our MASHŪRAH circle sessions, we came to a shared realisation about a prominent issue within the art industry: its moral orientation often appears to be skewed, driven primarily by self-interest and capitalism. These discussions took place, notably, during *Ramadan* in 2021, a period that coincided with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This distinctive context compelled us to turn our focus inward, triggering a profound period of introspection. It awakened our individual senses of morality and responsibility towards one another within the group. These newfound values became the cornerstone of our behaviour as we continued to evolve as an emerging artist-led community throughout our journey.

Next, we turn to explore the female perspective to Islamic Hermeneutics.

5.3.4 The Female Perspective To Islamic Hermeneutics

I was acutely aware of the underrepresentation of Muslim female voices in the South African art scene. In many South African art galleries, the proportion of Muslim females, whether as artists or in roles like curators, is disproportionately low, hindering their visibility. This disparity can be traced back to the influence of patriarchy within Islamic religious interpretations. Historically, tafsir did not prioritize the perspectives of ordinary women until the twentieth century (Wadud *et al.*, 2020). However, scholars like Amina Wadud, Amna Barlas, and Laleh Buktiar have undertaken significant work to redefine the Quranic perspective from a male-centric lens, asserting that the Quran holds liberation for Muslim women through their interpretative efforts (Badamasiuy, 2017). What defines their research is the unexplored world of female agency in different fields (Wadud *et al.*, 2020). As a Muslim woman, I found their works groundbreaking and essential references. It is imperative that the voices, stories, and leadership of Muslim women

are not only acknowledged but also developed further within the South African art space. During the MASHŪRAH dialogues, I made a conscious effort to encourage female artists to speak up and lead discussions, especially when male voices dominated. To genuinely advance and provide a platform for the female Muslim voice, it is crucial not just to discuss it but to take tangible actions and create opportunities.

In the subsequent section, we delve into African hermeneutics, which forms an integral part of South African Muslim history.

5.3.5 Themes Of Liberation In African Hermeneutics

In my quest to grasp the essence of African hermeneutics, I posed a fundamental question to both myself and the participants of the MASHŪRAH circles, a question that has ignited debates for many decades and has been articulated by scholars like Jonathan O. Chimakonam: What constitutes a philosophy as distinctly African? (Chimakonam, 2021). In our context, this inquiry arises from the recognition that in South Africa, Islam is often perceived as an 'outsider religion' rather than an indigenous African belief system. Chimakonam explains within the realm of African hermeneutical philosophy, two contrasting perspectives emerge. Some adherents of traditional African hermeneutics establish a racial criterion, contending that a philosophy can be deemed African only if it originates from the minds of Africans (Chimakonam, 2021). Conversely, universalists argue that the term "African" should be seen as a unifying concept devoid of racial connotations, emphasising instead that a philosophy can be considered "African" when it draws inspiration from African cultural backgrounds and modes of thought (Chimakonam, 2021).

In the context of African hermeneutics, the debate about what defines a philosophy as African becomes particularly significant in a nation like South Africa. Here, historical experiences are marked by colonization, enslavement, segregation, and the assignment of rights based on racial categorizations (Chimakonam, 2021). Within this complex socio-political landscape, the notions of 'blackness' and belonging are recurring themes. The interpretation of these concepts varies among individuals, with 'blackness' often intertwined with notions of Africanism and a connection to ancestral land. Personally, my own sense of belonging is multifaceted. It does not immediately connect to my Pakistani heritage or the village where my grandparents, parents, and

extended family originated. At times, my sense of belonging is influenced by the cultural facets of Pakistan, but there are moments when I feel distant from them and struggle to relate.

Socrates believed that all philosophical thought originates from a state of 'wonder,' leading individuals to experience awe, curiosity, or frustration (Plato, *Theætetus*, 155d, p. 37). Modern African philosophy emerged in the late 1920s, driven by the latter, deep frustration, referred to as 'onuma' (Chimakonam, 2021). African scholars, after pursuing education in the West, faced prejudice upon their return to the continent, fuelling an intellectual revolution among the African elite towards the study of philosophy.

Thus, the quest to define African philosophy and rediscover African identity became intertwined with the broader struggle for emancipation and decolonization, reflecting the complex interplay of historical experiences, intellectual curiosity, and the pursuit of justice within the African philosophical landscape (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010d)



Figure 5.1: Steve Biko, Source: Britanica Encyclopaedia

5.3.6 South Africa's Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)

Steve Biko is widely recognized as the initiator of South Africa's Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), which aimed to offer an alternative black identity to the one portrayed by apartheid-era

media. Fundamentally, the BCM sought to instil pride in black individuals regarding their race, language, history, and culture to attain mental emancipation (Biko, 1996). African Hermeneutics, as explained by Serequeberhan, significantly diverges from European Hermeneutics, focusing more on transformation rather than interpretation (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010b). It addresses the apprehensions associated with oppression, colonialism, marginalization, and the struggle for freedom.

The values upheld by the BCM resonate strongly with the Cape Town Muslim community and artists. Much like apartheid, international Islamophobia has shaped how Muslims are perceived globally, and this perception has affected their ability to express their experiences fully through art. Furthermore, many of the artists involved in MASHŪRAH had parents and families actively engaged in the struggle for liberation, either politically or socially. Recognizing that the participants possess their own unique voices and need for self-validation was a crucial aspect of our discussions.

My journey to comprehend the roots of African hermeneutics has a connection to my personal experiences in the United Kingdom, particularly during the early and mid-2000s following the events of 9/11. During this period, the arts and cultural scene witnessed a flourishing of creativity within Muslim culture. This resurgence was a response to the stigma and prejudice faced by the Muslim community in the global arena, amplified by the spectre of terrorism and Islamophobia. It was a time when initiatives like Art Dubai emerged, providing a platform for artists to express their discontent and offer an alternative narrative of what Islam meant to them. This link between Islam and its evolving contexts deeply resonates with my own life experiences and convictions. Therefore, grasping the significance of contributing to the struggle for liberation from the perspective of a South African Muslim becomes essential. In the upcoming section, we delve into the liberation journey of South African Muslims.

5.2 The South African Muslim Story Of Liberation

Discussing liberation struggles and African philosophy in the context of South Africa would be incomplete without acknowledging South African Muslim Imams like Imam Yusuf, Tuan Guru, and Imam Haron, who played instrumental roles in establishing Islam in Cape Town. These Imams' lived contributions hold a central place in the realm of African Muslim hermeneutical

research within the Cape. What unites African philosophy and South African Islam is a shared history of colonization, oppression, disadvantage, and a collective pursuit of justice, equality, and liberation. Many participants in the MASHŪRAH ecosystem could trace their ancestral roots back to the first Muslim settlers in the Cape during the 1700s, as well as to the early Imams who were actively involved in the struggle for justice and freedom. This historical connection was deeply ingrained in their identity and consciousness.

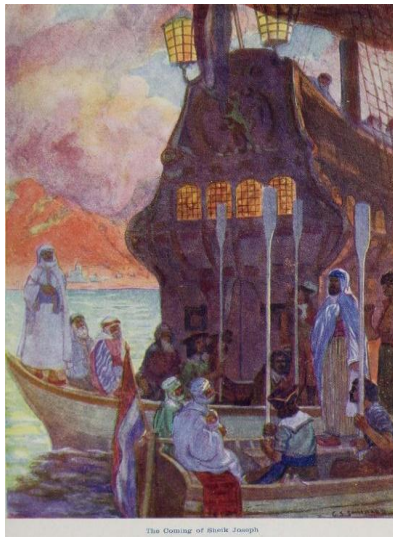


Figure 5.2: 'The Coming of Shaikh Joseph', 1909. Artist: GS Smithard

Source: SA history online



Figure 5.3: Depiction of Imam Yusuf

Source: Camissa Museum archive

5.3.6.1 Shaikh Yusuf

Delving into the remarkable life of Shaikh Yusuf, an individual credited with laying the foundation for Shafi'i Sunni Islam at the Cape, Achmat Davids narrates that the Shaikh was born in 1626 on the island of Celebes (in present day Indonesia), to noble lineage at the age of eighteen, in 1644, Shaikh Yusuf embarked on a pilgrimage to Mecca, combining it with a pursuit of Islamic knowledge for many years. On his return he settled in the court of Sultan Ageng in Indonesia, taking on roles as a teacher and spiritual guide. However, his defiance against Dutch control in 1693 led to his deportation as a political prisoner to Zandvliet in the Cape (Costa and Davids, 1994).

Despite the prohibition of private Muslim gatherings during that time, Zandvliet emerged as a gathering point for other exiles and free slaves, who were social outcasts. They rallied around Shaikh Yusuf, forming a cohesive community. His role in restoring the dignity of people who had endured enslavement and dehumanization through Islam was of profound significance. Shaikh Yusuf exemplified the core teachings found within the Quranic scriptures, embodying the three

fundamental aspects as described by Achmat Davids: scholarship, spiritual striving, and dedication to the cause of Allah. One of his most impactful contributions lay in the profound psychological transformation he instilled in free slaves and exiles (Costa and Davids, 1994).

5.3.6.2 Tuan Guru

Following Shaikh Yusuf, Tuan Guru, a prominent spiritual leader, theologian, and educator, continued to build upon the foundations of Islam's early presence on the Cape (Willemse, 2020). In 1780, Tuan Guru, a royal descendant in exile, was apprehended and transported to the Cape as a political state prisoner, where he endured 13 years of incarceration on Robben Island (Willemse, 2020). During this period, he authored the significant work "*Ma'rifat al-Islam wa'l-Imn*" (translated as The Knowledge of Islam and Faith). (Willemse, 2020). This manuscript holds a special place in the hearts of early Islamic leaders and educators, who regard it as the definitive authority on Islam in South Africa. Historian Achmat Davids underscores its unparalleled influence, stating that no other document wielded a more profound impact at the Cape (Willemse, 2020).

Notably, Tuan Guru, a Hafiz (a Quran memorizer), undertook the extraordinary task of transcribing the entire Quran from memory for the Muslim community in Cape Town. This Quranic transcription was rendered in Arabic-Afrikaans, a unique form of Cape Dutch or colloquial Afrikaans, but written in Arabic script, thereby making the Quran accessible to residents who did not speak Arabic. For well over a century, Tuan Guru's religious literature exerted a dominating presence in the Cape's religio-cultural milieu. He was widely recognized as a pioneer in the fight against tyranny, exploitation, and injustice, and his legacy endures to this day, more than a century after his passing (Willemse, 2020).

Faheem Jackson, who has dedicated himself to the meticulous study of Tuan Guru's handwritten scripts to establish a local calligraphic identity, believes that Tuan Guru's calligraphy can offer valuable insights into the culture and history of South African Islam (Atiyyah Khan, 2020).



Figure 5.4: Tuan Gurus Manuscripts - Ma'rifat al-Islam wa'l-Imn and the Holy Quran

Source: News24 article



Figure 5.5: Imam Haron

Source: Afrika Çalışmaları Merkezi (2022)



Figure 5.6: Imam Abdullah Haron funeral procession

Source: Iol.co.za, (2014)



Figure 5.7: Amongst men by Haron Gunn Salie

Source: About Her (2023)

5.3.6.3 Imam Abdullah Haron

Haroon Gunn Salie, an active participant in the MASHŪRAH dialogue, carries a name that pays tribute to the renowned South African Muslim imam and anti-apartheid advocate, Imam Abdullah Haron. On September 27, 1969, Imam Haron tragically lost his life while confined in a police

cell. His ordeal involved enduring a gruelling 123 days of solitary confinement and daily interrogations due to his active role in the anti-apartheid struggle (Brown, 2019).

Much like his predecessors, Shaikh Yusuf and Tuan Guru, Imam Haron's life was dedicated to the pursuit of social justice, and his application of Islam and leadership during a tumultuous era served as a role model for many. Imam Haron integrated social and political engagement seamlessly into his role as religious leader. In Cape Town, Islam evolved amidst the highly politicized struggle for liberation, and the books, translations, and lived examples of the Imam left an indelible mark for generations to come (Brown, 2019).

In an ironic twist of fate, Haroon Gunn Salie experienced a similar confinement at a very tender age, akin to his namesake. Born to parents, Shirley Gunn and Aneez Salie, both uMkhonto we Sizwe soldiers, Haroon spent his early life underground. Shirley's arrest led to Haroon's detention with her, and he was later separated from her and placed in a children's home. Security police used recordings of the toddler's cries to torment his mother. The Cape Town Muslim community played a crucial role in advocating for their release, leaving Haroon with a profound sense of indebtedness (Abarder, 2015).

In 2013, Gunn Sallie embarked on a creative journey to explore and pay homage to Imam Haron's unwavering struggle. His installation, aptly titled 'Amongst men,' featured numerous sculpted hats reminiscent of those worn by Muslim men who attended the imam's funeral in 1969 and a molded shrouded sculpture. 'Amongst men' effectively became an artistic representation of the profound significance of Imam Haron and his legacy to countless Muslims in South Africa (Abarder, 2015). Remarkably, this artwork was recreated for the inaugural Islamic Biennale in Saudi Arabia in 2023(Unknown, 2023). Next, we look at the key ideas of Phenomenology.

5.4 Phenomenology - The European Perspective From Husserl And Heidegger

It was important to include a phenomenological perspective when unpacking context at this level. This is because I approach interpretation not only through my personal experiences and religious texts but also by incorporating the language of historical, modern, and contemporary art. This holistic approach enriches my own life experiences and adds depth to my understanding of the

South African context. Visual language is consistently considered in my explorations, serving as a vital bridge between text and the broader cultural landscape.

In this context, I believe that art holds significant potential for societal transformation. It is intrinsic to the human experience, contributing to our spiritual and mental well-being. However, various societal and religious factors present challenges for Muslims in Cape Town to fully engage with art. Therefore, adopting a phenomenological perspective can be highly beneficial in comprehending how we experience art and addressing the unique dynamics at play.

Phenomenology has applicable tenets within Integral Research theory (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). They are as follows:

Key Tenets of Phenomenology (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010)

1. To concentrate on Illuminating the 'Inner World' of one's origins.
2. To immerse oneself in the context of one's immediately perceived essences.
3. To go beyond surface traits and empirical "facts" to underlying moral values
4. To locate what is unique in the local context to what one authentically is.

David Woodruff Smith elucidates that Phenomenology, as established by Edmund Husserl, fundamentally centres on the exploration of human consciousness and the lived experiences of individuals (Smith, 2018). Smith goes on to explain Husserl's foundational concept, subsequently developed by his successors, posits that the meaning of things is constructed through our engagement and interaction with them. This perspective implies a deep immersion in the world, a full engagement with life's flavours, sensations, and encounters, and it is within this domain that art finds its place. Sarah Bakewell underscores that phenomenology is essentially a method rather than a fixed set of theories, encapsulated succinctly by the command to "describe phenomena" (Yip, 2020).

The 'life world,' as defined by Husserl, encompasses the myriad ordinary occurrences often overlooked in our daily lives. Exploring these interactions, particularly in the context of South African Muslims and artists, enables us to unearth new and concealed meanings. Smith highlights

a pivotal concept in phenomenology by Husserl is intentionality. It asserts that human consciousness is perpetually directed towards something. Husserl's approach requires the suspension of personal biases and presuppositions through a process he termed 'bracketing' (Smith, 2018). Martin Heidegger, a disciple of Husserl, extended the scope of hermeneutics further by shifting the focus from mere knowledge to the exploration of 'what is being in the world' rather than 'knowing the world' (Smith, 2018).

The exploration of art experience and the definition of a work of art have been subjects of extensive scrutiny since the 20th century, giving rise to modern art (Schnee, 2016). I vividly recall my undergraduate years at art school when I encountered Duchamp's infamous toilet at the Tate Modern, prompting me to question how such an object could be considered art. In this thesis, my aim is not to arrive at a definitive answer regarding the essence of art but rather to stimulate a transformation in the consciousness of both a community and an art industry, opening them up to the boundless possibilities and potential of what art can be and achieve.

While Nietzsche considered art an illusory distortion of truth and remarks, "we possess art lest we perish of the truth," to make the harsh realities of life more manageable by veiling them in a shroud of ambiguous and thought-provoking expression, (Le Blevenec and Blevenec, 2017), Heidegger's viewpoint proposes that art not only serves as a medium for conveying an element of truth within society but also actively participates in the creation of truth. He contends that, in its highest form, art serves as the foundation of history, facilitating the emergence of truth (Thomson, 2010). Throughout this thesis and our MASHŪRAH circles, the question of what art truly is has evolved, considering the viewpoints of both the art world and the Muslim community. This is particularly relevant due to the divergent opinions regarding what is permissible for Muslims within the context of Islam and how artworks with religious themes should be integrated, curated, exhibited, and developed within mainstream contemporary art environments. Phenomenology serves as a valuable framework for exploring how we emotionally and experientially engage with art, what motivates our creative endeavours, and where the boundaries between art and non-art may blur.

Moving beyond clichés, the question arises of whether all art created by Muslim artists must

necessarily be religious in nature. To address this, we delve into the realms of religious experience and what it means to be a 'religious being.' Our stance is influenced by our personal encounters with spirituality, the unseen world, and the multitude of lived experiences. In our dialogue sessions, discussions about religiosity and spirituality were of paramount importance, as everyone's understanding and embodiment of Islam varied, consequently affecting their approach to art.

Phenomenology, in my perspective, brings remarkable clarity to both the realms of religious sentiment and artistic expression and experience. Both phenomenology and mysticism share foundations in the recognition of intersubjectivity and the acknowledgement of shared experiences. The following section will delve into Imam Ghazali and Allama Iqbal's Islamic perspectives on being.

5.4.1 Mystical Phenomenological Ideas Of Being

5.4.1.1 Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali, a prominent figure in Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and mysticism, hailed from Iran, where he received extensive education in various Islamic religious disciplines. His early exposure to Sufi practices laid the foundation for his spiritual journey. Notably, he was appointed as the head of the Nizamiyyah College in Baghdad, a role in which he lectured on Islamic jurisprudence, countered heretical beliefs, and addressed queries from diverse segments of society. However, after four years, he underwent a profound spiritual crisis that led him to renounce his prestigious career and worldly pursuits. He returned to his hometown of Tus, where he focused on writing, Sufi practices, and teaching his disciples until his passing. His autobiography explains that his shift towards Sufism was driven by his belief that certain knowledge and the conviction of revealed truth could only be attained through Sufism (Nakamura, 2018).



Figure 5.8: Depiction of Muslim scholar

Source: www.thehumblei.com

Al-Ghazali's perspective on *falsafa* was intricate, as he both rejected and condemned some of its teachings while accepting and applying others (Griffel, 2007)

Ghazali, much like Heidegger, delved into questions about human existence and ontology, exploring concepts such as (ATEŞÇİ, 2019):

1. The nature of being a human being.
2. Spiritual aspects that define human beings.
3. What distinguishes humans from other beings.
4. The true essence of humanity.

He approached these questions from a psycho-spiritual standpoint and provided insights into spiritual well-being and remedies. His emphasis on human ontology stemmed from the belief that self-awareness leads to a deeper understanding of the divine (*Ma'rifatullah*). In Ghazali's works, terms like the heart (*qalb*), intellect (*'aql*), spirit (*rūḥ*), and self (*nafs*) are used interchangeably, all holding a central place in his perception of human ontology and symbolizing the essence of human existence (ATEŞÇİ, 2019).

Derived from Kamal's study of Al Ghazali, I have extrapolated the following tenets (Kamal, 2004):

1. For comprehension, presuppositions should be devoid of any pre-given structures, norms, and judgements at the outset.
2. Stresses the unity of the literal “external” and hidden “internal” meaning understanding.
3. Understanding is based on spiritual intuition, and nothing stands between the mind and its subject in intuition.
4. It encourages emotional atonement.

Next, we look at Allama Iqbal and Sadequain Naqqash



Figure 5.9: Allama Iqbal, Sadequain, Quest for Knowledge mural by Sadequain

Source: www.kashmirilife.net & www.sadequainfoundation.com

5.4.1.2 Allama Iqbal And Sadequain Naqqash

Allama Iqbal's Urdu and Farsi poetry and prose have been a constant presence throughout my

life, yet I have never had the opportunity to fully engage with them. While I am fortunate to have received the gift of the Urdu language from my mother and can read Farsi, there remains a linguistic depth that eludes me.

Iqbal, born in Sialkot, Pakistan, came from a devout merchant family and received his education in Lahore. He achieved a philosophy degree from the University of Cambridge, became a qualified barrister in London, and earned a Doctorate from the University of Munich. Upon his return from Europe, he practiced law, but it was his Persian and Urdu poetry that brought him fame. In addition to being a poet, he was a philosopher who aimed to guide fellow Muslims in British-administered India toward the establishment of a separate Muslim state, which eventually became Pakistan (McDonough, 2023).

Iqbal's works on Islamic philosophy and Sufism through the 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' (Iqbal, 2013) particularly his poems '*Shiqwa*' (complaint) and '*Jawaab e-shiqwa*' (the answer to the complaint), as well as his ideas on social reform, have inspired me to explore the synthesis of my faith with the modern world. Iqbal observed that religion represents a holistic expression of the complete human being, extending beyond mere thought or action (Shabbir *et al.*, 2020).

Through his poetry, Iqbal voiced the pain of Muslim powerlessness and posed profound questions about the state and its conflicts. He gained recognition with the publication of his Persian poem "*Asrār-e khūdī*" (The Secrets of the Self), where he presented a theory of self-affirmation in contrast to the passive contemplation of classical Islamic mysticism. Iqbal and his followers argued that active self-realization through self-sacrifice for greater causes was the true path for Muslims (McDonough, 2023).

Iqbal's core philosophical concept, synonymous with his entire discourse, is "*Khudi*" or selfhood. He viewed the self as the origin of all existence, which he termed "*Falsafa-i-Khudi*" or the Philosophy of Self. According to Iqbal, human beings bear the responsibility of safeguarding all the potentialities of life, as encapsulated in the Urdu phrase "*Tiree fitrat ameen hai mumkinat-i zindigani ki*" (Your nature protects the possibility of life). In Iqbal's view, humans possess the

mastery to explore both the visible and the concealed realms, enabling them to uncover truths beyond what the temporal eye can perceive. (Hasan Azad, 2014).

Iqbal further advocated that individual, particularly children, should be nurtured to aspire to lofty ideals. Their inherent creativity should be fostered, allowing them to engage in scientific and artistic pursuits. Iqbal clarified that science, and the arts should not be seen as ends in themselves but rather as means to preserve and enhance life (Ali and Hussien, n.d).

Drawing from a diverse array of sources, including the Quran, Western thought, Eastern philosophy, and scientific knowledge, Iqbal developed a comprehensive philosophical framework for understanding religious and metaphysical experiences. He observed that Imam Ghazali's approach leaned heavily on religious and mystical wisdom, leaving limited room for rational and intellectual inquiry. Iqbal emphasized the importance of blending Western intellectual achievements with Eastern spiritual intuition to achieve a harmonious equilibrium in Islamic thought (Umair, 2015).

Sadequain Naqqash, the acclaimed Pakistani artist and calligrapher, was deeply influenced by Iqbal, a connection vividly expressed in the creation of the mural "Quest for Knowledge." Skilfully capturing Iqbal's concepts of *Khudi* (selfhood) and his theories on the 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam,' Sadequain drew inspiration from the mystical essence embedded in Iqbal's poetic expressions (Dadi, 2011). Throughout his artistic journey, Sadequain immersed himself in the rich tapestry of Urdu poetry, specifically exploring the profound works of Iqbal. Playing a pivotal role, he not only spearheaded a calligraphic renaissance in the South Asian region but also emerged as a foremost advocate of calligraphic modernism (Dadi, 2011).

This fusion of Western and Eastern cultures is not only vital to the collective human journey but also forms the basis of integral research. Having understood Allama Iqbal, below are the Tenets of '*Khudi*' (Self)

1. Religion is an expression of the complete human.
2. Your nature is the caretaker of life's possibilities.
3. The human being is the master of both the visible and the invisible

4. Harmonise western intellectual capabilities with eastern religious and spiritual sensibility.

I will now summarise my key takeaways to introduce a new set of evolved tenets combining all the learning until this point, that will be applied and guide the reader through the second part of the context stage in chapter 6.

5.5 My Evolved Tenets

The contextually relevant mixture of the evolved tenets is from my literature review of European, Islamic, and African Hermeneutics, Phenomenology and MASHŪRAH dialogues:

1. Faith is an expression of the whole person and balance's intellectual ability with religious and spiritual sensibilities to unite the hidden world (Batin) with the visible world (Zaher)
2. Art is a metamorphosis of life that reveals the value of ordinary experience, and we must "be" in the world to protect life's possibilities.
3. Promote social change and human diversity, use knowledge as a weapon for liberty, and as a moral guide for civilization.
4. Immersing ourselves in the context of our immediately perceived essences allows us emotional atonement for the circumstance.
5. Understand how the world is constructed and transform from the interpretive to the transformational by understanding that we are not passive observers of our realities, but active participants in them.
6. Recognize what makes us unique in our surroundings and be true to ourselves. Our presuppositions, prejudices, experiences, knowledge, emotions, and thoughts create our subjective and experienced life world, and logic and consensus provide balance.

Furthermore, to aid with the complicated multi-layered nature of context analysis, I will employ Schieffer and Lessem's "Integral context analysis" technique explained in the following sections (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010).

5.6 Integral Framework Analysis

This framework investigates the imbalances and potentials of community participation at three levels (Individual, organisation, and society) and from four perspectives Transpersonal, Transcultural, Transdisciplinary and Transformational:

1. **Transpersonal:** Exploring imbalances and opportunities for activating transformation by expanding on a purely individual perspective
2. **Transcultural:** Exploring imbalances and opportunities toward actualizing cultural capacities
3. **Transdisciplinary:** Exploring imbalances and opportunities for integrating knowledge sources
4. **Transformational:** Exploring imbalances and opportunities for mobilising co-creative participation.

The table below lists the questions that guide chapter 6. These questions originate from the onset of level 3's Calling and were further expanded through the first CARE phase in chapter 4 while mobilising the community. It was essential that I speak with members of the art ecosystem, Muslim artists, the Muslim community, and the South African population at large about the many challenges addressed in the table below, as well as study relevant literature. The questions provided are not exhaustive and each section serves as a lead inquiry. It enabled me to comprehend the background on a variety of interrelated levels. The table below illustrates the topics and questions that will guide our inquiry. These are the results of the MASHŪRAH process:

Table 5.1: 14-Trans questions guiding my research-to-innovation contextual inquiry

	Transpersonal	Transcultural	Transdisciplinary	Transformational
Activating Context to Uncover Potentials	Activating transformation	Actualizing cultural capacities	Integrating knowledge sources	Mobilising co- creative participation

<p>Individual Level</p>	<p>What is my relationship with self, art and Islam?</p> <p>What are the untapped opportunities that I can actualize?</p>	<p>How does culture affect my roles as a curator and the way I engage with audiences and artists?</p> <p>What are the untapped opportunities that I can actualize?</p>	<p>What disciplines do I integrate to support my role as an arts curator in my practice?</p> <p>What are the untapped opportunities that I can actualize?</p>	<p>How can my community engagement release potentials and address relevant changes?</p> <p>What are the untapped opportunities that I can actualize?</p>
<p>Organisational Level: Art Industry</p>	<p>How do the tastemakers and gatekeepers affect The art world and community engagement?</p> <p>What are the untapped opportunities that we can actualize?</p>	<p>What does the art world know about Indigenous wisdom and external knowledge of Muslim culture, and how does this affect community participation and portrayal of Muslim artists?</p> <p>What are the</p>	<p>What disciplines do organisation need to include to reconcile the imbalances and potentials between knowledge sources?</p>	<p>How do these disciplines lead to transformative relationships between the community and art world?</p>

		untapped opportunities that we can actualize?		
Society Level: Cape Town Muslim Community	Who should be involved in the Muslim community in co-creating better access and engagement with the art industry? What are the untapped opportunities that we can actualize?	1. What influence has the religio political environment had on the cultural lineage and milieu of the South African Muslim artists and their communities? What are the untapped opportunities that we can actualize?	What are the potential disciplines to be included in the future community engagement and art advocacy?	How can we create a transformative relationship between a future initiative and the community?

5.7 Conclusion

Chapter 5 established my analytical contextualization, which will be used in Chapter 6 as an in-depth investigation of the intersection of Muslim identity and art practice in Cape Town and South Africa. My research is in the arts sector, as well as my phenomenological engagement as a curator in the lives of Muslim artists in Cape Town and South Africa. I have therefore provided an entire chapter to outline my approach and framework in Chapter 5 as an introduction to the primary context analysis in Chapter 6.

This chapter examined the concepts and philosophies of thinkers that correspond to our context of South Africa, the art ecosystem, the Muslim community, and its artists, and built an innovative contextualising tool that directs the investigation further in the next context, chapter 6.

Chapter 6
ACTIVATION OF MATRIX TOWARDS A REGENERATIVE CONTEXT -
UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF SELF, THE CAPE TOWN MUSLIM
COMMUNITY AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN ART ECOSYSTEM

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 served as a comprehensive introduction to my contextual and methodological framework, providing an elaborate description of the tools that will be utilized in Chapter 6. This sixth chapter, constituting the second part of our contextual exploration from chapter 5, will delve into the examination of the intersection between Muslim identity and artistic practice in Cape Town.

In Chapter 5, I emphasized the importance of dedicating a whole chapter to primary context analysis. This decision stems from the nature of my research, situated within the arts sector, and my phenomenological engagement as a curator in the lives of Muslim artists in Cape Town. Additionally, the need to understand how Islam is interpreted individually and collectively requires the thorough understanding of Hermeneutics. Consequently, it is logical to allocate two separate chapters to this analysis. These chapters work in tandem with Chapter 7, which focuses on awakening consciousness within my CARE process. Together, they enable a more profound and extensive exploration of the array of methodologies I am employing in context analysis.

The research context serves to unpack the burning issues, which were identified in Level 1 of this thesis titled “Call” and explored in Chapters 2 and 3. This chapter provides essential ideas and considerations to provide a thorough understanding of the issues and formulates a synthesis to provide recommendations for how to proceed. It is not about presenting an exhaustive context analysis, but rather a focus on critical concerns, and I am offering a framework and approach for people who may conduct similar context analyses in the future.

While feedback from MASHŪRAH circles and various dialogues informed Chapters 5 to 7, combined with relevant literature to develop links within that framework of analysis, it is crucial to underscore my expertise as a curator, writer, public programs manager, and arts consultant

within the industry. This expertise is pivotal because I have firsthand experience with many of the themes emphasized in this thesis, and the project's originality is deeply rooted in this practical involvement. As a result, this process of holistic development becomes an extension of my curatorial practice and emerges as an innovative and essential curatorial tool as well. Some themes are difficult to traverse due to their sensitivity, particularly revealing family apartheid histories; hence, these talks and exchanges were semi-structured but partially organic, building on one another.

In this chapter the 4C trajectory moves from Call to Context and the GENE rhythm moves from Grounding to Emerging, Hermeneutics is the methodology that underpins the contextual framework of the Eastern Path of Renewal in Chapter 5 and 6 and 7 (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010c). This chapter continues with Hermeneutics Phenomenology introduced in Chapter 5 to grasp the various opportunities and obstacles within the many layers of the ecology (individual, organisation, and society) and using the evolved Integral Context Analysis paradigm and question matrix, the imbalances, possibilities, and potentials will be studied from four complementary perspectives: Transpersonal, Transcultural, Transdisciplinary, and Transformational.

This ~~is~~ method is a social innovation framework in and of itself, with evolved tenets supporting it. The questions introduced in the matrix emerged from the activation of the MASHŪRAH circles in chapter 4 and emerging ecosystem HalaqArt that will be introduced in chapter 7, as well as my personal work and career in the art industry. These are not exhaustive questions, but they attempt to guide the underlying collective ideals of these societies and their connection to contemporary art.

The following sections will apply the new Trans Framework to investigate the context on an individual, organisational and societal level of my research-to-innovation.

6.2 Individual Level: Transpersonal Imbalances And Opportunities - Giving The Other A Voice

6.2.1 What Is My Relationship With Self, Art And Islam?

6.2.1.1 Faith As An Expression Of The Whole Person

My personal conflict of mind and soul can be explained through a reflection by Al Zeera who explains that Muslims are torn between the mind and the soul (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010b). There is a constant tension between the sacred demands that lies within, and the secular demands of the modern world, causing a split in consciousness (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010b). I believe that conflict which Al Zeera refers to is shaped by the biases of an individual's lived environment and thus, their subjective and experienced lifeworld is also shaped by their biases, presuppositions, experiences, knowledge, emotions, feelings and ideas - logic and consensus is presumed to provide a balance to this (Demeterio, n.d). A split in consciousness became more prominent within me whilst growing up as a British Muslim throughout the years of the 'war on terror' and rising Islamophobia in London society following 9/11 that I have discussed in depth in chapter 2 and 3. The Muslim community was not as well understood by the rest of the British public as we had assumed. How can we comprehend others if we live inside our own bubbles and frameworks and others live within theirs? To address this, I needed to embark on a journey of spiritual growth for myself to shift my perceptions of the evolving world around me.

My art education helped me develop my own voice while also teaching me the importance of giving others a voice. To comprehend and interpret reality, one must rely on spiritual intuition and learning how to tune into it. My holistic evolution of understanding others began with understanding myself, hearing my inner voice, regulating my ego, and using my mind with my heart. When I began learning more about my personal connection with God (referred to as Allah(swt) in Islam) I was introduced to Sufism and learned The Quran has a hidden meaning in contrast to its exterior or apparent literal meaning. I discovered that faith is an expression of the whole person, so I needed to balance intellectual ability with religious and spiritual sensibilities to unite the inner and hidden world (*Batin*) with the exterior and visible world (*Zahir*) (Mahmoud, 2016a).

Within the hidden world (*Batin*) exists the 'self', in Islam this is known as the '*nafs*' or the ego that requires refining and purifying. Sufism's idea of mastering the inner self (*nafs*) is a process

that involves working through three principal stages towards development and refinement. It teaches that the *nafs* (self) must be nurtured and self-regulated in order to evolve towards being 'good' and 'inwardly meaningful' via one's thoughts and actions (Izdiyan Muttaqin, no date) In Imam Ghazali's studies the heart (*qalb*) is used synonymously with the intellect (*'aql*), spirit (*rūh*) and self (*nafs*). In other words, all these four concepts are at the centre of Ghazali's perception of human ontology, and they all signify essence of the human being (ATEŞÇİ, 2019).

To be a genuine and effective communicator within the realm of art, it is imperative that I remain deeply connected to my core as a human being. This involves forging a harmonious connection between my heart, intellect, spirit, and self. While this might appear to be a straightforward endeavour, navigating the art industry can prove to be a complex journey. It possesses a certain transience, capriciousness, and a penchant for egotism, often coupled with a culture of cancelation, where one's relevance today may not extend into tomorrow. This volatility has the capacity to sow seeds of doubt, leading to feelings of diminished self-worth or a relentless struggle for a place in the spotlight. However, on the positive side, the art world can also serve as a nurturing, empathetic, liberating, and compassionate space. The choice of how I wish to navigate and exist within the art world is mine to make.

Art is a metamorphosis of life, revealing the profound essence of our daily experiences through creative expression. My inclination leans towards art that places value on ideas, narratives, contextual depth, and social relevance, rather than solely fixating on form, composition, and aesthetics. I gravitate towards art that actively contributes to positive change in society and embraces the rich tapestry of human diversity. I seek out art that engages with, reflects upon, or at the very least acknowledges the pressing challenges that individuals face in various facets of life today.

In my view, I find myself drawn to artwork that achieves these goals indirectly, often by offering a fresh and unexpected perspective or by altering my perception of a subject, a collection of objects, or their interconnectedness. In a world marked by increasing complexity and interdependence, art stands as one of our most powerful tools for exploring this intricate system. My move to Cape Town upped my spiritual growth to new levels which I will detail in the next

section.

6.2.1.2 Immersing Myself in The Context of My Spiritual Essence In South Africa

6.2.1.3 The Caring Self Of The Curator - Using My Knowledge As A Weapon Of Liberation Rather Than Domination

In Chapter 5, I presented my exploration, adaptation, and refinement of Hermeneutic Phenomenology. This unique and creative lens, through which I approach understanding the Muslim arts scene in Cape Town, stands as an innovative endeavour. It signifies the emergence and embodiment of the curator I aspire to be. Hermeneutic Phenomenology operates by peeling away layers, forging connections through the myriad tools of language, symbols, and lived experiences, all in pursuit of a deeper understanding. This process mirrors the essence of my role as a curator, where 'curare,' from Latin rooted in the means 'to care (Persohn, 2021), are entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding art and the well-being of artists. My inquisitive nature aligns with the role of digging deeper into the meaning and significance of things. As a curator, a significant portion of my time is dedicated to researching art and delving into the lives of artists, all while reinterpreting their work for my inquisitive audience.

In the contemporary realm of curating, this profession encompasses several key facets. Firstly, it involves the preservation and protection of art's heritage. Secondly, it entails the role of selecting new works for display. Thirdly, it requires a connection to the rich tapestry of art history. Finally, it encompasses the art of arranging and presenting these works (Jeffries and Groves, 2014). In essence, curators function as skilled storytellers. They assume the responsibility of making pivotal decisions regarding which artworks merit exhibition and how they should be presented to the public. Curators also play a vital role in shaping the overarching themes and dialogues that artworks engage with, thereby introducing audiences to diverse perspectives. Starting from the initial research phase and extending through the entire process, including the conceptualization and launch of an exhibition, as well as the various stages of audience engagement, curators forge new contexts and deeper insights into the art and the conversations it sparks.

It is vital to acknowledge that art viewers may not always absorb information or messages they are not predisposed to receive. Interpretation varies across multiple levels, rooted in each viewer's unique subjectivity. Thus, the only aspect within my control is how I approach curation. My newfound insights, as reflected in my evolving principles, have illuminated the concept that art serves as a transformation of life, shedding light on the intrinsic value of ordinary experiences through creative expression. However, as curators, we must earnestly and respectfully consider the subjective intellectual, spiritual, and emotional landscapes within which these artworks operate. I must also recognize the intricate construction of the Muslim world in Cape Town, the South African art ecosystem, and broader South African society. This entails moving beyond mere facts and granting voices to the "other." As a curator, my role is not to wield knowledge as a tool of dominion but as a force for liberation, serving as a moral compass and guide.

In the next section, I will delve into how I purposefully integrated these principles into my curatorial practice.

6.2.1.4 My Community Building, Conscious Evolution And Healing During The Pandemic

Amidst the challenging backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, our MASHŪRAH circles evolved into more than just a platform for knowledge sharing – they transformed into sanctuaries. As the world underwent an unprecedented transformation, I found myself cocooned in a state of uncertainty and upheaval. Everything that once defined me or filled my life – from art projects and relationships to travel and simple pleasures – was suddenly unattainable or distant. I grappled with contracting the Covid virus twice, the loss of significant individuals, redundancy from my job on two occasions, a three-year separation from my family in the UK, and the struggles of post-Covid rehabilitation, during which I battled to breathe for the first time in my life after being diagnosed with asthma. This unexpected shake-up of our accustomed way of life had profound mental and emotional repercussions for me and those around me. It spurred me to seek a return to my former self and way of living.

Fortunately, in early 2021, our MASHŪRAH circles transitioned online via the Zoom platform, due to social distancing measures. This period coincided with the holy month of Ramadan, a time of spiritual renewal. Conversations often delved into the personal hardships each of us were

enduring during the pandemic. I approached the artist community with greater openness, and our dialogues deepened significantly. Many of the artists were now working from home studios, unable to access their usual resources or create new art, leading to a sense of panic for the future. Through these conversations, the artists (my co-researchers), cease to appear as solely art creators; I began to have glimpse into their roles as parents, spouses, children, and caregivers to elderly parents. They were living through vulnerabilities that are often only revealed through their finished artworks.

During our interactions, the artists exhibited greater kindness, empathy, and authenticity towards each other. The pandemic had led us to rediscover our open-hearted, human connections. This laid the foundation for our dialogues and knowledge-sharing within the MASHŪRAH circles. In my perspective, as we evolved together during the pandemic, we engaged in a process of deconstructing the world we thought we knew. We moved beyond mere facts and granted each other a voice. The knowledge we shared and co-created was liberating and without anyone dominating/controlling the others. Knowledge became our moral compass and guiding light, forming an innovative cornerstone for my evolving curatorial approach.

This approach, centred on ethical considerations, has profoundly influenced my curatorial practice. By infusing ethical principles into every decision, I make, I aim to ensure that the art and artifacts on display reflect my values and beliefs. This not only enhances the quality of my exhibitions but also fosters meaningful connections with artists, collectors, and museum visitors. As a curator, I am steadfast in my commitment to upholding these ideals and using them as guiding principles for all my future endeavours.



Figure 6.1: MASHŪRAH on zoom during Ramadan

Next, we move from understanding the imbalances and opportunities in myself to the collective South African art organisational space.

6.3 Collective Level: Transpersonal Imbalances And Opportunities – Understanding How The South African Art World Is ‘Constructed’

6.3.1 How Do The Tastemakers And Gatekeepers Affect The Art World And The Muslim Community Engagement?

6.3.1.1 The Intrinsic And Extrinsic Value Of Art

One of the central debates within contemporary art advocacy models revolves around the notion of art's value and the perceived disparity between its intrinsic and extrinsic worth. Tamsyn Palesa Stewart offers insight into this dichotomy. Intrinsic value refers to the worth derived from one's personal, subjective experiences and interactions with art—essentially, the inner values. When we talk about the intrinsic aspects of visual art, we delve into the sensory, intellectual, and emotional responses evoked by images, compositions, and organized elements like lines, colors, textures, and forms (Stewart, 2018). To appreciate visual arts on their own terms, one must place a high value on the knowledge, experiences, meanings, observational skills, and physical capabilities they offer. In essence, it encompasses modes of thinking and doing that develop through the study of and reaction to these stimuli, which are intrinsic and hold genuine value. Understanding how visual art can stimulate our senses and elicit emotional responses provides insight into how artists represent the world around us.

In contrast, extrinsic values tend to tether the arts to utilitarian purposes, often recognizing their significance only when they contribute positively to areas like the economy, job creation, or social cohesion (Stewart, 2018). These values, which can be thought of as external, focus on the tangible and quantifiable aspects of art. However, they offer an incomplete perspective on the importance of the arts, as they are not typically the primary reasons why people become interested in art. Art transcends mere material value; it embodies a concept and philosophy, which is where its true

worth lies. Art serves as a transformation of life, shedding light on the underlying significance of everyday experiences through artistic expression. It is important to note that the art market often prioritizes commerce over these intrinsic values.

The challenge, then, lies in finding a harmonious equilibrium between showcasing the intrinsic (Inner Batin) worth of the arts and acknowledging their extrinsic value (outer Zahir) (Mahmoud, 2016b). Balancing the profound impact of art on personal experiences, emotions, and perspectives with its role in economic and societal contexts is essential for a comprehensive appreciation of its multifaceted value.

The MASHŪRAH dialogues, born out of our personal experiences within our own practices and the broader art world, shed light on a troubling misalignment between the goals, vision, and functioning of art organizations and their public personas. This disconnect often results in a lack of authenticity within the art ecosystem. Many entities within this space prioritize profit maximization above all else, inadvertently becoming exclusive rather than inclusive, thereby stifling many artistic voices. From my own encounters, it has become evident that in numerous galleries, the influence of art collectors has eclipsed the voices of artists and non-buying audiences. This power imbalance in the realm of art consumerism is widely acknowledged, with cultural economist and art critic Ashraf Jamal aptly describing the art industry as "politically involved and morally bankrupt" (Ashraf Jamal, 2021).

Drawing upon my experiences working in the South African art sector since 2015, I firmly believe that the moral underpinnings of the system are flawed, with a marked lack of transparency. Cultural economist and gallerist Valerie Kabov adds another dimension to this discourse, suggesting that if the market lacks a moral compass—given its role as the primary driver of significant opportunities—it falls upon historians, critics, curators, and academics engaged in the sector to uphold and safeguard a sense of morality (Valerie Kabov, 2015).

Furthermore, there exists a compelling imperative for the South African art industry to align itself with the global art market and participate in prestigious art fairs and Biennales—an endeavour realistically attainable by only a select few galleries. To render art fairs financially viable and

ecologically responsible, it is imperative to recoup the substantial expenses associated with organizing and promoting these events, including logistics such as shipping and travel costs. To achieve this, pricing strategies must be devised with the intent of recuperating these outlays. Unfortunately, the influence of art fairs on contemporary art pricing in South Africa is notable, resulting in art prices that are inflated to sustain the business model, rather than being grounded in a fair market valuation sensitive to local economic conditions.

While art fairs undoubtedly serve as invaluable marketing tools, offer networking opportunities, and broaden artists' reach to diverse audiences, they present an unpredictable sales landscape. Relying on a mere four-day fair to generate substantial sales poses inherent risks. A sustainable art business necessitates the cultivation of a broad-based local and international market that can consistently support artists. If artists aspire to nurture their careers within their home countries, then the local art ecosystem must prioritize initiatives encompassing education, promotion, and market development.

The emergence of issues also extends to the art fairs like Cape Town Art Fair, Fnb Art Joburg, Turbine Art Fair, and the recently launched Durban Art Fair and Latitudes Art Fair. These events inadvertently create barriers for local South Africans, making it increasingly challenging for them to participate, as the balance of influence tilts toward foreign investors who can afford the fleeting visit of four days. These dynamic further distances the general population from art collecting and exerts a notable influence on art production, as artists may find themselves tailoring their work to align with the preferences and interests of foreign collectors. For instance, a case in point is the Essop brothers, who often recounted their experiences with the Goodman Gallery preventing their work from being showcased at specific international art fairs, citing concerns that the subject matter might unsettle attendees from abroad.

Nevertheless, there are opposing views in the art world, such as those articulated by gallerist Marc Stanes. He contends that international interest has played a pivotal role in advancing the growth of the South African art market, a growth that might not have been possible otherwise (Valerie Kabov, 2015). Stanes firmly believes that without the involvement of key international collectors and museums over the past two decades—through their interest, exhibitions, and publicity—the

South African art market would find itself in a fundamentally different position today. Thanks to this initial international engagement, artists now have an expanded array of opportunities to sustain their careers (Valerie Kabov, 2015).

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that challenges persist, such as infrastructure gaps and an ongoing electricity crisis. These issues contribute to a talent and resource drain while also pricing out many potential patrons, collectors, and advocates from engaging with the art scene.

To understand how the South African art world is constructed MASHŪRAH learning circle participants (my co-researchers) looked beyond facts and addressed some of the variables that contribute to the inclusion and exclusivity that exists in the South African art industry that Muslim artists in Cape Town are affected by, as outlined in the following sections.

6.3.1.2 The Unbreakable Cycle Of The Art Ecosystem

It was quite astonishing to discover that many of the younger artists in our discussions seemed unaware of the diverse roles that make up the intricate art ecosystem. This lack of knowledge placed them in a rather disadvantageous position when navigating these dynamic spaces. It is evident that within the realm of art, there exists an unyielding cycle wherein one is often expected to hail from specific social or educational backgrounds to fully engage. These spaces tend to exude exclusivity, often neglecting genuine inclusion of the communities they are meant to serve. This ecosystem can be broken down into three fundamental spheres: the artists, the curators and critics, and cultural workers, as well as the cultural consumers and audiences as seen in the diagram below.

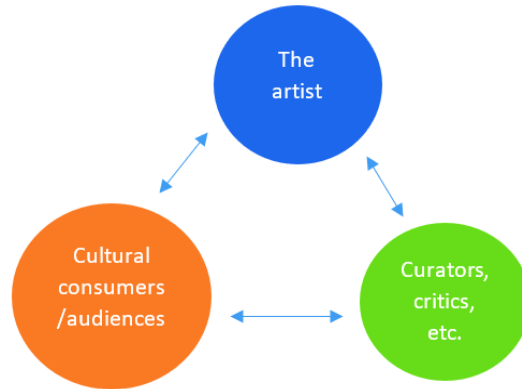


Figure 6.2: Art ecosystem

The 'tastemakers and gatekeepers' encompass key figures who shape the presentation of artworks in museums and galleries, influencing the public's perception of art and funding allocation. This group includes curators, critics, gallery, and museum directors, as well as patrons and stakeholders. Cultural consumers, who purchase and collect art, are also part of this equation.

In 2020, I conducted a workshop at the South African Foundation for Islamic Art (SAFIA), where a recurring question from participants was, "How do curators decide which artists are exhibited in a gallery?" I clarified that the process begins with the creation of artwork by the artist, followed by the decisions made by tastemakers and gatekeepers. These individuals assess the cultural and aesthetic value of the work for the public's benefit, and to some extent, I, as a curator, fall into this category. This is a matter of fact to the extent to which the final say often rests with stakeholders, namely gallery owners and directors. While the opportunity to elevate leadership roles in this context is apparent, numerous barriers must be addressed first. However, amidst these challenges, there are also opportunities, which will be explored in the following section.

6.3.1.3 What Are The Imbalances And Opportunities In Access And Engagement To Art In South Africa?

In December 2020, I had the privilege of participating in a discussion at Zeitz MOCAA, where the focal point was "Our Local Art Ecosystem - Fostering Democracy, Accessibility, and

Inclusivity." This engaging dialogue delved into the dynamics of the local art scene and the imperative need to ensure its inclusiveness and fairness across all segments of society. During the Q&A session with senior curator Storm Janse van Rensburg, I presented the following inquiries, which have been condensed for clarity:

1. My research has unveiled a disconcerting reality: the Muslim community I collaborate with feels excluded from art spaces and museums, despite their profound historical significance in Cape Town. How do you perceive this issue?
2. It is undeniable that systemic racism persists within our institutions. Are you willing to acknowledge and address this critical concern?
3. While we engage in conversations about inclusivity and accessibility, are you aware of the existence of a vibrant underground Islamic arts movement that remains largely unseen within institutions like Zeitz?
4. In the Western Cape, there are relatively few public museums, and regrettably, none of them offer free admission, including Zeitz. This financial barrier prevents many South Africans from visiting these cultural spaces. Could you shed light on the reasoning behind this fee structure?

Storm, rather than directly addressing my inquiries regarding the involvement of Muslim communities in their programs, chose to bypass this question entirely. Instead, he shared that the museum had faced the challenge of losing two major sponsors at the onset of the pandemic, resulting in a reduction of their workforce. Consequently, entrance fees became one of the few means of generating revenue to cover payroll expenses. Storm candidly acknowledged that the museum was entangled in a complex web of interconnected issues. He openly recognized the stratified nature of the art scene here, understanding the priorities of commercial galleries, and expressed his gratitude for shedding light on the issue of racism within the art world.

During the panel discussion, Ashraf Jamal, a cultural economist, underscored the primary challenges plaguing South Africa's education system. These issues included a lack of arts education, funding cuts, and the absence of funded arts education opportunities beyond the classroom. In contrast to countries like the United Kingdom, where aspiration is ingrained in the educational system, this ethos was notably absent in South Africa. Haroon Gunn Salie, another

panellist, advocated for holding donors and those whose names adorned museum doors more accountable for fundraising, referring to it as the most effective approach to address the challenges at hand. It was apparent from Storm's cautious remarks that he had to tread carefully, perhaps due to the live-streamed nature of the session, with the possibility that his responses might be conveyed to stakeholders and board members. Nevertheless, the feedback underscored that funding remained a pivotal factor contributing to these disparities, with many crucial public organizations struggling to thrive due to financial constraints.

Regrettably, the discussion remained constrained from delving into the topics of corruption and unethical practices that the Zeitz Museum itself had been entangled in. These critical issues will be further explored in the following section.

6.3.1.4 Corruption, Controversies And Unethical Institutional Practices In The South African Art Industry

From narrow-minded, untransformed art spaces striving to maintain relevance by featuring the latest trendy artists to influential tastemakers shaping the narrative, the art landscape faces significant challenges. Beyond the realm of commercial galleries, there are fewer art venues and limited financial support for artists, a situation exacerbated by the closure of community-oriented art institutions in the 1980s and 1990s (COOK, 2009). While commercial art spaces often prioritize profit maximization, larger museums must consider their list of trustees and benefactors when setting their objectives, as emphasized by Zeitz's senior curator, Storm Janse Van Rensburg. One potential solution entail funders and patrons empowering organizations in need of external support with genuine independence, rather than merely serving as ostensibly silent partners exerting subtle control.

However, it is not unreasonable to observe that African contemporary art still relies heavily on old money, with insufficient support from new sources. This shortage of backing is compounded by the inadequate state of art infrastructure, which has led to a talent and resource drain. Most foundations, art funds, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are comprised of unpaid board members seeking to enhance their resumes, and directors who frequently exhibit authoritarian, self-serving leadership, rather than a commitment to the community. In 2022, I assumed the role of Head of Public Programs at Void Gallery in Derry, Northern Ireland, a non-

profit space. Although a different country from South Africa, this experience afforded me valuable insights into the politics and challenges faced by non-profit art spaces globally.

Overall, in Cape Town, art workers are routinely underpaid, and the art world has gained notoriety for benefiting from unpaid internships. During my tenure as the Chief Operating Officer for a prominent South African art magazine starting in 2018, I and other staff members endured bullying, delayed salaries, and exploitation, which eventually led to the entire team resigning. Knowledge should serve as a tool for liberation and morality, rather than domination. Unfortunately, the toxic cultures and exploitation of skills perpetuate disempowerment among many art graduates, who are often sought for employment. Instead of nurturing a healthy, thriving art market, the current system in South Africa primarily benefits a select few, leaving those who are inexperienced or vulnerable within the art industry adrift or disinterested in pursuing careers within it.

We ought to harness knowledge as both a moral compass and a guiding light for the entirety of Cape Town's society. However, the pervasive issue of corruption within the South African government unfortunately extends its reach into the art ecosystem. Notably, the 'Stellenbosch mafia' is a widely recognized network of affluent South Africans that exerts a significant influence over the art industry, as pointed out by Pieter du Toit. While it's not uncommon for prosperous patrons to play a role in the art scene, Du Toit characterizes them primarily as white Afrikaners, predominantly male (Du Toit, 2021) and emblematic of the most egregious form of white monopoly capital.

Consider the case of Zeitz MOCAA, South Africa's largest museum of contemporary African art. In its inaugural year of welcoming the public, it found itself ensnared in a web of corruption and unethical acquisition practices, leading to the resignation of its former head curator, the late Mark Coetzee. Under the watchful guidance of Koyo Kouoh, the current director and chief curator, alongside Storm Janse van Rensburg, the institution has made concerted efforts to restore its reputation. Nevertheless, rebuilding trust has proven to be a formidable challenge, and the legacy of the Coetzee era continues to cast a shadow over its history.

FRIDAY

How Mark Coetzee's resignation may lift the lid on the arts industry's practices

Arts Desk 25 May 2018

Figure 6.3: Headline from local SA newspaper regarding Zeitz

Source: Mail and Guardian Newspaper

SUNDAYINDEPENDENT NEWS

Artists want to know what happened to their Covid relief money



Several artists have been sitting-in at the National Arts Council offices in Newtown, demanding answers on funding irregularities connected to the Presidential Economic Stimulus Package (PESP). File picture: Timothy Bernard/African News Agency(ANA)

Published Mar 28, 2021

Figure 6.4: Headlines of protests for missing Covid relief money

Source: Sunday independent Newspaper

Going back even further to 2011, the South African pavilion at the Venice Biennale found itself entangled in a controversy involving misappropriation and misuse of funds amounting to a staggering R4 million. Then, amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic, the NAC became embroiled in yet another corruption scandal. In this instance, a substantial sum of R300 million,

allocated for relief funding for artists, mysteriously vanished.

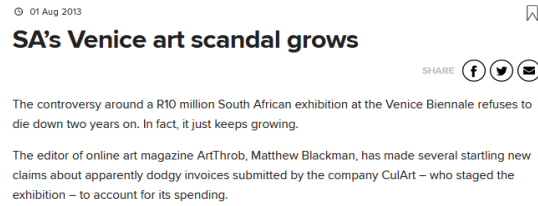


Figure 6.5: Venice Biennale scandal headlines

Source: News24

In 2018, I underwent an interview for a senior management position at the A4 Arts Foundation. While conducting my research, I uncovered that the foundation had its origins in the generous seed financing provided by director Wendy Fisher through the Kirsh Family Foundation. However, it came to my attention that Nathan Kirsh, Wendy's father, held sole ownership and had previously served as a director of Magal Security Systems (Gamedz, 2018). Notably, Magal Security Systems had been the primary supplier of electrical fencing to Israeli prisons and had been involved in the installation of perimeter control systems for the Apartheid wall in the West Bank, along with sections of the border surrounding Gaza.

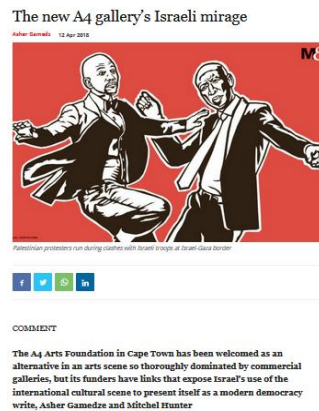


Figure 6.6: A4 foundation news article

Source: Mail and Guardian newspaper

Amidst a backdrop of government tender irregularities and the enrichment of affluent buyers favouring predominantly white gallery and institution owners, the inherent value of art appears

to be overshadowed by avarice and ego among those in charge. While recognizing the critical importance of extrinsic value for the sector's sustainability, it need not come at the expense of others. Instead, a reimagining of ethical business practices and socially responsible institutions, along with the engagement of new stakeholders and visionary patrons or industry leaders, becomes imperative.

In the next section, we will turn our attention to the voices of Muslim artists and their community.

6.4 Societal Level: Transpersonal Imbalances And Opportunities - Recognising The Unique Collective Voice Of The Muslim Community And Its Artists.

6.4.1 Who Should Be Involved In The Muslim Community In Co-Creating Better Access And Engagement With The Art Industry?

6.4.1.1 The State Of Art Making And Art Engagement In The Cape Town Muslim Community

The MASHŪRAH circles comprised individuals chosen for their willingness and eagerness to share their own experiences within the study framework. Our analysis was shaped by both a shared lived experience and the diverse perspectives within that shared experience. As a newcomer to South African society, a practicing Muslim, and a curator, my goal was to explore narratives and stories related to the Muslim community within the realm of art, but I discovered a notable absence of such narratives. Through the MASHŪRAH dialogues and my own experiences in the industry, several areas of imbalances and potentials became evident:

1. Representation: The mainstream modern and contemporary visual arts spaces in Cape Town exhibited limited exposure, exploration, and representation of artworks by artists from Muslim communities or those influenced by Islam or Muslim epistemologies. This scarcity was particularly pronounced among female artists.
2. Development and advocacy of diverse creative voices: There was a noticeable dearth of curators, gallery owners, art academics/writers, collectors, and patrons from a Muslim background within the art ecosystem.
3. Access and Engagement: Active involvement from Muslim communities in Cape Town with the art industry was scarce, and there was a lack of engagement and programming that genuinely considered the communities from which the artists originated.

My aim was to comprehend the community-wide disparities in art production that might hinder Cape Town Muslim artists from receiving adequate support, involvement, and recognition in the art business. During my research, I identified several art-making practices and exhibitions within the Cape Town Muslim community. One noteworthy exhibition, mentioned in earlier chapters was the 1994 showcase at the National Museum in Cape Town, celebrating 300 years of Muslim culture. Regrettably, only one surviving artwork by artist Fatima February remained, as the archive had been misplaced during a museum renovation, and no catalogue had been produced. This loss highlighted the erasure of voices and the disregard for the importance of preserving such archives. Surprisingly, none of the artists in the MASHŪRAH circles had any knowledge of this exhibition, except for Mahmudah Jaffer, who had attended it. Acknowledgment within art history is crucial for a community, as it provides a reference to their past artistic contributions.

Organizations like the South African Foundation for Islamic Arts (SAFIA), founded in 1989, aimed to raise awareness of Islamic arts and crafts while preserving their legacy on a national and international scale. Additionally, ACSA (Arabic Calligraphers South Africa), founded in 2019, focused on traditional teachings of arts derived from sacred components. However, even SAFIA, despite its significant role and value in South African art history, faced challenges in convincing institutions like the Zeitz MOCAA and the Norval Foundation to include their artists in exhibition programming. According to SAFIA's founder Achmat Soni, the feedback they received suggested that the artworks of their artists were not conceptually complex enough, and the artists' voices and narratives did not resonate through their art.

SAFIA, although not academically accredited, played an essential role in the history of South African art. Achmat Soni, a longstanding artist associated with SAFIA, has individually decorated the interiors over 80 mosques in the Western Cape, contributing to a narrative within art history that is often overlooked—the lived experience of an entire community. SAFIA has made efforts to incorporate more mainstream artmaking styles into its workshops to complement traditional Islamic arts. Consequently, SAFIA has exhibited at the Cape Town Art Fair, securing a booth every year.

It is incumbent upon us to recognize what makes our context unique and authentic. Organizations like SAFIA call upon practitioners and other institutions to engage in genuine collaborations that build upon their invaluable foundation, understanding the environment in which they operate, and

supporting their growth. Unfortunately, such organizations are frequently marginalized or dismissed for not conforming to the established canon. In contrast, based on my discussion with them, SAFIA is eager to expand its knowledge base while maintaining its unique Islamic voice.

Emerging Muslim artists in Cape Town and in South Africa as a whole face challenges, including the lack of a well-established local market for their work. Additionally, there appears to be limited international interest in South African art narratives from a Muslim perspective, according to feedback within South African art institutions and galleries. However exceptionally talented artists like the Essop brothers, Igshaan Adams, and Thania Peterson, all hailing from Muslim backgrounds in Cape Town, have managed to gain international recognition for their work. They attended art graduate schools and secured representation with some of South Africa's top galleries early in their careers. In 2022, Igshaan Adams even participated in the Venice Biennale within the South African pavilion. However, their success seems to be the exception rather than the rule, often contingent on their gallery's success trajectory and networks for emerging artists.

The questions arise: In a country where Muslims have made a significant contribution to the nation's fabric, why are so few artists from this community represented in the art industry worldwide? Is it a matter of the quality of their work, as some institutes and gallerists suggest? And on what criteria are these assessments based? Should not the industry naturally expand to embrace the "fringe" rather than adhering to a narrow model? Could the culture of the Muslim community itself be a barrier preventing new artists from entering the scene?

It is evident, however, that Muslim artists who create distinctive and thought-provoking work can influence the art world when their work is displayed and seen. This typically requires artists to have prior knowledge of the art world and the support of the right gallery or patron, often necessitating adherence to the preferred art school educational route, which is not readily accessible. Cultivating artists within this community demands more time, resources, and a genuine commitment to developmental efforts, which will be explored further in the next section on advocacy.

6.4.1.2 Advocacy Efforts And The Shortage Of Muslim Curators And Patrons

A notable issue within the South African art scene is the scarcity of curators, academics, and collectors with a Muslim background or sensibility. As a curator who practices the Muslim faith,

I often felt isolated, lacking fellow professionals who could truly empathize with my challenges. Within the Western Cape, where I operate, there are only a handful of art educational institutions. Even among these, none offer courses, departments, or mentors who directly engage with visual culture and practices through an Islamic or Muslim interpretative framework, conceptual lens, or cultural sensitivity.

Throughout my doctoral journey, I encountered difficulties in finding curators, professors, or thought leaders proficient in the critical discourse relevant to Muslim visual arts. Except for Ashraf JamaI and Dr. Fadiel Arnold, such expertise appeared scarce. In my view, this represents a significant imbalance, as support mechanisms for pedagogy are vital to nurture diversity and foster creativity across multiple levels, extending beyond universities. To truly connect with Islamic culture, we need individuals within the arts ecosystem who have engaged with the world through Islamic discourse, irrespective of their religious beliefs.

Unfortunately, there is a limited number of Muslim students pursuing curatorial, arts administration, or gallery studies. Those I have spoken with often expressed discouragement stemming from the nature of the art world, including the academic institutions within it. Hence, it is imperative that we invest in establishing inclusive, supportive environments within universities and beyond, facilitating participation in the creative sectors for individuals of diverse backgrounds and enabling them to reach their full potential.

During the discourse sessions, participants highlighted uncomfortable experiences when attending exhibitions with their families and friends, as well as navigating art venues. The intimidating atmosphere, the enigmatic terminology commonly used in the art world (often referred to as art jargon), and the absence of representation resembling themselves in those settings were all cited as barriers that hindered meaningful engagement with art.

Regarding art acquisition, influential collectors and patrons hold significant sway. Despite a growing middle class, the Cape Muslim community remains a minor player in the art market. Many of these disparities can be traced back to the legacy of apartheid and the limited opportunities for people of colour to pursue art education. This presents a substantial obstacle to

artist development, and I believe that the community should be encouraged to actively support the growth of artists.

To achieve this, we must initiate art-focused initiatives within the Cape Muslim community, designed to educate the public and inspire potential artists. We must recognize that we are not mere spectators of our realities but active agents who can drive transformation. Additionally, we must consider the deeply ingrained cultural aspects at play in this context, which we will explore further in the upcoming section on Transcultural Realities.

6.5 Individual Level: Transcultural Imbalances And Opportunities - Recognise What Makes Us Unique In Our Surroundings And Be True To Ourselves.

6.5.1 How Does Culture Affect My Role As A Curator And How Do I Engage With Audiences And Artists?

6.5.1.1 My Reconciliation Of Multiple Identities And Seeking The Authentic Self

My evolving perspective as a young woman, allowed me to engage in discussions and journeys, both internal and cross-cultural, that were previously beyond my reach. During my university years, my readings of Edward Said's work on Orientalism (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 2008) provided invaluable insights into the perplexing conflicts and misunderstandings between the East and West worlds in which I found myself entangled. These experiences expanded my understanding of what it means to be 'othered' and oppressed, shedding light on the deep-seated influences of colonial educational systems. While I occasionally grappled with imposter syndrome during my art school years, my time at the School of Oriental and African Studies offered a profound sense of connection with fellow students who, like me, were born and raised outside of Europe. They referenced knowledge centres not just from Europe but also from places like Baghdad, Lahore, Malaysia, Amman, and Damascus. Conversations with them felt more familiar and resonant.

To me, heritage is what you inherit from wherever you come. A significant part of my cultural identity was bestowed upon me as the granddaughter of a British Muslim Pakistani war veteran, a second-generation immigrant. The remainder of my identity has been forged through life

experiences, my career in the arts, my journey to Cape Town, South Africa, and is still evolving. I found a kindred spirit in the writings of British Asian author Ziauddin Sardar, whose family shared a similar background. Like many British South Asian fathers, both our fathers worked at the Ford Motor Company in Dagenham, England. Sardar emphasizes that British Asians inhabit multiple realms, each with its unique worldview. He suggests that recognizing and successfully managing multiple identities can be advantageous, allowing individuals to bring forth the relevant identity as needed, sometimes even embracing more than one simultaneously (Sardar, 2012).

My move to South Africa required me to navigate a multitude of identities. In my personal life, I initially assumed that assimilating into Cape Town's Muslim community would be straightforward. However, I quickly learned that trust cannot be established overnight; it takes time. I had initially believed that sharing the spiritual and lived experiences of being Muslim would be enough to connect with the local community. However, I soon realized that being Muslim in the Cape involved confronting the legacy of intergenerational trauma spanning hundreds of years. This trauma remained far from healed, with little justice served for the atrocities committed during apartheid.

My 'Muslimness,' as well as my cultural and ethnic identity, evolved in my new surroundings. In Cape Town, I was often mistaken for Indian or coloured, neither of which accurately represented my background. While I was comfortable embodying a range of identities, I was uncomfortable with an identity imposed upon me—authentic identity is a matter of choice. Cultural identities come with family histories and lineages that cannot be erased through forced racial classification. Migrating to South Africa made me appreciate and honour the journey and struggles of my grandparents and parents even more.

At one point, when I was struggling to find my place in this unfamiliar environment, I reached out to my father, overwhelmed with emotion. He reminded me that he had emigrated to the UK in the 1960s, at a much younger age than I was at the time. He advised me to visit the mosques and seek a community to be a part of. My parents and grandparents excelled at community development; a skill set that my generation needed to cultivate. Thus, I first turned to the Jumu'a Mosque of Cape Town, a mosque with a European and British congregation and clergy, and

eventually, I found my way to the mosque where I would marry my husband a few years later. Subsequently, I immersed myself in the realm of art.

Through art and religion, both domains rooted in 'feeling,' I learned to accept the version of myself that was emerging in my new Cape Town cultural milieu. As early as 2015, I began building relationships with several artists who would later become part of the MASHŪRAH process. My transnational perspective made me more appreciative of my Pakistani and Muslim heritage. The strong community consciousness in Africa, reminiscent of Muslim and Pakistani culture, provided a sense of belonging and reassurance. Conversing in Urdu, a language other than English, with many members of Cape Town's Indian population made me feel less like an outsider. While being a person of colour and British occasionally presented challenges due to colonial history and tensions, I sometimes preferred to be identified as Pakistani rather than British. This allowed me to establish new connections and immerse myself in the diverse voices of a transcultural community.

My husband, Yaseen, found my family history intriguing. According to him, being able to trace your ancestors back to a village is a privilege not many South Africans have. When meeting older adults in our culture, they often inquire about your family or place of origin, initiating an intuitive mental connection process based on family, acquaintances, or neighbourhoods, often tracing back to the village of your paternal grandfather. My father always emphasized that honour is tied to the paternal grandfather, and that is how recognition occurs.

Yaseen's role in my life has been invaluable on this doctoral journey, as he made me realize how much I had taken my cultural background for granted. Initially, I was naive and lacked exposure to the sensitive and complex sociocultural factors at play in Cape Town. Consequently, I underwent a profound cultural transformation process, first within the framework of Cape Town and later within the MASHŪRAH process. The next section will delve into my evolution as a curator.

6.5.1.2 A Transcultural Evolution In My Role As A Curator

Reconnecting with my authentic self as a curator allowed me to approach my role from a perspective that fostered deeper and more meaningful connections with artists. A memorable

instance of this was an exhibition I orchestrated during Ramadan in 2021 at the Jaffer Modern Art Gallery. For this event, I extended an invitation to all the participating artists to join in a '*Boeka*'—the meal marking the end of the daily fast observed during the holy month of Ramadan.

Considering the backdrop of the ongoing pandemic and the sporadic lockdowns, this gathering presented a unique opportunity for artists from diverse backgrounds and faiths to come together and share in a tradition they might not have been familiar with. It facilitated interactions among artists beyond their art practice, prompting me to reflect on the way hierarchies are constructed in such settings. In an industry characterized by strong egos, I could not help but ponder the potential benefits of fostering humility through the simple act of breaking bread together.

While I was already cognizant of the fundamental significance of art in our education and lives, as well as the enduring impact of colonialism on education, this awareness took on new depth and relevance for me in Cape Town. Embracing my own cultural identity enabled me to assume a more effective leadership role. Instead of feeling uneasy about being a Muslim creative or compelled to conform to a different mould, I allowed this aspect of myself to coexist within my work, fully embracing it. In doing so, I made it visible and audible to the artists and community members who sought that presence among them.

Now, I will delve into my interpretation of the connection between art and Islam and how I have imbued this understanding with meaning to enhance my role as an art curator, fostering a heightened awareness of art within the community dialogues.

6.5.1.3 Developing My Understanding Of The Culture And Potential Of 'Islamic Art'

During my upbringing, the prevailing attitude toward art among the older generation of British Muslims I encountered was one of frivolity and a waste of time, often accompanied by prohibitions. This recurrent debate concerning the permissibility of images in Islam, while inaccurate, proved to be wearisome. It obscured a rich, intricate history of intellectual and artistic expression that enriches our comprehension of how we interact with the world. The generation that raised me prioritized family over the pursuit of painting or similar artistic endeavours, and this mindset permeated many households. This was justified in many ways as building strong and stable families in a foreign country was the reason, they had left their homeland. This sentiment

was a common thread among many MASHŪRAH participants, as we often felt that our artistic careers received less support compared to more conventional professions, such as medicine or engineering. Furthermore, prevailing attitudes also dictated what aspects of art were deemed permissible to explore. In the homes of most Muslims, I knew; you would find framed calligraphic Quranic verses adorning the walls rather than contemporary art.

Growing up in England, I observed that the prohibition on art for Muslims tended to extend viewing or making nude frescoes, sculptures, and figurative classical paintings, but this restriction did not apply to mosque decor or calligraphy, which were regarded as sacred expressions of God. I endeavoured to uncover the explicit stance of Islam on this matter, only to find conflicting views. Even within our explorations in the dialogue circles, there was a sense of conflict, uncertainty, and confusion surrounding what could be deemed conclusive. Acknowledging that this remained a grey area for many of us in the creative community, we embarked on a journey to reconcile and make sense of it on our own terms, extending this understanding into our artistic practices.

Understanding Islamic aniconism is crucial for comprehending why Muslims, particularly in Cape Town, hold specific beliefs about boundaries in imagery and creative practice. Aniconism in Islam involves the avoidance or prohibition of depicting living beings, driven by the belief that only God has the privilege of creating animate forms and preventing idolatry (Ali, 2022).

The Quran provides guidelines on prohibited image types, but the clearest prohibitions are found in the Hadith, the traditions of Prophet Muhammad's words and deeds. These Hadiths express antipathy towards figurative depictions, warning against emulating God's creative power such as this example "He who creates pictures in this world will be ordered to breathe life into them on the Day of Judgment, but he will be unable to do so (Basak, 2017).

The initial purpose of image prohibition was to prevent idolatry, exemplified by Prophet Muhammad when he purified the Kaaba. The prohibition aims to prevent the worship of objects or images instead of God. The Quran forbids the idolization or worship of statues or sculptures stating "He said: Do you worship what you yourself sculpt/carve? And God has created you and all that you make/do." (Surah As-Saffat - 95-96 – Quran, n.d)).

During a discussion circle, artists Abdus Salaam and Hasan Essop emphasized the need for a critical interpretation of this Quranic quote. They pointed out that in the modern world, people often worship objects like cars more fervently than sculptures.

Islamic aniconism is more common among the Sunni sect, while Shia traditions tend to be less strict. Despite this opposition, figural depictions have played a role in Islamic art, with artists adapting and stylizing human and animal forms. As Islam expanded beyond the Arabian Peninsula, figural depictions gradually found their way into Islamic art. Historical examples, like frescoes and reliefs in Umayyad palaces, demonstrate the portrayal of living creatures in Islamic art. Figurative miniatures emerged later in most Islamic regions, with the dominance of human figures in Persian and other traditions. Examples from art history, such as the Pisa Griffin and Zoomorphic incense burners highlight the nuanced relationship between aniconism and figural depictions in Islamic art (Ali, 2022).

I recollect my Art History lecturer, Professor Doris Behrens Abouseif, fervently emphasized that there is no such thing as 'Islamic art'; it is simply art. This perspective often left me torn. Art historian Wendy Shaw, on the other hand, encourages a departure from a vision-centred perception of art and aesthetics in favour of a multisensory approach (James, 2021). She argues that two elements immediately come to mind when people think of Islamic art: image prohibition and calligraphy or ornamental design. However, she asserts that, like the Jewish tradition, there is no overarching, universal ban on images in Islam since both legal traditions are discursive and lack a central governing authority (James, 2021)

Shaw challenges us to consider, "When the primary sensory organ is the heart, what role does art history play without accounting for it? If the heart space is not factored into the creation, teaching, and reception of art, where and how do we find its true value? She contends that in Islam, the heart as the most esteemed sensory organ, relegates the act of seeing and the materiality of visual art to a secondary position (Shaw, 2019).

Shaw with whom I had many interesting discourses, takes a phenomenological approach, and argues that Islamic art emerges through reception rather than creation (Shaw, 2019). Islamic art is thus the result of what the Muslim beholder makes of it while consuming it, rather than the

artwork itself as produced (Shaw, 2019). She argues like my professor Doris Abouseiff, there is no innately Islamic artwork; but instead, Islam cannot materialize in forms without the decision of the beholder, and vice versa, objects cannot take on any identity without the Muslim gaze.

Art historian Valerie Gonzalez challenges Shaw's perspective, arguing that Shaw's assertion that the viewer's mind and psyche serve as the exclusive domain for interpreting the Islamic meanings in art is unsustainable. Gonzalez posits that this perspective limits the purpose of art to mere pragmatics (Gonzalez, 2020). She raises thought-provoking questions, such as whether objects like mihrabs adorned with calligraphy materialize Islamic thought or if Muslim spectators must actively engage for an artwork to be deemed Islamic. Additionally, Gonzalez questions whether these objects can be subjectively reinterpreted as non-Islamic.

In my argument, I contend that art serves as a transformative representation of life, revealing the underlying value of everyday experiences, including those of Muslims. Acknowledging that our very nature protects life's potentialities, Integral research asserts that we must actively immerse ourselves in the world rather than passively observing it (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). This leads to the question of whether individuals who identify as Muslim artists in Cape Town face challenges due to lingering anxieties and self-censorship. Mahmudah Jaffer and Faheem Rodah Jackson, for example, express reservations about labelling themselves as 'artists,' with Mahmudah specifically using the term 'Islamic line design' to navigate the complexities of what is considered permissible.

Shaw's critique extends to the classification of Islamic art and the Orientalist fascination with an enigmatic East, as seen in Western Museum collections. She suggests that a more authentic approach is to examine how art was used in the past to convey individuals' connections to humanity and their reflections on the sacred (James, 2021). By investigating how objects traditionally categorized as 'art' communicated meaning to the people who lived with them, Shaw emphasizes the limitations of terms like "art history" in understanding the broader cultural context of 'Islamic arts' across different times and places. This, in turn, leads to inherent ambiguity.

Consequently, the question arises: how do artists in Cape Town draw meaning from Islam and incorporate it into their art? The following section will delve into this inquiry in greater depth, shedding light on my exploration of this topic.

6.5.1.4 Deriving Meaning From Islamic Art

During one of our MASHŪRAH sessions, we embarked on a journey to delve into our perceptions of 'Islamic art' and the potential depth of knowledge that could be extracted from it. In this endeavour, I presented examples illustrating the nuances of subjective meaning, value attributions, and transcultural dialogues within the realm of art, both historical and contemporary. This dialogue proved to be profoundly enlightening as we engaged in discussions about the various interpretations of Islamic art across different eras and how it has evolved over time. Furthermore, we ventured into the intriguing territory of contemporary artists who draw inspiration from traditional Islamic art forms while simultaneously challenging them.

One example was an Ewer, a stunning artifact carved from rock crystal during the Fatimid era, originating from the Muslim workshops in Cairo at the dawn of the tenth century (Bloom, 1985). Items such as this example enriched with an ornate gold lid crafted in southern Italy at the close of the eleventh century, found use in the solemn liturgy of the Mass during special ceremonies in Italy.



Figure 6.7: Fatimid Rock crystal Ewer

Source: The origins of Islamic art

Another captivating example surfaced through a work by South African artist Igshaan Adams, which an Italian collector graciously shared from his own collection at a Cape Town art fair. What

struck me immediately was the depiction of a letter in the artwork, and to my surprise, the collector had no understanding of the letter's significance or meaning.



Figure 6.8: Artwork by Igshaan Adams

Source: Blank Project

This piece, titled "The light that lights up the darkness" takes the form of the Arabic letter *noon* (ن). In Islam, 'noon' symbolizes the two realms – Zahir and Batin, or this world and the next – as mentioned earlier in this chapter (Mahmoud, 2016)

Both examples serve to illustrate the boundless potential for new meanings and interpretation as well as the transmission of transcultural knowledge that I have gleaned from my exploration of art history, and modern and contemporary visual arts. This knowledge has significantly informed my role as a curator and has enriched the MASHŪRAH process. In essence, as Edward Said aptly argues, historical knowledge encompasses information about human civilization that extends beyond the natural world and hinges on judgment and interpretation (Clines, 2020). He highlights the interpreter's identity, the audience, the goals, and the historical context all shape the interpretation. Consequently, facts may be reshaped or manipulated to advance specific viewpoints or agendas. It is crucial to approach facts with scepticism and carefully analyse the context in which they are presented.

In the next section, we will broaden our discourse to understand the collective context of the South African art industry.

6.6 Organisational Level: Transcultural Imbalances And Opportunities - Utilise Knowledge As A Weapon For Liberty Rather Than Dominance.

6.6.1 What Does The Art World Know About Indigenous Wisdom And External Knowledge Of Muslim Culture, And How Does This Affect Community Participation And Portrayal Of Muslim Artists?

6.6.1.1 The Culture Of Organising And Cataloguing Cultures - The Case Of Irma Stern

Art organizations, especially museums on the international stage, grapple with a fundamental issue: their inability to effectively organize and categorize culture and knowledge. Their approach is deeply rooted in a European historical perspective, which often hampers their ability to incorporate insights from other cultures. The problem here lies not so much with the art itself but rather with how these institutions shape people's perceptions and connections with the Islamic world.

A notable instance highlighting this issue is the retrospective exhibition of South African master painter Irma Stern, which I had the opportunity to visit at The Norval Foundation in Cape Town in 2022. Stern devoted a significant portion of her artistic career in the twentieth century to portraying African and, among them, Muslim figures in South Africa and Zanzibar.

I distinctly remember my initial reaction after reading the first review of the exhibition, which, in my perspective, was written by a white journalist discussing a white artist's retrospective in an art organization owned and operated by white individuals. The exhibition centered on depictions of Muslim people, yet the subjects remained anonymous in the artwork titles. Titles like "2 Arab men," "Arab man," "pomegranate seller," and "wealthy old man" struck me as peculiar while I explored the exhibition.



Figure 6.9: Artwork ‘Aziza’ by Irma Stern

Source: Arthro

As I wandered through the collection of around 15 paintings, a striking observation became evident – none of the depicted subjects had a name, except for one individual named "Bibi Azeza," coincidentally the same name as my mother's, "Aziza." It struck me as surprising that these individuals, who likely spent hours or even days posing for Irma Stern, were left nameless, with only descriptions of what the artist observed. They remained unidentified, yet they held a profound sense of intrigue as Stern's subjects. From a curatorial standpoint, I could not help but feel that there was a significant oversight. The absence of names for Irma Stern's subjects should have been acknowledged by the curators of the retrospective. While the exhibition celebrated the artist herself, it missed an opportunity to pay tribute to the communities she portrayed, individuals with whom she would have spent considerable time.

A noticeable cultural divide has long persisted between the art industry and Muslim communities, and this divide has its roots in a historical context marked by deliberate cultural suppression and enslavement. This historical backdrop has emerged as a significant impediment to the growth of art awareness and practice within these communities. The art industry has assumed the role of defining the value and prominence of the Muslim voice in art history, despite having historically

excluded and misrepresented them due to pervasive historical propaganda.

However, in a promising development in 2022, director Iman Isaacs and Dutch actress Eva Bartels collaborated on 'IRMA,' a multimedia theatre production centred on the life and work of Irma Stern. This production thoughtfully explores the complexities of image creation. Drawing inspiration from Irma Stern's life and art, the play delves into thought-provoking themes, such as the contrast between extraction and exchange, the dynamics of exoticism, the choices artists make in their work, the wealth of cultural and ancestral knowledge, the quest for a sense of belonging, and the transformative potential of art and theatre (Unknown, 2022).

At the preview of the production which I attended Eva and Iman discussed how they navigate through history, offering their perspectives as two female artists hailing from different countries, both driven by a shared determination to reshape prevailing narratives. They examine the enduring legacies left behind by artists like Irma Stern and how these legacies have influenced their own artistic practices. Additionally, they tackle the intricate tension that exists within the art world between cultural appropriation and genuine appreciation, a question that has consistently challenged me both as a curator and as an engaged member of the audience.

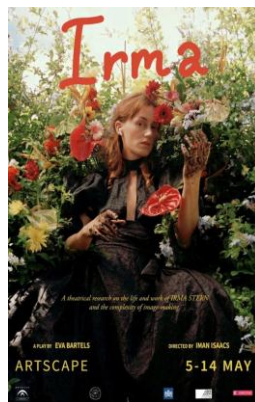


Figure 6.10: 'Irma' play poster

Source: Artscape

In the forthcoming section, we will delve further into these historical tensions and their relevance to the broader discourse on art and culture.

6.6.1.1 Historical Divides In Biased Representation On Muslims

In her significant work “Regarding Muslims – from slavery to post-apartheid”, Gabeba Baderoon (2014), elucidates the dynamics in South Africa where Muslims, to navigate a predominantly Christian society with uneven secularization, must adapt and integrate. Remarkably, there is no corresponding imperative for non-Muslim South Africans to familiarize themselves with Islam or Muslim culture. Baderoon underscores that even reasonably educated South Africans often lack this knowledge (Baderoon, 2014).

Baderoon (2014) emphasizes the pivotal role of a 350-year visual archive in comprehending the evolution of perceptions regarding race, sexuality, and belonging in South Africa. She aptly terms the representation of Muslims in visual culture as "visible ambiguity highlighting the intricate interplay between religious identities and multifaceted environmental influences. Baderoon (2014), further observes a recurring trend in the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in South Africa's historical narrative, spanning from the era of enslavement to the present day. Muslims are frequently depicted as either docile slave or capable subversive violence” (Baderoon, 2014).

While Cape Muslims may not have been prominently featured in art history books for their creative contributions, European painters of the twentieth century, such as Irma Stern, regularly included them as subjects. Stern, a highly celebrated artist, is recognized for her depictions of Muslims. However, a pertinent question arises: where are the South African Muslim counterparts to the likes of Irma Stern in history? This inquiry reveals the challenges also faced by Muslim artists when they seek to authentically convey their unique experiences.

As this thesis has illuminated, creativity within the Muslim community has a rich history and continues to thrive. Yet, the art industry falls short in adequately representing and nurturing this creative potential to its fullest extent.



Figure 6.11: Irma Stern '2 Arab men' from Norval foundation retrospective

Source: Norvalfoundation.org (2021)

For instance, in 2021, Achmat Soni, a founding member of SAFIA, and Dr. Fadiel Arnold, a retired educator specializing in holistic education, were invited to engage in a conversation at Zeitz MOCAA. The topic at hand was the framing of a local perspective in the development of Arabic calligraphy. Both individuals held esteemed positions within the Cape Town Muslim community, possessing substantial knowledge and eloquence. However, it became apparent that the museum's research staff had not thoroughly delved into the various dimensions of calligraphy, particularly in selecting a more diverse panel of practitioners for a topic as technical as calligraphy. This event seemed like a rushed attempt by the museum to rectify a previous omission in representing the Muslim voice, which had been pointed out to them a few months prior. Regrettably, I was never consulted for input on this panel, despite my ability to provide better context or connect them with more suitable calligraphers. This omission was exacerbated by the fact that several calligraphers were deeply disappointed with the way the sacred topic was presented, as it did not include any female calligraphers who had significantly contributed to the field's distribution and enhancement. I was requested to submit this critique to the museum on their behalf, which I duly did. These incidents underscore the importance of diligent study, integrity, and collaboration when curating cultures and representing communities.

Efforts to promote cultural engagement, communication, and meaningful societal change necessitate a departure from the confines of European epistemology. The historical dominance of white South African culture within institutions has fostered ignorance, indifference, and an air of

superiority, with white cultural norms serving as the benchmark against which all else is measured. To truly embrace diverse cultures, we must develop an internal sensibility that guides our external perception of the world, particularly those aspects of civilization with which we may not be familiar.

Transitioning towards a transcultural mindset opens doors to new possibilities for forging partnerships across diverse cultures, transcending the historical legacies of slavery and apartheid. Understanding the philosophy and history of discontent is vital in contemporary South Africa, but actively engaging with various cultures through discourse and conversations can lead to genuine liberation. The key lies in unlocking the potential inherent in different value systems, lifestyles, and languages (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010d)

Under the shadow of apartheid and colonialism, arts education exemplified a hierarchical system by elevating the culture of the colonizers above that of the colonized majority, while sidelining local arts practices and cultures. Consequently, in the context of the decolonization movement, arts education must deconstruct institutions that exclusively promote Western models and instead provide authentic visibility to previously marginalized local artists and art practices. This inclusivity extends to Muslim artists, not only those who have achieved recognition in the Western art world but also those whose art and practices do not conform to the Western canon, offering diverse perspectives on contemporary Muslim identity. The upcoming section will delve into the cultural and emotional intelligence of arts organizations.

6.6.1.2 Harnessing The Cultural And Emotional Intelligence Of Art Organisations

Leveraging the cultural and emotional intelligence of art organizations is pivotal for fostering innovation and reimagining the art world. This transformation goes beyond mere changes in ownership structures; it encompasses challenging the attitudes of dominance and privilege that often accompany privilege. Historically, South Africans have been deliberately kept apart and segregated from one another, with specific racial hierarchies devised to serve economic and power-related interests. However sometimes, the issue lies not solely in race but also in attitude. For instance, I experienced a situation while working for a Muslim gallery owner in Cape Town whose domineering, rude, and condescending behaviour towards employees and participating artists was astonishing. Therefore, instead of merely replacing ownership with individuals of

colour, I advocate for raising awareness about the existing paradigm and training individuals from diverse backgrounds as future cultural leaders, equipped with cultural and faith-based sensitivities derived from the very communities they represent.

Art and religion stand as two fundamental pillars of culture, manifesting through various art forms, religious rituals, and beliefs. Whether it's the ancient cave paintings of early societies or the intricate decorated temples of Hinduism, art and religion have consistently interwoven to provide insights into a society's values and beliefs, aiding in the comprehension of cultural history. However, in the South African art industry, as mentioned earlier, when it comes to representing spirituality, museums and galleries often approach the spiritual practices of people of colour with a mindset that stages them purely for spectatorship. The recognition of the spiritual or religious aspects of art has received limited attention in many national institutions. In my role as a curator, I strive to reclaim space for a more normalised portrayal of spiritual and religious experiences, undoing the tendencies to theatricalize the spirituality of Muslim individuals. In our MASHŪRAH circles, we contemplated the potential for mediating spirituality through lived and embodied experiences, fostering discussions on both extraordinary and everyday spiritual and religious events without relegating them to the obscure, subjecting them to ridicule, or turning them into spectacles.

When we perceive spirituality as an aspect of everyday embodiment, removed from the realm of performance, we begin to appreciate it as a shared element of the diverse ways people of all races and religious backgrounds have engaged with the humanisation of the spiritual. Normalising the portrayal of spirituality in art becomes an endeavour that transcends awe and fetishization of Muslim bodies, inviting the discovery of common ground among various faiths, religious beliefs, and spiritual practices, all without reinforcing forms of othering.

Furthermore, the inclusion of normalized Muslim voices in the South African art industry appears to hinge on a selection process that regulates how much of their 'Islamic' perspective is heard. This is interconnected with the extrinsic value ascribed to their work by tastemakers, collectors, and gallery owners. Ultimately, it is often driven by marketability, with the assumption in the South African art industry that 'Islamic' works may not sell well. This perception contrasts with the success of international art fairs and biennales, such as Art Dubai, Abu Dhabi Art Fair, Sharjah

Biennale, 154: Casablanca, Istanbul Biennale, and the newly inaugurated Islamic Art Biennale in January 2022.

Faith is a holistic expression of an individual, requiring a delicate balance between intellectual capacity and spiritual sensibilities. However, the South African art industry appears complicit in the limited representation of Muslim artists who encompass the full spectrum of their community's experiences. Muslim artists do indeed exist within this ecosystem, but their visibility is often regulated by industry standards and quotas, which necessitate a closer examination. The question arises: must these artists compromise their religious and spiritual identities to gain more prominence in the art industry?

The Essop brothers' experience sheds light on the conflicts that can arise between their beliefs, lived experiences as Muslims, and their artistic expression during their ten-year association with the Goodman Gallery, a prestigious international art institution in South Africa. Despite their stories being uniquely theirs to tell, they often encountered restrictions when trying to convey their authentic voices through their art. Hasan Essop shared that they ultimately felt that they had relinquished their artistic voices and have since worked independently without gallery representation. Similar patterns have been observed among other South African artists who have described instances where they were advised to downplay the Muslim voice in their work, with the term 'Islam' sometimes being a point of contention. They were also encouraged to limit their exploration to specific themes, consequently relinquishing their personal agency and voice. Just as the film industry often misrepresents and limits the narrative of Muslim characters, the art world can sometimes adopt a populist approach and dictate the narrative.

In a personal experience from 2021, an art installation I organized, featuring work by Cape Town-based artist Sahlah Davids, a member of our MASHŪRAH circles, had to be altered due to the inclusion of prayer mats. Despite the significance of these mats to the installation, the gallery owner expressed concerns that the religious iconography might make visitors uncomfortable. Sahlah Davids also shared her experiences at Michaelis UCT, where she frequently received advice not to overtly incorporate her religious identity into her work. Mishkaah Amien, another

MASHŪRAH participant, faced similar challenges during her time at Michaelis art school, which compelled her to temporarily suspend her artistic pursuits.

In South Africa, scholarly discourse, especially within the realms of arts and culture, has often overlooked discussions on acknowledging and fully engaging with modern religious communities and faith groups. Arts institutions frequently present themselves as secular spaces, raising questions about how debates regarding engagement with faith-based communities can evolve in the arts and cultural contexts, and what new approaches to artistic responsibility can be developed in this dialogue.

Saint Anselm of Canterbury's statement, "*I do not seek to understand so that I may believe, but I believe so that I may understand,*" underscores the interconnectedness of belief and understanding, faith and reason, in his canon (Cann, n.d). Ashraf Jamal's query, "How easy is it to detect the difference between a trade in things and a trade in beliefs?" Jamal (2021) further underscores the complexities surrounding religion and materiality, particularly in the Muslim context. What the South African art world often overlooks is that the modern Muslim art world is deeply rooted in faith, an integral aspect of life. Cultural and theological processes are intricately intertwined and not isolated. To bridge this gap, we need to shift our perspective from merely learning about other cultures, often from a standpoint of extraction and dominance, to learning from them, fostering mutual recognition and collaboration. These are the types of organizations we should strive to build.

Now, let us delve into the societal context of South African Muslim society, examining the imbalances and opportunities that exist within

6.7 Societal Level: Transcultural Imbalances And Opportunities - Recognise What Makes Us Unique In Our Surroundings And Be True To Ourselves

6.7.1 What Influence Has The Religion Political Environment Had On The Cultural Lineage And Milieu Of The South African Muslim Artists And Their Communities?

6.7.1.1 The Emergence Of Reconciliation Between Tradition And Modernity

In our MASHŪRAH dialogues, the theme of heritage emerged with great significance, emphasizing the need to recognize and pay homage to a past that was vivid in yearning yet often

hazy for many. Lineage proved to be a topic that elicited a wide range of emotions, from desire and scepticism to anger and outright rejection. Some participants believed that the legacy of the Apartheid government had left them grappling with a mess they were uncertain how to rectify. Thania Peterson aptly characterizes this notion as '*Kassarm*,' an old Malay term signifying 'a big mess' or "things being out of place"(Nefdt, 2021). Others felt that their ancestors had not been present or actively engaged in their lives in any meaningful way, leaving them with disconnected pieces. Previous chapters have delved extensively into the historical context of slavery, apartheid, and the pivotal figures in those struggles. In this section, we aim to explore the enduring influence of these historical events on the present cultural landscape of the South African Muslim community, as well as the traditions and practices that have arisen as a result. We will also examine these effects through the ethnographic lens, focusing on the works of artists Sahlah Davids, Thania Peterson, and Hasan and Husain Essop.

In South African racial politics, Islam is often not considered an "African" religion, whether by its adherents or outsiders. Instead, it is perceived as predominantly colored, Indian, or Malay, carrying an exotic connotation (Jacobs, n.d). This perception is especially pronounced in Cape Town, a hub of Islamic practice unlike any other in the world. To comprehend the complexity of contemporary Muslim life, one must delve into the history marked by systemic trauma. Here, acts of leisure, creativity, stillness, and empowerment intersect with religious rituals, defining what it means to be Muslim in post-Apartheid South Africa. The local manifestations of Islam, encompassing primarily Malay, but also Arab and Indian subcontinent elements, have thrived in Cape Town, giving rise to the current Muslim art scene (Ashraf Jamal, 2021).

Our MASHŪRAH discussions delved into the schism between what kind of art is deemed permissible within Islam in the Cape. Certain artists, as highlighted in previous chapters, have blurred these lines or developed their own subjective interpretations to pursue their artistic journeys. Ashraf Jamal suggests that contemporary Muslim art challenges conventional beliefs of prohibition, encompassing concerns about image, the centrality of faith, ritual, and prayer. He contends that the emerging contemporary Muslim art contradicts the outdated notion, from the previous century, that modern art is inherently atheistic (Jamal, 2021). There exists an important middle ground within the Muslim art landscape, often overlooked in my experience. Historically, the Cape Town Muslim community focused primarily on establishing the foundations of religion,

leading many to believe that all forms of art were inherently immoral. This stance was reinforced by a highly traditional clerical viewpoint. However, extensive travel and research have demonstrated to me that knowledge of Islamic history should encourage the fostering of new artistic forms and the elaboration of older ones. Sahlah Davids, an artist I had the privilege to meet in 2020, exemplifies this approach. Her work draws inspiration from domestic, traditional, and religious spaces, skilfully weaving together her lineage, the history of their struggles, and the embodiment of their spirituality.

Through my collaboration with Davids, I learned that the Cape 'Malay' identity emerged at the intersection of religion and politics, contributing to the development of distinct traditions. The subsequent section will delve deeper into the thematic framework of Davids' work on Malayism to gain a deeper understanding of the Cape Muslim milieu.

6.7.1.2 Invented Traditions In The Form Of 'Malayism' And Internal Cultural Tensions

6.7.2 The Impacts Of Transculturalism On Cape Town Reenacted Through Art

The emergence of a unified Muslim community in Cape Town faces challenges due to the city's growing Muslim population and the influence of global factors, resulting in diverse expressions of Cape Muslim religiosity. Within the tapestry of Cape Town's Muslim communities, there exists a multitude of social classes, races, and ethnic backgrounds. This mosaic encompasses Cape Malay, Coloured, Indian, African, and White South Africans, as well as migrant Muslims hailing from various corners of the world, including Somalia, West Africa, Pakistan, Turkey, and Arab countries. This amalgamation of diverse backgrounds contributes significantly to the shaping and reshaping of Muslim discursive traditions in the region (Alhourani, 2019)

The artwork by Thania Peterson provides a visual reflection of this cultural evolution. In the piece, the artist stands before a middle-class house in Athlone, donning a black headscarf and abaya. Peterson's choice of attire serves as a reference to post-apartheid Arab transnational influences on Cape Muslim Islam. She emphasizes that the headscarf and black abaya do not align with a local religious aesthetic, highlighting the shift from traditional Cape Malay attire, such as the medora, which was commonly worn at religious events. This transformation signifies the evolving nature

of the Cape Malay identity, demonstrating that while the community remains Muslim, its habits and identity have continued to evolve over time (Alhourani, 2019).

Ala Al Hourani, a lecturer at the University of Cape Town, conducts a comprehensive ethnographic exploration of what he terms the 'aesthetics of Muslim-ness.'(Alhourani, 2019) He scrutinizes the artistic endeavours of those who incorporate performance into their art, all the while authentically expressing their Muslim identity. Al Hourani posits that artists like Thania Petersen and the Essop brothers embody the concept of "the artist as ethnographer."(Alhourani, 2019) This suggests that their aesthetic choices are grounded in extensive research into the genealogy of Islam and the rich tapestry of Cape Muslim cultural and religious traditions, rather than arising spontaneously. Their art serves as a visual medium through which they portray imagined environments reflecting the personal and communal realities of Muslims (Alhourani, 2019).

For Petersen, her research aims to illuminate the intricacies of Muslim identity politics and its interaction with the broader political and cultural fabric of Cape Town's diverse communities. Moreover, she seeks to demonstrate that Cape Muslims are an integral part of South African history, actively engaging in the country's political issues throughout its tumultuous journey and displaying an adaptability to change (Alhourani, 2019).

The Essop brothers highlighted a significant challenge they confront as Muslims living in Cape Town, particularly in the post-9/11 era: the prevalent misperceptions about Islam and Muslims. They perceive these misrepresentations, both within South Africa and on a global scale, as a form of Islamophobia, which they argue is as detrimental as any other societal issue facing the nation. Drawing from their personal experiences as Muslims in post-9/11 Cape Town, they recounted instances where they often felt like outsiders.(Alhourani, 2019)

Despite these challenges, the Essop brothers firmly consider themselves South African citizens, deeply connected to South Africa, alongside their strong ties to their Muslim and Indian heritage, as well as the broader global Muslim community (ummah) (Alhourani, 2019). As a result, their sense of belonging and identity is multifaceted and fluid, encompassing religious affiliation, social concerns, citizenship, and a connection to the broader Muslim transnational ummah.

In 2017, the brothers transformed one of Cape Town's most beloved religious rituals, *Gadat*, into an artistic environment through their experimental site-specific work. Inspired by the tradition of Sheikh Yusuf who shared the *Ratib-al-Haddad* with the earliest Muslims in Cape Town, who were mostly servants and slaves (Unknown, 2017). The original collection of Quranic passages and Prophetic prayers were recited in a melodiously and polished tune as the consequence of slaves not being permitted to worship, so they pretended to sing.

Sahlah Davids, the Essops, and Petersen as described by Hourani employ their artwork as a means of depicting the lived realities of Muslims in Cape Town. Through their performances, they skilfully navigate the delicate equilibrium between social and religious commitment, national and religious identity, and cultural expression. However, their motivation extends beyond their personal inclinations.

These illustrative examples underscore the frequent endeavour by Muslim artists to harmonize a plethora of contrasting discourses, many of which are integral to their everyday experiences, encompassing identity politics, religiosity, and cultural aesthetics. It is imperative to shift our perspective away from perceiving Islam solely as a collection of discursive traditions guiding Muslims in their daily lives. Instead, we should delve into the nuances of Muslim lived experiences in their everyday contexts.(Alhourani, 2019)

Now, we transition into the transdisciplinary realm, commencing with an exploration of individual contexts.

6.8 Individual Level: Transdisciplinary Imbalances And Opportunities – How Is Your World Constructed?

6.8.1 What Disciplines Do I Integrate To Support My Role As An Art Professional In My Practice?

6.8.1.1 Sara As An Active Agent

In my professional life, I simultaneously wear multiple hats. I juggle various roles as an artist, administrator, researcher, writer, curator, producer, educator, organizer, mentor, strategist, catalyst, and often, a cheerleader. I firmly believe in the importance of not confining oneself to a single role or perspective. Instead, it remains crucial to navigate laterally and flexibly between these positions, which has been a fundamental lesson I have learned during my doctoral research

journey. Traditional job titles can be limiting when we become too entrenched in their definitions. Curating, by its very nature, is an interdisciplinary endeavour, and have been accustomed to collaborating with students from diverse fields such as theatre, fashion, and visual arts since my time at Central St Martins.

A pivotal shift occurred in my second year at university when I encountered the Iraqi artist Maysaloun Faraj, who encouraged me to delve into the world of modern and contemporary artists from the Near and Middle East. She emphasized the scarcity of female curators in this sector, inspiring me to broaden my horizons. It's often said that we shape ourselves based on our perceptions of our capabilities, and this is precisely what I set out to do. I embarked on a journey to immerse myself in the study of Near and Middle Eastern arts and the art industry, driven by the desire to be an active agent for social change in my immediate environment. Upon completing my undergraduate degree during the 2008 recession, I entered the workforce with a pragmatic mindset. I have always approached life with a realistic outlook, a trait inherited from my parents and grandparents, who displayed resilience and adaptability throughout their lives. The 2008 recession propelled me to hustle for an art career while simultaneously holding down other jobs, serving as a stark reminder of the ever-changing nature of our world.

Throughout my twenties and thirties, I dedicated myself to continuous self-improvement and skill diversification. In an evolving world, I aimed to acquire project management, writing, leadership, digital and technical competencies, as well as business acumen. In addition to my creative pursuits, I ventured into various sectors, including retail and finance, to bolster my income and gain invaluable skills. This multidisciplinary and multifaceted approach not only expanded my horizons but also provided a broader perspective on the world beyond the realm of art. It has equipped me with a pragmatic outlook that the art world often lacks due to its insulated nature.

Recognizing the constructed nature of our world, as opposed to solely idealizing it, has been a crucial aspect of my growth. However, the most significant source of knowledge for me has been the discovery of spiritual intuition and understanding how to simply "be" in the world, transcending the mere accumulation of knowledge to attain a degree of normalcy and groundedness.

Now, we transition from an exploration of individual experiences to the organizational context.

6.9 Collective Level: Transdisciplinary Imbalances And Opportunities

6.9.1 What Disciplines Do Organisation Need To Include To Reconcile The Imbalances And Potentials Between Knowledge Sources?

6.9.1.1 Art And Tech Boom And The Ever-Changing Space

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of technology across various traditional sectors, and the art industry was no exception. Unlike many other industries that struggled during the pandemic, the Art and Tech sector thrived. During this period, I was working for Gallery MOMO in Cape Town, and I had to quickly adapt to using online and digital operational strategies as a curator to keep the gallery running. In the first six months of the pandemic, the art world saw a significant shift towards the digital space, with art sellers and collectors increasingly embracing technology.

This sudden transition served as a wake-up call for many creative organizations that had been hesitant to fully embrace the digital realm. Art fairs moved online, galleries delved into virtual reality (VR), and innovation in the art market became more pronounced. This attracted startups, venture capital, and the emergence of the NFT (Non-Fungible Token) market. However, it also underscored the rapid pace of technological innovation in the art world, placing pressure on developing countries like South Africa to catch up, not only in the art industry but also in education.

Cape Town, like the rest of South Africa faces challenges in terms of inadequate art infrastructure and frequent power outages, exacerbating the lack of support for artists and hindering progress. To compete on a global scale, the country must equip its youth with the necessary skills and resources. The pandemic laid bare the digital divide, with students and artists in underprivileged areas facing significant disadvantages compared to their counterparts in well-resourced and private schools. South Africa's high data costs further impede access to essential information on mobile devices.

The pandemic underscored that technology is no longer a luxury but a crucial component of the educational process. Addressing various elements, from internet access to social and economic challenges faced by teachers, students, and schools, is essential to the development of artists and community engagement. The next section discusses this further.

6.9.1.2 Transdisciplinary Future Skills For Arts Education

According to Nick Binedell, the esteemed founding director of the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), the future of work will demand a fusion of logic and imagination, with innovators requiring a synthesis of both left and right-brain thinking (Investec, 2018). Alarming statistics from the Education Department, as reported by the non-profit Arts and Ubuntu Trust, reveal that only a mere 5% of schools offer art as a subject (Art and Ubuntu Trust, n.d). Consequently, many educators grapple with the challenge of teaching art due to a lack of proper training in the field.

An insightful study by the International Journal of Advanced Corporate Learning (IJAC) has illuminated the fact that most South African public schools do not allocate sufficient class time for children to develop their artistic skills. Moreover, arts education is often entrusted to volunteer teachers who may not possess the necessary expertise to instruct children in visual and performing arts (Nompula, 2013).

It is essential to recognize that art is an investment in people, serving as a paramount means for understanding humanity. It is a discipline that should be accessible to all, not solely those already inclined towards visual or performing arts. In my view Art endows individuals with problem-solving abilities and equips them to navigate the complexities of the future workplace. Additionally, the absence of adequate art education in schools denies the Cape Town Muslim community the opportunity to explore their rich heritage, a vital component in fostering a sense of self-identity that has, unfortunately, been eroding. The next section looks at faith communities.

6.9.1.3 An Interdisciplinary Approach To Understanding Faith Communities

As previously exemplified in educational institutions and art organizations like galleries, Muslim artists have consistently lamented the lack of understanding and support for Muslim or Islamic perspectives. This chapter has laid bare the antiquated attitudes prevailing in both the art world and the Muslim community concerning art education. It is imperative for organizations to grasp

the concept of how the world is continually being shaped, moving beyond mere facts and affording marginalized voices a platform across various disciplines. Art institutions must embark on a journey of self-education, delving into areas like religious literacy, as well as acquiring the skills to curate exhibitions that reflect the richness of faith-based cultures, thus engaging both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences in their programming.

My observations have revealed that religious institutions, in contrast to other educational entities, tend to maintain a degree of segregation to uphold a more insular form of education. Within mosques and religious institutes in Cape Town, there exists a reluctance to explore topics that lie beyond the confines of conventional religious studies. This limited approach neglects the potential for fostering a transdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach to art and creativity education. Knowledge, however, should be collaboratively generated across various professions, disciplines, and decision-making levels.

To encourage a greater number of young Muslims to participate in and contribute to the creative economy, it is imperative that art organizations, governments, academic institutions, religious bodies such as mosques and religious schools, and communities come together in a spirit of collaboration. By developing innovative integrated approaches, we can bridge the gaps and unlock the immense potential that lies within the intersection of creativity, education, and faith. In the following section, we will delve into the imbalances and opportunities that exist within the societal context.

6.10 Societal Level: Transdisciplinary Imbalances And Opportunities

6.10.1 What Are The Potential Disciplines To Be Included In The Future Community Engagement And Art Advocacy?

6.10.1.1 Art For A More Democratic South Africa

Many Muslim parents tend to dismiss art as a frivolous pursuit, deeming it a waste of time. However, it's crucial to recognize that art education holds significant importance across various aspects of life. Perpetuating these stereotypes not only does a disservice to ourselves but also to our children and society. Moreover, South Africa is witnessing growing dissatisfaction among its youth concerning leadership and representation, with a prevailing sentiment that their voices go unheard (City Press 2016, Ramphele 2016).

In response to this prevailing challenge, the emerging generation, today's youth, must cultivate sensitivity and awareness of the diverse cultures and experiences within South Africa. Art plays a pivotal role in fostering this awareness, as it nurtures independent and critical thinkers who contribute value to society and strengthen democracy. Through art, individuals learn to contemplate their lived experiences, shedding fresh light on them and transforming perceptions of both the individual and the collective. It serves as a medium for sharing both struggles and triumphs, ultimately nurturing critical thinking, a fundamental quality vital for a healthy democracy.

Regrettably, Cape Town Muslim religious leaders have also not been actively supportive of a more comprehensive education that integrates alternative creative narratives, citing concerns about its compatibility with Islamic principles. Consequently, young emerging Muslim artists often find themselves lacking the support and guidance of their community, which can hinder their artistic growth. There is a pressing need for greater support from parents and older community members, as well as the establishment of intergenerational dialogues.

Within the Cape Town Muslim community, those in more solidly middle-class positions have the potential to contribute significantly to the growth of the arts, but such investments are currently lacking. Addressing these challenges requires not only a consideration of external factors like colonization and modernization but also an examination of internal factors such as the incongruities and lack of harmony between Islamic scholars and various aspects of political, social, and educational practices. In the next section, we will delve into the transformational context at the individual level.

6.11 Individual Level: Transformational Imbalances And Opportunities - Immersing Ourselves In The Context Of Our Immediately Perceived Essences

6.11.1 How Can My Community Engagement Release Potentials And Address Relevant Changes?

6.11.1.1 Actively Redefining And Reconstructing My Identity

The first step toward restoring balance and instigating change in one's life, which can subsequently ripple out to impact others, is to look inward. As a researcher navigating the path of renewal and social awareness, I have found that culture and spirituality have played pivotal roles

in my journey of redefining and reconstructing my identity, resulting in transformation. This transformation recalls Sardar's assertion that British Asians, like us, are the product of a profound entanglement that has fundamentally altered both India and Britain. He contends that without Britain, there would be no India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh, and likewise, Britain's identity is inexorably intertwined with its shared history with the subcontinent (Sardar, 2012).

Understanding the intricacies of my cultural background and historical connections, as well as comprehending the dynamics shaping these cultural elements, has significantly influenced my thoughts and actions. These realizations have empowered me to continue evolving while living in South Africa, where I can flexibly integrate my diverse identities when the situation demands. My exposure to a significant part of my ancestral heritage has been enriching, but I have also observed how my perspectives on identity and cultural heritage evolved further upon moving to South Africa. In a place where many lacked a similar connection to their history, I began to appreciate the impact of the past on present understandings. While my circumstances differed from those of my forebears, their experiences moulded me to some extent. My grandparents and parents were immigrants who triumphed over the challenges of their journey, and I am a product of the events that shaped them, even though I was not an immigrant myself. Moving to South Africa allowed me to glimpse some of the perspectives of what it means to be a migrant, albeit in a smaller way.

My journey to South Africa was not arbitrary; it was a deliberate choice, and until my arrival, my understanding had largely been framed by knowledge centres in the North and West. However, South Africa had a profound effect on me by drawing out the deep-rooted elements of my eastern and southern heritage. It shifted my thinking and made me acutely aware of the tension Al Zeera described, where one's spiritual freedom is challenged in the West, and intellectual freedom is threatened in the East (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). This tension underscores the complexity of identity and how it is intricately shaped by our environment. It also emphasizes the importance of embracing diverse experiences and perspectives to gain a comprehensive understanding of ourselves and others.

I see myself as a catalyst, allowing my inner self to evolve and reveal my true nature at each stage of this ongoing process. Through my learning journey, I envision using MASHŪRAH circles as a platform to co-create something new, driven by a sense of purpose within my cooperative inquiry group. I also consider myself an agent of change and development, using the knowledge acquired from the examples shared to set me on a path toward emancipation. This newfound understanding will serve as the cornerstone for future discussions within MASHŪRAH Circles and my newly formed ecosystem, which will be dedicated to development and advocacy, expanding possibilities for Muslim artists. Now, let's shift our focus to collective organization and society.

6.12 Collective Level: Transformational Imbalances And Opportunities

6.12.1 How Do These Disciplines Lead To Transformative Relationships Between The Community And Art World?

6.12.1.1 Transformational Innovation, Paradigm Shifts And Opportunities During The Pandemic

Increased access to technology and digital platforms within the art space serves as a crucial means to foster understanding and connectivity. The advent of the internet and social media platforms has revolutionized the landscape of learning, accessibility, and collaboration. What was once confined to physical spaces has transcended boundaries, allowing for collaborations to occur seamlessly from artists' studios and homes. To ensure that South African students and artists remain relevant and engaged in the rapidly evolving global art scene, significant upgrades in digital infrastructure and access are imperative.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought forth a multitude of challenges and opportunities. It exposed South Africa's reliance on the global economy to sustain itself as borders closed and affluent art collectors reduced their purchases. Art galleries, auctions, and art fairs quickly pivoted to the online sphere, expanding their digital presence. However, this transition led to the closure of many physical art spaces, leaving artists and art professionals struggling to adapt. Amidst this transformative period, the large-scale exhibition 'Home is where the art is' emerged at the Zeitz MOCAA, running throughout 2021-2022. This exhibition, was a love letter to Cape Town, showcased artworks submitted by local artists, both seasoned professionals and aspiring amateurs

alike. The inclusion of artists like Mahmudah Jaffer and Kamyar Bineshtarigh, who were participants in our MASHŪRAH circle, held significant meaning for those involved.

The exhibition raised questions about accessibility and inclusivity, as brilliant artists who did not conform to the narrow confines of the museum's established boundaries struggled for recognition. While the exhibition held sentimental value for participating artists, it also seemed like a rushed attempt to salvage a program that had primarily catered to foreign tourists, lacking international presence it once enjoyed.

In the art world, hierarchies determine access to artists, events, venues, information, and funding. Despite the Investec Cape Town art fair's resumption in February 2022, two years after its last iteration, high-end collectors continued to receive VIP treatment, ensuring their place within the inner circle of the art elite. Conversations within our MASHŪRAH circle unveiled that gaining access to this inner circle often necessitated compromising one's integrity, a prospect that did not appeal to many Muslims.

The potential for transformative change lies in shifting the focus from "me" to "us" and fostering organizational alignment toward the common goals of nurturing, inclusivity, and care. The art world is in dire need of new stakeholders and collectors who represent diverse communities, addressing a significant deficit in this regard. The following section will delve into the imperative of decolonizing art buying and advocacy.

6.12.1.2 Decolonial Transformations

Schieffer and Lessem assert that to achieve individual, organizational, or societal transformation, we must transcend traditional paradigms, many of which are rooted in hierarchies and the subjugation of individuals and cultures, leading to social disconnection (Lessem, 2017) This entails embracing and nurturing both indigenous and external attributes by reconnecting with the source.

To address these disparities, art organizations, curators, and stakeholders can become catalysts for change by reevaluating their fundamental strategies. They can shift from a purely transactional approach to one that is more transformative and integrative. In this holistic approach, art organizations learn from, rather than merely about, each culture they engage with. This shift

involves fostering conversations, transparency, accountability, inclusivity, participatory decision-making, and a culture that values every voice and respects the wisdom derived from diverse experiences. It also requires actively involving the Muslim community as an integral part of their organization, rather than tokenizing their participation.

Art possesses tremendous potential to mediate, validate, and reshape identity politics, religious traditions, and cultural styles. Art from the Muslim community, whether within secular institutions like local and global art festivals, art fairs, and galleries, not only enhances the visibility and audibility of Muslims in the public sphere but also contributes to the evolution of Muslim identity, religion, and style. To truly reconnect with the source, individuals must first confront their shadow selves by openly acknowledging and sharing what has been suppressed within themselves with the outside world.

The South African art industry and the Muslim community have their own intertwined shadow selves, rooted in a traumatic and deeply ingrained past. This past continues to influence how the art sector perceives the Muslim community, and vice versa. Achieving emotional reconciliation regarding these issues allows us to engage with the core aspects of our current condition more clearly.

Therefore, it is imperative to remember and rehabilitate the past while dismantling the racial discriminatory processes that persist. Organizations, as they currently exist, are built upon a system that emerged from the twin ideologies of modernism and colonialism, emphasizing a top-down, supposedly universal paradigm. Decolonization does not entail erasing the impacts of modernity or reverting to an idealized, homogenous past. Instead, it allows for the coexistence of various elements that were lost. It is a process of restoration, not erasure. However, this transformation can only occur if we engage with others on their own terms. We need a cultural shift that challenges the entrenched notions of a meritocratic industry and promotes equity to achieve true fairness.

Transformation and renewal thrive in open systems with dissipative structures where ideas, thoughts, and emotions flow freely. Instability is the catalyst for transformation; the greater the instability and diversity within society, the more interactions and possibilities arise (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). Fortunately, the next generation of South Africans will not be bound by the

same frameworks as their parents, offering a promising vision for a more human-centred approach in arts organizations.

6.12.1.3 Human Centred Organizational And Curatorial Design

As a curator, I often find myself in a solitary role, yearning for closer collaboration with individuals who genuinely grasp or are open to understanding the essence of Muslim culture, Cape Town South African culture, and the global context. Through my doctoral program and the ecosystem, I have cultivated and embarked on a transformative journey, utilizing MASHŪRAH circles as a regenerative process to co-create something novel and rediscover a sense of purpose. The art space is not about humanizing those who are already human; rather, it invites people to recondition themselves through authentic mutual affection. Embracing human-centred design principles, which prioritize inclusivity for historically marginalized communities and facilitate the involvement of emerging art collectors in Africa's art economy, is imperative.

The field of contemporary art in Cape Town, particularly that of Muslim identifying artists, remains relatively undeveloped and lacks a structured framework. In this evolving landscape, there's a clear need and potential advantage in expanding exchange networks and strengthening existing relationships. The act of bridge-building sometimes highlights perceived conflicts rather than serving as a natural process of inclusion and expansion. To foster a more dynamic environment for both artists and audiences, we must transcend the conventional white cube model of galleries with its inherent constraints. It is essential to encourage innovative interactions for art collectors across all socioeconomic strata in Cape Town and South Africa, granting them improved access and exposure to artists and their creations.

Our efforts should extend to diversify the arts industry, audiences, and the art showcased in museums and galleries. By initiating change within one aspect of this cultural consumption cycle, we can create a ripple effect that undoubtedly cultivates a more introspective, innovative, and vibrant art world, accessible and enjoyable for all, regardless of socioeconomic status or educational background.

6.12.1.4 Funding And Development

A prevalent obstacle to success and development in Cape Town is the scarcity of government

funding, as most initiatives rely on private financing. This is particularly evident in long-term, sustained endeavours, with the bulk of support for Muslim artists being short-term or one-off initiatives. Achieving trust and cross-cultural engagement requires substantial time and a commitment to enduring investments and programs to witness meaningful change. In addition to this challenge, there is a need to establish and enforce higher curatorial standards, identify the most effective use of technology, promote professional growth, and broaden audience engagement.

Within this evolving sector, there are evident gaps that present opportunities for expansion. Initiatives focusing on contemporary forms of Islamic art and hybrid, or mixed art forms represent an underserved domain with untapped potential. The digital realm offers abundant possibilities for collaboration and cross-cultural engagement, such as the creation of social networking tools and the establishment of enduring cross-cultural communities centred around diverse cultural events. To ensure equitable exchanges, a shift towards partnerships and co-creation, as well as the prioritization of funding for long-term (multiyear) projects and initiatives over short-term events, is essential for fostering lasting change.

Moreover, since most initiatives currently have limited scopes, their impact primarily reaches local audiences. To facilitate the growth of this field, new efforts must be directed towards influencing decision-makers. Additionally, expanding artist residencies and travel funds to foster cross-border connections and professional development is crucial.

Many of these recommendations necessitate practitioners, curators, and industry leaders to effectively articulate the value of cross-cultural creative interactions. This may involve emphasizing the potential to bridge global divides by communicating shared values, highlighting the significance of cross-cultural education in dispelling misconceptions and stereotypes, engaging with youth cultures, and establishing greater parity with other fields that champion international exchange, such as science and technology. The following section will delve into the imbalances and opportunities for transformation at the societal level.

6.13 Societal Level: Transformational Imbalances And Opportunities

6.13.1 How Can We Create A Transformative Relationship Between A Future Platform And The Community?

To reiterate, there are numerous unresolved challenges in Cape Town, particularly concerning the acceptance of certain art forms and practices. The lack of support for aspiring young artists, whether pursuing art as a career or hobby, can be deeply frustrating. Insufficient internal community support often stems from varying beliefs regarding what constitutes Islamic art and the perceived value of pursuing it.

My personal experiences and beliefs have heightened my awareness of the concept of normativity, known in Islamic terms as *fitrah* – our innate nature. Staying true to our *fitrah* requires us to remember who we are, acknowledge the gifts we possess, and foster connections with the land, spirituality, ourselves, and one another.

This challenge has persisted within Muslim communities, partly due to the historical legacies of enslavement and apartheid. In the quest for reconnection, isolation has sometimes been inadvertently perpetuated. Restoring dignity is of paramount importance to gain recognition and a voice within the broader society, rather than being relegated to a mysterious and misunderstood fringe group.

Engaging in conversations and dialogues, even those that are exceedingly difficult, becomes essential to catalyse transformation. Such discussions should involve both the apartheid-era generation and those born into freedom, as exemplified by our MASHŪRAH circles. The focus should shift from commercial considerations to the intrinsic value of community development, truly seeing, and hearing each other.

6.14 Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter 5 elaborated on the methodological context, detailing the tools that will be applied in Chapter 6. This chapter represents the second part of the contextual chapters, aiming to provide an in-depth analysis of the intersection of Muslim identity and art practice in Cape Town and South Africa.

A consolidation of some of the emerging themes from Chapter 6 is illustrated in the table below and the **Four Trans: Imbalances And Outcomes** are summarised in the Annex.

Lived subjective experiences.	Linguistic freedom	Humanistic Hermeneutics
Intergenerational legacies	Mental emancipation	Empowered Feminine
Dignity	Curatorial integrity	Social justice
Tradition and Modernity	Spiritual Intuition	Decolonising

Figure 6.12: Consolidation of themes from chapter 6

These findings will serve as the foundation for our emancipation theory, expounded upon in Chapter 8. In the next chapter (7), we will move to the second in the CARE stage and explore the ecosystem that has developed on this doctoral journey.

Chapter 7

AWAKENING INTEGRAL CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH HALAQART AS AN INNOVATIVE ECOSYSTEM

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, we initiated the CARE trajectory with MASHŪRAH dialogue circles aimed at galvanizing support for the increased visibility of Muslim artists and creatives within the South African art ecosystem, with a focus on Cape Town. Our objectives included enhanced advocacy for artistic growth and more meaningful engagement with Muslim communities in the region.

These MASHŪRAH circles served as our initial step in building the foundation for our ecosystem and communities of practice, united by shared values and a collective vision. As we progress into the next phase of the CARE trajectory, termed ‘Awakening Integral Consciousness’, we underscore the critical importance of collaboration and collective action (Lessem, 2017a). Our mission is to cultivate sustainable 'Innovation Ecosystems' capable of addressing disparities and seizing opportunities, as expounded upon in context chapters 5 and 6, which emphasize the significance of considering transpersonal, transcultural, transdisciplinary, and transformational aspects. The emerging ecosystem 'HalaqArt' played a significant role in shaping the questions we posed to uncover imbalances and opportunities in our exploration within Chapter 6.

In Chapter 7, you will be guided through our (co-creators/co-researchers) process of designing this research ecosystem, focusing on two distinct levels: the inner or personal level and the collective level.

This chapter begins with an exploration of innovation ecosystems and their construction. It delves into the intricacies of my own internal ecosystem and consciousness 'Khudi'(Selfhood), which guides my curatorial endeavours and personal growth. Subsequently, the narrative expands to encompass the Muslim community in Cape Town, Muslim artists in South Africa, and the broader South African art industry.

The journey through this chapter reveals the results of community activation research, culminating in the creation of "MASHŪRAH circles," the unique and inclusive dialectic tool

tailored to our specific context. These circles were inspired by the fundamental concept of Tarbiyah explained in earlier chapter as a process of nurturing and rearing in Islam it emphasizes development and expansion of an individual, one can say training and upbringing and 'MASHŪRAH' or 'shura,' which conveys 'consultation' or 'seeking advice' in a non-hierarchical, democratic, and equitable manner (Walker, 2018). The aim was to facilitate dialogues, inquiry, the sharing of perspectives, and collaborative problem-solving, setting the stage for the imminent call to action, including the potential for hosting an exhibition, among other goals.

The philosophical foundations of Hermeneutics and Phenomenology also played a pivotal role in shaping the MASHŪRAH learning circle of context analysis detailed in Chapters 5 and 6. Guided by Hermeneutics phenomenology, my research did a comprehensive exploration of the European, Islamic, and African philosophies to yield a contextual synthesis of tenets. My aspiration has been to harmonize ideas that have profoundly impacted the places I have inhabited and explored, as well as those that have significantly influenced and inspired me throughout my life.

The narrative then unfolds to illustrate how we navigated the challenges of organizing our 'MASHŪRAH circles,' adapting to the constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the enduring electricity crisis in South Africa. This chapter serves as a testament to the proactive construction of an ecosystem and a community. We collaborated with a dedicated core group of individuals and organizations, united by a shared commitment to effecting change in the art sphere. Our objective was to forge a network of like-minded people and organizations devoted to the promotion and advocacy of the arts, with a focus on building relationships among artists, curators, academics, and art institutions on local, national, and international scales. The ensuing sections will provide a detailed account of this transformative process beginning with brief outlines of what it means to awaken consciousness and benefit innovation ecosystems.

7.2 Awakening Consciousness

'Awakening Integral Consciousness' is the next phase in the CARE trajectory aimed at fostering a heightened sense of awareness, understanding, and collective purpose within the community and art industry, concerning the development and advocacy of Muslim artists and voices in the South African art ecosystem, and the engagement effort of the art spaces with Cape Town's Muslim community.

In Awakening Consciousness some of the qualities and key attributes required include(Schieffer and Lessem, 2014)

1. Listening (picking up the implicit messages behind the explicit ones)
2. Reflective, intuitive, and pattern-seeking mind
3. The will and ability to grow in consciousness.
4. The ability to enter unknown, unfamiliar spaces.
5. The ability to engage with the cultural and spiritual dynamics of a particular place.
6. The ability to question and let go of some of one's convictions and beliefs.
7. Openness to surprising insights and for emerging patterns of culture
8. The ability to co-evolve with others, and to be a catalyst for evolution.
9. The ability to envision and to imagine the new, emerging dialectically out of the old
10. To have faith in oneself and in others

The subsequent sub-chapters will provide an interpretation and recognition of what the manifestation of 'Awakening Integral Consciousness' entails, within my personal context and the collective context. These interpretations will serve as lenses through which we as a research ecosystem can facilitate collaboration, personal growth, and the awakening of consciousness in ourselves.

7.2.1 Building Innovation Ecosystems

Embarking on this process, I contemplated the evolution of individuals over time in the context of forging ecosystems of change and solidarity, especially in unfamiliar terrain. In an increasingly challenging world, how can we reshape our interactions to transcend antiquated structures and embrace the unforeseen?

Community engagement, the establishment of an art initiative, and collaboration within the art industry demand a collaborative approach that nurtures interdependent connections to achieve a common goal. This can be achieved by creating an 'innovation ecosystem' consisting of five primary responsibilities, each aligning with the GENE rhythms of Grounding, Emerging, Navigating, and Effecting. These functions are interlinked, and the sustainability of one

individual, organization, or community hinges on the well-being of others(Lessem, 2017b)

The five role players of the ecosystem according to Lessem are (Lessem, 2017):

7.2.1.1 Progressing Towards A Learning Community

Grounding: Fostering Community Activation through Stewards (Anchoring us in our origins, history, and values):

1. In this role, you typically find community leaders deeply rooted in a specific context, all the while encouraging progress towards social innovation.
2. These stewards are the key figures who provide support and drive social innovation, ensuring it remains connected to our heritage and historical context.

7.2.1.2 Leading Towards A Developmental Sanctuary

Emergence: Cultivating Awareness through Catalysts (Catalysing and inspiring the emergence of new possibilities):

1. Catalysts are instrumental in welcoming innovations and introducing fresh potentials and opportunities.
2. They actively engage with the community, seeking their active involvement in realizing these newfound possibilities.
3. Catalysts are the innovative minds driving the regeneration process.

7.2.1.3 Leading Towards A Research Academy

Navigating: Pioneering Innovation-Driven Research through Researchers (Guiding local and global theories to realize the vision):

1. Researchers contribute to the vision by lending propositional or conceptual weight to the work.
2. They blend their own freshly generated insights with widely accepted theories, procedures, as well as local and global insights.

7.2.1.4 Leading Towards A Social Laboratory

Effecting: Enacting Transformation through Facilitators (Facilitating tangible impact):

1. Facilitators play a vital role in keeping things moving on the ground.
2. They manage the nitty-gritty details, from persuading individuals to participate in organizing events and turning ideas into reality.

7.2.1.5 Progressing Towards An Institutional Genealogy

Integrating: Orchestrating Alignment toward a Shared Vision (Unifying all endeavours for a common goal):

1. The integrator's role is to ensure that the innovation ecosystem incorporates elements of grounding, emergence, navigation, and effecting.
2. They oversee the harmonious collaboration of all four roles, working together to drive the transformational process.
3. The integrator also establishes the necessary governance framework to aid in achieving the goals while preserving the culture, spirit, and essence of the endeavour.

The process of social innovation hinges on the presence of a well-defined ecosystem, complete with appropriate structures and roles. Equally vital is the path or journey through which these innovation ecosystems evolve. An inadequate framework may lead to unintended negative consequences for the intended audience of the social innovation. It is, therefore, imperative to grasp the dynamics of the research ecosystem and ensure the inclusion of all stakeholders. This inclusive approach can foster the development of a more sustainable and encompassing innovation ecosystem that benefits all parties involved.

In response to the imbalances and opportunities that drive this research-to-innovation endeavour, I intend to deliberately expand my ecosystem and engage in awakening and activating consciousness across the following domains:

1. Individual Ecosystem (for my personal and curatorial growth)
2. Community Engagement (for the Cape Town Muslim community and the public)
3. Arts Initiative (for Muslim artists)

4. South African Art Industry (for collaboration and advocacy)

As I gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and limitations within a hierarchical and restrictive cultural landscape in Cape Town, I see fresh opportunities for collaboration with individuals and organizations. Simultaneously, I aspire to motivate the community and artists to progress with conscious integrity and support the holistic growth of the art industry.

The journey begins with an exploration of my own internal ecosystem and consciousness by also utilizing Jung's archetypes (Barbuto, 1997) and Myers-Briggs personality (Myers-Briggs, 2019).

7.3 Awakening Individual Consciousness - My Integral Innovation Ecosystem And My Personality Type

To craft my personal four-world personality typology, I drew inspiration from Carl Gustav Jung's exploration of psychological archetypes (Barbuto, 1997) and the insights offered by the Myers-Briggs personality indicator (Myers-Briggs, 2019). These frameworks offered me a valuable perspective to investigate potential strengths, imbalances, and potentials within myself. In addition, I found inspiration in the influential figures and role models who have profoundly shaped my inner world.

As I delved into Jung's four personality types of Feeling, Intuiting, Knowing, and Sensing (Sandhu, 2013) I began to organize my own integral realms of the South, East, North, and West. This process has allowed me to gain insights and foster a deeper understanding of my personality and inner dynamics:

1. Feeling > South
2. Intuiting > East
3. Knowing > North
4. Sensing > West

Additionally, after taking the Myers-Briggs personality test, I discovered that I fell into the Protagonist personality type, which is characterized by the following attributes (Myers-Briggs, 2019)

1. An inspiring optimist, driven to act according to what I believe is right.
2. They feel a keen sense of purpose in serving a greater good in life.

3. They are thoughtful idealists, always striving to make a positive impact on people and the world.
4. They seldom shy away from doing what is right, even in challenging circumstances.
5. They are vocal about their values, embracing authenticity and altruism, and they are quick to speak out against injustice.
6. Even when they disagree with others, they seek common ground and understanding.
7. Their communication style is marked by eloquence and sensitivity.
8. They often possess an unclouded vision of how individuals can improve themselves and those around them.
9. They tend to lead by example, demonstrating how ordinary situations can be managed with compassion, dedication, and care.

The Protagonist personality type can be further classified into four dimensions. Notably, my intuition scored highest, linking back to the Eastern path. My results are as follows: (Myers-Briggs, 2019)

1. **71% Extraverted:** Indicating a propensity for group activities and a value for social interaction, often expressed with enthusiasm.
2. **84% Intuitive:** Reflecting a strong sense of imagination, open-mindedness, and curiosity, with an emphasis on originality and uncovering hidden meanings and possibilities.
3. **60% Feeling:** Valuing emotional expression, empathy, social harmony, and cooperation.
4. **67% Judging:** Marked by decisiveness, thoroughness, and a penchant for organization and structure, preferring predictability and planning over spontaneity.
5. **78% Turbulent:** Characterized by self-consciousness and sensitivity to stress, alongside an urgency in emotions, a drive for success, perfectionism, and a continuous desire for self-improvement.

These discoveries and attributes have enriched my comprehension of my personality type, especially when viewed within the context of my spiritual knowledge and consciousness. Notably, my high intuition score did not come as a surprise; it aligns seamlessly with my spiritual growth and the development of trust in my inner voice.

This heightened self-awareness has not only deepened my understanding of how I function, both

as a curator and a professional in the arts, but more importantly, as a human being. My inner workings form a complex amalgamation, blending inherent wisdom, personality traits, life experiences, and the influences of everyday role models. This unique combination significantly impacts how I approach curation, engagement, work, and collaboration.

Regrettably, within the realm of the art sector, I have often found limited encouragement to wholeheartedly embrace and engage with these aspects of myself. Maintaining a spiritual compass has proven to be a crucial anchor for me.

In the following section, I will delve into my spiritual awakening.

7.4 Spiritual Awakening Of Individual Consciousness

My spiritual awakening predates the inception of my art career, a pivotal subject discussed in Chapter 2. I would even argue that my quest for spiritual peace and clarity served as the catalyst for my journey into the realm of art. Consequently, I find a deep sense of validation in my purpose and objectives within the creative sector. Without embracing my spiritual self, I doubt I would have found significance in my profession.

My parents and grandparents were my initial mentors, as were my interactions with my younger sisters, cousins, and other family members. Even as a child, I possessed dreams and aspirations, along with an unshakable belief that there was more to life for me beyond my immediate surroundings. This experience illuminated the influence of morality and values in shaping my perceptions and actions. We often learn more about ourselves as we strive not to emulate those we do not wish to become.

In the preceding chapters, I explored the profound influence of my grandparents on my life. However, their teachings and examples truly resonated after their passing. They served as my moral compass, grounding me and steering me through life's trials. They connected me with my aspirations, cultural heritage, and the traditions I had observed through them.

My mother's gift of teaching me the Urdu language not only opened doors to literature and relationships but also imparted lessons in tolerance. My father's unwavering work ethic and discipline instilled in me the ability to find practical solutions, especially during my transition to South Africa, where I sought his guidance.

My sisters instilled in me a sense of responsibility and the importance of looking out for others and nurturing a protective instinct. Yet what struck me most was the yearning for environments that nurtured my softness rather than constantly evoking my survival instincts. This yearning arose from the absence of expressiveness and comfort in my immediate family. I longed for authentic connections with people, embracing vulnerability.

My innate affinity for the arts as a haven for introspection fuelled my passion. However, meeting Iraqi artist Maysaloun Faraj was a transformative catalyst, aligning with my cultural sensibility. Scholarly voices like Wijdan Ali, a leading figure in Middle Eastern art revival, further inspired me. Seeing individuals in the art world who resonated with me became a driving force in my belief that a place existed for me among them.

Professor Doris Behrens Abouseiff, my mentor during my master's degree in art history embodied the roles of steward, catalyst, researcher, and facilitator. Her challenging approach honed my critical voice and confidence, urging me to engage in art debates like never before. These remarkable women embody all four roles within an ecosystem I have come to recognize in my holistic journey.

I found myself irresistibly drawn to countries and cultures in the Middle East and Africa that cherished the cultivation of relationships and friendships, mirroring the warmth I had experienced with my grandparents.

Delving into the works of Allama Iqbal became a special journey for me. His writings in Urdu and Persian, rather than solely in Arabic, resonated deeply with me. Iqbal's concept of *Khudi*, (selfhood) encompassing selfhood in terms of both individuation and totality, was particularly transformative (Garcia, n.d.). It emphasized the conscious commitment and self-empowerment required to elevate the worth of human existence, bringing it closer to the divine. For a long time, I grappled with the notion that I had to choose between focusing on the self or others, and Iqbal's philosophy skilfully resolved this internal conflict. Iqbal believes that the role of humanity is clearly defined in the Quran, where it is stated that our sacred nature originates from God, who breathed His own spirit into us (Garcia, n.d.). The human goal, according to Iqbal, is self-affirmation, not self-negation (McDonough 2023). Considering this understanding, Iqbal condemns any philosophy or mysticism that promotes the dissolution of the ego. He deems the consequences of this line of thinking as catastrophic, asserting that the destruction of the ego as

divine self-results in weakness and stagnation, ultimately leading to the downfall of humanity(Garcia, no date)

Ibn Khaldun's writings also left an indelible mark on me during my undergraduate studies. His renowned theory regarding the rise and fall of sovereign powers, likened these powers to living organisms with birth, growth, maturity, and death (Khaldun & Rosenthal, 2009). Moreover, Ibn Khaldun delved deep into exploring man's relationship with his environment and its impact. Among his ideas, the following were particularly enlightening:

Ibn Khaldun deeply explored the intricate relationship between humanity and its environment, recognizing profound implications. His insights shed light on several key concepts. Firstly, he emphasized the profound interconnection between individuals and their surroundings, asserting that humans are undeniably shaped by their environment. Additionally, he noted that harsh conditions often give rise to a collective sense of identity, known as *asabiyyah*, leading to the formation of tribes. It was evident that isolation was an unsustainable path, as survival and prosperity necessitated human assertiveness and dominance (Khaldun & Rosenthal, 2009). Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun highlighted the vulnerability of passive individuals, families, tribes, and nations to decline and extinction, while those who exhibited assertiveness, dominance, and exploitation were poised to endure and thrive (Khaldun & Rosenthal, 2009). He believed that human journeys typically commenced in challenging, unforgiving environments, far removed from the comforts of urban life, with the roots of every nation originating in the environmental fringes (Khaldun & Rosenthal, 2009). Rural dwellers, residing in open, harsh, hilly, and desert landscapes, displayed a strong sense of group identity and assertiveness. In contrast, urban dwellers, predominantly centered on self-indulgence, luxury, and lacking a strong emphasis on group cohesion, inhabited metropolitan, comfortable cities (Khaldun & Rosenthal, 2009).

I, as a product of both city and village-dwelling family members, represent a combination of these dynamics. I find myself drawn to both the hustle and bustle of London's city life and the natural beauty of Cape Town's surroundings, where I have resided since 2015. I have come to accept this polarity within myself, as both settings add a rich tapestry to my life and being. My experience in Cape Town has made me acutely aware of the impact of the natural environment on its inhabitants. This understanding of Khaldun's theories contributed to my understanding of why some individuals and organizations may have fallen by the wayside in the formation of my

ecosystem.

In a prior chapter, I delved into my relationship with my friend Zak, highlighting the profound impact he had on my expanding consciousness. Before my move to South Africa, Zak urged me to seek out the white lion and gaze into its eyes, as it symbolized hope and inner strength. He believed it to be my spirit animal, a metaphorical emblem of resilience. I later encountered the white lion during a visit to a private safari park shortly after my marriage.

When I met my husband, Yaseen, his serene demeanour attracted me. For the first time, I felt that I could embrace both my strength as a woman and my sensitivity as an empathetic individual without compromise. Yaseen acknowledged my abilities without feeling threatened, making me feel truly seen and cherished. Our partnership underscored the power of vulnerability and mutual support. He bridged the gap between my understanding of Islam and South African Cape Malay culture, enriching my life in ways rituals alone could not. Through the creation of a nurturing home, the core lessons of balance and security emerged.

By investigating the role players in my life, employing Jung's four personality types of feeling, intuition, knowing, and sensing, and taking the Myers-Briggs personality test, I am beginning to organise my own integral realms of the South, East, North, and West by recognising my own strengths and weaknesses. Gradually, I'm adjusting and evolving the flaws, striving for a more balanced Sara and being more cognizant of myself.

My inner ecosystem is beginning to take shape as follows:

7.4.1 Feeling (Ehsas) - South

Grounding/Steward - The Southern personality lays the foundation for my ability to connect with and enjoy society and environment, as well as organically co-evolve with other individuals and diverse cultures through feeling which has been nurtured greatly in South Africa.

7.4.2 Intuiting (Wajdan) - East

Emerging/Catalyst - The East's personality is naturally and deliberately evolving, and it is ingrained in my Pakistani cultural consciousness and spiritual orientation through intuition.

7.4.3 Knowing - (Ilm)- North

Navigating /Social Innovator and Researcher - My passion for art and creativity as well as knowledge and knowing convey the personality of the North.

7.4.4 Sensing (Sha'oor) - West

Effecting/Facilitator - Experience and competence in the art sector, travelling, as well as opportunities and intuition, all contribute to the character of the West.

Also illustrated in the diagram below with the Urdu equivalent in green:

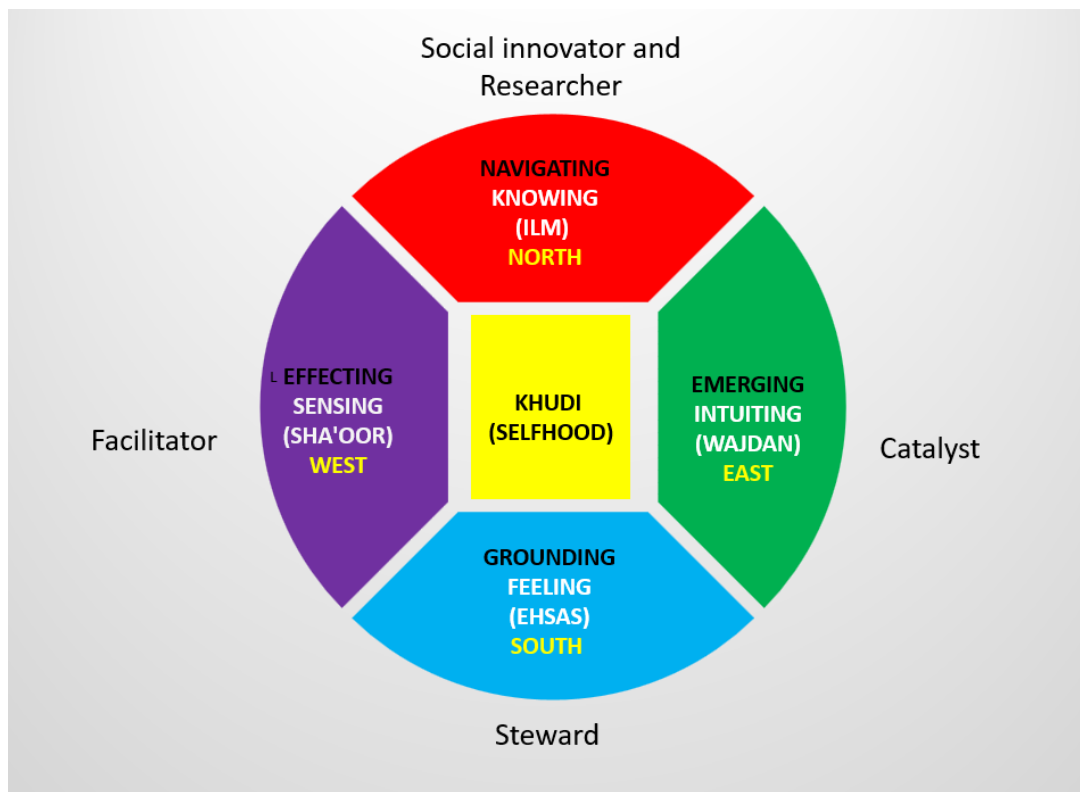


Figure 7.1: My inner ecosystem 'Khudi' and Gene-i-us

7.5 Early Attempts To Form A Research Ecosystem

My research ecosystem began to flourish during my years as an art student, where I consistently

engaged with fellow artists, community members, and the broader art world.

The catalyst for this thesis project came from my longtime friend, Aneeqa Malik, who later became a key facilitator on my doctoral research journey. Aneeqa had been a steadfast supporter of my vision for arts education. Through her collaboration with Tony Bradley, she introduced me to a social innovation centre, I saw an opportunity to engage with a receptive audience. Although my initial foray into the thesis took place in London, I explored institutional partnerships with the Prince's School of Traditional Arts. Unfortunately, due to scheduling constraints already planned a year in advance for their academic calendar, this avenue did not progress further, despite discussions with Alexander, Ronnie, Aneeqa, and me.

One of the significant challenges I encountered during the Ph.D. process was aligning with an organization. While I found entities that shared the vision of expanding art access, they often were unable to accommodate flexible collaboration due to various reasons, including resource constraints, time commitments, and a lack of commitment to the cause. Given the challenging economic climate, it was unreasonable to expect the same level of enthusiasm I had for my research, especially when asking for unpaid collaboration. It eventually became clear that I should not force this process. Instead, I envisioned and manifested the type of space and platform I wanted to create and the objectives I hoped to achieve. My doctoral research was a true embodiment of my values, and I was deeply invested in the process long before it became a thesis. In the following section, I will explain how my network expanded and how I eventually found alignment with the right people.

7.5.1 Expanding Networks In South Africa

A pivotal moment in my journey occurred when I travelled to South Africa for the Trans4m course at the Da Vinci Institute in 2015. It was during this course that I connected with my doctoral/Ph.D colleagues, who would later become integral parts of my long-term ecosystem. My friends Aysha Dalvie from London and my doctoral/PhD colleague Premie Naicker played significant roles in the pivotal shift that led me to relocate overseas. Aysha had suggested I visit Cape Town during my visit to South Africa to experience the city's beauty and meet her family. However, it was Premie who planted the seed that my vision and work could be of great benefit in South Africa. This trip not only catalysed my move to South Africa but also ignited a profound inner calling

that drew me to the country.

During the Trans4m course, I developed close relationships with colleagues like Sameer Al Abadi and Laila Majeed. Sameer and I first connected during our initial Trans4m module in Geneva in 2014. Later, during my trip to Jordan, I explored hermeneutics and Islam, spending two weeks at Sameer's home in Amman with his family to conduct research. A particularly special memory is the time I spent with Sameer's late wife, Hana, who sadly passed away in 2016. I visited Amman, Jordan again in 2017 as part of a module with my Trans4m cohort, deepening my connection with Laila. Together, we explored identity as women raised in Muslim cultures in contemporary times and the evolution of creative transformational education. Laila has remained a close friend and a strong source of support throughout my doctoral research journey.

When I moved to South Africa in 2015, I made the conscious decision to fully ground my research in Cape Town. This led me to connect with the art ecosystem in South Africa and Africa through my roles as a corporate manager and writer at Art Africa Magazine. My subsequent positions as a curator for Gallery MOMO and Jaffer Modern Gallery allowed me to delve deeper into the imbalances within the system. Through these connections and roles, I could work from within the system to explore these imbalances. It is important to note that my ecosystem is ever evolving, comprised of individuals and organizations that align with me organically. Their roles are intentionally dynamic, and I also recognize the significance of reflecting on any misalignments, which will be detailed in the next section.

7.5.2 Catalysation's From Misalignments In Building Relationships

An early institutional disappointment involving the A4 Art Foundation turned out to be a pivotal moment, setting the stage for unforeseen collaborations. In 2018, I was introduced to Josh Ginsberg, the director of the A4 Art Foundation, and Heetan Bhagat, the former curatorial consultant. This non-profit art laboratory in South Africa is described as.(A4, no date)

1. A site for experimentation, and an experiment itself.
2. A promoter of the arts as a catalyst for innovation.
3. Engaged in conversations with transdisciplinary collaborators.

4. Committed to continuous learning, quantum thinking, and serious play

Collaborating with A4, presented an intriguing challenge due to its controversial links to Israel through the Wendy Fisher trust. Nevertheless, I was drawn to the organization for its experimental and laboratory-style approach. Unfortunately, in 2020, just when our negotiations were reaching a crucial stage, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The organization, grappling with cutbacks and operational decisions, deemed that my project did not align with their immediate priorities. Their sudden change of direction left me disheartened, feeling like it was a letdown for the Muslim art community. We were on the verge of facilitating dialogues at a renowned and unique experimental art space.

Instead of letting this discourage me, I recognized the need for a swift redirection and saw it as an opportunity. It pushed me to engage more deeply with the community and to explore an approach without some of the limitations and conditions imposed by larger organizations. Historically, the silencing of voices and the dominance over others had been part of the problem in South Africa. It was crucial to work toward something that was self-sustaining. The birth of MASHŪRAH learning circles was aimed at fostering creative freedom and conversations with the goal of effecting change within the current art ecosystem.

Throughout my research, I initiated conversations with various artists, hoping to involve them in a group exhibition. Regrettably, despite their initial interest, they eventually opted out. This presented a valuable learning opportunity, as it unveiled further imbalances:

1. One artist, despite alluding to a willingness to improve conditions for other Muslim artists, seemed less invested due to the demands on his own career, particularly as he worked with high-tier galleries and had project restrictions.
2. Another artist, while having grown up in a Muslim country and culture, hesitated to be represented, as they were not religiously Muslim and did not want their art to be misinterpreted as Islamic within exhibitions with Islamic themes. Their perspective as a non-Muslim critics of Muslim regimes brought an essential dimension to the broader discussion on Muslim epistemologies.
3. The third artist expressed reservations about participating in an exhibition focusing solely on discourse related to Muslims. She argued that it risked further dividing people of colour in South Africa by implementing initiatives that created exclusivity or adhered to a

'Muslims-only' approach to advocacy. Her concerns highlighted the intricate political and racial terrain in South Africa.

It was important to work towards something that was self-sustaining and the birth of MASHŪRAH circles was intended to allow for creative freedom and conversations to take place with an end goal of manifesting a shift in the current art ecosystem. In the next and final section, we will look at the formation of the collective innovation ecosystem.

7.6 The Formation Of 'HalaqArt' –

The Collective MASHŪRAH Innovation Ecosystem

The following section will illustrate how the roles within the ecosystem adapted and evolved for HalaqArt focusing on the artists whose roles became more explicit.

7.6.1 Grounding: Fostering Community Activation Through Stewards

In the context of MASHŪRAH, the role of the steward is vital. The steward seeks to understand how the world is constructed and aspires to reconstruct the self and society by activating a vision for the future. This role requires a combination of dreams, aspirations, and the concrete skills needed to translate the vision into reality. Stewards interpret their environment indirectly by listening to the stories and experiences of others and integrating them into their plans. The identity of the steward within MASHŪRAH may evolve over time, depending on the situation and needs.

Throughout this process, certain artists embodied many of the characteristics of a steward. These individuals played significant roles within the ecosystem, providing essential support, and driving social innovation while remaining deeply rooted in their specific contexts. They bridged the gap between tradition and innovation, ensuring that progress remained connected to heritage and historical context.

1. **Hasan and Husain Essop** were instrumental from the outset, expressing interest in working on an exhibition that brought together artists from the Muslim community. Their involvement carried significant weight due to their renown and esteem within the Cape Town Muslim community. They not only provided confidence to younger artists but also signalled the support of the larger South African and international art world. Their

departure from the Goodman Gallery allowed them the creative freedom to explore their individual voices further.

2. **Faheem Rhoda Jackson**, a teacher, calligrapher, and researcher of Arabic and Jawi scripts, brought a unique perspective. His knowledge of the traditional school of arts and dedication to the revival of the Jawi script bridged the gap between ancient art practices and contemporary art. He contributed to the rich history of South African Islam and the revival of these traditions, providing a direct link to an artistic and faith-based practice.
3. **Haroon Gunn-Salie**, an artist and activist, believed in the potential of art to effect social change. His involvement was significant, as he is an accomplished artist with international and local renown. His work on Imam Haron established him as one of South Africa's most significant artists. Gunn-Salie's multidisciplinary practice focuses on socially engaged dialogue and exchange, aligning with MASHŪRAH's mission. His voice and contributions have been vital to the process.
4. **Achmat Soni**, an Islamic calligrapher and designer from Cape Town, who is extremely well known and respected amongst the Muslim community in Cape Town. He played a crucial role in popularizing the art of Arabic calligraphy in the Muslim community. His journey in the art and cultural space began in the 1980s, and his dedication to Islamic calligraphy has made a significant impact. Despite his accolades, the South African art industry failed to acknowledge him as enthusiastically as other 'masters.' Achmat's willingness to be part of the MASHŪRAH process demonstrated his support for contemporary artists exploring various approaches in their practice, fostering a sense of unity and collaboration.

These artists embody the characteristics of stewardship within the MASHŪRAH research ecosystem, bringing their unique perspectives experiences and networks to contribute to its growth and development.

7.6.2 Emerging: Awakening Consciousness Through Catalysts

These artists and individuals embodied the characteristics of Catalysts as they welcomed innovations and introduced fresh potentials and opportunities. They actively engaged with the community, seeking their active involvement in realizing newfound possibilities and driving the regeneration process.

1. **Sahlah Davids** is a mixed media artist whose work revolves around her ancestry and deep affinity for religious politics. Despite being an emerging artist, her examination of her family's history and her unique artistic approach deserved a platform. I recognized the importance of amplifying young female artists with mentors from a Muslim background. By curating her graduate work into an exhibition at Jaffer Modern, I provided Sahlah with the opportunity she deserved, and this marked her initial involvement with the MASHŪRAH process. The unique approach to her art practice, working with sculpture and repurposed antique furniture alongside her master's degree in urban design, really set her aside as a catalytic mind.
2. **Abdul Salaam**- I met through the Cape Town Muslim community and developed an ongoing discourse about the imbalances and potentials in the art sector. As an emerging artist inspired by Islam, he incorporated his background into his art. Despite his initial wariness of religious bias in art, I curated an exhibition for him at Jaffer Modern, ultimately leading to gallery representation and presence at international art fairs. Our collaboration formed a strong foundation for future independent work as a curator and artist. For me Abdul really was the embodiment of innovation in the way she approached his art practice, using new media and nontraditional methods of applying mediums.
3. **Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu** the director of Greatmore, played a significant role in community activation. Her understanding of the challenges faced by Muslim artists and her knowledge of the Cape Town Muslim community made her a valuable partner and supporter. While she was not actively involved in the MASHŪRAH artists' discussion circles, by offering Greatmore as a space to share the MASHŪRAH vision, we aimed to bring the organization back to its artist-led purpose and engage in wider discussions through its affiliation with the Triangle network of international art organizations.
4. **Igsaan Martins** as the founder and managing director of Martin Projects, Igsaan was instrumental in the development and promotion of African artists. Having worked as a director for Gallery MOMO and supported my career as a curator, he became a part of my ecosystem. While he was not involved in the MASHŪRAH artists' discussion circles, he lent his support, expertise, and relationships to the cause. His understanding of the South African art world and industry culture was invaluable for expanding the ecosystem institutionally.

5. **Shafina Jaffer** played a crucial role in the early stages of the MASHŪRAH process by providing me with curatorial freedom in her gallery, Jaffer Modern. Her unconventional approach to gallery management allowed me to develop my curatorial voice and build an appetite for the artists and issues I advocated for. This provided an opportunity to assess how audiences connect with Muslim artists and draw attention to the artists and shows I wanted to promote in a new space.

These Catalysts actively contributed to the emergence of new possibilities, forging partnerships, and driving innovation within the MASHŪRAH ecosystem.

7.6.3 Navigating: Conducting Innovation Driven Research Through Researchers

Fellow Trans4m doctoral/PhD researchers will play significant roles within MASHŪRAH, enriching the initiative with a wealth of local and global institutionalized research and researchers. This diverse group has already realized their developmental initiatives by bridging local (indigenous) and global (exogenous) knowledge, and they will contribute to MASHŪRAH with their novel theories and methodologies in shaping the innovation ecosystem.

In my Trans4m journey, I developed close collaborations with several colleagues, including Sameer Al Abadi and Laila Majeed. My connection with Sameer began during our initial Trans4m module in Geneva in 2014. Subsequently, during my visit to Jordan, I delved into hermeneutics and Islam, spending approximately two weeks at Sameer's home in Amman with his family to conduct research. A poignant and cherished memory from this period is the time I spent with Sameer's wife, Hana, who sadly passed away in 2016.

I revisited Amman, Jordan, towards the end of 2017 as part of a module with my Trans4m cohort. During this trip, I further deepened my connection with Laila. Together, we explored themes related to identity as women raised in Muslim cultures within contemporary contexts, as well as the evolution of creative transformational education. Laila has remained not only a close friend but also a strong support system throughout my doctoral research journey. Artist Laylaa Jacobs was integral to the MASHŪRAH process. We developed a very close working relationship with her applying her invaluable skills to support me on the developing project and designing our catalogue and marketing material.

All the following artists were integral parts of the HalaqArt ecosystem and alongside the artists mentioned earlier in this chapter became permanent members of the MASHŪRAH process, functioning as co-researchers and embodying elements of various roles as they evolved through the transformative process:

1. **Kamyar Bineshtarigh** - A young Iranian artist in Cape Town whose work delves into the aesthetic aspects of written language and its emotional and conceptual dimensions, crossing language boundaries. I first met Kamyar when I helped curate a show at the Eclectica Gallery in 2018. Although not a practicing Muslim, his experiences with Iranian politics mirrored those of Sepedeh, and he was eager to participate in the initiative from its inception.
2. **Shameelah Khan** - A filmmaker and activist from Johannesburg, now based in Cape Town. I met Shameelah in 2016 through the Jum'ua mosque community in Cape Town, sharing a kinship as female artists. She is an experimental documentary filmmaker and creative writer, as well as the founder of WOW, an organization empowering Muslim women. Her creative work focuses on unearthing the silenced history of her community, specifically addressing gender, ethnicity, and religion.
3. **Nabeeha Mohamed** - A Cape Town-based visual artist who explores the complexities of identity and socioeconomic privilege in post-apartheid South Africa. Her personal narrative reflects her journey as a woman of colour and how she reconciles her identity with her upbringing in a predominantly white culture. Although she is not strict Muslim, her family's affiliation with the religion has influenced her deeply, making her a valuable part of our ecosystem.
4. **Hanna Noor Mahomed** - A dynamic visual artist based in Cape Town, exploring freedom, renewal, and production within the context of her own experiences and the broader Islamic world. Her work delves into the challenges faced by women in society, especially women of color, offering a poignant perspective.
5. **Mishkaah Amien** - A visual artist from Cape Town whose vibrant works celebrate her identity as a Muslim, often featuring geometric and arabesque patterns. Her mentorship and insights into her experiences as an artist and mother have been invaluable in our journey.
6. **Shukry Adams** - A motion designer and creative director based in Cape Town, introduced

to me by Haroon Gunn Salie and artist and DJ Atiyyah Khan. His unique creative perspective challenges industry standards and enriches our ecosystem with diverse representation.

7. **Rushda Deaney** - A visual artist from Cape Town whose work reflects on her Muslim identity, personal experiences as a Muslim woman, and the complexities of expressing her female identity while celebrating her faith. Her participation in the MASHŪRAH circles helped her overcome her initial timidity as an artist, emphasizing the importance of nurturing environments for marginalized artists.

Other co-researchers include Atiyyah Khan, Nyamabo Masa Mara and Gulshan Khan.

These remarkable artists contributed to the expansion of our ecosystem, bringing unique perspectives and narratives to the forefront.

7.6.4 Effecting: Embodying Transformation Through Facilitators

Facilitators are pivotal in driving the transformation process by ensuring that all operational aspects on the ground run smoothly. They excel in handling the intricacies of the initiative, from persuading individuals to actively participate to meticulously organizing events and turning innovative ideas into concrete reality. Facilitators serve as the backbone, ensuring that both researchers and catalysts receive the necessary support to contribute effectively to the overarching objectives of the project. They are instrumental in cultivating and sustaining the vital connections among ecosystem members.

In the context of our initiative, I, along with Ukhona, emerged as the most adept facilitator, leveraging our distinct skill sets to navigate the multifaceted responsibilities of this role.

7.7 Integrating At The Centre

The integrator plays a pivotal role in weaving together the diverse elements of the innovation ecosystem, encompassing grounding, emergence, navigation, and effecting. Their primary responsibility is to oversee the seamless collaboration of all four roles, orchestrating their efforts to propel the transformational process forward. Furthermore, the integrator takes the lead in establishing the essential governance framework, essential for achieving the project's goals while preserving its intrinsic culture, spirit, and essence.

In the context of our initiative, I excelled as the integrator, leveraging my unique skill set to unify all endeavours and align them with our shared vision.

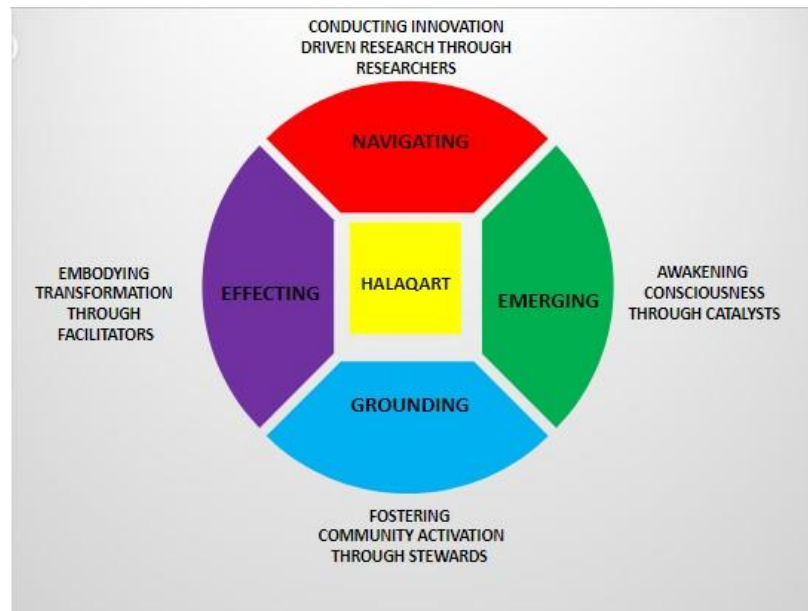


Figure 7.2: HalaqArt innovation ecosystem

7.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced innovation ecosystems and how to build them. I explored my own internal ecosystem and consciousness, as this serves as a guide for my curatorial practice, then explained how I expanded my ecosystem to incorporate the Muslim community, the South African Muslim artists, and, finally, the South African art industry.

The various kinds of community activation research led to the development of MASHŪRAH learning circles, my version of an inclusive, integrated, and locally tailored dialectic tool. In chapters 5 and 6, I applied 'MASHŪRAH circles' to help me navigate the multi-layered nature of analysing context. The following chapter 8 will lay out the new theory that was developed because of the context analysis completed.

Chapter 8

NEW EMANCIPATORY APPROACH TO INTEGRAL CURATORSHIP LEADING TO ENHANCED ACCESS ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY TO MUSLIM COMMUNITIES AND ARTISTS IN CAPE TOWN

8.1 Introduction

We now move to the third level of the 4c trajectory from Context to Co-creation. Having examined the societal imbalances and untapped potentials identified in the Context including chapters 5, 6 and 7, this chapter explores the co-creation (along with my co-researchers) of a new emancipatory model to offset the imbalances and crystallize potentials. Driven by the primary focus to create a space for collaboration, development, dialogue, and dissemination of artistic practices for Muslims in Cape Town and broader South Africa, my research-to-innovation effort was guided by a combination of Critical Theory and Feminist Theory as emancipatory methodologies.

Critical Theory is fundamentally cognitive-based and firmly geared towards the emancipation or decolonisation of the mind (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). Feminism on the other hand is primarily relational and affective in nature (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010).

Guiding this chapter is a set of tenets evolved from the comprehension of these emancipatory methodologies of Critical Theory and Feminist Theory to critically interrogate existing methods and practices of curating, access and engagement, advocacy, and development of art. In birthing an emancipatory model, I encountered an intersection between critical theory on the Eastern path of Integral Research and Feminism on the Southern Path. This new model will be collectively developed with the innovation ecosystem HalaqArt introduced in chapter 7 and thus become the foundation for developing practical approaches to strengthen advocacy and development of Muslim artists in Cape Town within the South African art ecosystem, as well as increased access and engagement of Muslim communities in Cape Town.

There is a need to include the evolution of my curatorial practice as Lessem and Schieffer (2010) explain, the aim of this research to innovation trajectory of the integral research framework is to transform reality through critique and emancipation of *self* and *society*. The researcher is at the

centre of the change-making process, and as a curator—a function with many facets—I am dynamically positioned within the exhibition-making, advocacy, access, and engagement processes. My function in life is not limited to only witnessing what occurs; it also includes my intervention as a subject and what takes place in the environment around me (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010).

In the context analysis, I attempted to comprehend the disparities in my own life as well as the context of South Africa, more specifically the Muslim community in Cape Town, where my study is entrenched, the artists that emerge from or around this community, and the South African art scene. I looked at the guiding principles of the phenomenological world I study, to review what the indicators were. I sought opportunities and gifts that would serve as the foundation for my emancipatory ideology.

It was also important to apply both methodologies because of the context we researched; the South African art sector, is entrenched in white patriarchy, and the South African female Muslim Creative voice is limited. As a female Muslim curator who has held positions of leadership in this industry, my feminine lens is a vital and natural point of reference and experience. However, inequities in hierarchical structures and patriarchal attitudes persist in both the South African art sector and Muslim communities. Whereas Feminism as a response to patriarchy is deeply embedded in the goal of representing human diversity (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). This chapter considers emancipation on both an individual level and a collective. Building on Chapter 6's contextual knowledge we determined what an emancipated Sara as a curator, arts advocate and an integral human being would look and feel like. To determine the disciplines that are relevant to my liberation, the mechanisms for dominance that lead to silencing according to Critical Theory and Feminist theory will be viewed. These combined emancipatory methodologies will be explored in detail in subsequent sections. They include the expanse of European Critical Theory, Islamic liberation theory, Feminism and its variants. Additionally, Self, Organisational and Societal experiences will be revisited.

8.2 Recap Of Chapter 6

In chapter 6 my ecosystem HalaqArt and I identified the following key areas where imbalances and potentials existed. They were:

1. **Representation** - There was limited exposure, exploration, and representation of art by artists from Muslim communities and/or art by artists who are influenced by Islam or Muslim epistemologies in the mainstream modern and contemporary visual arts spaces.
2. **Development and advocacy of diverse creative voices** - There are very few Muslim curators, gallery owners, art academics/writers, collectors and patrons in the art ecosystem supporting advocacy.
3. **Access and engagement** - Access and Engagement with Muslim communities was limited and engagement and public programming that considers the communities these artists depart from was scarce.

Context analysis is a multilayered and complex task and thus I applied Schieffer, and Lessem's Integral Context analysis paradigm that examines imbalances and opportunities within three levels - self, organization, and community from four complementary perspectives: Transpersonal, Transcultural, Transdisciplinary, and Transformational. This was supported through the dialogue circles that helped formulate the questions that would lead the inquiry through a Question matrix.

1. **South > Transpersonal:** Exploring imbalances and opportunities for activating transformation by expanding on a purely individual perspective
2. **East > Transcultural:** Exploring imbalances and opportunities toward actualizing cultural capacities
3. **North > Transdisciplinary:** Exploring imbalances and opportunities for integrating knowledge sources
4. **West > Transformational:** Exploring imbalances and opportunities for mobilising co-creative participation.

Next is an analysis of Critical Theory (CT) and its variants.

8.2.1 Co-Creating Through Critical Theory

Critical Theory is a methodology for criticism and emancipation of the self and the collective (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). It is explicitly focused on fostering the liberation of the self and others and in its broadest sense.

Critical theory aligns with profound reflection and the scrutiny of an overarching concept, which

may encompass aspects that are social, economic, financial, socio-economic, or political in nature (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). The notion of deliberate and conscientious critique across all facets of existence finds a parallel in "Kant's examination of the ideal within the Critique of Pure Reason." Kant's concept of the "Critique of Pure Reason" aims to delineate the boundaries and extent of pure reason within a specific belief framework aligned with the morality of that belief or knowledge. Kant posits that reason itself is the agent responsible for conducting this critical evaluation. Reason inherently possesses a proclivity to seek application without regard for the context of knowledge, and it is the task of critique to confine reason's epistemic application to the confines that Kant deems as the limits of knowledge (Rush, 2004: 28).

The term was introduced by the Frankfurt School of theorists and the multiple generations of German philosophers and social theorists associated with the Western European Marxist tradition (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010a).

According to Lessem and Schieffer the core tenets of Critical Theory are (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010a):

1. Your enquiry is rooted in concrete experience and daily life arising out of the suffering of the self and the community
2. You uncover power relations and hegemony
3. Your reality is regarded as socially constructed where multiple interconnections and intersections exist
4. CT is explicitly focused on fostering liberation of the self and others

Critical Theory (CT) differs from Traditional Theory in that it serves a specific practical role. Whereas Traditional theory is concerned with comprehending the world, CT goes further and seeks human liberation from enslavement and aims to build a world that meets human needs and capabilities (Inayat Ali *et al.*, 2021). CT builds on the systematic breakdown in historical capitalism to evolve new potential social orders (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). The next section addresses the originations of Critical theory.

8.2.1.1 European Critical Theory

Critical Theory is frequently acknowledged by the founding movement at The Frankfurt School -

a philosophical and social movement which began in 1923 (Arato and Gebhardt, 1978). Some of the school's primary topics and preoccupations include criticising modernity and capitalist society, as well as defining social freedom. CT interprets some of Marxist theory's fundamental economic and political ideas (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010a). According to Lessem and Schieffer (2010), Critical Theory is concerned with the co-creation of social scientific method and social science (from history and anthropology to sociology and economics). By claiming that values, attitudes, and interests influence observations that lead to ideas, it criticises empirical study (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010).

Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, stood as key figures in the initial wave of Critical Theorists (Landmann, 2011). As time advanced, a fresh wave, characterized by thinkers like Jürgen Habermas, emerged in the 1970s (Hohendahl and Silberman, 1979). This second generation extended the influence of the Frankfurt School globally. Notable contributors from this era include Axel Honneth and Paulo Freire (Corradetti, n.d). The following section will provide an introduction and critique of the latter two in the context of this thesis.

8.2.1.2 Axel Honneth's Theory Of Recognition

Axel Honneth, a prominent figure associated with the Frankfurt School, has significantly contributed to the concept of recognition. He emphasizes the importance of creating environments that validate individuals' uniqueness and humanity (Loquias, 2019), which I personally resonate with as it involves perceiving people as distinct individuals, actively listening to their experiences, and fostering meaningful connections to promote social inclusion.

Honneth's theory of recognition is structured into three spheres. In the private sphere, encompassing family and friends, self-confidence is nurtured through affection, attention, and care, where love serves as a prerequisite (Presbey, 2003). In the legal sphere, self-respect and recognition are rooted in democratic ideals, ensuring equality before the law and non-discrimination. The sphere of solidarity involves collective settings where self-esteem arises from acknowledgement within a community, team, or collective (Presbey, 2003). Additionally, Honneth defines three levels of self-relationship: self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, each associated with recognizing and celebrating various aspects of oneself (Presbey, 2003).

Participating in a supportive artistic community is essential to gain significant recognition but does not guarantee a sense of acknowledgement. As an arts graduate and curator, I have personally experienced isolation and frustration, especially when discussing Islam in my practice. This experience highlights the importance of creating inclusive environments where everyone feels seen, heard, respected, included, and appreciated. Recognizing the challenges faced by Muslim artists, including overcoming preconceived notions about their faith and culture, is crucial. Muslim artists can find belonging in creative networks that foster inclusion and enable the creation of art that captures the complexity of Muslim experiences.

Honneth's theory of recognition resonates within the context of Cape Town, where various justice movements can be seen as struggles for recognition. Recognizing cultural distinctness and the historical context in acknowledging differences is imperative. In my experience, the art world can appropriate, dismiss, and diminish cultures.

Honneth argues that struggles for justice and resistance are morally motivated, rooted not only in injustice but also in disrespect. People revolt and resist based on their implicit perception of what they deserve (Presbey, 2003).

John Dewey suggests that individuals cannot react to social injustice in emotionally neutral ways and that proactive behavior is necessary to alleviate the stress caused by humiliation (Presbey, 2003). Art practice can serve as a proactive response, particularly in addressing the challenges faced by Muslim artists.

In reflecting on this section, the Zulu greeting "Sawubona," which means "I see you. You are valuable to me," holds significance. It underscores the importance of creating spaces where others feel heard and seen, even if we cannot exist for others in a literal sense (Sawubona- Loom International, n.d).

Next, we will look at Paulo Friere, another critical theorist whose work also deeply resonates with me.

8.2.1.3 Paulo Freire's 'Critical Pedagogy' And Black Conscious Movement

In my exploration of South Africa and its complex history, I grappled with addressing sensitive

themes as a foreigner, given my British background. The deep-seated resentment toward the monarchy and the colonial legacy in the nation added to the tensions. Though these sentiments were not personally directed at me, conversations on these topics often became uncomfortable. Consequently, I chose to delay my involvement in curating and public programming in Cape Town until I was better equipped to navigate these sensitive issues responsibly and to learn from my environment. Recognizing the importance of accurately identifying and interpreting racial, political, and social injustices within South African society.

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, and critical theorist, underscores the need to amplify the voice of the oppressed in the face of oppression and inequality (Sinwell, 2022). He posits that economic oppression arises from silence, illiteracy, cultural dominance, and ignorance (Sinwell, 2022). While his critical pedagogy was initially developed for education, it can be applied to curating, engagement, and co-creation with artists and communities in Cape Town, shifting the curator's role from dominance to collaboration.

Freire's approach emphasizes a mutual learning process, where teachers and students learn from each other through dialogue, breaking away from one-directional knowledge transmission (Ishihara *et al.* 2021). This approach was initiated at the Centre for Environment and Development Studies (CEMUS), in a joint centre between Uppsala University and Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, in which students were hired as Course Coordinators (CCs) to develop and facilitate freestanding university courses (Ishihara *et al.* 2021). By engaging in dialogue, both teachers and students mutually give and receive, nurturing students' creative abilities rather than belittling them (Ishihara *et al.*, 2021).

According to Freire, genuine education empowers students to develop critical thinking skills, break free from oppressive systems and actively engage with the world (Ishihara *et al.*, 2021). He believed education should be a transformative tool, fostering agency and autonomy, and making students less susceptible to domination and manipulation. Thus, true liberation, according to Freire, requires more than just a change in mindset; it demands challenging and transforming the systems perpetuating oppression (Ishihara *et al.*, 2021).

South Africa has a long-standing tradition of Freirean adult education focusing on community engagement and social justice. Freire's ideas influenced the Black Consciousness Movement

(BCM) and broader struggles against apartheid and continue to hold relevance (Sinwell, 2022). The Pedagogy of the Oppressed arrived in South Africa in the early 1970s through the University Christian Movement (UCM), despite being outlawed by the Apartheid administration. Paulo Freire's influence on Steve Biko, founder of the South African Students' Organization (SASO), is noteworthy (Sefatsa, 2020).

As discussed in earlier chapters, the BCM stressed the importance of Black leadership in the struggle against apartheid (Chimakonam, 2021) and thus embraced Freire's ideas, engaging in ongoing critical reflection as part of an ongoing conscientization. The BCM also played a crucial role in the lives of Cape Muslims, as discussed in earlier chapters concerning Imam Haroon's role and his ultimate sacrifice in the struggle against Apartheid. The next section will delve into the emergence of Islamic liberation theory in South Africa, examining South African Muslim thinkers such as Farid Esack and Abdal Khader Tayob.

8.2.1.4 Islamic Liberation Theory And Its Development In The Western Cape

Critical Theory serves as a framework with the intention of fostering progress for individuals who are marginalized and oppressed (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010a). Within the context of Cape Town's Muslim community, which continues to grapple with marginalization, my research led me to scholars who have focused on the concepts of Islamic liberation and its evolution within the local Muslim societies. In Chapter 6, I delved into the roles played by earlier imams and political exiles, such as Sheikh Yusuf and Tuan Guru, as well as the significant contributions of Imam Haron as a fervent anti-apartheid campaigner and advocate for the black-conscious movement.

Professor Abdal Khader Tayob, a prominent scholar, has conducted extensive research on modern Islam in South Africa and the emergence of a modern Islamic paradigm. His work offers valuable insights into the social history of Muslims in South Africa, underscoring the historical authority of religious leadership in the realm of Islamic knowledge (Tayob, n.d). Tayob emphasizes that Islam(ism) in South Africa is characterized by its strong emphasis on public engagement, political involvement, and identity, with distinct regional expressions (Tayob, n.d).

However, it is worth noting that in the context of South African racial politics, Islam is sometimes perceived as foreign, not only by outsiders but even by some of its own followers (Jacobs, 2022).

This perception is noticeable in Cape Town, where Islam is most visibly practiced as a religion. I encountered this issue when I extended an invitation to a group of Black artists to participate in an exhibition at the Jaffer Modern Gallery in Cape Town. Several of the artists expressed reservations, as they could not envision how their work fit into the framework of a "Muslim gallery," as they referred to it. This incident shed light on the underlying tensions between the Black and Cape Muslim communities. The artists regarded the gallery's culture as something unfamiliar, rather than an extension of their own. While my previous focus had been on the Muslim community's attitudes toward Black communities and Black Muslims, this encounter provided insight into the opposite perspective, which left me perplexed. I explained to the artists that the gallery's mission was to showcase contemporary African art from a diverse array of artists, irrespective of their religious or cultural background. I also pointed out that many Muslim artists explore themes such as identity, social justice, and spirituality, aligning with the concerns of Black South African artists. Ultimately, the artists agreed to participate in the exhibition, and their work received a positive reception from all audiences.

This encounter underscored the underlying contradictions and discussions surrounding attitudes towards Islam. Historically, Islam emerged as a creole identity, attracting converts from various enslaved populations who brought their own cultural practices and beliefs, which were subsequently integrated into the evolving Islamic tradition (Jacobs, 2022). Islam transcends racial divisions however in the apartheid era, Tayob highlights that ethnic hierarchies were used to control people. Although Muslims could openly practice their religion, it meant supporting the oppressive system. Tayob explains Muslims, like others of their ethnicity, experienced persecution and exploitation. Colored Muslims struggled to fit into a society that assigned specific roles to different groups (Jacobs, 2022).

Nevertheless, the shift toward a more liberating Islamic approach to combating apartheid took decades. In South Africa, the initial expression of Islamic liberation theology, known as "Review of Faith" and authored by Farid Esack, played a pivotal role in fostering personal devotion and conscientization against apartheid (Palombo, 2014). Islamic liberation theology evolved from the political actions of Muslims opposing settler colonialism and apartheid (Palombo, 2014). Matthew Palombo (2014) highlights that political Islam, not in the context of state-building but as a political praxis, provided a unique platform for the development of Islamic liberation theology, which

navigated the intersection of two distinct ideological paths: humanism and Islamism.

According to Palombo, these two ideological paths, though seemingly incompatible, possess contrasting principles (Palombo, 2014).

Humanism:

1. Bases political activism on the inherent political dimension of human existence to rejuvenate humanity.
2. Downplays the significance of religion.
3. Aims to prevent the mystification of the liberation struggle through religious means.
4. Seeks to avoid dividing people along religious lines.

Islamism:

1. Anchors political activism in the principles of being a Muslim for the revival of Islam.
2. Emphasizes the role of religion.
3. Strives to ensure that humanism does not overshadow the importance of religion in people's lives.
4. Concentrates on the teachings of historical Islam.

Recognizing the limitations of both ideologies, it became apparent that holding multiple ideologies concurrently was possible, giving rise to the distinct Islamic liberation theory in South Africa apartheid (Palombo, 2014). Ebrahim Moosa South African Professor of Islamic Thought and Muslim societies underscores the essential role of a thoughtful perspective in the political engagement and duties of Muslim leaders. This critical theological approach demanded their active involvement with contemporary philosophy and modern social sciences to utilize Islamic theology for the cause of human liberation apartheid (Palombo, 2014). As Muslims became part of the anti-apartheid movement, their motivation was rooted in their religious identity and the innate responsibility held by every Muslim to resist any manifestation of injustice (Palombo, 2014).

Residing in Cape Town, I observed ongoing efforts to establish a link between Coloured or Malay

Muslims and their Indonesian heritage and culture. This connection can be attributed to several factors, potentially including resistance to perceiving Islam as an African religion and racial dynamics within the Muslim community. The challenges faced by Islam in its relationship with the South African art community parallel the friction and convergence experienced between Islamism and Humanism during the apartheid struggle. In my perspective, contemporary Muslim artists and the Muslim community in Cape Town encounter a similar dilemma as Islamism did in the past because Islam in South Africa exists as a discursive space that opposes the secularisation of the religion. Secularisation, as exists in the art world as well, attempts to confine faith to the private realm by reducing it to a matter of culture, ethnicity, and traditions, thereby excluding it from the political sphere. Political Islam, as aptly described by Nadvi, encompasses a broader discursive space that allows for various modes of ideological expression (Palombo, 2014). In the apartheid era, the government made Islam a private and secular matter to control Muslims and stop them from joining the freedom movement. They purposely portrayed Muslims as not truly African or European, pushing them to the margins of society (Palombo, 2014).

Based on Palombo (2014) discourse, Islamic liberation theory is broken into three fundamental commitments:

Commitment 1:

1. It is a people's theology rooted in an understanding of struggle and experience of oppression; the praxis of suffering is key.
2. Theology is not the discourse of detached, elite scholars reflecting on idealistic texts and occasionally offering opinion

Commitment 2:

1. The importance of cultivating conscientization is central to Islamic liberation theology
2. Understand social structures and ideologies as historical, changeable and a product of privilege and biased human activity.
3. Oppressed people have an epistemic advantage in understanding oppression and sacred text far beyond scholarly analyses

4. A critical consciousness speaks of the importance of *basirah* (insight)

Commitment 3:

1. Requires a commitment to political praxis for justice and avoids reducing religion to the socially privatised or personal struggle of the individual.
2. In struggles for justice it is necessary to connect one daily faith practice with liberation praxis
3. Conscientisation and Taqwa (God consciousness) go hand in hand
4. To become aware of the underlying dynamics of systemic injustice, recognizing self-interest and personal gain.

In conclusion, Islamic Liberation Theology (ILT) emerges as a significant component of a rich tradition that involves critical moral inquiry into political engagement. From a different angle, ILT transcends mere theoretical exploration; it manifests as a daily religious practice, representing an unwavering devotion to Allah amidst the presence of injustice.

Recognizing this dual nature of ILT is paramount in effectively engaging with and representing the Muslim community in Cape Town. By comprehending its multifaceted significance, we can foster meaningful collaboration and dialogue with individuals whose lives are deeply influenced by this profound theological framework. Embracing this understanding will not only strengthen connections with the Muslim community but also contribute to a more inclusive and informed approach to addressing social and political issues from their perspective.

The next section will look at critical theory in the domain of art and evaluate some key Muslim creative voices both international and on the African continent.

8.2.1.5 Critical Theory And Art

Critical art theory is a dynamic field of inquiry that I first encountered during my art journey at Central St Martins university. It delves into the social, political, and cultural implications of art, drawing upon diverse philosophical, sociological, and political frameworks (Schnee, 2016).

Emerging in the mid-20th century, critical art theory challenged prevailing art theories like formalism and art for art's sake. Instead, it aimed to interrogate traditional notions of art and aesthetics and explore the intricate connections between art and its social and political contexts (Ray, 2007).

Critical art theory encompasses a wide range of perspectives, including Marxist aesthetics, feminist art theory, postcolonial theory, queer theory, poststructuralism (Schnee, 2016), and Islamic aesthetics to name a few.

Throughout history, people have debated the meaning of art, considering its emotional impact, its relationship with society, economy, and politics, the creative processes involved, and the proper ways to interpret and comprehend artworks (Schnee, 2016). This raises a fundamental inquiry: should critical theory establish a universal standard for the analysis, comprehension, and assessment of all artworks? (Schnee, 2016).

This question holds significant relevance to this thesis, which explores the nuanced aspects of preserving and curating Muslim culture accurately, especially in the context of the profound influence of colonial encounters on the art histories of marginalized communities.

In my curatorial practice, I have always been driven by a keen interest in transnational dialogues and the ways in which history, migration, oppression, liberation, memory, and identity shape contemporary realities. My work centres on questioning the challenges of transmitting knowledge through theoretical research and socially engaged art projects. I draw inspiration from critical art theory and practice and knowledge systems originating from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa, as they continue to inform and inspire my understanding and research pursuits. My commitment lies in utilising my voice and creating a platform to amplify marginalised perspectives and foster meaningful dialogue and creative output. The next section will delve into Islamic critical art theory, exploring its distinct contributions to the field.

8.2.1.6 Islamic Art Theories (Iat) And Aesthetics

The predominant perspective among art historians and contemporary critics constrains the definition of Islamic art, mainly focusing on visual expressions of Islamic creativity in fields like architecture, calligraphy, and related applied arts. It also embraces the innovative amalgamation

of aesthetics and utility found in architectural structures, books, manuscripts, tools, furnishings, and various functional items (Mohammed, 2017). Islamic art theory, in this light, functions as an approach to framing and understanding art and aesthetics rooted in Islamic culture, philosophy, and societal norms. Hanash explores diverse theories concerning Islamic art and its complex interrelations with individuals, society, history, culture, and the audience. Each field of study has specific goals, requiring tailored methods he describes (Mohammed, 2017).

For instance, investigating the connection between Islamic art and the culture of its producing society differs from studying how it relates to the broader social system. Similarly, the analysis of how Islamic art influences both artists and audiences vary (Mohammed, 2017). All these studies collectively form the 'theory of Islamic art,' which constructs frameworks, concepts, methodologies, and practical approaches to understand the multifaceted significance of Islamic artworks in social, cultural, religious, and philosophical contexts (Mohammed, 2017).

The term 'Islamic art' emerged in the early 19th century, and its study can be divided into three phases (Mohammed, 2017). The first phase focused on discovering and understanding art from different historical periods, examining their cultural roles with Orientalists using varied methods. In the second phase, academic studies emphasized the uniqueness of Islamic art. Orientalists living in Muslim regions and Arab/Muslim researchers and Muslim researchers made significant contributions. However, Orientalist biases sometimes obscured the authenticity and richness of Islamic art. The ongoing third phase signifies a post-Orientalist academic approach. It corrected Orientalist inaccuracies and biases and introduced a more subjective, philosophical, and aesthetic approach to Islamic art. During this phase, many ideas, and analyses, including core themes like the concept of Islamic art, have undergone reassessment (Mohammed, 2017).

I noted a challenge in context analysis regarding the secularisation in academic teaching of Islamic art scholarship during my time studying for my Masters. This issue warrants further consideration and attention, as it hinders a holistic understanding of Islamic art and its broader implications. By addressing these concerns and fostering a more inclusive approach to the study of Islamic art, we can better appreciate its profound cultural and historical significance. The next section will explore Feminism.

8.3 Feminism Theory In General

According to Lessem and Schieffer, Feminism as a research methodology is a tool for emancipation and achieving social justice. Furthermore, it challenges the binary view of subject and object and moves the researcher into dialogical spaces with the community towards collective knowledge creation. Feminist research also complements the masculine perspective (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010d).

According to Lessem and Schieffer (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010). the key tenets of feminism are:

1. You aim to create social change.
2. You see knowledge as a tool for liberation not domination.
3. Feminist research strives to represent human diversity.
4. As a researcher you as a person are included.
5. And so is nature.

Feminism can be divided into three distinct waves; each representing a particular period and focus of the movement. The first wave emerged during the 19th and early 20th century, primarily in the United States, and concentrated on securing women's suffrage rights (Malinowska, 2020). Moving forward to the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave emerged as the women's liberation movement, aiming to achieve legal and social equality for women in Western societies, addressing issues of discrimination and gender inequality (Malinowska, 2020). The third wave began in the 1990s, recognizing the importance of intersectionality in women's lives, emphasising how various factors such as race, ethnicity, class, religion, gender, and nationality influence their experiences within feminist discourse (Malinowska, 2020).

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that Western feminism has not consistently been empowering for women in the non-western world or cultures. To gain a more comprehensive understanding within my own context and the female Muslim artists I work with, it is essential to explore Islamic Feminism in South Africa, which is rooted in the lived experiences of Muslim women and their specific cultural, social, and historical backgrounds in the following section.

8.3.1 Islamic Feminism In South Africa

Islamic Feminism is a movement that seeks to reconcile the principles of Feminism with the teachings of Islam, advocating for gender equality within the Islamic framework (Wadud *et al.*, 2020). The emergence of Islamic Feminism in South Africa during the 1980s and 1990s can be attributed to multiple factors. Firstly, it was grounded in developments within the Muslim community in the 1980s when there was a noticeable trend of globally reinterpreting Islamic scriptures from a feminist and contextual perspective, facilitating their reevaluation within the South African context (Jeenah, 2006).

The backdrop of apartheid the anti-apartheid struggle and the emergence of political Islam provided fertile ground for the development of Islamic feminism in South Africa. Islamic activists, actively participating in the struggle, found themselves reinterpreting Islamic scriptures to align with these causes. This reinterpretation not only influenced political discussions but also impacted conversations about women's rights (Jeenah, 2006).

Over recent decades, Muslim in South Africa women have been asserting their rights and working towards greater involvement within their community, paving the way for the growth of Islamic feminism (Jeenah, 2001). Their persistent efforts to achieve independence and empowerment have been instrumental in shaping this progressive movement.

Understanding Islamic Feminism in South Africa and globally is imperative to effectively address the pressing challenges faced by women within Islamic contexts and the South African art industry. As a female Muslim curator, I have learnt the importance of placing women at the centre of these discussions. Recognizing the significance of women's experiences and perspectives and giving them a central role in shaping the discourse on art and leadership within the art industry will be instrumental in finding meaningful solutions. By embracing and empowering women, we can cultivate a more inclusive and equitable environment that genuinely represents the diverse voices and talents of Muslim women artists and those who want to work in the industry. Consequently, this will enrich the artistic landscape and contribute to the broader advancement of gender equality and social progress in the country. Next, we will take the learning from these theories to introduce a new set of tenets.

8.4 New Evolved Tenets

The following are an evolved set of tenets from knowledge harvested in Critical Theory and Feminism and the tenets presented at the outset of this chapter.

Tenets:

1. **The practice of recognition and transformative dialogue:** You understand the importance of Practising Recognition for gradually developing meaningful connection with the people you aim to support, and it forms the foundation for fostering social inclusion and valuing each person's dignity.
2. **Dismantling systemic barriers:** You recognise the need to dismantle systematic barriers that perpetuate injustice in the art world. By challenging these barriers, you strive to create a more accessible and equitable environment for artists and communities.
3. **Mutual learning:** You emphasise dialogue and mutual learning in curating, engagement, and co-creating with artists and communities and view communities as a source of knowledge and resources.
4. **Critical consciousness and proactive behaviour:** You recognize that art practice is proactive behaviour. It aims to empower artists and communities to express themselves freely, especially in the face of oppressive narratives and challenges. A critical consciousness speaks from a place of *basirah* (spiritual insight).
5. **Curatorial justice:** You understand the principles of liberation to address the specific challenges faced by Muslim communities in South Africa. You emphasise justice in curatorial practices and art engagement.
6. **Dismantling Eurocentrism:** You challenge the Eurocentric paradigm in art history and advocate for the recognition of diverse centres, including African, Arab, and Muslim art, and adopt a global perspective that includes marginalised voices in the art discourse that provincializes Europe.
7. **Inclusive Feminism:** You recognize the importance of empowering Muslim women's voices in the art world. You strive to address critical issues faced by women within Islamic contexts and the South African art industry, ensuring that their experiences and perspectives shape the discourse and liberation.

In the upcoming section, I will conduct a thorough examination of key concepts relevant to curating, engaging, and advocating, aiming to propose alternative methodologies. I continue to ask:

1. What kind of foundation can my ecosystem and I create in Cape Town and by extension South Africa to provide better representation, exposure and support for artists departing from Muslim epistemologies - particularly female artists and cultural workers?
2. How can we better engage Muslim communities in the development and advocacy of creative voices?
3. How can we develop the community engagement approaches of the art industry?
4. How do we use the GENE-i-us and CARE-ing models, along with the 4C's research trajectory, to empower the self and the collective through a new practical integral access, engagement, advocacy model and integral curatorial practice.

These questions will be explored within key topics with the application of the above evolved tenets:

1. Participating in Authentic Engagement and Recognition
2. Building on Subjective Aesthetics, Beauty and *Basirah*(Spiritual Insight)
3. Navigating Systemic Barriers
4. Mutual learning and co-curation

8.5 Participating In Authentic Engagement And Recognition

The importance of Practising recognition for gradually developing meaningful connection with the people you aim to support forms the foundation for fostering social inclusion and valuing each person's dignity (Presbey, 2003). Effective community participation entails empowering those who are most impacted by an organisation's endeavours, allowing them to have a say in programs and implementation. The success and vigor of an organization can be gauged by its level of connection to the larger community. The idea of cultural vitality acknowledges that arts and culture have their roots within communities rather than solely from external influences. When an organization invests in engaging with the community, it not only strengthens itself but also contributes to economic stability and enriches the cultural vibrancy of the region (Jackson *et al.*, 2006).

Hence, giving preference to fostering relationships with the communities served when formulating strategies, managing finances, and distributing resources is crucial. Nevertheless, many organizations tend to follow the opposite approach. Non-profit and government-funded sectors provide an ideal environment for the development and engagement of both artists and communities. Government arts funding in Cape Town is scarce and galleries and private financiers dominate funding art projects and development over Non-For-Profit organisations that continue to face challenges as highlighted in chapter 6. For this reason, private commercial organisations need to rethink how they operate in the ecosystem particularly if they are currently dominating the narrative and how artists work.

Honneth underscores the significance of establishing three crucial spheres for authentic recognition: Self-Confidence, Self-Respect, and Self-Esteem (Presbey, 2003). By recognizing the value of acknowledgement and actively engaging with others, we have the potential to foster an environment that upholds the dignity of every individual and actively works to dismantle systemic barriers that perpetuate injustices. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that numerous arts and culture organizations in Cape Town are still in the process of comprehending the importance of genuine community engagement and recognition.

This issue was vividly illustrated in a dialogue I described earlier in this narrative at Zeitz MOCAA. I pointed out to the Head Curator the museum's evident disconnection from community engagement and inclusivity practices. Many arts and organizations in Cape Town primarily focus on transactional sales, without making a concerted effort to build community connections. They favour community outreach programs, rather than engagement, which primarily focuses on what could be done for the community rather than *with* the community. However, its impact leads to short-term benefits without establishing lasting connections. This approach further perpetuates inequality and hierarchy, limiting the representation and support for artists from Muslim backgrounds and their communities.

Yet, while there is a pressing need for improved representation of Muslim artists, an even greater need exists for cultural workers and leaders from the community to hold decision-making positions within the art industry. Regrettably, such representation is lacking. Artists within the art ecosystem often lack substantial influence and are subject to the systems already in place. Building an artist's career is just as easy as severing ties with an artist and removing them from gallery representation.

Maya Angelou asserted that embracing diverse voices is akin to celebrating the mosaic of human experiences (Verma, 2023).

Genuine connections and empathetic engagement are transformative acts that bridge societal divides. While acknowledging the industry's need for profitability to support Muslim artists and cultural workers' careers, I wish to emphasise the importance of building reciprocal communal relationships. By doing so, we can foster a co-creative approach to curating, engaging, and advocating that aligns more effectively with the context and proves to be more sustainable due to its deep-rooted connection with the Muslim community.

We should champion leaders who demonstrate a profound comprehension of the experiences of artists and possess the ability to navigate the complex terrain they navigate. Such leaders not only represent artists but also nurture their talents, ultimately contributing to a vibrant and thriving artistic ecosystem. However, the crucial aspect lies in comprehending a community and effectively representing them, their stories and understanding their knowledge systems whilst engaging them with the art. This necessitates embodying similar experiences or adopting a lens through which to approach their perspective. Unfortunately, this is not the prevalent situation in the South African Art industry, where the power of voice predominantly rests in the hands of those with wealth and power, consequently perpetuating a repetitive cycle of inequality.

We must consider how art can positively impact the community, but this can only be achieved through authentic engagement, empathy, and conscious awareness with *Basirah* (spiritual insight). Without these elements, there is an essential disconnect between the artistic endeavours and the community they are intended to serve. Authentic recognition should not merely be an afterthought arising from a successful outcome or profit. Instead, it should be integral to the entire process of engagement and showcasing right from the start, rather than waiting until the end when the results become apparent.

The previous chapters highlight that authentic recognition has not taken place historically for the Muslim community, Baderoon (2014) calls it 'Ambiguous visibility' which means to be seen but not authentically and this creates an air of mystery and staged identity of a community. So, while valuing relationships is indeed a crucial factor, equally significant is the nature of the relationships we establish with the community. The quality of these connections profoundly impacts the

effectiveness and sustainability of our endeavours.

The process of achieving authentic community engagement is more complex than it may seem. To ensure meaningful involvement, organizations should regularly hold inclusive meetings involving their board, staff, artists, stakeholders, community members, and leaders. Sometimes, due to hierarchy and personal interests, these discussions lack transparency. Organizational leaders should pose specific questions to gain insights into their community engagement dynamics:

1. Is engagement an ongoing process or limited to specific events
2. Does participation involve individuals or groups?
3. Is engagement characterized by formality or informality?
4. Are the platforms and methods used accessible to the communities involved?

To enhance their presence and acceptance within the community, arts and culture organizations should also consider the following:

1. Maintain a consistent commitment to promoting diverse perspectives, particularly when seeking community input.
2. Clearly define and communicate the reasons for community engagement to avoid any perception of performative actions.
3. Collaborate with community members to set goals, allocate resources, and determine outcomes. Avoid unintentionally overpowering the community's voice and instead, amplify the voices of those most affected.
4. Select an engagement strategy, provide clear guidance, and follow through on the plans
5. Create opportunities for raising and addressing concerns. Regular and ongoing interactions allow people to express their concerns before they escalate into significant issues or spiral out of control.

In the art ecosystem, community museums also play a vital role beyond institutional museums and galleries. They uncover overlooked indigenous knowledge and contribute to local expertise. Valmont Layne's insights into the founding of the District Six Museum in Cape Town in 1988, as part of the Hands-Off District Six Campaign, marked the emergence of community museums as a new sector in South Africa (Layne, 2004). These community museums primarily originate from local efforts tied to events like land claims, urban revitalization, and archaeological discoveries.

They challenge established museum practices by actively involving marginalized communities, and the District Six Museum is a tangible example of this movement (Layne, 2004). This museum's unique focus on land restitution and aiding those affected by forced removals has gained it recognition on both local and international fronts. Anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff describe it as a "meta-museum" critiquing traditional museums and their politics (Layne, 2004).

Significantly, numerous artists within the dialogue circle, including prominent figures like Haroon Gunn Salie, Essops, and Thania Petersen, have actively engaged with the District Six Museum. However, persistent funding challenges have hindered its operations. The impact of the pandemic nearly led to its closure, prompting external building managers to assume control, leading to considerable tension within the museum's political landscape and among longstanding staff members. This situation serves as a stark reminder of the vulnerability that external factors can impose even on the most resilient community institutions.

The next section will look at the idea of building on Subjective Aesthetics and Beauty.

8.5.1 Building On Subjective Aesthetics/Beauty

Aesthetics, as a philosophical exploration, consistently challenges our perceptions of beauty, the concept of the beautiful, and the notion of "taste" when considering both human-made creations and natural elements. It involves inquiries into the origins and fundamental nature of art, as well as the interpretation and significance of beauty (Scruton and Munro, 2023).

Wilhelm Dilthey's emphasis on subjectivity in aesthetics highlights the deeply personal nature of aesthetic experiences and evaluations (Hansen, 2014). In this context, Dilthey's insights gain relevance, as he argued that objectivity has limited influence on our interactions with art. It underscores the interconnectedness of beauty, artistic value, and art interpretation with individual observers' preferences, emotions, and unique perspectives (Hansen, 2014).

While the Quran draws our attention to the beauty of divine attributes and their manifestation through the beauty of creation using terms like *Husn* (excellence, beauty), *Zeenah* (adornment, beauty), *Jamal* (attraction, beauty) and *Baheej* (beautiful, delightful) (Islam, 2018) the Muslim community sometimes grapples with reconciling the concept of beauty and its appropriate applications. The common question arises: What defines the prevalent sense of beauty experienced

within the Muslim aesthetic? Is it shaped by traditional or societal influences, or is it inherently unique to everyone? Moreover, is beauty the sole emotion that art aims to evoke?

Dithey's subjective approach to aesthetics diverges from the idea of a universal or objective standard by which all art can be judged (Schnee, 2016). Instead, it suggests that the contribution, appreciation, and evaluation of art are heavily contingent on the viewer's (and artists) personal background, cultural influences, emotional responses, and individual preferences.

This discussion naturally leads us to consider the European standardization of art history, the secularization of art spaces, and how these narratives should be conveyed when engaging with faith communities in Cape Town, as we will explore in the following section.

8.5.2 Secularisation Of The Art Space

In the context of the 19th and 20th centuries, Wendy Shaw highlights significant societal, intellectual, and artistic changes, heavily influenced by major shifts in Europe's social, political, and religious landscapes, including the Enlightenment, industrialization, and colonial expansion (Shaw, 2019). These transformations led to the emergence of the discipline of art history to reevaluate a region formerly seen as predominantly Christian through the lens of the West. This transition involved moving many customs once associated with religious worship to the realm of art appreciation (James, 2021).

These profound shifts challenged established religious norms and hierarchical structures, resulting in the increasing secularization of society and a critical reassessment of traditional religious beliefs (Shaw, 2019). Art historians responded by adopting a more secular approach in the study of Islamic art to, emphasizing aesthetics, historical context, and cultural significance. This shift allowed for a broader interpretation of artworks, freeing them from their original religious contexts (Shaw, 2019). Art was no longer exclusively tied to religious rituals and worship but came to be recognized as a means of expressing human creativity, emotions, and ideas (Shaw, 2019). Furthermore, as European powers extended their influence globally, they aimed to establish cultural and intellectual supremacy over other regions.(Shaw, 2019) Colonial powers imposed their definitions of art and aesthetics on colonized societies, often viewing indigenous artistic traditions as inferior while elevating European art as the standard of excellence (Shaw, 2019).

Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge the limitations inherent in these contemporary categories and to broaden our perspectives by embracing alternative approaches and categories. To embark on the journey of decolonizing art history and genuinely embracing subjectivity within art practice, we must take a step back, acknowledge the existence of diverse categories, and permit them to guide our inquiries (James, 2021). While European art and its historical significance are undoubtedly of value, this should not occur at the expense of other cultures and their unique artistic expressions. The next section will look at this further with the confluence of Islam and Africa and the art of Ebrahim El-Salahi.

8.5.3 A Confluence Of Islam And Africa Through The Art Of Ibrahim El-Salahi

I have long been captivated by the Khartoum school (Tate Modern, n.d) and the Casablanca art school (Trigg, 2023) as these artistic movements brought together the fusion of African, Arab, and Western traditions. Two of my favourite artists Mohamed Melehi and Ibrahim Salahi were part of them. I returned once again to think about how the confluence of Islam and Africa developed in the schools for inspiration. In this section, we will focus on Sudan and El-Salahi. I first encountered Ibrahim El-Salahi work exhibited at the ‘Word into Art’ exhibition at the British Museum in 2006. An influential figure in African and Arab Modernism El-Salahi's own pioneering integration of Islamic, African, Arab, and Western artistic traditions has established a groundbreaking visual vocabulary in Sudan (Hackworth, 2016). El-Salahi's innovative fusion of multiple aesthetic traditions has opened new avenues for comprehending African and Arab modernisms. His work exemplifies the intricacies of Sudanese identity as well as the possibility for repositioning African, Arab, and Muslim art within a global contemporary framework, which I believe is especially applicable in the South African Muslim context (Hackworth, 2016).

Delving into the intricate concept of identity, El-Salahi wrestles with the multi-layered facets of Sudanese identity. He reflects upon this intricate blend of being Arab, Nubian, African, and other elements. Within this intricate web of identities, he grapples with the perception of Arabs seeing him as African, while among Africans, Sudanese are often viewed as Arabs. This prompts him to question where he truly fits in (Browne, 2021).

El-Salahi's artistic journey was marked by its own set of challenges. Following an exhibition in Khartoum, he was disheartened to find that attendees seemed primarily motivated by the

refreshments, causing the exhibition to quickly fade into obscurity (Browne, 2021). Encountering a creative impasse that persisted for two years, he embarked on a period of introspection, pondering why his work failed to resonate with people. It was during this reflective phase that he introduced small Arabic inscriptions in the corners of his paintings, resembling postage stamps. Astonishingly, this subtle alteration piqued the interest of viewers (Browne, 2021). As he delved deeper into the meanings behind these letters, a transformative process unfurled. The once-abstract symbols gradually gave way to the emergence of the visual language for which he is now renowned (El-Salahi, 2013).



Figure 8.2: El-Salahi in studio, Ibrahim El Salahi artwork

Source: Tate Modern website

In Cape Town, Muslim artists do not adhere to a specific 'school' or immediately recognisable visual vocabulary exclusive to their community, unlike those in North Africa and Sudan. Nevertheless, the Muslim art scene does unite in its unique political, racial and religious features, within performance, photography, self-portraiture, and materiality playing prominent roles, even though the development of renowned painters and sculptors has been less pronounced.

Ala Hourani introduces the concept of visual language in South African Muslim art, asserting its pivotal role in fostering coherence and unity across diverse Islamic traditions (Alhourani, 2019). He contends that this 'aesthetics of Muslimness' generates sensory effects, imbuing an aura of authenticity, while the notion of 'formations' signifies the ongoing evolution of religious practices (Alhourani, 2019).

To illustrate this, Hourani employs the art of Thania Petersen and the Essop brothers, emphasizing that 'aesthetic formations of Muslimness' serve two primary functions: first, cultivating a personal sense of religious devotion in individuals, and second, contributing to a shared identity and communal style (Alhourani, 2019). Consequently, aesthetics and performance become intricately intertwined, with performance itself considered as an aesthetic expression (Alhourani, 2019).

Given the profound essence of these works, the concept of secularization stands in contrast. These works should be viewed from a perspective that acknowledges their departure from Basirah, or spiritual insight, as they possess a depth and significance that goes beyond mere secular interpretations. This does not mean that work must be experienced as such, as subjectivity still plays a role in its reception by audiences. By recognizing the deliberate engagement of the artists with religious and cultural elements while confronting the complexities of secularization, we can truly apprehend the inherent value of their creations and the meaningful bridges they construct between art and spirituality. The subsequent section will delve into Salah M. Hassan's arguments concerning alternative knowledge systems and African Modernity within the context of art history.

8.5.3 Navigating Systematic Barriers:

8.5.4 Mutual Learning And Co-Curation

Curatorial Collaboration, Reflexivity, And Feminist Approaches In The Cape Town Muslim Community And The South African Art Industry

Salah suggests addressing curatorial challenges by re-examining knowledge production in the art world and scrutinizing curatorial principles. The conventional curatorial model, which positions the curator as the sole authority, warrants reassessment, he contends (Hassan, 2009). Instead, he advocates for a broader global outlook that incorporates comparisons across diverse cultural contexts.

With curating gaining increasing prominence in the last few 20 years and curators being recognized as influential figures in the art industry, it propels us to ponder significant question; What role these curators play in our lives?

Furthermore, this research delves into the profound importance of how curators, artists, and cultural producers convey meaning in the art created by Muslim artists. Understanding the

methods, they employ to convey significance is crucial for grasping the broader impact of their work. By addressing these central concerns, the thesis illuminates the dynamic landscape of curation in contemporary South Africa, providing insights into cultural representation and enhancing our understanding of Muslim communities in Cape Town. Curatorial collaboration, reflexivity, and feminist frameworks are vital in the Cape Town Muslim Community and the South African art industry. By infusing their practices with these principles, curators can create exhibitions that stimulate dialogue, deconstruct biases, and cultivate an inclusive and culturally vibrant artistic landscape.

To cultivate authentic narratives through art, a shift towards collaborative curatorial practices is crucial, integrating urban life and experimental art production. This evolving understanding of the term curator signifies a versatile approach that embodies diverse interpretations. Curators wield substantial influence within the art world, impacting cultural memory and confronting inequalities. Their curated exhibitions reshape perceptions of artists and communities, challenging established norms. Curators must be aware of power dynamics and embrace alternative approaches rooted in diverse knowledge systems (Hassan, 2009).

Taking from the Vally and Hassans approach's curating is inherently political, involving decisions on inclusion, exclusion, and the appreciation of artworks and artists. Curators must bridge the gap between themselves and artists and communities, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of all.

The concept of curatorial collaboration, as championed by Harald Szeemann, has transformed the exhibition landscape, liberating curatorial practice from institutional confines. Szeemann's vision redefined the curator's role, encompassing administration, authorship, and more (Ann and Stretton, 2018).

Artists should actively participate in the curatorial process, fostering a participatory and dynamic environment (Ann and Stretton, 2018). Art Organisations and galleries in Cape Town emerge as potent catalysts in shaping exhibitions and engaging diverse audiences. These spaces becoming vessels for profound public dialogues and shared experiences. Beyond passive observation, visitor engagement offers a unique lens to evaluate experiences and viewpoints, contributing valuable insights to future curatorial endeavours (Ann and Stretton, 2018).

The principle of social responsibility requires a deeper connection to local communities and their concerns, fostering cultural awareness and social consciousness even in commercial galleries. Reflexivity within curatorial practice is vital, as it highlights the link between curators' backgrounds, values, beliefs, and their research and curation methodologies (Ann and Stretton, 2018). Additionally, Feminism curatorial practices challenge norms, fostering disruption and transformation in exhibitions and gender equality within exhibitions is crucial (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010d).

Additionally, Art collecting as a form of advocacy, especially within commercial spaces and institutional collaborations, also plays a pivotal role. Art collecting has historically been tainted by elitism and colonial looting. Communities, including Muslim communities, can empower custodianship practices aligned with their beliefs, fostering inclusive dialogue and engagement with local artists and institutions. This does not negate that pricing disparities in the art market can hinder accessibility, necessitating a reconsideration of price points to democratize art access. Redefining art collecting and custodianship empowers communities to shape their cultural narratives and safeguard heritage. It strengthens collective bonds and ensures the preservation of art for future generations.

8.5.5 MASHŪRAH/Advocating For Co-Curation, Authentic Engagement And Recognition Through Critical Theory And Feminism

This section will gather the knowledge presented within the four concepts mentioned above, crafting a new framework called 'MASHŪRAH', a process advocating for co-curating embedded in authentic engagement and recognition.' This process operates on the rhythmic principles of the GENE model, involving Grounding, Emerging, Navigating, and Effecting. Through a continuous and evolving approach beginning in the South world and ending in the West, we address imbalances within our larger system on an ongoing basis (Schieffer & Lessem, 2014).

Beginning in the **South** is **Grounding** in nature and community for being, connecting and experiencing.

Then we move **East** for **Emergence** through unfolding the nature of the issue, exploring and spiritual renewal.

We come to the **North** of Navigation where new insights are structured into new concepts and new knowledge.

Finally arriving at the **West** of Effecting in which we as co-researchers in the learning cycle put all levels into integrated action.

The new proposed model/process has an underlying rhythm as illustrated below:

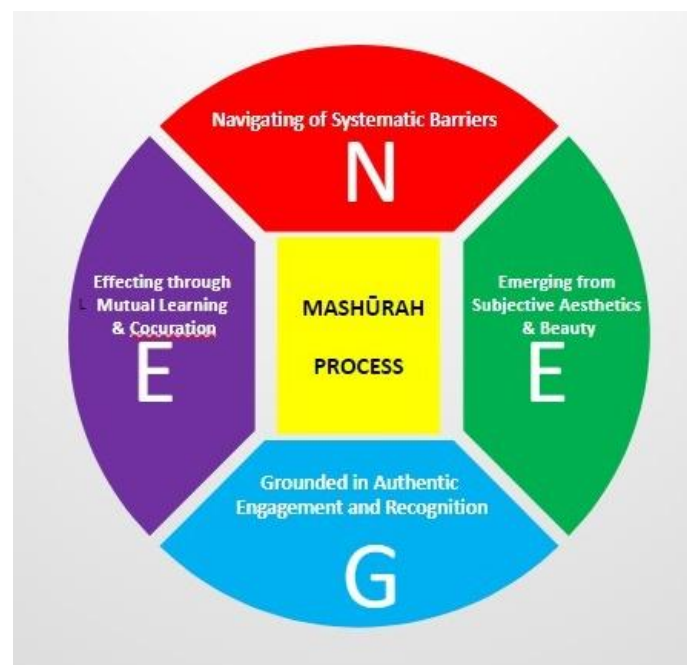


Figure 8.3: New Emancipatory Model

We emphasise the significance of practising recognition to foster meaningful connections with the communities an art organisation aims to support, thereby promoting social inclusion and respecting individual dignity. Effective community participation involves empowering those most affected by an organisation's efforts and involving them in decision-making. An organisation's success is gauged by its integration with the broader community, acknowledging that arts and culture emerge from within communities. Community engagement empowers arts organisations, enhancing stability, economic strength, and cultural vibrancy. Prioritising community relationships should take precedence over art itself when strategizing, managing finances, and allocating resources. The

non-profit and government-funded sectors are ideal for artist and community development, though arts funding scarcity in South Africa favours galleries and private financiers. Building real recognition involves self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, as noted by Honneth.(Loquias, 2019)

However, many arts organisations in South Africa are still learning the importance of genuine community engagement, as demonstrated by a focus on sales rather than connections. Authentic engagement requires embracing diverse voices, understanding artists' experiences, and representing communities. For sustainable impact, co-creative curation, empathetic engagement, and conscious awareness are crucial. The absence of authentic recognition historically for the Muslim community leads to "ambiguous visibility." Strengthening connections requires continuous engagement, diverse thought promotion, clear intentions, collaboration, and concern-raising opportunities. Community museums contribute to local expertise and previously overlooked indigenous knowledge. The District Six Museum in South Africa exemplifies the community museum movement, born from struggles for justice and land. While artists like Haroon Gunn Salie and Thania Petersen engage with it, funding challenges and external influences threaten these institutions. The fragility of such community institutions underscores the broader impact of external factors. In essence, recognizing the importance of genuine community engagement, representation, and connection-building, can dismantle systemic barriers and inequalities, ultimately enriching cultural vibrancy and inclusivity.

8.5.5.1 Eastern Emerging From Subjective Aesthetics And Beauty

(Art)/Art Empowers Artists To Express Themselves Freely/Art As A Tool For Social Critique

The concept of subjective aesthetics highlights how aesthetic experiences and judgments are individual and influenced by personal preferences and emotions. This subjective perspective challenges the idea of universal standards for judging art. This shifts us towards thinking about the secularisation of the art space, tracing changes in societal values and the evolution of art history towards a secular lens. The influence of European powers on art history and the imposition of Western norms on colonised societies lead to a call for decolonizing art history by recognizing diverse categories and perspectives.

By further examining the confluence of Islam and African art through the work of Ibrahim El-Salahi. His innovative fusion of Islamic, African, Arab, and Western traditions highlights the complexity of Sudanese identity and offers insights into repositioning African, Arab, and Muslim art within a global contemporary framework. The significance of recognizing the "aesthetics of Muslimness" among South African Muslim artists is emphasised. This aesthetics serves to create unity and coherence among diverse Islamic traditions, shaping collective identity and evoking sensory experiences in religious practices.

The solutions highlighted revolve around embracing subjective aesthetics, acknowledging diverse artistic categories, and understanding the interplay of spirituality and cultural elements in art. To effectively engage with Muslim artists and communities, it's crucial to appreciate the nuanced connections between art, identity, and spirituality. By departing from secular interpretations and recognizing the depth of religious and cultural engagement in artworks, a more meaningful and respectful approach can be taken. Understanding and valuing the deliberate choices made by artists in integrating their religious and cultural heritage can foster genuine connections and appreciation within the art world.

8.5.5.2 Northern Navigating Systemic Barriers

A Critical Consciousness That Speaks Of The Importance Of Basirah (Spiritual Insight) For The Inclusion Of Diverse Categories/Knowledge Systems/Lived Experiences

It is necessary to redefine modernity in art by integrating diverse categories and knowledge systems, particularly focusing on African and Muslim art. Salah M Hassan's perspective highlights the importance of including non-European perspectives in the global art discourse and challenges Eurocentric paradigms. This entails questioning traditional hierarchies of artistic value and understanding modernity as pluralistic and context dependent.

Systemic barriers arise from preconceived expectations and stereotypes tied to African and Muslim artists. Curators often perpetuate these challenges by seeking artists who conform to narrow notions of "African" or "Muslim" art, limiting the representation and expression of these communities. Summaya Vally's Islamic Art Biennale exemplifies a solution by embracing an expansive and inclusive definition of Islamic arts, rooted in lived experiences and philosophies relevant to the present. This approach encourages South African curators to shift away from

Eurocentric definitions and celebrate the complexity of local Muslim artists' identities.

Navigating systemic barriers is crucial in working with Muslim artists and community engagement. By challenging stereotypes, celebrating diversity, and adopting inclusive models, curators and institutions can provide authentic platforms for artistic expression that resonate with Muslim communities. This approach not only fosters pride and unity within the community but also promotes understanding and appreciation among diverse audiences, contributing to a more accurate representation of the rich artistic heritage of South African Muslims.

8.5.5.3 Western Effecting Through Mutual Learning And Co-Creation With MASHŪRAH And HalaqArt And Collaborative Curation Model

Salah M Hassan advocates reevaluating curatorial authority, embracing global perspectives, and recognizing African modernism's anti-colonial nature (Hassan, 2009). Curators are urged to challenge hierarchies, adapt to diverse contexts, and use exhibitions as platforms for dialogue. Museums, galleries, and biennales are seen as spaces for interaction and understanding, while reflexive practice and feminist viewpoints enhance inclusivity. Art collecting is redefined as a means of cultural preservation, empowering Muslim communities to establish custodianship practices aligned with their values. Overcoming pricing disparities is crucial for democratising art access. Overall, embracing diverse perspectives, collaboration, and inclusivity shapes an inclusive artistic landscape in South Africa.

8.6 Conclusion

The MASHŪRAH Process – a emancipatory theory for curating, access, engagement, advocacy, and development is the new comprehensive framework that aims to transform and improve the practices within the South African art world to foster social inclusion, challenge oppression, and empower marginalised voices. It draws inspiration from the ideas of Axel Honneth, Paulo Freire, Islamic Liberation Theory, Critical Art Theory, Islamic Art Theory, and Feminism. As a transformative, innovative, integral process it addresses the imbalances and activates the potentials that were surfaced in chap 5 and 6 and offers an alternative for curating, engagement and advocacy and exhibitions.

Summary of key themes:

The Power of Curatorial Collaboration: A Paradigm Shift

Museums and Galleries as Catalysts for Engagement

Social Responsibility and Transformative Curatorial Practice

Reflexivity: Unveiling Biases and Navigating Complexities

Evolution of Curatorial Definitions: Beyond Object Arrangement

Embracing Feminist Perspectives: Disruption and Transformation

Inclusive and Vibrant Artistic Landscape

Now, we turn to Chapter 9 to explore the Contribution of the co-created innovative model to the Cape Town Muslim art community.

Chapter 9

INSTITUTIONALISED RESEARCH-TO-INNOVATION THROUGH MASHŪRAH ARTS INITIATIVE

9.1 Introduction

Chapter 9 represents a crucial third phase in the **CARE** trajectory. "Institutionalization of Research-to-Innovation," is a concept that runs parallel with my exploration of **Co-Creation**, which culminated in my new **Emancipatory Theory** discussed in Chapter 8. As this chapter forms part of the Co-Creation, which is level 3 of my research journey, it builds upon the foundational principles of emancipatory theory with the applied methodologies of critical theory and feminism. It also builds on the journey of CARE, which commenced in Chapter Four, starting with **Community Activation** through MASHŪRAH circles. This is an integral, transformative innovation dialogue process, signifying the initial steps toward establishing my ecosystem and activating the wider Cape Town community. Following this **Community Activation**, I progressed to the pursuit of **Awakening Integral Consciousness** through establishing an innovative ecosystem detailed in Chapter 7. This phase aimed to rouse and cultivate mindfulness and awareness within individuals and the collective group. Now, in chapter 9, I transition into the realm of transformative **Institutionalized Research-To-Innovation** where we concentrate on collaboratively building or improving structures or institutions to establish Research-to-Innovation in a sustainable manner.

This chapter will elaborate the pivotal role of art exhibitions and the importance of institutions as custodians of this 'Institutionalized' process I am co-creating with other artists as co-researchers. Unlike the conventional approach of formalising research within a centre or academy, my focus is on establishing a new art platform called MASHŪRAH Arts to spearhead these exhibitions. This initiative encompasses essential components such as critical research analysis, action-based research methodologies, and the invaluable wealth of both local and global knowledge that has been amassed. The next section of the narrative delves into the importance of institutionalising social innovation followed by the incorporation of the MASHŪRAH Arts into a practical tool that serves to fully actualize and advance the new conceptual approach outlined in Chapter 8.

9.2 Institutionalising Social Innovation

"Institutionalizing" refers to the process of establishing and incorporating certain practices, rules, procedures, or norms as standard and accepted within an organisation, society, or system. It involves making these practices a formal part of the way things are done and ensuring that they are consistently followed and enforced over time. According to Lessem (2017), the realm of social research frequently develops in seclusion as an academic endeavour, resulting in minimal influence on communities. Lessem proposed the integration of social research and innovation, incorporating it into a committed institutional structure that consistently rejuvenates itself and generates fresh perspectives. Moreover, Lessem's insights emphasised the imperative for institutionalised research to have its roots deeply embedded in both nature and community. This entails active engagement with the community to propel comprehensive progress spanning ecological, economic, scientific, and cultural domains. Within this context, he championed the utilisation of participatory methodologies in action research and the nurturing of interconnected institutional ecosystems.

One of the outcomes from our MASHŪRAH learning circles, as discussed in Chapter 4, was the desire to hold an exhibition. The proposed exhibition will explore Muslim epistemologies. This exhibition will be one that had never been executed before; at least since the late 1990s. We did not want the exhibition to be a flash in the pan event, but a part of a long-term process for change in the art industry. However, there was no way of determining how such an exhibition would be received by the industry as well as the Cape Town Muslim community. So, for this long-term vision to materialise, key strategic steps towards institutionalising knowledge creation were required and the intention to launch MASHŪRAH ARTS was born.

As an ecosystem, we organized meetings where we asked ourselves questions to guide our vision and decided action. These questions include:

1. What type of institution did we want to be?
2. Where did we want to hold our first exhibition without owning a physical space of our own?
3. Which media platforms did we want to engage to help promote our message?

From this series of meetings was birthed a vehicle for strategic renewal of the MASHŪRAH process. This vehicle was MASHŪRAH ARTS, a platform which would provide space for:

1. Dialogue circles
2. Exhibition curation
3. Dedicated research and advancement
4. Development of an art collection aimed at advocacy and preservation.

Outcomes from these ecosystem meetings also centred our endeavour to institutionalise these transformative efforts operates in three areas:

1. At the individual level; further developing my role as a curator.
2. Mobilising structures for MASHŪRAH Arts as an integral part of the South African Art ecosystem.
3. Initiating engagement efforts to resonate within the Cape Town Muslim community.

The narrative to be developed in the following sections aims to address the following questions:

1. How can we institutionally incorporate nuanced narratives steeped in Islamic philosophy to depict the real-life experiences of Muslims in Cape Town more accurately and globally within the national and international discourse?
2. What approaches can be adopted by communities of practice to establish community engagement and audience reach?

The next two sections will set the foundation to help answer these questions.

9.2.1 The Framework For Institutionalising MASHŪRAH Arts

This critical step in the process of institutionalising Research-to-Innovation via the establishment of MASHŪRAH Arts, led to the creation of four institutional dimensions that function as supporting structures. The MASHŪRAH circles emerged as the cornerstone of our Communities of Practice. Grounded in the concept of healthy participatory coexistence and relationships (Schieffer & Lessem, 2014) circles represent the transformative foundation in the Southern

context. The ecosystem, known as HalaqArt, was inspired by the idea of an Eastern developmental sanctuary. This space was intended for engaging in dialogue and elevating consciousness within a spiritual and cultural environment, akin to the function of a HalaqArt. Further building on this foundation is the establishment of the MASHŪRAH Research Hub, an extension of the research laboratory concept. This hub ventures into the Northern sphere, emphasising collaborative knowledge creation and social innovation. Lastly, the MASHŪRAH Project Space facilitates transformative curation and engagement in practice.

Demonstrated as follows:

1. **G - MASHŪRAH circles** play a crucial role in institutionalising community activation by fostering the development of creative communities of practice and innovation ecosystems.
 2. **E - HalaqArt** serves as a catalyst for awakening both individual and collective consciousness through practices like intersectionality, conscientization, and deep dialogue.
 3. **N - MASHŪRAH Research Hub** functions as a dynamic space for research, facilitating collaborative knowledge creation and scholarly endeavours.
- E - MASHŪRAH Project Space** stands as a dedicated arena for transformative and experimental curating offering an environment where meaningful interactions and experiences can unfold with artists and audiences.

The diagram below further illustrates this:

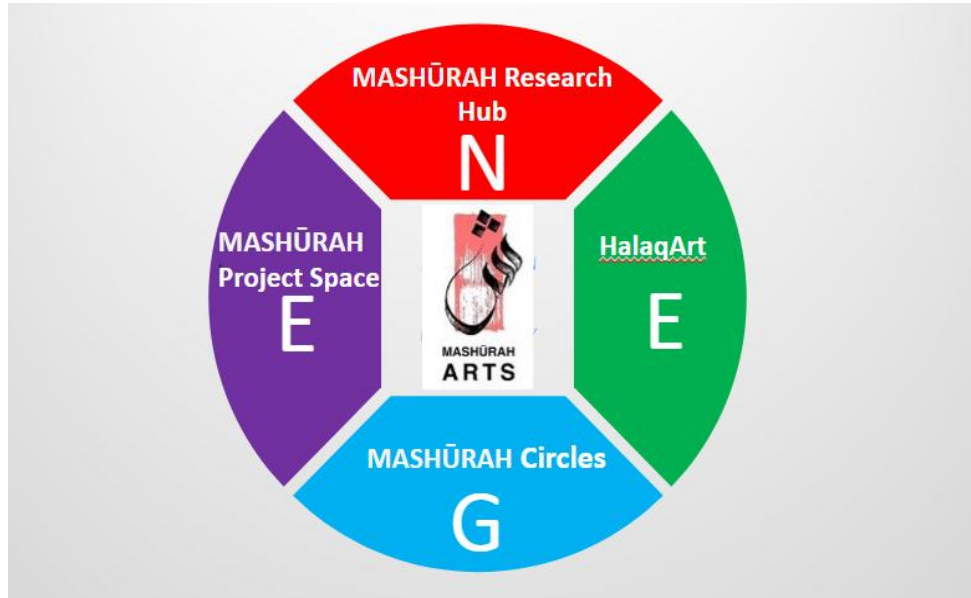


Figure 9.1: MASHŪRAH Arts for transformative curation and engagement within the GENE

The next section focuses on the process of institutionalisation of my research-to-innovation via community practice.

9.3 Communities Of Practice - An Introduction

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are groups of individuals who come together around a shared interest, profession, or passion to collaboratively learn and enhance their skills through interactions and discussions. These communities create a platform for members to exchange experiences, knowledge, and best practices, ultimately improving their expertise within the domain. CoPs have an informal nature, relying on voluntary engagement, and can flourish in various settings, such as workplaces, online forums, and educational institutions (Cundill *et al.*, 2015).

CoPs, originally introduced by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger-Trayner in 1991, are characterized by Law (2015).

1. Centering around a shared domain of interest or expertise, providing a common focus for members to deepen their understanding and skills within that domain.
2. Fostering a sense of belonging and social identity among members, enabling them to establish relationships, build trust, and engage in collaborative activities that contribute to shared knowledge and community growth.
3. Facilitating the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and insights related to the domain, leading to the improvement of individual and collective abilities.

Members of these communities share tacit knowledge that may be challenging to formally articulate but is essential for mastering complex skills or tasks. According to Wenger (Wenger-Trayner, 2015) the success of CoPs relies on several critical elements, including a strong sense of belonging and intimacy, a sense of trust and influence, mutual fulfilment of needs, and a shared emotional connection among members, fostering a cohesive and supportive network for knowledge sharing and collaboration (Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

The following section will talk through the institutional framework that was established for MASHŪRAH Arts.

9.3.1 Grounded In Communities Of Practice- Activating Creative Communities Through MASHŪRAH Circles

The MASHŪRAH **circles** emerged as the cornerstone of our Communities of Practice. Grounded in the concept of healthy participatory coexistence and building relationships (Schieffer & Lessem, 2014) the MASHŪRAH circles represent the transformative foundation in the Southern context. The circles were established by merging Western external tools like Study Circles and World Café with Islamic methodologies such as HalaqaArt, MASHŪRAH, Tarbiyah and Hiqmah, as detailed in Chapter Four and recapped below:

1. Southern **Grounding** in Halaqah circles of learning to establish knowledge exchange
2. Eastern **Emergence** through MASHŪRAH to consult and seek guidance
3. Northern **Navigating** through Tarbiyah for development and training
4. Western **Emancipating** with Hiqmah through dialoguing and seeking wisdom.

These circles were intentionally designed to serve as a reflective haven, a space for nurturing relationships, and a platform for like-minded creative individuals to come together and construct a micro-community for the exchange of knowledge. Within this community, participants engaged in constructive dialogues where they could either agree or disagree, all while recognizing the potential for collaboration and support (Lessem, 2017). This initiative brought together artists and creative professionals, uniting them to form a practice-focused community dedicated to solidarity. These creatives shared artistic concepts, and curatorial insights, explored imbalances and opportunities, and collaborated on an emancipatory theory. Over time, the initiative evolved to consider strategies for mobilising and institutionalising MASHŪRAH Arts. As this chapter runs parallels to the emancipatory theory in chapter 8, the Southern direction of the emancipatory theory emphasises authentic engagement through practices such as Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition (Loquias, 2019), while fostering meaningful dialogue with the following in mind:

1. Arts and culture emerge from within the community
2. Authentic engagement requires embracing diverse voices, understanding artists' experiences, and representing communities.
3. For sustainable impact: co-creative curation, empathetic engagement, and conscious awareness are crucial.
4. Strengthening connections requires continuous engagement, diverse thought promotion, clear intentions, collaboration, and concern-raising opportunities.

Once the concept of hosting an exhibition at Greatmore Studios materialised, artists engaged in a dialogue that, for the first time, extended beyond their private discussions and into the public sphere within the very walls of Greatmore Studios. This collaboration with Greatmore marked an expansion of our network as Greatmore is part of a global network of art organisations known as 'The Triangle Network'. This circle included the participation of artists Sahlah Davids, Hasan Essop, Nabeeha Mahomed, Abdus Salaam, and me. The session itself was filmed by Art Meets, a platform dedicated to curators experimenting with various engagement models in their programming and content creation. This gathering provided a unique opportunity for the artists to candidly articulate their motivations for partaking in an exhibition that delves into the realm of Muslim epistemologies and explores their personal experiences within both their artistic practices and the broader industry and community contexts. It gave them the opportunity to in fact have

autonomy over their own voice and reasons before the exhibition even went public. Subsequently, this session was shared across our networks and made accessible to the public on Youtube, representing our first foray into 'public engagement.' I must admit that I approached this moment with a mix of excitement and apprehension, as it essentially marked our initial public announcement of the forthcoming exhibition.



Figure 9.2: Triangle Network session at Greatmore,

Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MAes6JVZoc

The recorded dialogue sparked a robust response from a prominent local art collector who held reservations about an exhibition exclusively centred on Muslims. His stance revolved around the belief that such an exhibition was unnecessary, contending that the community has no need for a separate platform to express their views. He expressed concerns that this approach could potentially fragment Cape Town's diverse community, particularly among people of colour, suggesting that unity should prevail through a shared experience of being black. Dealing with this perspective posed a significant challenge, as it highlighted the inherently political nature of the exhibition, whether intentionally so or not and provided insight into the types of responses it may get. Another reason why communities of practice are so critical is fires such as this require different types of responses and considerations - I was not always the correct person for this. I had to be conscientious that I could not speak from my bias, and I would ensure I always feedback

communication that was directed at me to the artists. The next section will look at institutionalising the HalaqArt Ecosystem.

9.4 Emerging in Conscientization And Dialogue As An Institutional Concept and Practise With The HalaqArt Ecosystem

The development of the HalaqArt ecosystem, built upon the foundations of the MASHŪRAH circles, represents a unique step towards institutionalising research and innovation. HalaqArt draws inspiration from the concept of a *Halaqah*, which traditionally serves as a space for meaningful dialogue and the elevation of consciousness within a spiritual and cultural context (USULI, 2018) Within this ecosystem, a personal inner ecosystem, representing various facets of the self, began to take shape. These facets reflect different dimensions of my identity and orientation. I also draw from Allama Iqbal (referred to in Chapter 7) whose philosophy of Khudi (selfhood) inspired the development and design of my inner ecosystem. Iqbal encourages recognition through affirmation - he condemns the disintegration of the ego as it results in weakness and stagnation. Selfhood thus strengthens the worth of human existence by being closer to the divine(Garcia, no date)

1. **Steward Grounded in Feeling (Ehsas):** This aspect draws its essence from the Southern personality, which finds its roots in South Africa. It emphasises the ability to connect with society and the environment on a deep emotional level, fostering organic co-evolution with diverse cultures.
2. **Catalyst Emerging through Intuition (Wajdan):** The Eastern personality, deeply ingrained in Pakistani cultural consciousness and spiritual orientation, embodies the qualities of evolution and intuition, guiding creative processes.
3. **Social Innovator and Researcher Navigating through Knowing (Ilm):** Rooted in a passion for art and creativity, this personality reflects the North's emphasis on knowledge and understanding, driving research and innovation.
4. **Facilitator Effecting through Sensing (Sha'oor):** Drawing from experience in the art sector, travel, and intuition, this personality represents the West and its capacity for effective facilitation.

Expanding upon the principles of emancipatory theory, specifically Subjective Aesthetics and

Beauty in the Eastern direction, I turn to Sumayya Vally, who underscores the profound influence of beauty, asserting that " Beauty and social justice are not mutually exclusive. Beauty is social justice" (Vally, 2020). By acknowledging the significance of individuality in aesthetic experiences and the definition of beautiful art, this perspective effectively questions the conventional concept of:

1. Universal standards for art evaluation
2. Advocating for embracing subjective aesthetics
3. Acknowledging diverse artistic categories
4. Exploring the nuanced connections between art, identity, and spirituality.

Institutionalising this approach through the ecosystem meant capitalising on the participants' strengths, which arise from their unique intersectionality and subjectivity and identifying how each participant's strengths could contribute to the ongoing evolution of universal standards of aesthetics. This diverse community of artists, at varying stages of their careers, revealed that each member possessed distinct assets, whether spiritual, organisational, skill-based, or rooted in personal relationships and networks. This recognition strengthened the ecosystem, allowing individuals to assume different roles as needed, as demonstrated in Chapter 7. This experience was a significant learning curve, demonstrating that artists were not only creators but also activists, innovators, and mentors to one another. They could adapt to a variety of functions within themselves, aligning with the needs of a platform like MASHŪRAH Arts. This level of autonomy was empowering, setting it apart from the more structured environments of galleries and institutions.

In the subsequent phase of ecosystem development, the emphasis shifted towards designing an exhibition and conceptualising a platform. Selecting the name "MASHŪRAH" for both the platform and exhibition symbolised our identity and purpose, in that we were seeking consultation with each other and the wider community and industry. This step was followed by the creation of a logo and the establishment of a visual identity for MASHŪRAH Arts.

By recognizing the importance of storytelling through branding, marketing, and public relations, we took early steps to integrate these elements into our strategy, understanding their pivotal roles in the success of art organisations. The introduction of this identity through the logo represented

our initial formalisation of the message and approach we aimed to convey. Faheem Rhoda Jackson played a key role in designing the logo, with input from Laylaa Jacobs and myself. Subsequently, our identity and purpose were packaged for:

1. All digital communications and stationery
2. MASHŪRAH Arts social media pages
3. Media communication/Press packs
4. Catalogue for the upcoming exhibition, which Laylaa Jacobs designed under my guidance.

Once this step was completed, a public relations (PR) strategy was the next key step in sharing our journey and garnering support and momentum from the wider public. It was an important step in the process of institutionalising MASHŪRAH Arts. PR assumes a pivotal role in the launch of a new exhibition or initiative by serving as its storyteller, to ensure the dissemination of information about your exhibition to a broad audience, nurturing excitement, confidence and eagerness in prospective attendees. It stands as an indispensable component in securing the success of your exhibition. Moreover, PR excels in cultivating an atmosphere of anticipation and inquisitiveness surrounding the exhibition. It subtly imparts tantalising insights arousing the curiosity of individuals and motivating them to delve deeper into the subject. Furthermore, the aspect of credibility becomes pertinent. When esteemed sources and influential figures express favourable opinions about the exhibition, it confers an air of reliability. This is akin to the endorsement of a trusted confidant, instilling a sense of assurance in potential attendees.

PR also excels in precise audience targeting ensuring that individuals with the keenest interest in the exhibition receive the pertinent information. Lastly, PR adeptly manages inquiries or apprehensions that individuals might harbour regarding the exhibition. It is analogous to having a knowledgeable and amiable guide available to elucidate details and ensure that everyone feels at ease and informed.

My experience and networks in PR and communications were extremely useful at this stage. As we did not have an external budget allocated, I utilised my media lists and the artists utilised there's. Our priority was to have the artist's voices heard by as much of the Muslim community as possible. I was put in touch with Shafiq Morton, a Cape Town-based photojournalist, editor, radio and TV presenter who presents the popular Drivetime afternoon current affairs slot at Voice

of the Cape radio station and has covered local South African stories such as the anti-apartheid campaign, the release of Nelson Mandela, the 1994 elections and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We agreed to a weekly slot on his show where each artist participating in the exhibition would be interviewed by Morton. It was a major step in our engagement efforts and at the same time provided a real opportunity for artists who had not spoken publicly before to gain confidence practice and recognition.

Our journey in institutionalising research and innovation within the HalaqArt ecosystem has been marked by a deep appreciation for individuality, a commitment to dialogue and conscientization, and a deliberate effort to create a cohesive and impactful identity and recognition through branding and visual representation amongst the community and industry. This journey continues to evolve, driven by the collective strengths and unique contributions of our diverse community of artists and thinkers. The next section moves to the Northern realm of navigating through the MASHŪRAH Research Hub.

9.5 Navigating Communal Institutional Knowledge Creation And Social Innovation: The Role Of MASHŪRAH Research Hub

In our commitment to Institutional Knowledge Creation and Social Innovation, a coherent framework is emerging. This advancement holds the potential to invigorate curation, engagement, and advocacy, reaching beyond Cape Town to encompass South Africa and the global stage. At its core resides a profound recognition of the importance of Basirah, a spiritual insight. This insight propels the acknowledgement and seamless integration of diverse categories, knowledge systems, and lived experiences. Furthermore, guided by Paulo Freire's transformative pedagogy (Sinwell, 2022), we unveil a potent structure for amplifying marginalised voices and navigating systematic barriers amid the challenges of oppression and inequality. Freire's insights echo curation, engagement, and the collaborative creative process with artists and communities in South Africa in knowledge creation. This shift from a curator-driven, gallery owner-driven, collector-driven and monetary-driven process, to a cooperative process aligned with the ethos of critical pedagogy which positions the above-mentioned stakeholders as learners involved in reciprocal dialogues. Thereby challenging said stakeholder's conventional role of being exclusive knowledge transmitters. This also aligns with meaning of MASHŪRAH - to seek consultation and the progression leads us to establish a shared repository for collaborative knowledge creation

and social innovation in art history.

This is where the MASHŪRAH research hub assumes a pivotal role for the South African Muslim community as well as for the interconnected local and international societies. Functioning as a catalyst, it drives research and social innovation to tackle the challenges confronting artists and their communities. The knowledge generated enriches the archive chronicling the art history of Muslim communities. This material will take shape through diverse mediums like catalogues, research papers, and recorded sessions, including podcasts derived from our insightful discussions. The focal point centres on crafting research and educational materials inspired by this thesis which resonate deeply with and practically address the specific needs of Muslim communities. The effectiveness and applicability of these resources rely on inputs from the entire ecosystem, signifying a departure from traditional Research and Development models in favour of collaborative knowledge sharing, ensuring enduring success and continual enhancement.

The next section will move into effecting through the MASHŪRAH Project space.

9.6 Effecting Through MASHŪRAH Project Space

Fostering Transformative and Experimental Curating For Enriched Artistic Interactions And Experiences

My experience as a curator in South Africa has given me a real-world understanding of the art industry's complexities and opportunities, which has been invaluable in guiding my approach to institutionalising MASHŪRAH Arts. My role at the Jaffer Modern Art Gallery was important in moulding my curatorial style as I was granted the freedom to make curatorial decisions, allowing me to experiment with new ideas and approaches, which later informed the MASHŪRAH project. While at the gallery I was also responsible for strategy. Along with my previous managerial experience, facilitating the research-to-innovation process came naturally. Collaborating closely with diverse artists and exploring various themes, while engaging the local Muslim community in Cape Town, has expanded my professional horizons. This journey not only broadened my curatorial skills but also helped me establish credibility in the industry. By curating exhibitions that resonate with diverse audiences and bridge cultural gaps, I have positioned myself as a curator dedicated to inclusivity, cultural representation, and engagement with marginalised communities; values which have become a fundamental part of my professional identity.

In the run-up to the first MASHŪRAH Arts exhibition and launch, I have curated pilot exhibitions which have specifically featured emerging Muslim contemporary artists. In 2020, I connected with artist Sahlah Davids, whose body of work 'Pierced' became a central part in the group exhibition *'Tell me three things about yourself that I curated'*. This exhibition also featured the works of South African artists Aimee Messenger and Abdus Salaam. Each artist's work symbolised distinct facets of introspection and retrospection, creating moments of contemplation and invitations for dialogue.

Sahlah Davids, drawing from her Cape 'Malay' identity, showcased artwork deeply rooted in the intersection of religion and politics. She exhibited works that illuminated the role of acts and rituals in preserving Islamic traditions during political turmoil, offering a sense of belonging and resistance to apartheid and colonialism (Doola, 2021). Sahlah's art not only highlighted the historical legacy of skilled Muslim artisans, passed down through generations, but she also explored the influence of her own family's craftsmanship.

Her installation, featuring mangled and warped chairs with uncomfortable upholstery made of sharp pins and beads, offered a striking commentary on domesticity, resistance, and religiopolitical heritage. This 'ugly beauty, (Davids, 2021) as she termed it, evoked memories of her family's tailoring and sewing traditions, bridging personal history with the Cape's socio-political lineage. 'Pierced' placed viewers amidst a spectrum of emotions and experiences: from prayer to debate to freedom struggles and expressions of joy and sorrow (Davids, 2021) I did face challenges in the installation process as the choice to include numerous prayer mats was deemed as being too religiously confronting for non-Muslim viewers - although this was a critical facet of Sahlah David's installation. I did challenge this, and we managed to include one prayer mat.

The exhibition deeply resonated with Sahlah's family, who attended the show and were moved by her portrayal of their history. Furthermore, the exhibition received a positive response from viewers, fostering discussions on faith, memory, and existence from diverse viewpoints. Notably, this exhibition also played a pivotal role in advancing the careers of both Abdus Salaam and Sahlah Davids, with Abdus Salaam gaining gallery representation and showcasing internationally, while Sahlah's work gained recognition in subsequent exhibitions. Aimee Messenger also continued her academic journey with a master's degree, underscoring the importance of mentorship and opportunities in fostering artistic progress.

In subsequent years, I curated two more shows with the same objective of showcasing emerging Muslim artists: The second exhibition titled, “*The Art of Everyday Things*”, included artists Hanna Noor Mohamed and Nyambo Masa Mara, alongside other South African contemporary artists. While a third show “*Does this resonate with you?*” included gallerist Shafina Jaffer and artist Mishkhaah Amien with works that delved into traditional Islamic arts and motifs.

These exhibitions played a vital role in the institutionalisation process of MASHŪRAH Arts for several key reasons. First, they offered emerging Muslim artists such as Hanna Noor Mohamed, Nyambo Masa Mara, and Mishkhaah Amien a platform to showcase their work, granting them visibility that might have otherwise remained limited, generating audience and collector interest in their work. This not only empowered these artists but also introduced a diverse array of artistic voices and perspectives into the South African art scene.

This fusion of tradition and modernity challenged the prevailing notion of secularising art, illustrating that art could seamlessly incorporate cultural heritage and spirituality. It demonstrated that the art world could embrace diverse influences and narratives. Moreover, these shows contributed to the evolution of my curatorial practice. This shift expanded my awareness of possibilities within curatorial approaches, underscoring the significance of recognizing and celebrating the diverse cultural and religious knowledge systems that influence that shape an artist's work. Additionally, we included programming elements such as inviting all the artists from the shows to participate in a “Boeka”, or the opening of the fast-during Ramadan. This provided an opportunity for the artists themselves to engage with one another by participating in a sharing of cultural practices.

Another area I wanted to tackle in my role at the gallery was the inaccessibility of art collecting and pricing disparities for the local community. In my role as a curator at the gallery, I actively applied the concept of redefining art collecting as a means of cultural preservation, recognizing its profound implications for Muslim communities. It was clear that this paradigm shift had the potential to empower these communities to establish custodianship practices that harmonised with their cherished values. This was especially poignant in our efforts to preserve cultural heritage that had often been overlooked or sidelined throughout history.

By embracing this new perspective, I encouraged the gallery to view art collecting as more than a mere acquisition of artworks but as a safeguarding mechanism for cultural assets and narratives.

Through curated exhibitions and acquisitions, we aimed to facilitate a sense of control within Muslim communities over their own cultural heritage. This proactive approach ensured the continuity of these valuable narratives for generations to come, reinforcing the importance of cultural preservation in our curatorial endeavours.

Moreover, as we embarked on this journey, we were acutely aware of the pricing disparities that mar the art world. These disparities were a significant hurdle that needed to be surmounted to fulfil our mission of democratising art access. We recognized that when artworks were disproportionately valued or priced beyond the means of many, it exacerbated exclusivity and hindered access to these cultural treasures. Consequently, we committed ourselves to actively addressing these pricing inequities.

Our efforts to overcome pricing disparities were aligned with our broader goal of making art and cultural heritage more accessible to a diverse audience. We believed that by taking steps to bridge these financial gaps, we could foster a profound sense of cultural inclusivity and shared ownership within the community. In doing so, we were working towards ensuring that art and cultural assets ceased to be exclusive commodities but evolved into equitable resources for all members of the community.

9.7 Conclusion

In summary, my role as a curator in the gallery was characterised by the application of these transformative principles. We harnessed the redefinition of art collecting as a mechanism for cultural preservation to empower Muslim communities to take ownership of their heritage. Simultaneously, we actively tackled pricing disparities in the art market to break down barriers and make art and cultural assets more accessible and inclusive. These integrated efforts formed a cohesive strategy aimed at reshaping the practice of art collecting within Muslim communities, thereby enriching their cultural legacy.

Chapter 10 focuses on the Cooperative Inquiry process applied in this innovative research in validating the MASHŪRAH model.

Chapter 10

COOPERATIVE INQUIRY TO ACTUALISING THE MASHŪRAH EXHIBITION

10.1 Introduction

In this fourth and final level, we turn from Narrative Methods, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Critical Theory, and Feminism to John Heron's Co-operative Inquiry (CI) which is the Action Research methodology bringing forth the contribution to the Eastern Path of Renewal.

The five key tenets of CI according to Lessem and Schieffer (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010a) are:

1. You engage in a politically oriented process, in a participative form of inquiry.
2. You are involved in a knowledge-oriented process epistemic in nature and scope.
3. You engage in an alternating current of informative and transformative inquiry.
4. You undertake your research in successive action-reflection cycles.
5. The validity you seek for your research is goodness, trustworthiness, and authenticity.

This chapter serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it endeavours to put the MASHŪRAH process, which has been developed in preceding chapters, to the test through its first exhibition as a participative form of inquiry, at the same time launching MASHŪRAH Arts to the public. This exhibition not only aims to draw out fresh insights and discoveries for various stakeholders, including the ecosystem, the CI groups, and myself but also sheds light on its alignment with the future trajectory of MASHŪRAH ARTS.

Secondly, this chapter seeks to illustrate the research's role in empowering the marginalised Muslim voice within the South African art scene, using Cape Town as a crucible for experimentation. Additionally, it aims to chart my personal and curatorial evolution throughout the research journey, with a specific focus on the application of CI.

Throughout, CI will be intentionally integrated into the framework of the MASHŪRAH process, serving as both a methodology and a tool for perpetual enhancement and transformation. The next section will serve as an introduction to cooperative inquiry.

10.2 Exploring Cooperative Inquiry via John Heron's Four Modes of Knowledge

Co-operative Inquiry (CI), as described by Heron and Reason (2001) is an approach to research where one engages in a process of inquiry with others like me to collectively make sense of our context, to see our world through new lenses and to co-identify and embody new possibilities. We thus collaborate to define our burning questions and how we will pursue them. Our questions arise from our lived experiences (Experiential or Empathetic knowing); while together we express and explore these questions through various forms of creative expression (Presentational or Imaginal knowing); leading us to new ways of understanding and encountering our world (Rational or Conceptual knowing) and allowing us to embody new possibilities and ways of being in the world (Practical knowing) (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2001). This is a cyclical process, drawing on a fourfold epistemology in a pattern that is repetitive to reveal new layers of possibility. Cooperative Inquiry is also a dialectical and spiritual orientation, that is closely aligned with the Eastern path of renewal that I have predominantly worked with (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010).

The results of the CI process will be provided using Heron's four inquiry methods portraying the four modes of knowledge (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2001):

1. Experiential or Empathetic Knowledge
2. Presentational or imaginal knowledge
3. Propositional or Conceptual knowledge
4. Practical Knowledge

Presented in the diagram below:

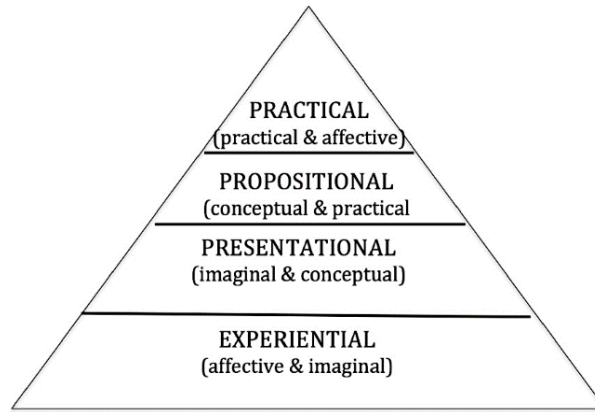


Figure 10.1 Four Ways of Knowing

Image source: Adapted from John Heron Human Inquiry Archive

By introducing CI and the CI/action/reflection process in the context of exhibition preparation, I demonstrate how the MASHŪRAH model seamlessly fits into the research-to-innovation sequence. This involved navigating the action/reflection cycles while employing the four modes proposed by Heron, all of which harmoniously align with the integral and MASHŪRAH process. This integration spans from the initial concept to the practical execution of the exhibition, showcasing its evolution into a fully functional endeavour. For instance, at the first step, I applied experiential knowing to ground and build the community involved in the exhibition, crucial for fostering inclusivity. The imaginal mode then envisions the possibilities of application, expanding on the experiential groundwork. The conceptual and practical modes come into play, building upon the foundation laid by the preceding stages.

My overarching thesis objectives centre on the level of inclusion or exclusion of Islamic art and the emancipatory potential of the MASHŪRAH process in expanding awareness and integration of this art into society. To demonstrate this impact, I strategically utilised the exhibition and the entire process of preparing and engaging with the audience as illustrative tools. The decisions I made along the way addressed imbalances and sought integral solutions to the issues I've outlined

in the thesis. Furthermore, I not only focus on qualitative aspects but also consider quantitative measures, thereby demonstrating the tangible outcomes of my exhibition curation.

Evidently, from its onset, the MASHŪRAH process has been a form of Cooperative Inquiry. In my role as a lead researcher and facilitator, I actively participated in both one-on-one and group interactions, integral to the exhibition-making process. Furthermore, the MASHŪRAH process served as a Political Emancipation Tool within the South African art scene. Its primary objective was to empower the marginalised Muslim voice, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and expansive dialogue within the art community with Cape Town as the departure point.

The next section will detail the inaugural MASHŪRAH exhibition, looking at the individual and collective contribution, respectively.

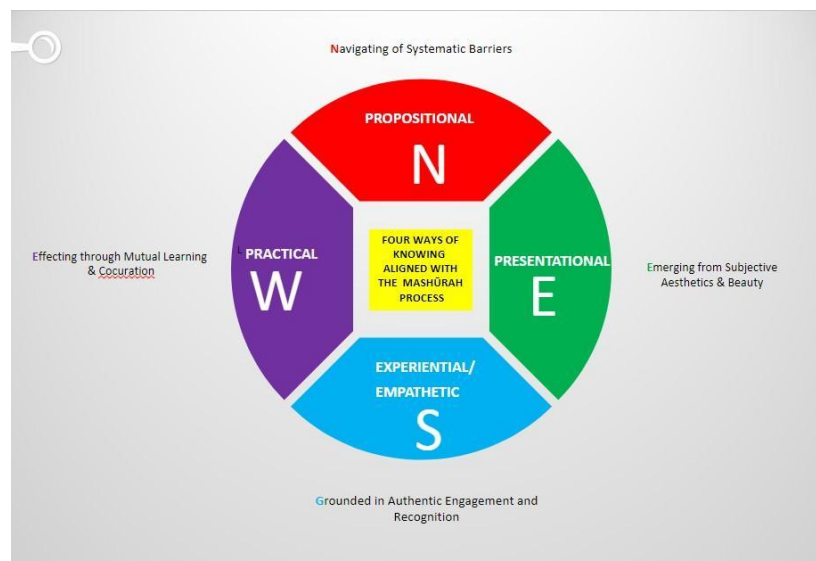


Figure 10.2: MASHŪRAH Process as CI and Heron's 4 Modes of knowing.

10.3 Southern: Aligning Experiential/Empathetic Knowing With Emancipatory Theory

Grounded In Communities Of Practice Through MASHŪRAH Circles, For Agreeing, Planning, And Devising A Focus Of Inquiry

In this section, we explore how the formation of the communities of practice and relationships impacted the exhibition's central theme and the process of selecting artworks. We delve into the narratives embedded within the artwork and how these themes are interconnected. The artists form a vibrant community of practice, contributing significantly to the exhibition's richness and diversity. We begin with the individual contribution.

10.3.1 Individual Contribution

My personal journey through the doctoral /PHD process embarked with a transformative encounter with my supervisor in Geneva, setting the stage for an experience that would profoundly change my life. Right from the outset of the doctoral process, my primary focus revolved around nurturing a close-knit community of individuals all driven by a deep commitment to catalyse social innovation and facilitate positive change. This incredible journey allowed me to not only apply the integral model within the context of my doctoral research but also facilitated personal and spiritual growth. The journey immersed me in the rich tapestry of experiences and cultures from Europe, Africa/South Africa, the Middle East/ Jordan, and UK/Northern Ireland. These diverse cultural encounters served to enrich my reflective process, expanding the horizons of my curatorial growth.

I embarked on the MASHŪRAH journey, starting with a firm foundation in the Relational South, where the focus was on fostering genuine engagement to nurture communities of practice (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010d). This initial step harmonised experiential knowledge with the act of grounding and building the exhibition's community. It underscored the vital role of establishing supportive structures to foster the mission's purpose. These interactions laid the groundwork for a comprehensive approach to the work.

Within our MASHŪRAH circles, I engaged in action reflection, meticulously examining and evaluating my own actions, decisions, and progress throughout the MASHŪRAH journey as well. This commitment ensured an ongoing process of learning and enhancement. This transformative experience not only empowered me but also made a substantial contribution to my personal

growth, connecting me with a like-minded creative community that shared my vision. It instilled a deep sense of belonging within the art community and provided a nurturing environment for personal development, all while offering constructive solutions to address challenges. Moreover, gaining a deeper understanding of my Protagonist archetype early in this process enriched my self-awareness.

These key tenets help define and shape the protagonist archetype (Myers-Briggs, 2019):

1. *Courage and Determination*: Protagonists are known for their bravery and determination in the face of adversity. They are willing to confront challenges and take risks to achieve their goals, often displaying physical and moral courage.
2. *Moral and Ethical Values*: Protagonists typically adhere to a strong set of moral and ethical values. They stand for what is right and just, often serving as a moral compass within the story. Their actions are guided by principles such as honesty, integrity, and fairness.
3. *Conflict and Struggle*: The protagonist's journey is marked by conflict and struggle. They face formidable obstacles, both internal and external, that they must overcome. This struggle is a central element of their character development and the story's plot.
4. *Transformation and Growth*: Protagonists often undergo significant personal growth and transformation throughout the story. They may start as ordinary individuals but evolve into individuals who have learned important lessons and become better versions of themselves by the story's end.
5. *A Quest or Mission*: Protagonists typically have a clear goal or mission that drives the narrative. This quest can vary widely, from saving the world to achieving a personal ambition. Their journey is defined by their pursuit of this objective.

I was able to recognise certain traits within myself as my strengths; also, as an empath, my emotional intelligence and strong intuition enabled me to establish deep connections with others. I have shown resilience in facing and surmounting life's challenges. While I do not see myself as a born leader, I took on leadership roles in my personal life as the eldest of three sisters. However, asserting this identity beyond family matters was challenging for me at the onset. Upon reflection, I recognized that early experiences, including questioning authority and the instability in my parents' marriage, made me hyper-independent, leaning more into my masculine energy. Over

time, I have sought to rebalance this by embracing my feminine side and intuitively applying the four ways of knowing.

I have fostered communities through friendships, even though this conflicts with the prevalent European mindset of individualism. Eventually, I acknowledged the importance of community, despite initial difficulties. Joining the Doctorate program played a significant role in this transformation, as it provided me with the opportunity to be vulnerable and share my story with strangers who would become friends and colleagues on a life-changing journey over the years.

From a young age, I have questioned and challenged authority figures, leading to occasional obstacles when expressing my opinions, even in my professional life. However, this trait also brought numerous successes. A recent example was choosing between focusing on my Doctorate or dedicating myself to my role as Head of Public Programs in Northern Ireland. An unethical work environment led me to leave the latter position. Similar challenges arose throughout my career, especially in corporate finance. In hindsight, I recognize better ways to handle these situations with the knowledge I now possess.



Figure 10.2: Trans4m Cohort, South Africa & Jordan

Conversely, if I had been subservient and avoided challenging situations, neglecting my self-development and growth, I would not have realised my potential or achieved my aspirations of freedom. Hindsight reveals that a support system would have eased this journey. Professionally reflecting on my experiences and challenges fuelled my determination to create a better environment and support network for other creatives. Sharing my experiences opened doors in the

MASHŪRAH process for other artists to share their own stories, both personally and within their art practices. Through CI, I have learned the importance of turning intentions into actions and then reflecting on those actions. This process has allowed me to balance my intuition with introspection and self-questioning, enabling me to make purposeful decisions.

It is worth noting that this journey was a significant milestone for me as curator and it marked my inaugural independent exhibition outside the confines of a gallery, granting me substantial creative freedom and choices. My role centred on curating an exhibition that authentically conveyed the artists' narratives and emotional depth, while also championing inclusivity, creativity, and artistic autonomy. The integration of Cooperative Inquiry and Heron's experiential and empathetic knowledge into the MASHŪRAH exhibition reveals a collaborative and participatory approach to selecting, presenting, and interpreting the artwork. My aspiration to curate an exhibition spotlighting Muslim voices and epistemologies predated my encounters with the artists who eventually became part of my network and community of practice. While curators like me undeniably play a crucial role, it is vital to recognize our inherent biases, given that our editorial choices wield substantial influence rooted in these predispositions. Consequently, the formulation of precise objectives and goals for the exhibition had to occur later in the process to facilitate the emergence of co-creation. These objectives served as the guiding principles for the exhibition, delineating the themes, messages, and intended impact within both the local community and the broader art sphere.

Heron's experiential and empathetic knowledge involves gaining a deep understanding by directly experiencing something. It is akin to forming an emotional connection where you can empathise with how others might feel in similar situations. This knowledge entails stepping into someone else's perspective and genuinely sharing their feelings, facilitating a deeper understanding and a more profound connection (Heron J & Reason, 2001). In my capacity as the lead curator, I actively applied experiential and empathetic knowledge from the outset of the MASHŪRAH process when I embarked on the search for artists whose work deeply resonated with me and compelled me to share their stories. Artwork selection is a collective effort with me as the curator facilitating and contributing opinions and ideas to the process. This journey began with one-on-one interactions with each artist, commencing with private studio visits and engaging dialogues. These encounters were not only geared toward grasping the artists' unique perspectives and their experiences within the art

world but also toward exploring alternative ways of framing their narratives. The application of this experiential and empathetic knowledge was an immersive journey into the artists' creations and the emotional and sensory responses they stirred within me. I delved into their art connecting with the emotions it evoked and discerning how these emotions would resonate with an audience. This empathetic understanding of the profound emotional impact of art became the cornerstone upon which I wanted to build a meaningful and captivating exhibition experience.

Throughout this process, my intention was threefold. Firstly, I aimed to spotlight Muslim narratives and epistemologies. Secondly, I sought to showcase a diverse range of artists from various stages of their careers and lastly, I wanted to engage the Muslim community and wide-ranging audiences from Cape Town including the art industry.

In my curation approach, I refrained from imposing strict criteria or credentials and exerting influence on the process, allowing the artists themselves to evolve and eventually decide with me on the pieces that best represented the ongoing conversation. I did have to be careful in adhering to certain Islamic principles and to the wishes of some of the artists, such as not including any work with nudity. I remained open to letting the art & artists guide my decision-making process. A critical element in the art selection process also revolved around my deliberate choice not to prioritise the financial aspects of the artwork, therefore I selected works that do not have the most selling ability as is usually the case when working with a gallery. The exhibition was not conceived for personal financial gain but for artistic experimentation. Instead, I extended to the artists the freedom to determine whether they wanted to sell their pieces. In our dialogue circles, we uncovered an imbalance where pricing often acted as a deterrent, intimidating communities from engaging with the artwork, but also the type of opportunities available to artists based on their financial return. My intention was to elicit genuine responses to the artwork without the undue influence of monetary considerations. I think for the artists that chose to sell their work it was refreshing that they would make the total revenue of the sale - whereas a gallery would usually take 50% I chose to take nothing at all. The next section will look at the collective contribution.

10.3.2 Collective Contribution

Initially, engaging in an inquiry itself serves as a catalyst for individuals to become more attuned to different facets of their world. When we become part of a collective endeavour with others who

share similar inquiries, it naturally brings forth fresh perspectives and dimensions of our surroundings. In the early phases of an inquiry, it can be beneficial for participants to simply observe and take note of the novel ways their world presents itself to them (Heron J, 1996; Heron J & Reason, 2001). At the outset, artists engaged in one-on-one dialogues with me, unaware of the other participating artists initially, as that aspect was still evolving. As this initial phase unfolded certain artists took the initiative to introduce their fellow artists to the project, fostering a sense of community and collaborative spirit. Early participants expressing interest in the exhibition and the forthcoming journey included Hasan Essop, Kamyar Binishtarig, Abdus Salaam, and Sahlah Davids. Hasan Essop played a pivotal role in supporting the exhibition's realisation, and his enthusiasm and confidence that many other artists would embrace this 'movement' significantly bolstered my faith in the endeavour. I understand from the feedback that it was also an exciting opportunity for younger and emerging to work with established artists on a level field.

Unlike a conventional curatorial process, where curators actively seek and select artists, in this case, artists also came forward in alignment with the envisioned objectives and introduced others they thought should be involved as well. This approach was instrumental in shaping our commitment to the collaborative circles and addressing both imbalances and potentials within the project. The choice of MASHŪRAH as the exhibition title was a natural progression, embodying the notion of consultation and seeking advice, aligning perfectly with our intention; acknowledging that none of us had definitive answers, and we were all on a collective quest to tell our stories our way.

A significant shift began to take shape, amplified in part by the emotionally charged atmosphere during the Covid lockdown. What worked well was that established artists did not dominate the less established artists in dialogue and decision-making - which had been a concern of mine at the start. This transformation encompassed a newfound sense of unity, which manifested through consensus-building, meticulous planning, and the development of a clearly defined inquiry focus on Muslim epistemologies (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2001). In discussing what artworks, the artists wanted to submit, the relationships that unfolded also contributed to these choices - the narratives woven within the artworks and the intricate connections between the themes began to formulate. In line with Heron's notions of experiential and empathetic knowledge, we firmly rooted ourselves in authentic engagement (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2001). Embracing

emancipation as a fundamental pillar, our commitment to genuine change became unwavering. Simultaneously, the institutional framework found its foundation within communities of practice, effectively catalysing creative communities through the utilisation of MASHŪRAH circles.

At this stage, we had agreed that twenty artists would participate in the exhibition, with each artist contributing one to two pieces spanning various mediums, including photography, video installation, painting, and sculpture. Our final exhibiting artist list was:

Exhibiting artists: Shukry Adams, Mishkhaah Amien, Kamyar Bineshtarigh, Sahlah Davids, Rushda Deaney, Hasan and Husain Essop, Haroon Gunn-Salie, Faheem Rhoda Jackson, Laylaa Jacobs, Mahmudah Jaffer, Atiyyah Khan, Gulshan Khan, Shameelah Khan, Hanna Noor Mahomed, Nyambo Masa Mara, Nabeeha Mohamed, Rahimah Ismail Rajiwate, Abdus Salaam, and Achmat Soni (see images in annex).

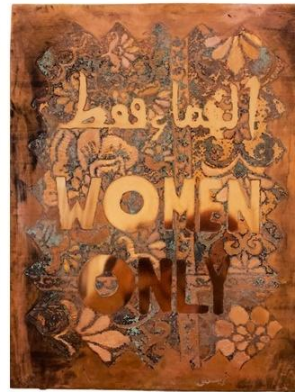
Some of the works were created specifically in response to the exhibition, such as Hanna Noor Mahomed's 'Post Colonial Probe', Shukry Adams 'Koples Now, Nabeeha Mohamed (Berji, 2021; Ishmail, 2021). Others were chosen through a collaborative process between the artists and me, considering their existing bodies of work or their interconnectedness within the exhibition. It is not possible to discuss each artwork however I have selected a few as discussion points.

For instance, Haroon Gunn Salies' black and white lithograph print, derived from his installation 'Amongst Men,' portrayed the funeral bearers and attendees of Imam Haron's funeral. As Hind Berji describes in the review of the show (Berji, 2021), "it is paying tribute to the Islamic communities that campaigned for an artist and his parent's release from jail cells when he was just two years old; it is that same community demanding justice for an anti-apartheid imam whose family never received closure after his death". This piece not only engaged in a meaningful dialogue about the apartheid struggle through a poignant reflection on the communities that carry us through life and into death but also provided a striking contrast to Laylaa Jacobs' large-scale bright pink fabric installation, which encapsulated her inner reflections and fears related to death.

Berji goes on to aptly describe the interweaving of stories (Berji, 2021), "*The incommensurable nature of gendered spaces for one artist (Rushda Deaney) recalling a visit to Medinah correspond with photographs of jubilant, visibly Muslim women otherwise made invisible by Western visual culture and media (Gulshan Khan). The video work of an artist piecing together her mother's*

wedding day, as both documentarian and spectator, (Shameelah Khan) lends a proverbial hand to the shrouded burial piece reflecting on the certitude of death as a connective force (Laylaa Jacobs). Visual documentation of these gendered, often nuanced, experiences transcends the material realm, harkening us back to the geometric language of the universe expressed in traditional Islamic art (Faheem Rhoda Jackson). Flora, geometry, and line design create a triumvirate celebration of the veils of reality (Mahmudah Jaffer). Here, precision in form is absolute and negative space is just as meaningful as the shapes and figures embellishing gouache on paper” (Berji, 2021).

Furthermore, notable connections surfaced among artists who possessed calligraphic expertise. For instance, Kamyar Bineshtarig's venture into the realm of Farsi script, inspired by the works of Persian Sufi poet Hafez, presented a thought-provoking challenge to Orientalism (Berji, 2021). His art often confronted misconceptions where it was mistaken for religious Quranic text. In parallel, Faheem's exploration of Arabic and Quranic calligraphy delved into the profound influence of language and interpretation. These intricate interconnections infused the exhibition with added depth and intricate layers, seamlessly intertwining a diverse range of artistic expressions and narratives. The following section ventures further into the Eastern sphere in alignment with Heron's concept of Imaginal knowing.



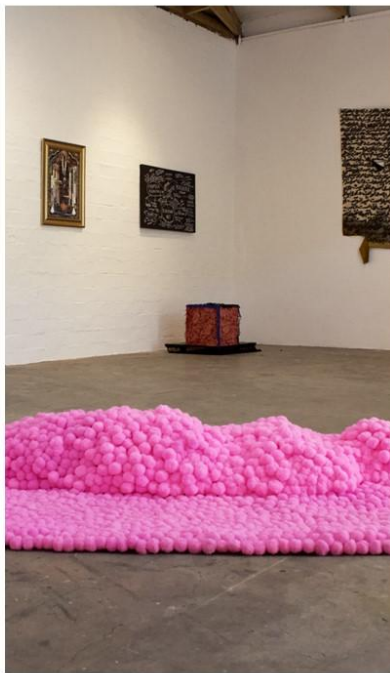
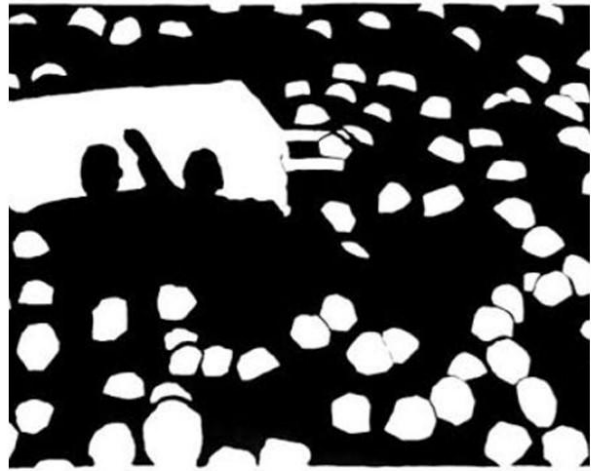




Figure 10.3: Images of submitted artworks by artists for the MASHŪRAH exhibition

Source: Laylaa Jacobs

10.4 Eastern: Observing and Recording Experiences

Aligning Heron's Presentational Knowledge with Emancipatory Aesthetics And Beauty To Shape Conscientization And Dialogue As A Practised Concept Within The HalaqArt Ecosystem For Action

In this section, we cover the following aspects: preparation and planning for the exhibition opening, the encountered challenges, documenting the walkthrough, creating a comprehensive catalogue, interaction with the media, and managing our presence on social media platforms.

10.4.1 Individual Contribution

Presentational knowing involves expressing experiential knowledge through various forms, such as visual arts, music, dance, poetry, and storytelling (Heron J, 1996; Heron J & Reason, 2001). These forms enable the transformation of abstract experiences into communicable expressions. Throughout history, diverse cultures have developed sophisticated ways to symbolise human experiences using presentational knowing. It is a fundamental aspect of the inquiry process, serving as both a valuable outcome and a necessary step before reaching propositional outcomes.

One aspect that has had a significant impact on my growth is the further discovery of the immense potential rooted in expressive forms. This form of knowledge has acted as a bridge, seamlessly

connecting the vast expanse of my accumulated knowledge, diverse life experiences, and creative talents. It has all coalesced to fuel my conscious drive to champion social innovation and facilitate transformation through a continuous cycle of purposeful action and introspective reflection.

In my role as a curator, I was in the realm of Presentational knowing also known as the Imaginal, where creativity and visual storytelling take centre stage in showcasing artworks within the exhibition space (Heron J, 1996; Heron J & Reason, 2001). It is all about crafting a captivating connected visual narrative. Once the artworks had been selected my responsibility was to strategically arrange the artworks, considering factors like placement and the overall flow of the exhibition area to tell these stories. I was encouraged to let my imagination soar, creating an immersive and enthralling experience for our valued visitors. This phase involves collaborative efforts to enhance the visitor experience and understanding. It includes the development of educational components like interpretative materials such as curatorial statements, programming to supplement the exhibition, and areas of respite and reflection within the exhibition.

Characterised by hands-on logistical work I was faced with the challenges of turning a large-scale space that had recently been painted dark blue into a gallery standard exhibition space. I tackled tasks like correct lighting, ensuring aspects that could potentially damage the work, like moisture, humidity and water leaks were addressed. Storage and insurance were imperative, particularly works that were being loaned by galleries such as SMAC for Thania Petersen - which we were not able to receive due to an insurance condition for example. I experienced moments of panic and frustration as I faced new challenges with the Greatmore Studios which highlighted issues in non-profit art spaces in South Africa that were new to me. We would struggle with a lack of resources and painting such a large space was a costly task. Additionally, there was no internet and at times electricity would run out, which caused challenges in overseeing technical aspects, coordinating schedules, and meticulously ensuring the flawless execution of every detail that breathes life into the exhibition.

But despite this, it is where my practical expertise gained strength as I navigated the discomfort of not having a ready-made gallery space and infrastructure to transform the exhibition concept into a tangible and captivating reality. I think the emotional support of the artists was welcome during this time, although I felt the pressure of resolving the more logistical challenges without their

knowing. I did feel a lesser disconnect with the artists than usual when curating an exhibition and this was due to our close ecosystem and relationships that had formulated.

I considered several factors when deciding on interpretative materials to guide our visitors. The first thing I placed at the entrance was informative wall texts introducing the exhibition. Next, I chose to have interpretative text throughout the exhibition space detailing each work and the artist's biographies. Notably, I chose not to display the prices of the artworks available for sale and this decision had multiple benefits. It ensured that artists were not judged based on the monetary value of their work, thereby preventing any hierarchy among them. Moreover, it encouraged all members of the community to engage with the art without being deterred by price tags. This was an issue that had arisen in our dialogues, and I wanted to be intentional in addressing and seeing the response.

Amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, we also faced the possibility of hosting an exhibition with limited or no physical attendance from the audience. To address this challenge, I developed a contingency plan. We proceeded with the installation of the exhibition while making provisions to film a curator-led walkthrough that could be accessed online on Youtube in case the exhibition could not welcome physical visitors. This decision held significant importance, as it aimed to honour the dedication of the artists who had invested their time and effort in creating new works during a globally challenging time.

My belief was that by proceeding with the exhibition installation, it would become a momentous part of art history, regardless of whether it could be witnessed by in-person visitors because the art was on the wall. To ensure a seamless installation process, I enlisted the assistance of Igsaan Martins from Martin Projects, who had extensive experience as a director for various galleries in Cape Town. Additionally, I collaborated with filmmaker Bilqis Deaney for filming and editing expertise, all while navigating the uncertainty of potential COVID-19 restrictions and their impact on the exhibition. This way our ecosystem continued to develop.



Figure 10.4: installation shots of the installation process and final layout

Meanwhile, Laylaa Jacobs and I were diligently working on the exhibition catalogue (Bint Moneer Khan *et al.*, 2021) recognizing its importance as another valuable addition to the art history archive. The catalogue served as a method to contribute to this archive, and we produced a beautifully designed copy for print in the future with appropriate funding secured. We were fortunate to have a foreword written by Art and culture writer Ashraf Jamal and Ukhona from Greatmore Studios. Simultaneously, I was spearheading a media campaign, primarily focusing on local media but also targeting international outlets. As discussed in the chapter on institutionalising research, public relations (PR) played a crucial role, and as a curator experienced in communications but lacking a dedicated marketing team, I took on the responsibility.

MASHŪRAH

PRESENTED BY



**MASHŪRAH
ARTS**

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Artists: Shukry Adams, Mishkaan Amien, Kamyar Bineshatirah, Sahlah David, Rushdi Dean Hasan & Husain Essop, Haroon Gum-Sale, Layla Jacobs, Fahem Rhoda Jackson, Mahmud Jaffer, Atiyah Khan, Gulshan Khan, Saameelah Khan, Hanna Noor Mohamed, Nyamba Ni Nara, Nabesha Mohamed, Rahmah Ismail Rajiwate, Abdus Salam, Achmat Soti

Curator: Sara Bint Moneer Khan

Curatorial Assistant & Designer: Layla Jacobs

Video-graphy & Editing: Brijes Deane & Hanga Lucia Lukak

24 July - 30th September 2021.
Greatmore Art Studios, Cape Town, South Africa

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Acknowledgements: This exhibition and catalogue were conceived and realized as a result of the enthusiasm and support of all those involved, and I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to them all.

To Ukhoza Mtsali Mando, director of Greatmore Studios, for her unwavering support in bringing this exhibition to fruition, for welcoming MASHŪRAH into the Greatmore Studios, and for her humble presence throughout. Thank you to the Greatmore resident artists for sharing their artistic home with us and for welcoming both MASHŪRAH artists and visitors.

To Layla Jacobs for her time, patience, and ongoing support in the development of this catalogue, as well as curatorial assistance. Thank you to, Shafiq Morton, Ashraf Jan Mahmudah Jaffer, Martin Projects, and Brijes Deane for their academic, logistical, and technical support. Thank you to all of the media platforms, including ART AFRICA, SABC, Cape Arg Cape Times, Southern Suburbs Tatler, ENCA, Daily Vox and Art plugged, for the support & cooperation. I'd like to thank each and every artist who took part in the MASHŪRAH & brought it to life with their artworks and narratives, without whom this exhibition would not be possible.

Thank you to everyone who came to view, appreciate, and participate in these works. First I'd like to thank my husband Yaseen Matthews for his months of patience, love, and support, as well as my PhD supervisor Professor Alexander Schaeffer for helping me push forward on my own MASHŪRAH journey over the last few years. Many individuals have been transformed as a result of this process, both personally and professionally, and we have been reminded of the importance of collectivity, community, and, above all, art.

MASHŪRAH ARTS
Sara Bint Moneer Khan
Curator and Founder

6 CURATORIAL STATEMENT

By Sara Bint Moneer Khan

The exhibition, *MASHŪRAH*, is a collective of artworks by 16 artists, each with their own unique voice and perspective. The artists are from various backgrounds and disciplines, and their works explore a wide range of themes and issues. The exhibition is a celebration of diversity and a platform for artists to share their stories and experiences. The curatorial statement provides a context for the artworks and discusses the themes and issues explored in the exhibition. It also discusses the challenges of curating a diverse group of artists and the importance of creating a safe and inclusive space for all artists to participate. The statement is written in a conversational and accessible style, and it aims to engage and inform the audience about the exhibition and the artists involved.

7 FOREWORD

By Nafiz Jinnat

MASHŪRAH is a collective of artworks by 16 artists, each with their own unique voice and perspective. The artists are from various backgrounds and disciplines, and their works explore a wide range of themes and issues. The exhibition is a celebration of diversity and a platform for artists to share their stories and experiences. The foreword provides a context for the artworks and discusses the themes and issues explored in the exhibition. It also discusses the challenges of curating a diverse group of artists and the importance of creating a safe and inclusive space for all artists to participate. The foreword is written in a conversational and accessible style, and it aims to engage and inform the audience about the exhibition and the artists involved.



13 DIRECTOR, GREATMORE ART STUDIOS

by Ukhona Nishali Mando

"The whole experience of meeting Sara the curator of MASHŪRAH just before lockdown to this first iteration which is by no means it's ultimate culmination, is a good indication that while we can and have to be global in our thinking, there's also value in responding to your immediate environment. The pandemic gave us no choice in a way, and we were forced to engage and rekindle possibilities. For me this MASHŪRAH and seeking advice in this way and being in conversation with one of the many markers of identity that make up our environment as Greatmore is just that:

It just seeks to offer space for exploration, investigation, conversation and play that centres art and the artists and the kinds of things that they are interested in and or are grappling with. With Greatmore being very deliberate about inching closer to this idea of being an artist-led -community of practice it made sense to respond and collaborate with the vision of these artists and their curator. We were drawn to the fact that the very premise of it did not claim to be anything that it can not be- to absolute but rather a conversation starter and a provocation to more dialogue."

Figure 10.5: From MASHŪRAH Catalogue

Source: Designed by Laylaa Jacobs

My tasks included creating media kits generating interest among journalists and influencers and establishing a strong social media presence through an Instagram page with a marketing plan for the public. My goal was to ensure that this exhibition attained a level of recognition that would deem it museum-worthy. This would open the possibility of considering future venues for the exhibition within South Africa. Initially, I had anticipated showcasing a maximum of ten artists when embarking on this journey. However, the scale of the exhibition grew beyond my initial expectations, especially considering that I was managing twenty artists and the administration alongside a full-time job which was also at a gallery and its own exhibition programme to oversee. Going forward I recognised the need for enlisting assistance in areas such as dedicated marketing and curatorial assistance for a more sustainable and smoother process. I think it was necessary that I had more of a team from a logistical aspect and realised that any follow-on exhibition would require this.

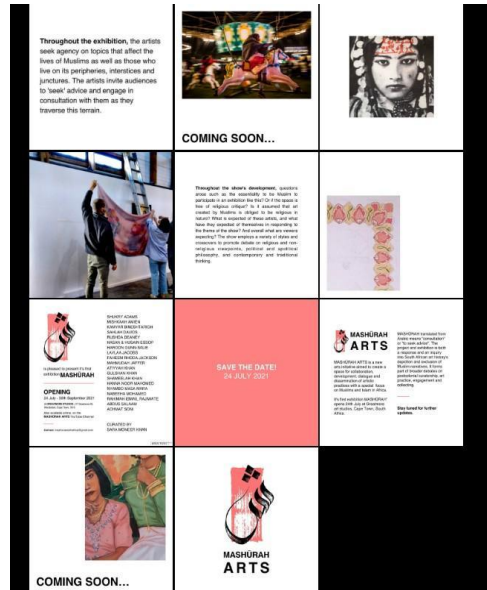


Figure 10.6: MASHŪRAH Social media page

Upon learning that we would be allowed to invite limited audiences for the opening day, I faced another challenge in managing this process. Instead of opting for an RSVP-invitation-only approach, I chose to maintain the spirit of inclusion and allowed people to attend without prior invitation. This decision aligned with our intention of fostering a less elitist and exclusive environment and to recreate the warmth and closeness that we had within our ecosystem and circles. We carefully managed the audience flow throughout the day, and it also helped to monitor how audiences organically attended and a lot of the local community came alongside the media and industry members. The next section will address the collective contribution during the same period.

10.4.2 Collective Contribution

Throughout this transformative journey, Heron's Presentational knowledge played a pivotal role for the artists as well. It encompassed the action phase of observing and recording experiences, allowing artists to capture and reflect upon the evolving ecosystem and their unique roles within it. Moreover, emancipatory theory emerged from the realm of subjective aesthetics and beauty, guiding the artistic process in the pursuit of meaningful subjective expression and its reception.



Figure 10.7: Exhibition opening day.

Simultaneously, the Institutional Framework materialised through conscientization and dialogue, evolving as both a concept and practice within the HalaqArt Ecosystem.

During this phase, the artists actively immersed themselves in a dynamic and ever-evolving ecosystem to tell their stories. As the exhibition unfolded in real-time, it generated significant interest and excitement within the art community. However, the looming presence of the pandemic added an undertone of concern and stress, with limited exhibition opportunities available, forcing many artists to create their works from the confines of their homes. Nonetheless, this artmaking phase served as a profound and reflective space for the artists as they primarily focused on engaging in internal dialogues whilst I overtook logistical responsibilities. This represented a departure from the conventional gallery setup, where gallerists often exert influence over creative decisions, primarily driven by the objective of selling artwork, leaving minimal room for experimentation. Within our unique process, narrative and artistic expression took precedence over transactional considerations. An exhibition, at its core, serves as a series of interconnected conversations: between the artist and the viewer, between the curator and the audience, and even among the artworks themselves. The true magic of an exhibition arises when it not only provides answers but also ignites new questions.

A compelling example is the initial hesitancy felt by artists like Nabeeha Mohamed about

participating in the exhibition. This hesitation sparked a profound personal inquiry, prompting her to explore the source of her reluctance. She candidly shared that while she did not exclusively identify as Muslim, she had been raised within the culture and its rich tapestry of rituals. This internal exploration led her to create a work that paid homage to the enduring Palestinian crisis while delving into the concepts of *sadaqah* and *zakat* (*Voluntary and Compulsory charity in Islam*). Artists were requested to record themselves in their studios and unfortunately, it was not something many of the artists made headway with, however for Rushda Deaney it became an opportunity to journal her reflections and weave that into her practice and she filmed time in her studio. For her the 'MASHŪRAH formed part of her master's in fine art as a reflective journey as she produced a body of work for her final thesis.

It has been a testament to the power of experiential learning, collaborative inquiry, and the unwavering commitment of artists to express their truths. It has illuminated the transformative potential of art, where creativity, culture, and community converge, transcending boundaries and inspiring both artists and audiences alike. The legacy of the MASHŪRAH exhibition lies not only in the artwork it presents but, in the dialogue, it fosters, the questions it raises, and the connections it forges within the ever-evolving landscape of contemporary art. The next moves to the Northern realm of Navigating.



Figure 10.8: Rushda Deaney studio video



Figure 10.9: Some MASHŪRAH artists

10.5 North: Navigating Experiential Learning

Integrating Heron's Propositional Knowledge, Overcoming Systemic Barriers With Emancipatory Theory, And Cultivating Collective Institutional Knowledge And Social Innovation Through The MASHŪRAH Research Hub

In this section, we cover various aspects of the exhibition opening, including the public opening, the VIP event for artists, the curator's weekly walkthrough, the media's exploration, and feedback from the art industry's walkthrough.

10.5.1 Individual Contribution

Heron's Propositional Knowing is deeply rooted in ideologies and philosophies that manifest in our individual ideas and belief systems. It aligns with the intellectual understanding of ideas and theories, akin to knowing about something (Heron J, 1996; Heron J & Reason, 2001). For me, Propositional knowing resembles the act of constructing mental frameworks and classifications, much like how an artist gives meaning to their work by categorising and labelling experiences through colour technique and forms. It also draws parallels with the approaches of art critics and art historians, employing logical thinking and analytical methods to delve into the context they study.

In my personal journey, I adeptly fused various competencies to address the intricate challenges within curatorial and arts management roles in the creative industry. These roles demand a harmonious blend of both soft and hard skill sets to thrive successfully. For me, the transformative

learning process embedded in the doctoral/PHD experience has been nothing short of fulfilling. Delving into academic theories, Islam, art history, methodologies, and philosophies to craft my own frameworks and methodologies has proven to be profoundly rewarding. This intellectual voyage has left an indelible mark on my writing and has also provided me with a powerful platform to channel my artistic expression, giving voice to my innermost thoughts and experiences.

Propositional knowing entails a deep exploration of the concepts and intellectual underpinnings not only of the artworks but also of the entire MASHŪRAH exhibition. When curating the exhibition, it became imperative to delve into the themes, historical context, and theoretical frameworks that form the foundation of the artworks. This reservoir of knowledge serves as a vital tool for effectively conveying the exhibition's significance and translating its meaning to the audience.

In the context of navigating systemic barriers within the framework of emancipatory theory, I confronted personal barriers as a non-South African leading this project. However, over time, my imposter syndrome waned. My journey involved not only overcoming obstacles but also constructing the necessary institutional framework to continue addressing them. This was achieved through a concerted effort to navigate communal institutional knowledge creation and foster social innovation, all facilitated by the pivotal role of the MASHŪRAH Research Hub. Through my network, I have effectively cultivated a community of enthusiastic individuals who share a common vision. Together, we are committed to harnessing the transformative potential of dialogue and collaboration, contributing to the cultivation of novel skills and knowledge within the spheres of the creative industries and within the communities we engage with.

Once the exhibition had opened to the public, questions arose:

1. What were the audience's initial thoughts?
2. What was the initial reception by the industry?
3. What did independent journalists and media have to report?
4. What had we missed out and could improve?
5. How were the artists feeling now that the show was open? and what conversations were taking place for them?
6. Did this feel like a success?

My personal reflection from the stage of the exhibition opening was that a sense of relief washed

over me as the public graced our opening day and despite my doubts along the process, I had made the right decision to curate this show. At the opening as a deliberate alignment with the steady stream of visitors, I made the conscious choice to forgo an opening speech, opting instead to step into the background. I also chose not to serve any alcohol at the opening which is usually common at art openings. This day was reserved for pure observation, setting the stage for the forthcoming one-month run of the show. All the artists were in attendance, and for some, it marked their first encounter with the exhibition. Within this unassuming ambience, our audience had the unique opportunity to fully engage, connect, and delve deeper into the essence of the exhibited artworks. To elevate this experience, I carefully included a curated playlist by Atiyah Khan's "Rotation of Bismillah" (Atiyah Khan, 2021) adding an additional layer of immersion to the overall artistic journey.

There was a substantial turnout of members from the Muslim community, and many were familiar with each other, creating a more meaningful and natural atmosphere that made it seem as though the show was specifically tailored for them. My own family members attended, and my in-laws knew some of the artists' and their families. The exhibition was extensive, and I realised that if space and resources had been allowed, I would have included even more artists. However, this experience affirmed that such exhibitions could manifest in future iterations.

At the outset, my main priority was to collect feedback from the audience rather than seeking validation purely from the industry. This is not to say that industry feedback was not important, but I found it genuinely satisfying that most visitors hailed from the community, which was the target audience often missing from exhibition openings. As industry professionals attended the exhibition, I could not help but notice a distinct sense of surprise among them. This reaction was largely attributed to the exhibition's striking diversity, as I had purposefully curated a harmonious blend of non-traditional and traditional artworks, positioning them on an equal plane; an approach not typically embraced by South African galleries. Curating a multitude of narratives representing diverse Muslim experiences in a single exhibition was an unprecedented endeavour. It illuminated the fact that such a significant spotlight on a large group of Muslim artists had never been cast before and was possible.

In addition to the opening day, I organised weekly curator-led tours with the hope of more active artist participation. However, we eventually struck a compromise that redirected the artist's

support towards a surge of media interviews. These interviews played a crucial role in the exhibition's success, creating a valuable archive and documenting its impact. It evolved into a media whirlwind, with interview requests and news slots often requiring immediate availability, presenting a significant challenge with availability. Nevertheless, I acknowledged the time-sensitive nature of these opportunities.

One recurring personal lesson for me during this period was that I bore a substantial workload, and the presence of a co-curator would have been greatly appreciated. It also posed challenges for exhibition programming, as the time demands for curator-led tours and media commitments left little room for flexibility and the support from Greatmore Studios was difficult due to resources. While these experiences offered valuable lessons, they also underscored the undeniable success of the exhibition. It became evident that, in this initial iteration, our resources and capacity simply could not accommodate every opportunity that arose but there would be opportunity for it in the future. The next section will move to the collective contribution.

10.5.2 Collective Contribution - Artists and Industry

Throughout this comprehensive process we continued to hold space for discussing progress, addressing challenges, and exploring potential enhancements. Furthermore, feedback was actively given from audiences, industry, and community as well as media once the exhibition had been unveiled. The commitment to maintaining an open-minded attitude towards iteration and adaptation remained unwavering. The insights and feedback gathered played a pivotal role in implementing necessary adjustments for the future, recognizing that Cooperative Inquiry is an iterative process with the aim of amplifying the exhibition's impact.

As we received a wealth of feedback, it will be impractical to detail it all. In this section, I will specifically highlight feedback from artists and the industry. The subsequent final section will delve into our community round-up session and media feedback.

I arranged for a separate opening for the artists some days after the exhibition had opened to the public. I was mindful to create the same warm environment we had experienced in our Zoom sessions. Feedback from the evening highlighted that it was unlike usual art openings and felt much more inviting with a real sense of belonging.

Participating artist Rushda Deaney describes:

“Mashūrah explores the different ways most South African Muslim artists interpret Islamic art. The exhibition explored individual understandings of Islamic Art through various mediums based on each artist’s understanding of Islam in South Africa. It relies on the personal experiences and interpretations of the artists concerned. As art is subjective, and Islam likewise filters into the everyday personal actions of everyday living, in my view Islamic art cannot have a fixed definition”.



Figure 10.10: Artists private opening event

Rushda went on to share her personal reflections of the opening day of the show:

“I glanced at this poster before walking into the Gallery space with my father. As I look at every artwork and installation, I notice the space slowly begins to fill with people. As time passes, I begin to take photographs of the artwork and the people. Some faces are familiar because over the past months almost every Sunday at ten o’clock in the morning we have had Zoom meetings. Here we talk about what Muslim art is, the struggles Muslim artists face before making art and while making art. I was struck by the various ways Muslims

experience Islam, and how the artwork reflects that. Our understanding of Islam as individuals allows each of us to interpret personal ways of being Muslim as unique, yet similar. These shared stories or rather shared experiences become a collective contemporary understanding of Islam through various mediums namely, mixed media, traditional calligraphy, photography, painting, video and installations. Taking the time to read each artist’s information about the artwork, I am learning about my heritage through their work”.

Sahlah Davids shared the reception of her artwork “What was a truly remarkable experience was when I spoke to a wonderful aunt who came to view the MASHŪRAH exhibition in Greatmore Studios. The aunty mentioned that the chairs reminded her of when she was younger. When they would find loose pins lying around, they would press them into the chairs as a way of storing them. It is these stories that are shared and really sparked my intention of using familiar objects. *Pierced* becomes both relatable visually and provides a space of conversation and instils that feeling represented through shared experiences and stories”.



Figures 10.11: Stills from Al Nur documentary.

Ukhona, the director of Greatmore Studios played a pivotal role and facilitated the exhibition to form part of the Greatmore programme. We were requested to partake in a documentary interview about the exhibition for Al Nur on SABC along with artist Rahima Rajiwate. Here she gives her feedback on the process and outcomes:

“Sara approached me as Director of Greatmore Studios to share the vision of MASHŪRAH and to invite Greatmore to be part of it just before lockdown. The vision both curatorial and ideological, spoke to a few pillars of my own strategic direction that I consider important for Greatmore at this stage of its lifecycle:

1. The making true and tangible idea of an artist-led community of practice. Receiving this idea and creating an enabling environment for Sara and the artists that would form part of the group exhibition, would be one of the ways I felt would allow the artistic community and art to lead the direction of our programming.

2. It provided an opportunity to explore other possibilities of community engagement that are not paternalistic and did not take on a narrative of developing with the assumption of the artists being the superior importers of knowledge to a community in what is commonly termed outreach. This project and exhibition were a specific focus on art that would create engagement based on various points of interest that proved to be of relevance, intrigue and interest by virtue of what it sought to investigate and explore. This form of community engagement that emerged from this was not contrived. All involved were pleasantly surprised by its reach. We did not predetermine or preconceive its reach.

3. A gap had been identified by the curator from a process of thorough research and they proposed an open and explorative format of arriving at an outcome. This style of working I believed to be in line with the ethos of play and being process centric I envision Greatmore being a safe and brave space. Not being a commercial gallery is an advantage that makes space for possibilities that I consider critical for springboarding new possibilities.

4. It provided an opportunity for localised action (immediate, Woodstock, CT, South Africa and the continent) where a quest for internationalism had begun to be eroded at Greatmore.

Inevitably the exhibition had a global reach but that was not its premise. That was a refreshing shift.”

In its execution process, I derived pleasure in watching the team grapple towards the final presentation. Grappling with finding the most appropriate forms of inviting those who believed in the vision into the vision as artists, collaborators, and coauthors of public opinion. There was a methodical deliberateness in the process.

The dynamic that it introduced in activating Greatmore post-COVID lockdown was well-timed. All concerned responded to the needs of the moment. Relationship building between artists in residence at Greatmore and the curator and participating artists was organic and, in some cases, continuing. The response from the media affirmed its relevance as a conversation starter towards a longer and enduring and necessary discourse. Dissenting views also provided an important window into understanding some of the perspectives that would be threatened by the idea of this exhibition. This feedback was considered and invitations for further engagement were sought and offered:

“I personally enjoyed the integrity that Sara brings to her work. It made for a healthy and inspiring working environment where many stimulating conversations took place”.

Participating artist Abdus Salaam shares his journey with me that led to his participation in the MASHŪRAH exhibition:

“During the midst of the Covid pandemic, I reached out to Sara and discovered her immersed in a new project gallery. As we discussed my latest work, she extended a gracious invitation for me to visit and participate in a group exhibition she was curating as the director and curator of the space. Collaborating with Sara was an absolute delight from inception to completion. She not only granted me complete creative freedom but also provided invaluable guidance on logistical and presentation aspects. The exhibition proved to be a resounding success and, in many ways, served as the launching pad for my now thriving career. I look back on that time with immense fondness and a profound appreciation for Sara's exceptional curatorial insight and unwavering support. Subsequently, Sara embarked on the ambitious journey of curating and presenting her own group exhibition, aptly named "MASHŪRAH". During this endeavour, Sara

wholeheartedly engaged with the local Muslim community, orchestrating speaking events and media gatherings. The exhibition itself was groundbreaking, marking a significant milestone for the community as it ventured into uncharted artistic territory”.



Figure 10.12: Artist Abdus Salaam and I installing his first exhibition with me

Scott E Williams was a resident artist at Greatmore Art Studies and responsible for Greatmore’s communications and therefore became a part of the extended and evolving MASHŪRAH ecosystem at a later point. He shares his insights:

“My impression of MASHŪRAH as an exhibition and collaborative platform is that the exhibition was a much-needed event from the perspective of the Woodstock community as well from the Greatmore programming perspective. The exhibition brought together artists from different career levels. What I liked also was the multiplicity of media and there was no real hierarchy of what could be considered fine arts and more traditional arts because it also melded the presentations of artists like Achmat Soni and the Essop brothers who use performance and photography in more current languages. Also, art forms are not necessarily as close to practices of worship as others in the exhibition. So, there was a levelling of the playing field for me as a curator also and artistic producer. It is always an interesting exercise that these different art forms can be evaluated on their merits. And, how they contribute to our understanding of concepts in the world and our appreciation for each other's livelihoods and identities. In contributing to further discussions between people, whether you are Muslim or not, there was a catalytic and generative quality to the MASHŪRAH exhibition and platform. What was also interesting to me was that this

exhibition came at a time when Greatmore was facing intense economic pressure intense internal fighting, major shakeup in its structures. So, the exhibition also brought in audiences and fulfilled a role at Greatmore Studios which has a long history of serving as an alternative nonprofit non-commercial platform on the Cape Town art landscape. So MASHŪRAH finds itself in good company since its role is predominantly a sense-making platform and an awareness platform, it's an educational platform and conversational platform treating the media of exhibition as a conversation. So, it definitely fits into the culture of an organisation like Greatmore.”

Beyond that, the MASHŪRAH also invited new audiences into the space which is a feather in the curator's cap. Because exhibitions largely are preaching to the choir and luring arts audiences, an exhibition like MASHŪRAH attracted people who were perhaps more interested in conversations around Islam, so that was an interesting platform for me. MASHŪRAH was also a generative platform in the sense that it allowed for more conversations to develop between artists who then became peers on the platform and continued conversations with the curator. This is a positive and hopeful gesture to know that curators are still interested in cultivating longer-term relationships with artists whose goals and ideas align with theirs in ways that can be expanded and broadened out or contested and interrogated at later stages. So, these are the things that stood out for me, that there were relationships that extended out of the exhibition then beyond just the exhibiting artists' cohort”.

The next section moves to the final in this cycle of practical knowledge in the West.

10.6 West: Effecting By Leveraging Heron's Practical Knowing, Facilitating Mutual Learning Cocurating In An Emancipatory Environment And Cultivating Transformative And Innovative Artistic Engagement And Experiences

In this section, we delve into various aspects, including feedback from the media, community MASHŪRAH feedback sessions, and reflections after the formal closing of the exhibition.

This section begins with the Collective contribution which addresses the community feedback that was conducted in an open-air sit-down MASHŪRAH circle with artists and audiences at the closing of the exhibition. I follow with the collective media feedback highlights and conclude with my individual reflections at the final stage.

In this section, we continue to evaluate the transformative potential of the MASHŪRAH Initiative and its inaugural exhibition, with a focus on Heron's practical knowing aligned with the anticipated emancipatory processes, while simultaneously examining the media and community feedback. Firstly, practical knowing involves applying the knowledge gained through experience to inform future actions. The MASHŪRAH exhibition is not merely a theoretical concept; it represents a practical endeavour where we have applied real-world knowledge and experience. Secondly, as the emancipatory processes emphasise the significance of mutual learning and cocurating the MASHŪRAH serves as a collaborative space for growth and knowledge co-creation, fostering an environment where individuals learn from one another.

The institutional aspect is paramount in effecting transformative change and the MASHŪRAH Initiative is strategically positioned as a platform for nurturing transformative and experimental curating and community engagement. Consequently, it acts as a catalyst for enriched artistic interactions and experiences, potentially reshaping traditional curatorial practices and pushing the boundaries of what art spaces can achieve.

Media feedback and community feedback sessions played integral roles in our evaluation process. These feedback mechanisms provide us with a comprehensive understanding of the MASHŪRAH's impact on external perceptions and the community it serves. Our commitment to transparency is underscored by our willingness to adapt and improve based on input from various stakeholders. The following section moves to the community MASHŪRAH session.

10.6.1 Community MASHŪRAH Session

As the exhibition neared its conclusion, we conducted an evaluation by inviting the audience to participate in an open-air MASHŪRAH circle alongside the artists. Journalist Nontobeko Aisha Mkhwanazi, who covered certain reflections in an article for the local publication Muslim Views(Aisha, 2021), was among the attendees. This provided an opportunity to engage more intimately with the artists and assess whether we had achieved our initial goals, reflecting on what worked well and areas requiring improvement.



Figure 10.13: Community MASHŪRAH

Source: Personal archive

The session unfolded in the relaxed courtyard of the Greatmore Studios, maintaining an informal ambience while incorporating facilitation to structure our initial questions. We commenced by delving into the artists' practices and examining their submitted body of work, eventually shifting the focus towards gathering thoughts and feedback from the attendees. During the event, it was noted that the different thoughts which exist in society about MASHŪRAH as an exhibition were encapsulated through the work of Hanna.

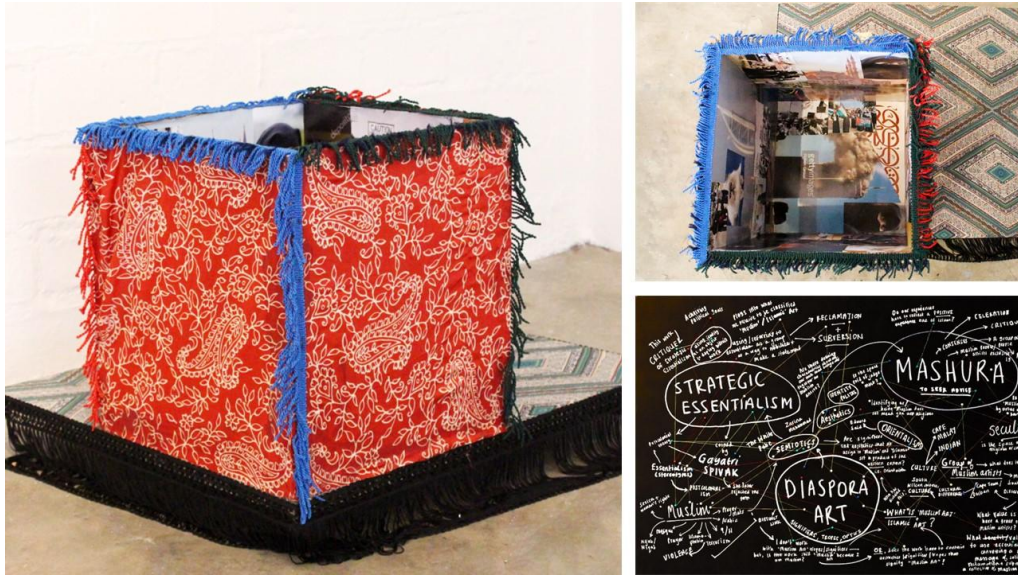


Figure 10.14: Post Colonial Probe artwork by Hanna Noor M

Source: Layaa Jacobs

Noor Mohammad, titled ‘A Postcolonial+ I Probe’. She elaborated “The first artwork is a mind map which highlights MASHŪRAH, strategic essentialism and diaspora art” (Aisha, 2021). Strategic essentialism (comes from essentialism which can be negative stereotypes) is strategically using the stereotypes to mobilise a group of people,’ Hanna explained. “Gayatri Spivak, who coined the term, also rejected it. This makes it a muddle of identity politics, and within it arises a question of whether it is helpful to use stereotypes or not and that led me to diaspora art.... The artwork is basically my take on the entire showcase of what it is and what it is not”.

Here is the feedback gleaned from the community session held with artists and audiences:

1. The attendees' demographic spanned various age groups, from individuals in their twenties to those in their 50s, 60s, and 70s, encompassing both genders. Notably, the majority of participants hailed from the Cape Town Muslim community. This diverse attendance underscored that the exhibition had successfully captured the interest of a broad spectrum of age groups, fostering intergenerational dialogue, a crucial aspect of our

endeavour.

2. During the community session valuable insights were reiterated regarding the challenges of engaging in cultural activities, particularly for disadvantaged ethnic minorities like the Cape Town Muslim community. Complex social and cultural factors, including socio-economic disadvantages, cultural disconnection, and a lack of information, contribute to their exclusion from cultural opportunities.
3. The feedback underscored the diversity in storytelling allowed attendees to connect with the art and the exhibition on a personal and emotional level, enhancing overall engagement. By incorporating multiple narratives, the exhibition effectively catered to a wider and more heterogeneous audience, creating a richer and more inclusive cultural experience. The multiplicity of narratives played a pivotal role in making the exhibition accessible, relatable, and meaningful to diverse attendees, ultimately contributing to its success and impact.
4. One significant factor for the future highlighted was identifying community representatives capable of bridging the gap between the community and cultural institutions. These individuals act as mediators and ambassadors, boosting community participation and enriching the understanding and narrative surrounding art. It was suggested that religious leaders should be more involved as their religious centres form the bedrock of the community.
5. During the artist selection process, concerns arose regarding the absence of Black Muslim artists, leading to the recognition of this issue. However, a deliberate decision was made not to impose specific criteria at that time, with the intention of pursuing greater inclusivity in future exhibitions. This community feedback underscored the importance of encouraging participation from underrepresented backgrounds in subsequent iterations.
6. The overarching goal has been to guide all visitors in exploring collections from unique perspectives, uncovering their diverse layers. Consequently, the feedback emphasised the value of interpretative materials strategically placed around the venue. These materials proved essential for engaging with the art, especially when no one was available to provide additional information, benefiting audiences who may have hesitated to ask questions. Audio prompts were suggested to aid audiences to accompany the written statements, which were not possible during the Covid pandemic.

7. The topic of buying artwork was also discussed, and a significant portion of the audience expressed their reluctance to make purchases due to financial constraints. However, they expressed a willingness to support artists and their development through alternative means, such as attending upcoming exhibitions.

The next section will consolidate the media feedback.

10.6.2 Media Feedback

During the early stages of the MASHŪRAH process, I took the initiative to identify potential media platforms for partnerships, with the aim of effectively conveying our message to both local and global audiences. This storytelling approach was chosen for its ability to reach a diverse range of viewers, including those who may not initially express an interest in the arts. Our collaboration with **The Voice of the Cape radio** station played a pivotal role, serving as a significant launching point for our project. We gradually expanded our presence on this platform, and thanks to the support of presenter and journalist Shafiq Morton, I was able to establish connections with other journalists. Furthermore, I invested a considerable amount of time in personally reaching out to journalists and media outlets who could authentically and genuinely carry our story forward. This personalised approach ensured that our message was conveyed with the right intention and resonance. Additionally, established artists within our ecosystem leveraged their media connections to further our cause.



Figure 10.15: With broadcaster Tanya Nefdt for ENCA News

Sharing all the media coverage article summaries in this chapter will not be possible. However, the following publications and news outlets supported the exhibition with reviews and coverage: NEW ARAB; TRIANGLE NETWORK & GREATMORE (Triangle Network TV, 2021); ENCA NEWS (EncaNews, 2021); SABC3 -An Nur the Light (available offline); SA FM (Masinga, 2021); ART AFRICA MAGAZINE (Bell Roberts, 2021); THE DAILY VOX (Shephard, 2021); VOICE OF CAPE (Bint Moneer Khan, 2021); Art Plugged (Art Plugged, 2021); IOL; Muslim Views (Aisha, 2021);

Here is a summary of some of the feedback we received:

Cape Town Imam Rashied Omar shared his thoughts with ENCA News (EncaNews, 2021)

"One of the reasons this exhibition is important is that the Muslim community was historically disenfranchised, particularly during the apartheid era when Muslim artists had limited opportunities for self-expression. Additionally, in recent decades, a rigid interpretation of Islam has gained dominance. However, this form of Islam is now receding, making way for the more mystical and compassionate tradition of Islam. Thus, this exhibition represents a unique and significant moment in Cape Muslim history."

Hind Berji, in her review for the New Arab publication (Berji, 2021) which gave the exhibition an international reach, raised “the thought-provoking questions about our traditional perceptions of Islamic art and the importance of viewing contemporary art by Muslim artists and those in their orbit as original and distinct. She emphasised the need to break free from politicised stereotypes while placing this art within a broader multicultural context (Berji, 2021). Hind described MASHŪRAH “as a vehicle for exploring the complexities of these inquiries. She delved into how the “exhibition provided a microcosm of the intricate visual and cultural experiences of the participating artists”. She highlighted that “the theme of homage, as depicted in the artworks, carried both personal and political undertones, connecting historical narratives with contemporary moments. It was akin to a violinist - (in reference to Mishkaah Amiens work), playing haunting notes in honour of marginalised artists from the past and the speculative calligraphic endeavours of 18th-century religious leaders, including poets, activists, and exiles as illustrated through Faheem Rhoda Jackson” (Berji, 2021).

The exhibition, according to Hind (Berji, 2021), “initiated dialogues about Afro-Arab identities in imagined post-apocalyptic settings, challenged the notion of Africa as a monolithic continent, and explored the meaningful connections between South Africa and Palestine. These discussions intersected with subjective lived experiences. Ultimately, Hind found “the beauty of "MASHŪRAH lay in the richness of shared themes and intersections among the artists, as well as in their introspective and outward-looking exploration of tensions and complexities”. The exhibition, in her view, “became a reflection of these intricate dynamics and multifaceted narratives” (Berji, 2021).

Art Africa Magazine publicly supported the exhibition by highlighting its need (Bell Roberts, 2021).

"ART AFRICA is thrilled to witness the launch of MASHŪRAH ARTS curated by Sara Bint Moneer Khan. This initiative is long overdue and much needed for South African arts and culture. For far too long, there has been a lack of voices from the Muslim community contributing to the mainstream contemporary visual art narratives of the region. It is our hope that our support can, in some small way, contribute to redressing this imbalance."

Bridget Masinga from SA FM radio shared her initial thoughts (Masinga, 2021)

"Throughout my years of engaging in artistic conversations, I had never encountered discussions around artistic expressions originating from the Muslim community in South Africa, despite its deep heritage. There seemed to be a lack of visibility in this space, not due to a shortage of creatives, but rather limited access. We often tend to have narrow perspectives, especially from a faith-based standpoint, which can lead us to overlook the nuances within the Muslim artistic community."



Figure 10.16: Some Newspaper coverage of MASHŪRAH exhibition

In conclusion, the feedback from various media outlets and individuals highlighted the significance of MASHŪRAH in addressing historical and cultural narratives, challenging stereotypes, and amplifying the voices of the Muslim artistic community in South Africa. It served as a beacon of inclusivity, fostering dialogue and understanding among diverse audiences and redressing the imbalances. The next section moves to my individual contribution.

10.6.3 Individual Contribution

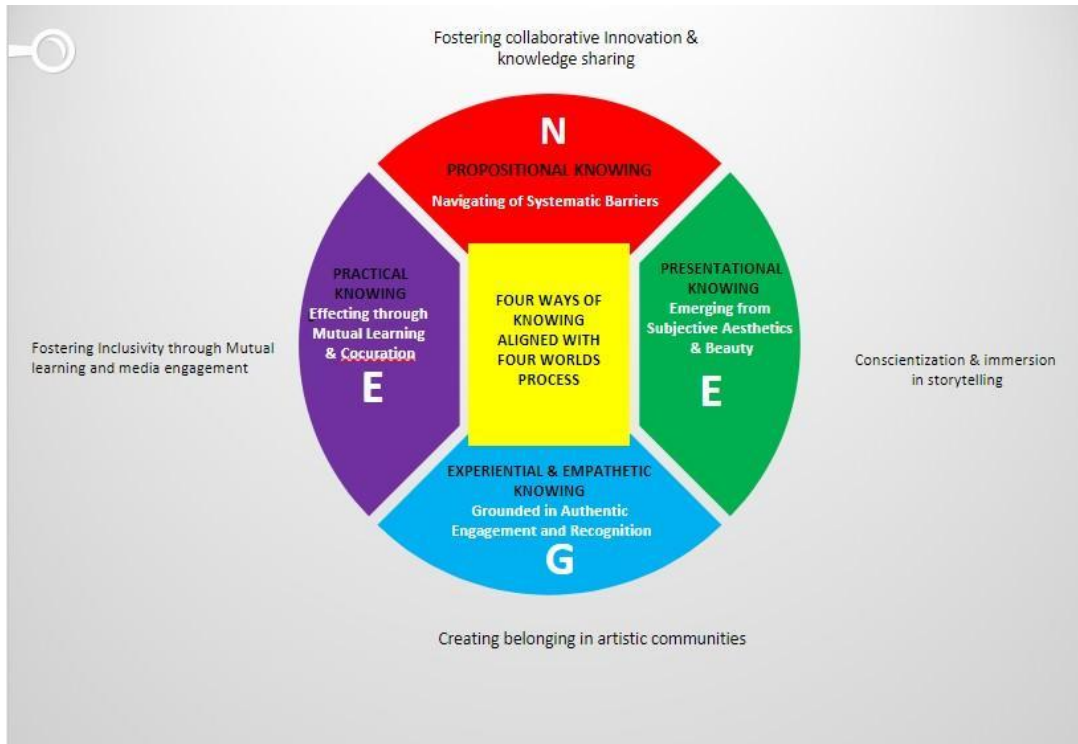
My personal growth throughout this journey has been nothing short of life changing. Simultaneously, my role as a curator evolved significantly. As I embarked on the path of practical curation for the MASHŪRAH exhibition and the creation of its accompanying platform, I delved

deep into the thematic intricacies of Islamic art, with a resolute aim to reshape the prevailing perception of this art form. Commonly, the term 'Islamic art' conjures images of intricate architectural elements such as domes, arabesque patterns, and minarets. However, it's vital to recognize that these elements are cultural developments and not inherent to Islam from its inception. My objective during the exhibition was to present an alternative definition of Islamic art and art from Muslim communities, one firmly rooted in our faith's guiding principles and individual experiences. This redefined concept served as a pathway, inviting us to draw from the wisdom of these principles and equipping us with the tools to explore a myriad of questions and perspectives, all deeply relevant to our contemporary challenges.

Through this profound artistic exploration, I was not only encouraged to appreciate my humble role within ecosystems but also to synchronise with the changing seasons and responsibly utilise resources. It marked a significant shift in how I perceive my place within the broader tapestry of existence. I transitioned from being a custodian of art to a facilitator of transformative experiences. This shift involved not only curating the physical artworks but also curating conversations, connections, and understanding among the artists and the audience.

The following section consolidates the findings and introduces the evolved outcome.

Figure 10.17: Evolved four ways of knowing aligned with four worlds process



10.7 Social Return On Investment

To evaluate the value of unconventional research, such as the PHD, we turn to the concept of "Social Return on Investment" (SROI). This method is tailored to assess aspects that typically escape scrutiny in conventional research analyses reporting, encompassing dimensions that span across social, economic, and environmental considerations. The underlying premise behind the application of SROI is the acknowledgment that economic systems exert profound influences on individuals, the economy, society, and the environment (Yates and Marra, 2017).

The impact of this process, or the social return on investment, in relation to this research and its role in fostering innovation is multifaceted. The Cooperative Inquiry embarked on an extensive journey, engaging deeply with the Cape Town Muslim community, its artists, the South African artistic ecosystem, the broader Cape Town population, and South African society. Additionally, the

Inquiry garnered international recognition and facilitated the expansion of networks.

Primarily, it has nurtured a sense of belonging within artistic communities through meaningful dialogues and unity. Secondly, it has created opportunities for heightened awareness and active involvement in storytelling, along with a more profound understanding of communal consultation. Thirdly, it has catalysed the development of a culture, characterized by collaborative innovation and the free exchange of knowledge. Finally, it has promoted inclusivity through mutual learning and active participation. The subsequent section will elaborate on these contributions and the social return on investment, aligning them with the four integral perspectives of South, East, North, and West.

10.8 Step 1: Southern Grounding

Creating Belonging In Artistic Communities Through Dialogue And Unity

The journey to foster a sense of belonging within our artistic community began with a primary focus on nurturing a tight-knit community dedicated to catalysing social innovation and positive change. This closeness enhanced our reflective processes and significantly contributed to our growth as creatives. We embraced a unique curatorial approach centred on empathetic understanding, allowing us to forge deep connections with fellow artists and their work. Our goal was clear: to create a platform and first exhibition experience that resonated emotionally, showcasing the profound impact of art on our lives.

Collaboratively, we rallied artists around the exhibition's objectives, nurturing a robust sense of community and purpose. This collective dedication shaped our unwavering commitment to the project's goals. The curatorial approach intentionally diverged from traditional norms, empowering artists to select pieces that best represented our ongoing conversation while maintaining full control over their revenue. Our research findings highlighted the impact of these collective efforts. Relationships among us and our interactions played a crucial role in selecting thematically interconnected artworks. Regular Zoom circles and studio meetings served as vital spaces for fostering a warm sense of community and belonging, nurturing a dynamic marked by unwavering support and empathy.

This community spirit aligned seamlessly with the Southern Grounding dimension and the experiential and empathetic knowledge embodied by the Cooperative Inquiry (CI) Process. This

process facilitated heightened creative reflection, profoundly enriching our artistic journey.

10.9 Step 2: Eastern Emerging

Increased Conscientization and Immersion In Storytelling And Seeking MASHŪRAH (Consultation)

Our research underscores the profound impact of increased conscientization and immersive storytelling, coupled with the pursuit of active **MASHŪRAH**" (consultation), on our artistic journey. These elements played pivotal roles in shaping both our individual and collective contributions, offering valuable insights amidst challenges and yielding positive outcomes. Conscientization and dialogue evolved within the HalaqArt Ecosystem, becoming both a concept and a practice that shaped our ongoing work.

Individually, our explorations acted as bridges, connecting our accumulated knowledge, life experiences, and creative talents. My role as a curator involved the intricate task of weaving a visually compelling narrative within the exhibition space. This demanding role necessitated not only imaginative thinking but also collaborative efforts to enhance our visitors' experiences and raise awareness with a conscientious approach.

Yet, our creative journey was not devoid of logistical challenges, and this brought with it the realisation that logistically more assistance would be beneficial. Nevertheless, these obstacles served as fertile ground for the growth of practical expertise. The unwavering support of our fellow artists played an indispensable role in surmounting these hurdles. Collectively, increased conscientization emerged as a guiding principle, emphasising the importance of observing and documenting our experiences.

Within this dynamic ecosystem, artists fully immersed themselves, navigating the added complexities brought about by the backdrop of the pandemic. The need to shift towards home-based art creation prompted profound reflections and a departure from transactional considerations often found in traditional gallery settings. Instead, our focus is closely aligned with conscientization, fostering a deeper connection between our art and our audience.

A poignant example of this heightened conscientization can be found in Nabeeha Mohamed journey. Despite initial hesitation, she embarked on a profound personal inquiry, resulting in the creation of a powerful artwork. For Rushda Deaney, the "MASHŪRAH" became an integral aspect

of her master's in fine art thesis, highlighting the transformative impact of our research journey.

In essence, our research findings underline the enduring legacy of the "MASHŪRAH" exhibition. This legacy transcends the showcased artworks, encompassing the dialogue it nurtured, the thought-provoking questions it posed, and the connections it forged within the contemporary art landscape. It stands as a powerful testament to the potential of conscientization, immersive storytelling, and the unwavering commitment of artists to authentically express their truths.

10.10 Step 3: Northern Navigating

Fostering A Culture Of Collaborative Innovation And Knowledge Sharing

The research on social innovation and knowledge sharing, exemplified by the MASHŪRAH exhibition, showcases a comprehensive approach to individual and collective contributions. Propositional knowing, rooted in personal ideologies and intellectual understanding, aligns with the exhibition's framework, blending soft and hard skills in transformative academic exploration.

This knowledge effectively conveys the exhibition's significance, highlighting how individual expertise contributes to collective understanding. In addressing systemic barriers, although I faced personal challenges, we fostered social innovation through promoting communal knowledge creation and collaboration within the creative industry and communities. Feedback from the industry, artists, media and the community, highlighted successes and areas for improvement. We prioritised audience feedback and drew in the target community audience, often absent from such events, surprising the industry with the exhibition's diversity and potential for future spotlighting of underrepresented groups. Innovative programming choices such as a filmed walkthrough, curator-led tours and continuous media interviews documented and enhanced the exhibition's impact and reach.

Additionally, the exhibition's role in cultivating artist-led communities and innovative community engagement, aligned with Greatmore's mission and revitalised Greatmore Studios, solidifying its non-profit, non-commercial platform status. The exhibition levelled the playing field for artists, fostering lasting relationships between artists and curators beyond the exhibition. Despite challenges such as the need for additional support in managing workloads the exhibition's impact on the creative landscape was substantial, with potential for future collaborations.

10.11 Step 4: Western Effecting

Fostering Inclusivity Through Mutual Learning And Media Engagement

The collective contribution underscores the MASHŪRAH Initiative's success in promoting inclusivity and mutual learning. A community feedback session conducted during the exhibition's closing revealed the initiative's impact on a diverse audience, spanning various age groups and genders, with a significant representation from the Cape Town Muslim community. This diversity facilitated intergenerational dialogue, a vital project goal. Valuable insights emerged regarding the challenges faced by disadvantaged ethnic minorities, emphasising the importance of accommodating multiple narratives to enhance accessibility.

Community feedback also highlighted the need for community representatives to bridge the gap between the community and cultural institutions, thereby increasing participation and enriching art's understanding. Concerns about the underrepresentation of Black Muslim artists led to a commitment to greater inclusivity in future iterations.

Individual reflections revealed my transformative journey from a custodian of art to a facilitator of transformative experiences. By redefining Islamic art beyond architectural elements, I aimed to explore a myriad of relevant questions and perspectives. The MASHŪRAH Initiative succeeded in fostering inclusivity through mutual learning and media engagement. It highlights the exhibition's impact on diverse audiences, challenges to stereotypes, and my personal growth. While commendable, there is room for improvement in terms of even more inclusivity and community representation in future iterations and seeking core funding.

10.12 Conclusion

The MASHŪRAH initiative stands as a testament to the power of practical knowledge, mutual learning, and institutional change. This comprehensive approach firmly positions the initiative as a catalyst for positive transformation across multiple domains, spanning art, curation, education, institutional development, and community engagement. The application of Cooperative Inquiry has been instrumental in guiding the transformative journey of learning from curating the MASHŪRAH exhibition and reshaping the perception of Islamic art. By applying Cooperative Inquiry to the exhibition, we could reflect on and adapt the visitor experience and knowledge-sharing. This collaborative spirit contributed to the enhancement of the exhibition's overall quality,

enriching the cultural landscape, and promoting a deeper appreciation of artistic heritage.

This process harmoniously embodies the five core tenets of Cooperative Inquiry. First and foremost, the MASHŪRAH initiative embraced a politically oriented and participative form of inquiry. It boldly challenged prevailing stereotypes and preconceptions actively engaging artists and the wider community in a diverse array of dialogues and perspectives. This approach laid the foundation for a more dynamic exploration of Islamic art, breaking down barriers and fostering a spirit of collective inquiry. Moreover, the endeavour exhibited a robust commitment to knowledge-oriented and epistemic inquiry. It delved deeply into the lived experience of South African Muslims and decoloniality.

The initiative's approach featured an alternating current of informative and transformative inquiry, evident through a series of action-reflection cycles. These cycles not only educated the audience about the historical and cultural context of Islamic art and art from Muslim communities but also facilitated profound transformative shifts in perception and understanding for the artists and myself as well. This dynamic process encouraged continuous learning and adaptation, allowing ideas, narratives, and even the exhibition itself to evolve.

The research and curation process were underpinned by a steadfast commitment to seeking validity in terms of goodness, trustworthiness, and authenticity. Art from Cape Town based Muslim communities was presented in an authentic and trustworthy manner, firmly anchored in the principles of faith. The concept of goodness extended to promoting inclusivity and harmonious coexistence, transcending boundaries, and fostering a sense of unity among diverse communities.

In essence, this holistic approach resulted in an exhibition that substantially elevated the overall quality of artistic presentation. The MASHŪRAH initiative remains a dynamic and transformative force, serving as a catalyst for positive change across the domains of art, education, and institutional development. It eloquently exemplifies the power of Cooperative Inquiry in reshaping perceptions, fostering inclusivity, and promoting a deeper understanding of cultural and artistic heritage.

I would like to conclude this chapter with closing remarks from a review by Ling Shepherd for The Daily VOX (Shepherd, 2021).

“All the works deserve individual reviews and analysis. The best advice would be to go and view them for yourself. I circled the room multiple times to take it all in. The artists may be Muslim,

but their works, commentary, and inspiration transcend their religious affiliation. They do this by weaving it into narratives and embracing it. The exhibit is a microcosm of an oft misunderstood community, which are more than the one thing we define them.

With viewing the exhibition space, one cannot help but wish there were more works on display. Despite its size, it leaves an impression. Proving that visibility is important no matter how small. Art exists to make us think deeply about the world around us.

MASHŪRAH goes above its meaning by highlighting how the artists have experienced the world and perceived it with artistic expression. Visiting exhibits like these are important to create awareness, and dialogues and to constantly problematise the world around us, and the people who inhabit it.

Chapter 11

EMBODIMENT OF THE INTEGRAL MASHŪRAH PROCESS AND THE FUTURE OF MASHŪRAH ARTS

11.1 Introduction

In this fourth and concluding chapter of the CARE trajectory, I aim to bring together the key components that have enabled the actualization of this research-to-innovation journey. These components encompass community activation, the awakening of integral consciousness, institutionalized research, and embodied transformative education and organization. My intention is to focus on both individual and collective aspects to underline my commitment to perpetually renew the MASHŪRAH model and framework. The goal is to adapt it into relevant and concrete learning and educational programs for MASHŪRAH Arts.

In this holistic approach, the GENE remains a guiding light, embodying self-leadership, organizational development, and societal progress in a perpetual cycle of renewal. Integral development provides the framework and processes to realize transformative potential at all levels, connecting individuals, organizations, societal development, and global development in an intertwined, holistic system.

This chapter will delve into the complete embodiment of social innovation within three core dimensions: the self, organizations, and societies. The concept of embodiment serves as the culmination of the CARE trajectory, signifying the fulfilment of this research-to-innovation process.

The previous chapter highlighted the significant contribution of the exhibition in presenting a contemporary understanding of Islam and art from Cape Town's Muslim community. It celebrated the diversity of artistic expressions, fostering a rich exploration of personal experiences and interpretations. The collaborative effort proved particularly beneficial for emerging artists, serving as a launchpad for their careers. MASHŪRAH's exceptional curatorial support and engagement with the local Muslim community further magnified its impact. The MASHŪRAH initiative served as a remarkable example of the social investment that yielded excellent returns in various domains. This comprehensive approach spanned art, curation, education, institutional

development, and community engagement, positioning the initiative as a catalyst for positive transformation.

The following sub-chapters will demonstrate how the adapted GENE-ius process unlocks integral embodiment and ensures continuous evolution of the research-to-innovation journey across three levels: the self, the educational program (with potential for application in other locations), and the institution (MASHŪRAH Arts). I will apply the MASHŪRAH process as a self-reflective tool and the subsequent sub-chapter initiates with a focus on individual embodiment at the self-level.

11.2 Individual Embodiment: Renewal And Regeneration Of An Integral Feminine Curator - 'Khudi' And Self-Learning

In the pursuit of self-discovery and professional evolution, this thesis embarks on a journey that commenced with an exploration of my personal narrative and inherent calling in Chapter 2. This initial exploration marked the genesis of an augmented self-awareness, which, in turn, laid the foundation for the investigation of my aspirations. Throughout this journey, the theme of self-discovery persisted, gradually unveiling my strengths, apprehensions, self-imposed constraints, and presuppositions. This process allowed for the acknowledgement and appreciation of my innate competencies, the conscious confrontation and scrutiny of self-imposed boundaries and assumptions, and the revelation of latent potentials, ultimately leading to the accumulation of profound insights.

Inspired by Pakistani philosopher Allama Iqbal, the concept of '*khudi*,' as a source of consciousness signifying that only a developed self can decolonize the body, played a pivotal role in this journey of self-realization and self-learning (Garcia, no date). As a curator, I recognized the significance of integrating my Islamic foundations into my role. In my personal and professional endeavours, I consistently strived to lead with integrity, endeavouring for the alignment of the organizational vision and values with my own. Art organizations often invest substantial marketing efforts in articulating their visions and values, yet there exists a prevailing tendency amongst them to neglect the internalization of these principles. Social cohesion, diversity and engagement are terms frequently adopted without a thorough examination of their authenticity. My inclination toward challenging these superficial practices led to the changes that unfolded.

A common observation was the mismatch between what was said and what was done, often driven by a focus on self-interest and commercial return. It became evident that a misalignment existed between the organizational values and culture and the broader Muslim community its artists. This incongruity prompted my commitment to encourage fellow artists to transcend conventional paradigms and critically question their roles within the ecosystem. I engaged in conscious constructive critique This approach facilitated the development of a robust structural foundation and an innovative conceptual framework for me as a curator. This framework offers continuous evolution and transformation, allowing the integration of newfound wisdom and experiences into empathetic action and ongoing reflection.

11.2.1 Grounded In Authentic Relationships – Transpersonal Level

My deep-seated belief in the potential of art for empowerment and emancipation was repeatedly tested from my time at university through to my step into the art industry. The messages I aspired to convey about the culture I was rooted in often fell short of alignment with my personal encounters. Wrestling with these discrepancies became a recurrent theme in my quest for belonging and recognition within the artistic community.

As I embedded myself deeper within the industry's culture, my determination to challenge the status quo grew stronger. Faced with environments misaligned with my value system, I opted not for conformity or departure, but instead chose to confront existing paradigms. My objective was to shield others from the same impostor syndrome I had once experienced.

Enrolling in the Integral Development doctoral research program marked a pivotal moment when I was encouraged to commence with my own narrative. This process, aimed at addressing imbalances and opportunities within our contexts, not only rekindled my connection with self but also served as a gateway to exploration. The openness and authenticity with which my colleagues and I were encouraged to show up on my first module in Geneva, Switzerland laid the foundation for my own awakening to what authentic relationships and dialogue feel and look like. I found emancipation within the vulnerability and the permission to gain inspiration and strength from the stories and my own in a newfound way.

My journey unfolded first in the UK then in South Africa and then back again to the UK. I found myself grappling with the challenging dimensions of race, identity and my Islamic practice in a

new environment, and my evolving relationship with art. These aspects further enriched the complex narrative of my exploration into the art world. Within this thesis, I embarked on a profound exploration of my values, closely examining both my own beliefs and the values upheld by the organizations I was involved with along the way. In navigating my own challenges and seeking answers, I forged a profound empathy for fellow artists wrestling with similar trials. Embracing a leadership style inspired by the community steward, I engaged in constructive critique while maintaining a conscious awareness. This transformative process not only enabled me to discover and amplify my own voice but also inspired others to do the same. This exploration unearthed numerous intersections and these shared values formed the bedrock upon which conversations about the future of visual literacy, art advocacy, and curatorial practices took place. Notably, this vision encompassed a future focus on Muslim and marginalized communities on a global scale.

This understanding, over time, evolved into a process of transpersonal growth, yielding valuable insights into the human condition. My perspective on how to engage with and navigate the art world has undergone a significant transformation. I now embrace a holistic approach that extends far beyond the confines of curating alone. This comprehensive perspective shapes the way I establish relationships and guides me from the inception of a project to its culmination, including the curation and presentation of exhibitions.

In this evolved approach, my emphasis has shifted from exclusively catering to the art world's established audience or merely preaching to the choir. Instead, I place a greater focus on engaging with the communities that the art organizations are embedded in but often neglect. This change reflects my commitment to a more encompassing and community-oriented artistic practice and how I have emerged as a cultural catalyst.

11.2.2 Emerging As A Cultural Catalyst - Transcultural Level

Discussed in earlier chapters, Sardar emphasizes the concept that British Asians inhabit a multitude of realms, each characterized by its unique worldview. As I reflect on my own identity, I find it to be a tapestry woven with various dualities. I walk the line between introversion and extroversion, with a slight inclination toward the latter. Over time, I came to acknowledge the presence of both feminine and masculine qualities within me. Realizing I embodied more of the latter, by gaining a deeper understanding of their role, led me to lean further into my feminine. While I often demand much of myself and maintain a firm stance, I also welcome my capacity for empathetic and

compassionate leadership. My dedication to personal achievement is harmonized by a profound appreciation for people and community and their stories. As a British Pakistani Muslim woman, I also seamlessly integrated elements of Africa into my identity. These dualities, once a source of internal conflict, have now evolved into wellsprings of strength.

My conscious awakening to my cultural and spiritual self-marked a transformative moment that set me on the path of holistic development. It led me to recognize the importance of refraining from judgment and embracing the values of dialogue and collaboration. Moreover, it allowed me to find a harmonious balance between my British education in the North and West and my South-Eastern heritage.

Throughout my journey in pursuit of a Doctorate, I had the privilege to delve into the exploration of my religion, culture, and artistic abilities. I also ventured into the application of archetypes such as the protagonist, frameworks such as integral theory, literature, and theories such as Al Ghazali, Allama Iqbal and Feminism. This enhanced my ability to articulate thoughts in a more profound manner through writing. This process has empowered me to fully embrace my role as a cultural catalyst and a transcultural leader.

Furthermore, my collaboration with both local and global ecosystems has not only broadened my horizons but has also opened doors to innovative knowledge creation. It has nurtured transdisciplinary thinking, a topic I will delve into further in the following section.

11.2.3 Navigating As A Social Innovator - Transdisciplinary Level

I was acutely aware of the disconnect between the knowledge systems I was being taught and the one rooted in my religion, culture, and spirituality during my time at university. This awakening prompted me to focus my undergraduate thesis on the perception and reception of the Alhambra Palace in Spain, a place steeped in 700 years of Muslim rule and influence (Irwin, 2004) My intention was to delve into diverse knowledge systems, to consciously integrate the wisdom of Islam and the West and this trajectory eventually guided me toward pursuing a Doctorate.

The desire to develop educational programs for the UK curriculum had already taken root shortly after I completed my master's degree in the history of Islamic art. It was my friend Aneeqa Malik who saw the potential to pursue this and introduced me to my Trans4m supervisors, Alexander

Schieffer, and Ronnie Lessem. To catalyse tangible social change, I realised the importance of embracing the roles of a Social Researcher and Social Innovator. My career in the art industry provided the initial platform for this transformation. However, it was during my doctoral research journey that I was spurred to translate this vision into meaningful social change in Cape Town. The creation of the MASHŪRAH process, with a steadfast emphasis on Islam as the foundational philosophy, enabled me to embody the core principles of Integral research.

Theories such as Islamic and African liberation theory, hermeneutics, phenomenology, critical theory and Feminist theory and counterbalancing this with Sufism and Basirah (Spiritual insight) played a substantial role in my critical examination of community and place. It also illuminated the intersectional nature of religious practice and oppression, enhancing my appreciation for experiential knowledge while exposing power dynamics within existing structures. These realizations reshaped my perception of knowledge sources and guided my approach throughout my doctoral research journey, ultimately leading to the development of the MASHŪRAH process as the theoretical foundation for research-to-innovation, grounded in these insights and understandings.

11.2.4 Effecting Transformative Collaborative Curating And Mutual Learning

Throughout my extensive academic journey, I have accrued intellectual and practical tools that empower me to contribute to the ever-expanding local and global pool of knowledge. Additionally, I have constructed innovative frameworks for local and global curatorial practices and community engagement. Amid this journey, I encountered numerous challenges and triumphs. These experiences have not only deepened my understanding but have also served as powerful catalysts for my personal growth and transformation into the arts professional I am today.

The Covid-19 pandemic played a significant role in shaping my identity, serving as both the forefront and backdrop during our project's realization. This global crisis not only influenced our decision-making but also deeply impacted our living conditions, affecting not just me but also my collaborators. The heightened emotions of this time prompted us to reconsider life's true priorities; time seemed more precious, like a borrowed resource. I felt a stronger connection to my home, creating a sanctuary away from the cacophony of a pandemic-ridden world that, at times, felt apocalyptic.

The pandemic ushered in a slower pace of life and, sadly, the loss of many lives, leaving a traumatic mark on our collective psyche. Nevertheless, it also brought about a shift in our consciousness, one that many still have not fully comprehended even a year or two after the pandemic. While there was a pressing need to return to normalcy, the world we re-entered had evolved, and so had we. I continue to grapple with the changes that occurred within me during this period and reflect on the time when stillness was unexpectedly thrust upon us. I believe that I manifested a lot during this period that is still in the process of coming to fruition.

The exhibition garnered acclaim for its role in nurturing artist-led communities and its capacity for meaningful community engagement. Its experimental format resonated with a process-centric ethos, providing a safe and innovative space for artistic expression. Simultaneously, it answered the call to revitalize art spaces like Greatmore, attracting new audiences. Furthermore, the exhibition's inclusivity bridged artists from diverse career levels and artistic backgrounds.

Based on the feedback from audiences and Media, MASHŪRAH undeniably enriched the art community and engaged a broader audience in dialogues about Islam and art, functioning as a platform for sense-making, awareness, education, and conversation. The exhibition's profound impact was not only felt during its duration but also in the enduring relationships it cultivated between artists, curators, and audiences. This lasting impact on the creative landscape was a testament to the exhibition's significance.

The success of the exhibition and the relationships forged, presented new possibilities for institutional embodying beyond the confines of Greatmore Studio. Invitations began to pour in, offering opportunities to replicate similar models in organizations located in Zimbabwe and Nigeria. A year later, we inaugurated our second exhibition in partnership with Madlozi Arts and the District Six Museum in Cape Town, marking the next stage of embodying the research in organizations and the broader creative landscape. In the following section, I will delve into this exciting endeavour further as move to the next subsection on organisational embodiment.

11.3 Organisational Embodiment - Developments 1 Year Later

11.3.1 Salon Afrique - A Homecoming Reimagined

Following the interest generated by our initial exhibition, I received an invitation from the curator,

Beathur Mgoza Baker of Madlozi Arts, to co-curate an exhibition at the District Six Museum in Cape Town in 2022. This event was nothing short of ambitious, taking place at the soon-to-be newly relaunched District Six Homecoming Centre, which had been transformed into a vibrant cultural hub incorporating the previously known Fugard Theatre. The District Six Homecoming Centre (HCC) stands as an extension of the District Six Museum, designed to celebrate the rich culture and history of its people and the place it embodies (Thompson, 2022). In 2021, the Fugard Theatre, located within the same building, had to close its doors due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently, it was returned to the management of the District Six Museums Trust and District Six Museum to whom the theatre belonged. They in turn undertook operational and financial modifications to transform it into a revitalized cultural hub. This versatile space now thrives as a platform for art exhibitions and performances, engaging and educating communities while preserving the collective memory.

Our curatorial collaboration, which involved Beathur, me representing MASHŪRAH Arts, and the museum, encompassed the sprawling three floors and featured the diverse works of over 30 artists hailing from various corners of the African continent. My role centered on weaving the narrative of Islam in Africa into this multifaceted exhibition, aptly named 'Salon Afrique - A Homecoming Reimagined.' Our curatorial statement for this exhibition beautifully encapsulated our collective vision. It was yet another testament to the commitment to embodying the ethos developed during the research to the innovation process and rejuvenating cultural spaces facing challenges while drawing in fresh audiences. This time around the collaborative approach involved two curators and a project manager for administrative support. The exhibition ventured beyond the confines of Islam to embrace a more comprehensive conversation about Africa and District Six. I thoughtfully handpicked 13 artists, not exclusively from Muslim backgrounds, but each with a direct connection to either Islam or District Six. Artists such as Rahimah Rajiwate and Rushdah Deaney who had participated in the first exhibition were encouraged to submit more extensive bodies of work, elevating the depth of conversation surrounding their artistic practices. The curation intentionally encouraged a dynamic dialogue across the various artworks, ensuring that it that Islam was not relegated to a single room. This time, we seized the opportunity to include artists who were unable to participate in the first iteration, fashioning a more diverse and fresher showcase. One of the significant changes was in the programming element, which was a more

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

New exhibition 'Salon Afrique - a Homecoming Reimagined' opens on 1st June 2022 presented by the District Six Museum Homecoming Centre as part of the new HCC cultural venue's launch celebrations. The exhibition and its complimentary cultural programme explores themes of visibility, a safe passage and creating a homecoming away from home that welcomes diverse identities from across Africa to commune and coexist under one roof, in Cape Town.

The experimental visual exploration is an immersive salon of contemporary art and heritage by curators *Beathur Mgoza Baker* and *Sara Bint Moneer Khan* to negate cultural invisibility and silencing. It is inspired by the legacy of District Six as a place of memory and convergence where diverse cultures could coexist and truly belong.

Exhibition Overview

A salon, in true African spirit, is a gathering place for culture, storytelling, and community togetherness.

The Cape Town Homecoming Centre is pleased to present a specially curated exhibition and immersive journey by *Beathur Mgoza Baker* and *Sara Bint Moneer Khan* that unites diverse cultures from across the African continent through visual art in our home - a site of hope, remembrance, and belonging.

This exhibition and accompanying cultural program, explores critical questions through the work of contemporary visual artists, filmmakers, cultural thinkers, and performers, creates a space for dialogue and sharing at a time when our country is struggling to provide Africans with a sense of belonging. Bringing them together as a community at the salon.

At the Homecoming Centre, a center of cultural pride and dignity, we encourage audiences to explore this unique gathering place of memory, beauty, creativity, and imagination that exposes ideas and art from throughout the African continent. The exhibition responds to the historical space and symbolic role of District Six as a unique place of integration, storytelling and negating difference to enable belonging.

ART CREATING COMMUNITY ACROSS BORDERS, BEYOND BINARIES

Salon Afrique uses the stunning landscape of Cape Town as a canvas to welcome people to engage in an immersive visual art program that allows us to reflect back on history and the knowledge learned, while simultaneously looking forward with optimism.

The Salon aspires to reflect the voices of South African and pan-African artists united in their capacity to celebrate Africa and our position in the world through a deeper investigation of memory, cultural identity, and lived experiences that the artworks portray.

The exhibition, together with its accompanying cultural program, offers a homecoming away from home - a safe welcome and experiential space for creative expression - an immersive salon of art and traditions, where cultures and people meet and connect.

Responding to the Homecoming Centre's history and tradition, curators *Beathur Mgoza Baker* of Madiqzi Art & Heritage and *Sara Bint Moneer Khan* of MASHŪRAH ARTS decided to create a space of affirmation, belonging, and pride. Both are independent curators renowned globally for their critical engagement with topics of identity, belonging, and memory, as well as curating the body and decolonial contemporary art practice.

Their individual and combined work and ideas reflect the contemporary moment in art, critical thought, the complexity of identity, gender, geopolitics, public culture, and heritage that responds with great resonance to that of the District Six Museum. Individually both curators are involved in establishing physical and intellectual space for examining critical themes around belonging, memory, and cultural representation on the African continent, in the global South, and globally.

Figure 11.2: Curatorial statement

Source: Personal archive

11.3.2 Void Gallery

In 2022, my journey came full circle as I took on the role of Head of Public Programmes at the Void Gallery, a non-profit art centre in Derry, Northern Ireland. This first return to the UK since before the pandemic marked a significant chapter in my career. Despite its status as part of the UK, Northern Ireland bore the deep scars of decades of strained conflict between the Catholics and Protestants during a period known as the 'Troubles'. A conflict I was familiar with, having grown up during the 80's and early 90s with Irish Republican Army (IRA) bombing in London taking place.

My background in artist development and community work with MASHŪRAH, which I had wholeheartedly embraced, coupled with the valuable experiences I had gained in South Africa, played a pivotal role in securing this position. The shared histories of oppression, segregation, and conflict in both countries made me a candidate well-suited to tackle the unique challenges that Derry presented according to the Director. This opportunity further emphasized the potential for the knowledge I had accumulated in South Africa to make a meaningful impact in different ecosystems, reinforcing the significance of my holistic journey.

I was not however as prepared for this move as I had anticipated and was not given the support by the gallery to adapt to the change. A small city divided by a river, on which one side lived

Protestants and the other Catholics. The neglect by the UK and Irish governments in the post conflict era have resulted in high rates of unemployment, poverty, and youth suicide for Derry. I found myself living in the Bogside – a neighbourhood steeped in a history of violence and the infamous ‘Bloody Sunday’ massacre that took place in 1972. The remnants of this traumatic history lingered on every street and house I passed. The large murals of civilians who had died during the conflict looming at you, and small tombstones protruding amongst the grass in people’s front gardens, alongside the names of children who had been killed by the British army, listed on the walls of homes they had once lived. I could not have anticipated the depression that would creep up on me from the environment – which mostly felt hopeless. Streets curbs painted with the Union Jack would inform that you were in a protestant area. During my 6 months in Derry, I lived in both the predominantly Catholic area of Bogside as well as in the Protestant area a road away from a housing estate known as the ‘Fountain’ surrounded by security fences and guards. This was a neighbourhood for Protestants in the Catholic majority part of the city, cordoned off by fences to separate them from the ensuing clashes. Derry reminded me in so many ways of South Africa’s trauma, where a nation was yet to heal, and the atmosphere carried the energy of those wounds. I tried my best to engage with the city and it’s trauma’s.

Despite the Void Gallery's international and multicultural exhibition program, one of the initial challenges that surfaced when I took on my new role was the lack of racial diversity among gallery visitors and programme participants. The gallery had a dedicated department called 'Engage,' which hosted various public and community programs to support the five exhibitions held each year. These programmes catered to a wide range of age groups, from art workshops for toddlers to early years, teens, university students, adults, and vulnerable adults.

Despite the growing refugee and migrant community in Derry, their integration into the city was lagging, and this was reflected in the programme attendance. This was an issue that had been previously addressed with little success. One glaring aspect was the composition of the gallery's team, which consisted of all white females, including an all-white board. I was the first person of colour to be hired.

Even as a newcomer to the city, I struggled to find social spaces outside of pubs to meet other people. Addressing diversity swiftly became a top priority for me, leading to the implementation of thorough research to uncover the factors that could attract a more varied audience to our space and

the potential deterrents. In response, I introduced 'Chai and Chat,' a monthly gathering where I extended invitations to women to join me within the gallery space where I would make the Chai. We created a warm ambience, complete with intimate lighting and a selection of music from various cultures found in Derry. The aim was to transform the gallery into a welcoming, homely atmosphere, rather than a cold, unwelcoming space.

We promoted the event extensively and even secured a radio interview to discuss the motivations behind 'Chai and Chat.' The results were surprising, as the event drew a diverse group of women from backgrounds including Iranian, Indian, Moroccan, and Spanish. Many of these women formed connections during the event, underlining the evident demand for such an initiative. This highlighted the importance of recognizing and responding to cultural nuances to effectively meet the community's needs.

My PR text for the event read as follows:

“Arriving in Derry for the first time toward the end of 2022, invited an opportunity for me to get to know the local community, but I didn’t really know where to start. In my first few weeks in Derry, I listened to various accents and languages and realized how diverse the city was, all intermingled. Drinking tea with someone and learning another man’s language are two things that have always helped break down barriers in society. Nelson Mandela said, “If you communicate to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head, when you speak to him in his own language, it touches his heart”.

The cold weather fuelled a desire for warmth and connection. I looked for sites where people from various walks of life might meet due to not feeling comfortable going to the pubs alone, but I could not locate any. Chai, which is a name for teas in numerous languages, is made in the Indian subcontinent by blending milk with spiced black tea. It is a staple in my family; and the first thing my mother serves when I walk in. Chai is one of the most poignant markers of my Pakistani ancestry. As a sign of hospitality, it creates sentiments of kinship, ties people to their humanity and brings comfort. With these considerations in mind, I would like to invite people to join me for Chai and the Void Gallery and various points throughout the year.”

During this period, I came to realize a misalignment between my concept of a healthy organization and the reality at Void. Their model was rooted in the white cube gallery approach, yet their work

culture was misaligned with their stated mission or my values. The staff were often overworked and underpaid, a common issue in many nonprofit organizations. Moreover, there was a hierarchical system that placed the curator or creative director on a pedestal, emphasizing distinctions in importance.

As a senior manager, my open and authentic approach to relationship building clashed with the environment they had fostered, which revolved around excessive workloads, long hours, limited appreciation, and what often felt like discrimination. I frequently heard the phrase "just get on with it," and open dialogue was only encouraged when it served to micromanage and control the workplace. My experiences in South Africa and my doctoral journey allowed me to quickly recognize this misalignment between myself and the gallery as well as Derry, and I left Void to return to South Africa in 2023 to complete the last phase of my thesis. Void mirrored the very type of environment we had previously identified as problematic in our South African context, but this time, the issue was rooted heavily in the internal work culture. It would take me some time and distance to fully comprehend the learning from Northern Ireland and I will return to another introspection at a later point in my life. I did accept that when I arrived in Derry, I was willing to fall in love with the city and by the time I left I had become extremely despondent.

Both these examples of District Six Museum and Void illustrate the attempt at embodying the research to innovation within organizations at different stages and contexts. There was success, but at the same time limitations where the organisation was not transparent with its vision and intent were also uncovered.

The next section will look at the anticipated curatorial programme that is intended to be implemented with not-for-profit organizations and educational institutions such as UCT Michaelis School of Fine Arts.

11.4 MASHŪRAH Arts

Integral Curatorial Development Incubator

My primary focus throughout this journey has revolved around the equitable promotion of art practices, specifically with a focus on Muslim epistemologies. As I progressed through this journey, I uncovered significant imbalances in the South African art ecosystem, particularly the limited representation of Muslim leadership voices. Even as the initial phase of this journey ended, it was

clear that the presence of Muslim curators, apart from myself, remained limited. This concern has weighed heavily on my mind.

In response, I was compelled to create a curatorial development incubator that could pave the way for more curators to engage with Muslim communities, both locally and globally. My vision for this program was not limited to creatives from the Muslim community alone; I aimed to welcome non-Muslim art professionals as well. The MASHŪRAH Arts Integral Curatorial Development Incubator is a programme that fosters collaboration, development, and dissemination of art practices with a specific focus on Muslim epistemologies. The core of this programme revolves around the holistic transformation of the individual and practical skills for curating exhibitions and engagement. The MASHŪRAH Arts Integral Curatorial Development Incubator offers a structured learning journey for integral curators, combining theory and practice to prepare them for transformative roles in the art world. These modules guide curators in building connections, redefining curatorial practices, and engaging with communities and diverse stakeholders. The course can be offered as part of existing curatorial courses at art universities or non-profit and independent spaces.

Halaqah - The Circle

Module 1: Curatorial Grounding: Transpersonal

1. Discovering your personal story through Narrative
2. Enhancing leadership through archetypes
3. Building healthy ecosystems and communities of practice
4. Emphasis on recognition and meaningful connections through dialogue
5. Heron's experiential and empathetic Knowledge
6. Exhibition thematic and artwork Selection

Tarbiyah - The Training

Module 2: Curatorial Emergence of Subjectivity and Spirituality: Transcultural

1. Contextual awareness through Hermeneutics and Phenomenology
2. Embracing subjective aesthetics

3. Conscientization in Islamic Art theory
4. Observing and recording experience
5. Engaging with local communities and organizations
6. Presentational knowledge and self-expression
7. Exhibition writing/interpretative and programming
8. PR Strategies and media engagements techniques

MASHŪRAH - The Consultation

Module 3: Curatorial Pluralism and Redefining Modernity: Transdisciplinary

1. Liberation through Critical Theory and Feminist Literature
2. Integrating spiritual insight (Basirah) and Selfhood) Khudi
3. Diverse categories knowledge systems
4. Community engagement through shared knowledge
5. Understanding social innovation
6. Immersion engagement and Propositional Knowledge
7. Creating PR packs
8. Stakeholder engagement techniques

Hiqmah - The Wisdom

Module 4: Transformative Curatorial Authority and Empowerment: Transformative

1. Co-operative Inquiry and the Four Ways of Knowing
2. Reevaluating curatorial practices and empowering communities
3. Mutual learning and collaborative curatorial models
4. Art collecting as cultural preservation.
5. Empowering communities through custodianship and archives
6. How to participate in media interviews
7. Reflection

11.4.1 The Embodiment Of The Mashūrah Arts For A Renewed Artistic Landscape

From working through Chapter 10 contribution - in our forward-looking journey, I have articulated several intentions that guide our MASHŪRAH evolutionary path:

1. **Creating affirming and supportive Spaces:** Our first intention is to continue seeking and establishing safe and supportive spaces like Greatmore and District Six Museum, for collaboration that recognizes the diverse expressions of the Muslim experience. These spaces are vital for fostering creativity and understanding within our community.
2. **Engaging at the local level:** Recognizing the significance of engaging with local communities, we plan to collaborate with local community centres and community ambassadors. Partnering with influential figures who have a strong voice in local communities is one strategy to broaden our impact.
3. **Contributing to a global dialogue:** We aspire to contribute to a global repository of knowledge and artistry, ensuring that our work becomes an integral part of broader conversations around culture, identity, and the Muslim experience worldwide as well.
4. **Co-creation and inclusivity:** We recognize the importance of co-creating our vision from various perspectives. This approach ensures that our work remains multi-dimensional, inclusive, and adaptable, reflecting the richness of Muslim experiences.
5. **Understanding the Intersection of time, support, wellness, and potential:** We also acknowledge the intricate connections between time, support, wellness, and human potential in our journey. These elements intersect and influence our efforts, and understanding their dynamics is crucial.
6. **Affirming spiritual roots:** We aim to access methodologies and practitioners who affirm Muslim experiences and are spiritually rooted in our identity. This spiritual grounding is essential for our work's authenticity and resonance.
7. **Expanding into a sustainable sanctuary:** Ultimately, our goal is to expand this intervention into a sustainable and ongoing support system to offer a continuous sanctuary for Muslim creatives and their communities, as well as society at large. This requires funding which we aim to secure.

11.4.2 MASHŪRAH- The Way Forward

Collaboration and cocreating are at the heart of MASHŪRAH Arts. And since the first exhibition it has encountered several exciting opportunities, each contributing to the embodiment of the MASHŪRAH process and the potential for a renewed artistic landscape. Additionally, we have plans to incorporate technology into our drive to engage more people with art. These opportunities and plans include:

1. **Google Arts Collaboration:** Google Arts presents an exciting avenue for sharing art and culture with a global audience. I was approached for a partnership that would extend MASHŪRAH Arts' reach and impact on a much larger scale.
2. **Book Publication:** The intention is to publish a book to document the journey, experiences, and insights of MASHŪRAH Arts. This book would serve as a valuable resource for those interested in the intersection of art, culture, and community engagement.
3. **Podcast Creation:** The development of a podcast will provide an innovative way to share stories, ideas, and experiences related to art, curation, and the MASHŪRAH process.
4. **Formation of Not-For-profit/Funding:** Funding has been a core issue we addressed and to make the process sustainable I would like to turn MASHŪRAH Arts into a Not-For-profit organisation. Including board members will allow the organisation to be constantly evolving.
5. **Participation in Art Fairs:** Engaging in art fairs allows MASHŪRAH Arts to exhibit and share its curated works with a wider audience. It provides a platform to display the talent and diversity within the MASHŪRAH Arts community.
6. **Curatorial Course for University:** The invitation to offer a unique curatorial course at the Art schools in South Africa signifies the recognition of MASHŪRAH Arts' expertise and experience in the field. This presents an opportunity to pass on knowledge and skills to the next generation of curators, furthering the organization's impact.

These opportunities collectively reflect MASHŪRAH Arts' long-term perspective, its commitment to fostering artistic growth and cultural engagement, and its dedication to nurturing and empowering local communities.

11.5 Conclusion

Chapter 11 marks the culmination of MASHŪRAH Arts' transformative journey, presenting the embodiment of its integral curatorial process and a forward-looking vision for the future of art and cultural engagement. The chapter underscores the organization's resolute dedication to reviving

the MASHŪRAH model, adapting it into concrete educational programs, and guiding both individual and collective growth. It highlights the profound evolution of the author and the organization, emphasizing self-discovery, community engagement, and the integration of diverse knowledge systems.

Furthermore, the chapter introduces the creation of the MASHŪRAH Arts Integral Curatorial Development Incubator, designed to nurture and amplify curatorial voices, especially from Muslim backgrounds. The chapter also outlines MASHŪRAH Arts' future vision, with a focus on inclusivity, global engagement, and the establishment of a sanctuary for Muslim creatives. The organization's commitment to authentic spiritual foundations and holistic development underscores its authenticity.

Lastly, the chapter presents potential opportunities for collaboration, funding, publication, and education, setting a clear path for MASHŪRAH Arts' future endeavours, and demonstrating its potential to make a significant impact on the global art landscape.

Chapter 12

DISTILLING THE ESSENCE OF THE RESEARCH-TO-INNOVATION JOURNEY - MASHŪRAH ARTS AN INTEGRAL APPROACH TO ART ADVOCACY, VISUAL LITERACY AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

12.1 Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I will provide an overview of my research-to-innovation journey, summarizing key findings and their implications, and offering a glimpse into future research questions. Together with my collaborators, I embarked on a quest to address a central research question: "How can we enhance Art Advocacy, Visual Literacy, and Engagement within Cape Town's Muslim communities to foster a deeper understanding and active participation in the local art ecosystem?" This endeavour was inspired by my relocation to Cape Town in 2015, which exposed the scarcity of Muslim voices in the city's art scene and South Africa as a whole.

My study revolved around three key dimensions:

1. Art Advocacy, which aimed to strengthen support for artists within Cape Town's Muslim community, recognizing advocacy's role in nurturing talent and cultural expression.
2. Visual Literacy, which explored the intricate relationship between the Muslim community and art, seeking to understand their unique perspectives and interpretations, reflecting the rich tapestry of their culture and beliefs.
3. Engagement, which delved into the dynamic interactions between the Muslim community and the broader art ecosystem, transcending passive observation to reveal active participation and contributions to the local art scene.

This multifaceted exploration formed the core of my research-to-innovation journey. It's important to highlight that engagement is a two-way process, encompassing not only how the art ecosystem engages with the community but also how the community engages with the art ecosystem. This mutual influence and development occurred within a co-evolutionary space, emphasizing the intricate relationship between the Muslim communities and the broader art ecosystem in Cape Town, a dynamic interplay examined throughout this research journey.

Rooted in core principles, this project was driven by my profound passion for the arts and art history, motivating an exploration of its potential for societal transformation. A commitment to equitable knowledge aimed to make knowledge accessible to all, fostering cultural exchange and democratization of art. Furthermore, this research aspired to effect societal change, contributing to the transformation of society and the promotion of cross-cultural dialogue. It represented the culmination of my personal experiences, educational background, and a career in the arts, underpinned by a belief in the transformative power of the arts, with a focus on its potential to advance society and cultivate fresh perspectives.

Key inquiries centred on the influence of Islam on artistic expression and the definition of 'Islamic art.' Additionally, this research explored perceptions of art produced by artists from Muslim communities among non-Muslim audiences, including galleries, curators, art fairs, and art foundations.

At the core of Trans4m's work is its Integral Four Worlds (South, East, North, West) model, a culturally adaptable framework and process for individual, organizational, and societal transformation. Its primary goal is to co-develop and implement locally authentic integral solutions, restoring balance, co-creating, and connecting the four worlds for sustainable integral development.

In Chapter One, I introduced my research topic and provided a comprehensive overview of my predominant research path, the Eastern Path of Renewal, and the supporting South Relational path. I guided the reader through my fully integrated research-to-innovation journey, following the flow of the 4C's (Call, Context, Co-Creation, Contribution), and the CARE trajectory (Community Activation, Awakening Consciousness, Institutionalized Research, Transformative Education and Enterprise). I explained and illustrated the collective transformation trajectory, which gradually moved towards full embodiment individually and institutionally. Both trajectories were underpinned by the underlying GENE (Grounding, Emerging, Navigating, Effecting) rhythm, restoring balance and unleashing the potential of an integral Art Advocacy, Visual Literacy, and engagement model, as well as my evolved curatorial practice.

While this doctoral/PHD focused on the context of Cape Town and its Muslim community, artists, and art ecology, the MASHŪRAH process and MASHŪRAH Art arts initiative presented in this thesis hold the potential to benefit organizations and communities globally.

12.2 Reviewing The Research - To Innovation Journey

Dual Trajectories Of 4c's And Care

12.2.1 Reflecting On The 4cs Trajectory

12.2.2 Inner Calling

A Search For An Integral And Creatively Aligned Purpose An Exploration Of My Inner Calling

Chapter 2 Marked The Commencement Of My Introspective journey, driven by a quest to explore my inner calling. This journey was deeply intertwined with the tapestry of my cultural and life experiences and chronicled the choices I made, the challenges I confronted, the triumphs I celebrated, and the profound lessons I absorbed. This exploration was intrinsically linked to my family's story, one that traversed from Pakistan to the UK, etching its indelible mark on my identity. This chapter served as a bridge, connecting the evolution of my family with my personal evolution and my profound connection with them and the art world.

Guided by the Narrative Method, a cornerstone of the Eastern Path of Renewal, I embarked on comprehending my Inner Calling through the lens of my personal narrative. This narrative unfolded through the four facets of Randall's framework: the 'outside story' (existence), the 'inside story' (experience), the 'inside-out story' (expression), and the 'outside-in story' (impression). Within the realms of my 'inside-out story,' I delved into introspection, meticulously exploring the experiences, thoughts, and memories that intricately woven the tapestry of my inner narrative. This personal exploration was complemented by the 'outside-in story,' which revealed how the perceptions of others influenced my own self-perception.

This chapter served as a profound catalyst for self-reflection, leading me to unearth my yearning for art engagement and inclusivity. This ultimately steered my calling toward Cape Town, South Africa.

Throughout the process of crafting this chapter, I revisited it multiple times, allowing new insights to permeate its pages. This rigorous exercise in introspection and reflection, though at times emotionally challenging, served as a catalyst for my personal growth and emotional healing. As I evolved on my doctoral research journey, this chapter served as a living record of my transformation, which included relocations from the UK to South Africa and Ireland and culminated in my return to South Africa, where I also embarked on the journey of marriage.

12.2.3 Outer Calling

Retrospections Leading To Responding To The Outer Call Of The Muslim Community And Artist Community In Cape Town

Chapter 3 marked the transition from my inner calling to addressing the external imperative for community and institutional engagement in the transformation of visual literacy and arts access within Cape Town's Muslim communities. This journey was driven by the desire to better represent and support the sustainable development of Muslim artists within the region.

This chapter delved deep into the transformative potential of art, entwined with the intricate intersections of faith, tradition, politics, and the art ecosystem. It questioned the feasibility of this transformation while spotlighting contemporary artists who embodied this potential. Each artist's work echoed their unique experiences and identities, shaped by a myriad of factors including culture, society, politics, inequality, poverty, and injustice.

The chapter underscored the daunting challenges faced by the Cape Town Muslim community and its artists, born from a lack of understanding of Islam and Muslims, restrictions on religious art, and the enduring effects of slavery and apartheid. As I ventured to address the societal call to align my inner calling with art's potential for social change, I came to realize my unique position within the intersecting realms of tradition, religion, critical art discourse, and contemporary art practice.

This newfound insight propelled me to contribute to bridging the existing challenges through my role as a Muslim contemporary art practitioner and curator. The aim was to design an Integral emancipatory curatorial and engagement model in Cape Town, in harmony with my core values and principles resonating with the local Muslim community and the broader art ecosystem, within the framework of Integral Research.

Within this chapter, the pressing concerns of the Cape Town Muslim community and its artists were brought to the forefront, and the role of the South African art industry in supporting arts within this community was scrutinized. The desires and questions raised in Chapter 2 were seamlessly woven into the fabric of my life's purpose and contribution, set within the context of this expanded narrative.

The issue of inequality, a persistent challenge in post-apartheid South Africa, remained a central theme. Societal divisions, predominantly along racial lines, persisted, and my conviction in the transformative potential of art to break down barriers faced by disenfranchised communities remained unwavering. I concluded that art could serve as a potent educational tool, fostering understanding and bridging the existing gaps between the art world and Cape Town's Muslim community.

12.3 (Part 1): Individual And Collective Methodological Contextualisation

In Chapter 5, the 4C trajectory shifted from 'Call' to 'Context,' and the GENE rhythm progressed from 'Grounding' to 'Emerging.' This pivotal chapter on the Eastern path employed Hermeneutics as the primary research methodology for building the contextual framework. However, a synergy emerged with Phenomenology, stemming from the Southern Relational approach of Integral Research. These two methodologies, Hermeneutics and Phenomenology, intertwined and complemented each other, resulting in 'Hermeneutic Phenomenology' as my approach.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 at level 2 collectively aimed to explore the historical context of Muslims in Cape Town, South Africa, along with their contemporary challenges and involvement in the South African art industry. Simultaneously, these chapters investigated the potential for establishing a transformative framework to enhance access, engagement, advocacy, and curatorial practices.

Chapter 5 was the first on this level, focusing on methodological contextualization and introducing the primary context analysis presented in Chapter 6. This approach was necessary due to the research's grounding in Islam and the arts sector, as well as my phenomenological engagement as a curator with Muslim artists in Cape Town and South Africa.

Given South Africa's complex colonial history and the diverse composition of the Muslim community in Cape Town, a thorough exploration of the literature of European, African, and Muslim thinkers was essential. This literature was significant for understanding the contemporary Cape Town/South African culture and my personal context, considering my role in the global Muslim and Pakistani diaspora.

The exploration included works from various thinkers like Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Nietzsche, Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Islamic hermeneutics, and modern developments in Islamic interpretation by figures such as Nasr Abu Zayd and Fazlur Rahman. It also encompassed the contributions of female Quranic interpreters, including Amina Wadud, and the philosophies of Al-Ghazali and Allama Iqbal, focusing on selfhood (Khudi). The study delved into South African Black consciousness movements and Islamic liberation, closely examining influential figures like Steve Biko, Sheikh Yusuf, Tuan Guru, and Imam Yusuf.

These explorations led to the development of an innovative contextualizing tool and an evolved set of tenets to guide the contextual analysis in Chapter 6. Additionally, a question matrix involving the ecosystem was created to steer the inquiry in the subsequent chapter.

12.4 (Part 2) Activation Of Matrix Towards A Regenerative Context - Understanding The Context Of Self, The Cape Town Muslim Community And The South African Art Ecosystem

In this chapter, our focus shifted to the examination of the intersection between Muslim identity and artistic practice in Cape Town. This research context was designed to delve into the critical issues identified in Level 1 of our research, referred to as "Call."

We continued to employ Hermeneutic Phenomenology here, building upon the method introduced in Chapter 5. This approach enabled us to explore opportunities and obstacles within various layers of the ecosystem, including individuals, organizations, and society. We utilized the evolved Integral Context Analysis paradigm and a question matrix to investigate imbalances, possibilities, and potentials from four distinct perspectives: Transpersonal, Transcultural, Transdisciplinary, and Transformational. This method not only served as a framework for analysing the current context but also offered a blueprint for future context analyses, representing a social innovation framework. Supported by evolved tenets, it provided a structured approach to understanding the complexities of contemporary art's connection to collective societal ideals.

The questions included in the matrix were inspired by insights from the MASHŪRAH circles in Chapter 4 and my personal experiences in the art industry. While they were not exhaustive, these questions aimed to guide our exploration of the underlying values and their relevance to contemporary art.

Throughout our exploration, we've uncovered crucial insights within the various dimensions of the 4C trajectory, each offering a distinct perspective on imbalances and opportunities. These findings serve as the foundation for the emancipation theory we'll delve into in Chapter 8.

12.5 Summarised Outcomes

In the Transpersonal realm, we uncovered imbalances at individual and organizational levels, including Islamophobia, institutional racism, the sacred-secular conflict, and art worker undervaluation. These imbalances also offered opportunities to connect with spiritual essence, foster authentic communication, promote holistic wellness, and enhance curatorial processes.

The Transpersonal: Societal domain highlighted imbalances, like the Muslim community's discomfort with art events and limited representation of Muslim artists, leading to opportunities for curating exhibitions, fostering diversity, and community support.

Within the Transcultural domain, challenges included 'othering,' colonial education, and Islamophobia, providing opportunities to embrace diverse identities, co-create inclusively, and use a Muslim female curatorial voice. Organizational opportunities involved transcending historical narratives and leveraging cultural intelligence.

In the Transcultural: Societal dimension, imbalances centered on faith-expression struggles and art's undervaluation, while opportunities encompassed fostering new artistic forms and integrating art into everyday life.

The Transdisciplinary sphere revealed imbalances in skill diversity and digital limitations, with opportunities for interdisciplinary learning and digital strategies.

At the Transdisciplinary: Organizational level, imbalances related to art infrastructure and education, while opportunities involved collaborative knowledge generation and innovative education.

Transdisciplinary: Societal imbalances included limited support for young artists, with opportunities for intergenerational discourse and middle-class support.

In the Transformative domain, we identified challenges in understanding cultural dynamics and dominance of North-Western knowledge centers. These challenges prompted opportunities to redefine identity, advocate for Muslim artists, and optimize technology.

The Transformative: Societal realm's imbalances involved South Africa's art history and funding limitations, while opportunities included greater art community visibility, collaboration, and inclusive design principles.

12.6 New Emancipatory Approach To Integral Curatorship

Lending To Enhanced Access Engagement And Advocacy To Muslim Communities And Artists In Cape Town

The Co-creation Chapter marked a pivotal phase in the 4C's trajectory and was dedicated to developing an emancipatory methodology grounded in the imbalances and untapped potentials explored in Chapter 6. In this chapter, I integrated Critical Theory and Feminist theories to construct a theoretical model actively addressing the imbalances and potentials identified in

Chapters 5 and 6. It also delved into the evolution of my personal emancipation as a curator and as an individual, envisioning what an emancipated Sara would look and feel like. These theories were instrumental in critically evaluating existing methods and practices in curating, access, engagement, advocacy, and development.

During this stage, an extensive literature review was conducted to inform the research design, drawing from various theories and scholars such as Axel Honneth's theory of Recognition, Paulo Freire's 'Critical Pedagogy,' the Black Conscious Movement, Islamic liberation theory, Critical art theory, Wendy Shaw and Salah M. Hasan's Islamic Art theory, and African Modernity.(Biko, 1996; Presbey, 2003; Ray, 2007; Hassan, 2009; Palombo, 2014; Shaw, 2019; Sinwell, 2022)

The resulting theoretical model The MASHŪRAH process was a collaborative effort with innovation ecosystems structured around the CARE process. It serves as the foundation for practical approaches aimed at enhancing advocacy and development for Muslim artists within the South African art ecosystem. It also focuses on improving access and engagement of Muslim communities within the art world. By examining relevant disciplines for liberation and as mechanisms for hegemony, the research aimed to establish a new knowledge framework suitable for the contemporary South African context, fostering critical thinking and action, ultimately contributing to positive individual development.

12.6.1 Overview Of Emancipatory Theory

The Southern approach underscored the significance of authentic community engagement, prioritizing community relationships over art itself. It empowered affected individuals, promoted self-confidence, and aimed to dismantle systemic barriers, enriching cultural vibrancy and inclusivity.

In the Eastern perspective, subjective aesthetics challenged universal art standards, emphasizing understanding the deliberate choices of Muslim artists in integrating their heritage for a more meaningful approach that respects their identity and spirituality.

The Northern approach focused on redefining art's modernity by integrating diverse categories and knowledge systems. Navigating systemic barriers, challenging stereotypes, and celebrating diversity were crucial in working with Muslim artists and community engagement.

The Western perspective encouraged mutual learning, co-creation, and embracing global viewpoints. Curators were urged to challenge hierarchies and enhance inclusivity, making museums and galleries spaces for interaction and understanding.

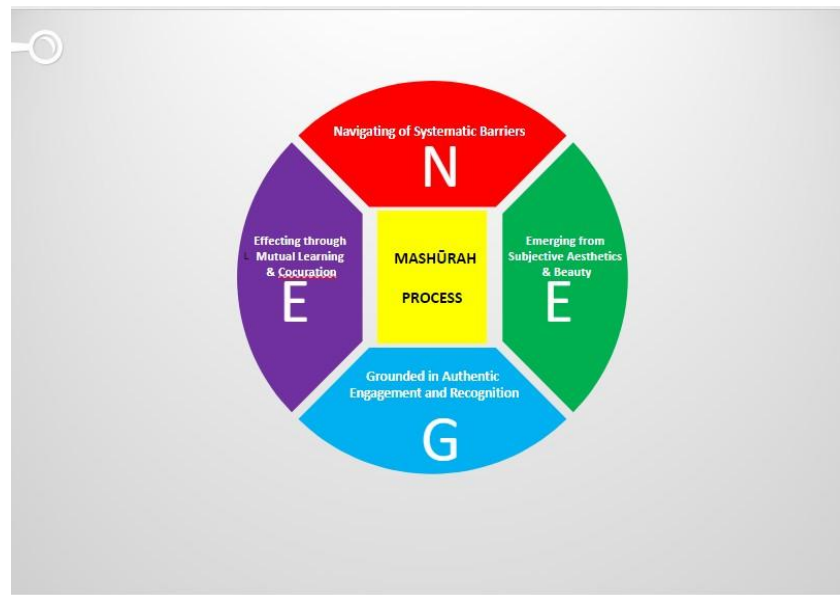


Figure 12.1: The MASHŪRAH process

12.7 Cooperative Inquiry To Actualising The MASHŪRAH Exhibition

In our final level, we embraced Co-operative Inquiry (CI) by John Heron, following the Eastern Path of Renewal and focusing on four modes of knowledge: Experiential, Presentational, Propositional, and Practical Knowledge. We integrated this approach with the GENE rhythm, moving from Southern grounding to Eastern emergence and Northern navigation, with Western effecting at the core.

This chapter served a dual purpose. First, it tested the MASHŪRAH process by launching our first exhibition ‘MASHŪRAH ‘as a participative form of inquiry, seeking fresh insights and alignment with the future of MASHŪRAH ARTS. Secondly, it underscored our research's role in empowering the marginalized Muslim voice in the South African art scene, using Cape Town as a crucible. Throughout, we intentionally integrated CI into the MASHŪRAH process, enhancing and transforming our approach.

We seamlessly incorporated the MASHŪRAH model into the research-to-innovation sequence by introducing CI and the CI/action/reflection process during exhibition preparation. This integration spanned from the initial concept to the practical execution of the exhibition, fostering inclusivity, envisioning possibilities, and building upon the foundation laid in prior stages. This holistic approach culminated in the successful execution of the exhibition, reflecting our journey of empowerment and transformation.

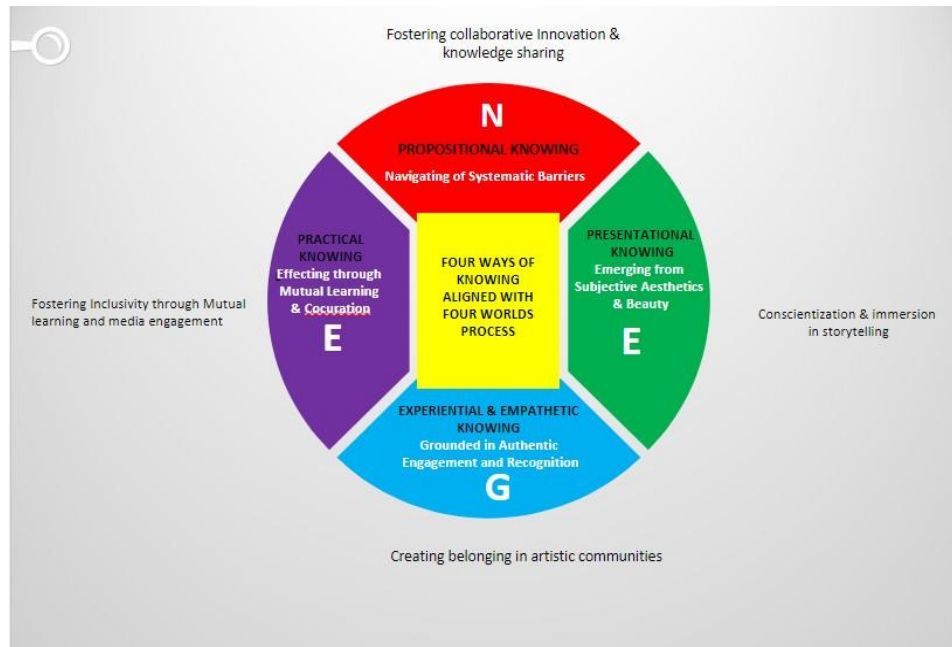


Figure 12.2: Four Ways of knowing aligned with the Four Worlds Process:

12.7.1 Summary Of Cooperative Inquiry Outcome

12.7.1.1 Grounding - Creating Belonging In Artistic Communities

In this phase, our journey began by nurturing a close-knit artistic community dedicated to catalysing social innovation and positive change. We prioritized empathetic understanding, creating a deep sense of connection within our community. Our aim was to resonate emotionally with our audience and showcase the profound impact of art on our lives. We deviated from traditional norms, empowering artists to maintain control over their work and revenue. Regular Zoom meetings and studio sessions nurtured a warm community spirit, aligning with the Southern

Grounding dimension and experiential knowledge of Cooperative Inquiry (CI). This approach enriched our artistic journey.

12.7.1.2 Emerging - Increased Conscientization And Immersion Via Storytelling And MASHŪRAH

In this phase, increased conscientization and immersive storytelling, coupled with MASHŪRAH (consultation), played pivotal roles in shaping our contributions. Our individual explorations connected our knowledge and life experiences. Logistical challenges spurred practical expertise growth. Collective conscientization guided our experiences. The pandemic led us to focus on conscientization and a deeper connection between art and our audience. Notably, our research findings highlighted the legacy of the "MASHŪRAH" exhibition and its potential for transformative storytelling.

12.7.1.3 Navigating - Fostering A Culture Of Collaboration

This phase showcased a comprehensive approach to individual and collective contributions in the MASHŪRAH exhibition. It aligned with the Northern Navigating dimension, focusing on social innovation and knowledge sharing. Individual expertise contributed to collective understanding, addressing systemic barriers. Innovative programming, audience feedback, and community engagement demonstrated the exhibition's impact. It fostered artist-led communities, reviving Greatmore Studios. Despite challenges, it substantially impacted the creative landscape, with potential for future collaborations.

12.7.1.4 Effecting - Fostering Inclusivity

The MASHŪRAH Initiative successfully promoted inclusivity and mutual learning. Community feedback showed the initiative's impact on diverse audiences and intergenerational dialogue. Concerns about the underrepresentation of Black Muslim artists led to a commitment to greater inclusivity. Individual reflections revealed a transformative journey, redefining Islamic art beyond architecture. The initiative's impact on diverse audiences and challenges to stereotypes were notable. Room for improvement exists in terms of further inclusivity, community representation, and securing core funding in future iterations.

12.8 Reflecting On The Care Trajectory

12.8.1 Community Activation

Care-Ing For Art Advocacy In The Community:

Community Activation Through MASHŪRAH Circles As An Integral, Transformative Innovation Dialogue Process

Looking back, "Community Activation," designated as "C" in this chapter, represented the first stride on the CARE path of this Integral Research, running in parallel with the 4C trajectory—Call, Context, Co-Creation, and Contribution. This phase prominently featured the shift from research to innovation and materialized as a practical manifestation of the corresponding "C" step within the 4C trajectory. The core objective of community activation revolved around fostering conversations, discussions, and dialogues addressing crucial issues among Muslim artists and the Cape Town Muslim community. These dialogues delved into matters of visual literacy, advocacy, and how the nation's political, racial, and socioeconomic landscape influenced both its people and art spaces.

To engage and revitalize these communities, I established "MASHŪRAH circles." This innovative approach encouraged deep and meaningful discourse while promoting the exchange of ideas and resources to collaboratively devise and implement transformative solutions. The journey of community activation drew inspiration from Islamic traditions of dialogue and seeking answers to both internal and external challenges. In shaping my study and dialogue circles, I placed the fundamental principles of *Tarbiyah* and MASHŪRAH at the forefront. These principles emphasized development, nurturing, growth, and non-hierarchical, democratic consultation. My hope was for participants to engage in dialogues, question, express concerns, share perspectives, and collaboratively seek answers.

The concept of "MASHŪRAH circles" was born from the harmonious amalgamation of several individual processes:

South - **Grounding** (Halaqah): Focused on the exchange of knowledge within "Circles of Learning."

East - **Emerging** (Tarbiyah): Emphasizing development and training, with a focus on the learning process.

North - **Navigating** (MASHŪRAH): Embracing consultation and guidance-seeking as a collective endeavor.

West – **Emancipation** (Hiqmah): Prioritizing collaborative dialogue and wisdom-seeking.

The activities and conversations with diverse individuals were both spontaneous and purposeful. I reached out to individuals closely aligned with the arts, who championed unique ways to bring about change, forging connections, and inspiring transformation within the community. As community activation unfolded in this chapter, a palpable sense of movement, collaboration, and initiative began to emerge. Artists from diverse practices came together, united by a shared aspiration for empowerment. This journey led to the formation of a group of artists and the prospect of an innovative exhibition. It became increasingly clear that the time was ripe for Muslim artists to flourish.

"MASHŪRAH circles" emerged as a contemporary, inclusive, and locally tailored community engagement tool. The discourse served as a precursor to an impending call to action, with the curation of a distinctive exhibition taking centre stage. All individuals involved concurred to meet both in person and online as needed. This chapter showcased the active creation of a research ecosystem, a community of artists, and a learning circle of MASHŪRAH, fostered through collaboration with a dedicated group of individuals and organizations sharing a collective vision focused on making a meaningful impact on the South African art landscape.



Figure 12.3: Cape Town Muslim art community dynamically existing within the GENE

12.9 Awakening Integral Consciousness Through HalaqArt As An Innovative Ecosystem

This chapter aimed to cultivate sustainable 'Innovation Ecosystems' capable of addressing disparities and seizing opportunities, as expounded upon in context chapters 5 and 6. In Chapter 4, we initiated the CARE trajectory with MASHŪRAH dialogue circles aimed at activating the community for increased visibility of Muslim artists and creatives within the South African art ecosystem and enhanced advocacy for artistic growth and more meaningful engagement with Muslim communities in the region.

These MASHŪRAH circles served as our initial step in building the foundation for our HalaqArt ecosystem and communities of practice, united by shared values and a collective vision. As we progressed into the next phase of the CARE trajectory, termed ‘Awakening Integral Consciousness’, we underscored the critical importance of collaboration and collective action. In Chapter 7, you were guided through our (co-creators/co-researchers) process of designing this research ecosystem, focusing on two distinct levels: the inner or personal level and the collective level.

This chapter delved into the intricacies of my own internal ecosystem and consciousness '*Khudi*,' which guided my curatorial endeavours and personal growth. The emerging collective ecosystem 'HalaqArt' played a significant role in shaping the questions we posed to uncover imbalances and opportunities in our exploration within Chapter 6.

My internal ecosystem '*Khudi*' (Selfhood) was guided by values such as Feeling (Ehsas), Intuiting (*Wajdan*), Knowing (*Ilm*), and Sensing (*Sha'oor*).

I faced challenges in aligning with organizations due to constraints like resource limitations and time commitments. Instead of forcing collaboration, I envisioned and creating a space and platform to achieve my objectives.

My attempts to involve various artists in a group exhibition revealed imbalances, with different artists having unique concerns and perspectives and these collaborations did not transpire. These challenges brought to light the complexities of advocating for Muslim artists in South Africa.

The chapter highlighted the dynamic nature of ecosystems, emphasizing that roles could not be assigned rigidly from the outset. Observing the artists' strengths and evolution, roles were adapted over time, with a focus on practical, direct approaches to Integral Research. The collective ecosystem involved artists who participated in the dialogue circle, and although specific roles were not initially assigned, certain artists and individuals embodied characteristics of Stewards, Catalysts, and Researchers within the ecosystem.

This chapter highlighted the ongoing development of the research ecosystem, emphasizing the need for flexibility and adaptability in working with a diverse group of artists and individuals. The final collective ecosystem was created with the foundation of artists that had begun the journey in the dialogue circle at level 1 of the CARE process. The following roles were established with the following artists and individuals to form the final ecosystem that would be carried forward in the rest of the project:

Stewards' characteristics: Hasan Essop, Faheem Rhoda Jackson, Haroon Gunn Salie, Achmat Soni,

Catalyst characteristics: Sahlah Davids, Abdus Salaam, Ukhona Mlandu, Igsaan Martins, Shafina Jaffer

Researchers: Fellow doctoral/Phd colleagues Sameer Al Abadi and Laila Majeed and artists; Laylaa Jacobs, Kamyar Bineshtarigh, Shameelah Khan, Nabeeha Mohamed, Hannah Noor Mahomed, Mishkaah Amien, Shukry Adams, Rushda Deaney, Atiyyah Khan, Nyambo Masa Mara, Gulshan Khan

Facilitator: In the context of our initiative, I, along with Ukhona, emerged as the most adept facilitator, leveraging our distinct skill sets to navigate the multifaceted responsibilities of this role.

12.10 Institutionalised Research-To-Innovation Through MASHŪRAH Arts Initiative

Chapter 9 represented a crucial third phase in the CARE trajectory, "Research to Innovation, Institutionalized," a concept that ran in parallel with my exploration of Co-Creation, which had culminated in my new Emancipatory Theory in Chapter 8. As this chapter formed part of the co-creation level 3, it built upon the foundational principles of the emancipatory theory with the applied methodologies of Critical Theory and Feminism. It also built on the journey of CARE, which had commenced in Chapter 4 with Community Activation through MASHŪRAH circles.

Subsequently, in Chapter 9, I transitioned into the realm of transformative research-to-innovation, where we concentrated on collaboratively building or improving structures to establish Research-to-Innovation in a sustainable manner. Within the confines of this chapter, I elaborated on the pivotal role of exhibitions and the importance of institutions as custodians. Unlike the conventional approach of formalizing research within a centre or academy, my focus was on establishing a new art platform called MASHŪRAH Arts that spearheaded these exhibitions. This initiative encompassed essential components such as critical research analysis, action-based research methodologies, and the invaluable wealth of both local and global knowledge that had been amassed. This section of the narrative was dedicated to the incorporation of MASHŪRAH Arts into a practical tool that served to fully actualize and advance the new conceptual approach outlined in Chapter 8.

12.11 Embodiment Of The Integral MASHŪRAH Process And The Future Of MASHŪRAH Arts

In the fourth and final chapter of the CARE journey, my aim was to synthesize and bring to life the key components explored throughout our voyage. This was achieved through the application of the MASHŪRAH process, a tool for deep self-reflection. These components included community activation, the awakening of integral consciousness, institutionalized research, and the embodiment of transformative education and organization. The intention here was to emphasize my commitment to the continual evolution of the MASHŪRAH model and framework, adapting it into tangible and relevant learning and educational programs for MASHŪRAH Arts.

Within this holistic approach, the GENE remained a guiding beacon, symbolizing self-leadership, organizational development, and societal progress within an ever-renewing cycle. Integral development provided the structure and processes to unlock transformative potential across all levels, interconnecting individuals, organizations, societal development, and global progress within a holistic system. This chapter delved deeply into the complete realization of social innovation across three core dimensions: the self, organizations, and societies. The concept of embodiment marked the culmination of the CARE journey, signifying the fulfilment of the research-to-innovation process. I apply the MASHŪRAH process as a self-reflective tool, focusing on individual embodiment at the self-level.

The success of our exhibition and the relationships forged, led to invitations to replicate similar models in Zimbabwe and Nigeria. Consequently, a year later, we inaugurated our second exhibition in partnership with Madlozi Arts and the District Six Museum in Cape Town. In 2022, my journey came full circle as I assumed the role of Head of Public Programmes at the Void Gallery, a non-profit art center in Derry, Northern Ireland. This marked a significant chapter in my career, as it was my first return to the UK since before the pandemic. Despite its status as part of the UK, Northern Ireland bore the deep scars of decades of strained conflict, resulting in high rates of unemployment, poverty, and youth suicide. A new program to be piloted was developed, called MASHŪRAH Arts: Integral Curatorial Development Incubator.

12.12 Summary Of Social Return On Investment (SROI)

Chapter 10 delved into the intricate impact of this process, specifically the social return on investment, within the context of this research and its diverse role in promoting innovation. In a nutshell, the Cooperative Inquiry embarked on a comprehensive journey, deeply engaging with the Cape Town Muslim community, its artists, the South African artistic ecosystem, the broader Cape Town population, and South African society. Moreover, the Inquiry gained international recognition and facilitated the expansion of networks.

Primarily, it fostered a sense of belonging within artistic communities through meaningful dialogues and unity. Secondly, it created opportunities for heightened awareness and active involvement in storytelling, along with a deeper understanding of communal consultation. Thirdly, it catalyzed the development of a culture characterized by collaborative innovation and the free exchange of knowledge. Lastly, it promoted inclusivity through mutual learning and active participation. The following section will elaborate on the limitations of my research.

12.13 Limitation Of My Research

The research findings bear certain limitations that require thoughtful consideration when interpreting their implications. Firstly, the study's primary focus on Cape Town's Muslim communities may constrain the generalizability of its conclusions to diverse regions and socio-cultural contexts. Consequently, a cautious approach is essential when applying these findings beyond this specific context. Additionally, the research's predominant emphasis on the arts may inadvertently sideline broader issues affecting the Cape Town Muslim community, potentially restricting its relevance to other facets of community development.

Furthermore, the study underscores the challenges encountered in collaborating with organizations, primarily due to resource constraints and time limitations. These constraints raise concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of the initiative and its ability to acquire the necessary resources for success. Lastly, the importance of flexibility and adaptability when working with a diverse group of artists and individuals underscores the need for frameworks that allow for the adjustment of roles and responsibilities as the initiative evolves.

12.14 Recommendations And Conclusion

Considering these limitations, several recommendations emerge for future research endeavours. It is advisable for subsequent studies to explore how the findings from this Cape Town-based research can be applied to Muslim communities and art ecosystems on a global scale, considering the potential transferability of the contextualising tool and its principles to diverse regions. Additionally, ongoing community participation is crucial to ensure that the perspectives and experiences of the Muslim art community continue to evolve and are not isolated to a single event.

Further research efforts should extend to universities and schools to comprehensively understand the metrics and performances of Muslim students, possibly involving inquiry groups to delve deeper into their experiences. Moreover, conducting in-depth explorations of the challenges and obstacles encountered during the MASHŪRAH process and its associated initiatives can yield valuable insights for enhancement.

The development of practical toolkits and guidelines for curators, artists, and community leaders can facilitate the practical implementation of the theoretical model in real-world settings, nurturing critical thinking and action. Simultaneously, research should focus on ongoing efforts to secure core funding for future iterations of the MASHŪRAH Initiative, ensuring its sustained impact and effectiveness.

Lastly, a robust sustainability plan needs to be formulated for MASHŪRAH Arts to guarantee its continued success and long-term impact. Furthermore, investigations into the challenges and opportunities of replicating the MASHŪRAH model in different regions, accounting for variations in culture, economics, and social dynamics, are vital to ensure its broader applicability and triumph in various contexts. This comprehensive approach will enhance the potential for success and relevance of the MASHŪRAH model globally.

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ANNEX

Chapter Flow

Level	4c's	Path	Methodology	4 - Care	Overview	Mashūrah Trajectory
Chapter 1- Introduction						
Level 1: Call & Community Activation						
Chapter 2 - Inner Calling	Call	Eastern	Narrative		Describe My Life's Call	
Chapter 3 - Outer Calling	Call	Eastern	Narrative		How Does It Respond To The Outer Call Of South Africa's Art Ecology And Communities	
Chapter 4 - Community Activation		Eastern	Narrative	C	Activating A Community Of Practice	Mashūrah Circles Of Learning & Dialogue
Level Two: Context & Awakening Consciousness						
Chapter 5 - Methodological Context	Context	Eastern/Southern	Hermeneutics/Phenomenology		Literature Review And Create New Integral Context Analysis Tool	Mashūrah As An Integral Dialogue And Analysis Tool With Halaqart Ecosystem
Chapter 6 – Individual And Collective Contextual Analysis	Context	Eastern/Southern	Hermeneutics/Phenomenology		Context Analysis To Surface Imbalances & Potentials	
Chapter 7 - Awakening Consciousness		Eastern/Southern	Hermeneutics/Phenomenology	A	Illustrate How I Designed Halaqart Ecosystem	

Level Three: Co-Creation & Institutional R- To-I						
Chapter 8 - Individual & Collective Emancipation	Cocreation	Eastern/ Southern	Critical Theory/Feminism		Further Literature Review & New Emancipator y Developed	Mashūrah Process As Alternative For Curating, Engagement & Mashūrah Arts As An Initiative And Organisation
Chapter 9 - Institutional Research -To – Innovation	Cocreation	Eastern/ Southern	Critical Theory/Feminism	R	Illustrate How I Institutionali sed Mashūrah Arts	
Level Four: Contribution. Embodiment Through An Enterprise						
Chapter 10 - Individual & Collective Contribution	Contribution	Eastern	Cooperative Inquiry		Mashūrah Process Activated & Tested The Through Coopertive Inquiry With Exhibition	Mashūrah Arts Exhibition Is Introduced Hosted By Mashūrah Arts
Chapter 11 - Embodiment Through An Enterprise-In- Community	Contribution	Eastern	Cooperative Inquiry	E	The Ongoing Embodiment Of Researcher & Mashūrah 1 Year Later	Mashūrah Hosts More Exhibitions And Continued Opportunities In The Future
Chapter 12 - Distillation Of The Research- To-Innovation	Conclusion				Concluding Remarks	

Four Trans: Imbalances And Outcomes

Transpersonal: Individual

Imbalances

- Islamophobia and institutional racism

- Demands between the sacred and the secular in the modern world cause a split in consciousness.
- Art workers are easily indispensable; this can leave one with a sense of low self-worth.

Opportunities:

- The opportunity to stay connected to one's spiritual essence and connect heart, intellect, spirit and self.
- The opportunity to be an authentic communicator for artists and the audiences.
- The opportunity to encourage deep wellness as an important form of activism.
- Opportunity to contribute to a healing, empathetic, liberating, safe and caring art spaces.

Transpersonal: Organizational level

Imbalances

- Art industry can be a very transient, fickle and egotistical space with a type of cancel culture.
- The goals, vision, and operations of art organizations vs public persona lack authenticity.
- There is systemic racism in the organizations.
- Gaps in infrastructure and the electricity crisis continue to contribute to talent and resource drain.
- The ecosystem mostly prioritizes profit increase & the art collectors' influence surpasses the voices of artists and non-buying audiences.
- Lack of transparency and corruption in the South African government filters into the art ecology.
- Pressure for the South African art industry to keep up with the international art market and events and this effect access for the local market.

Opportunities

- Opportunities for historians, critics, curators, and academics working in (and engaging with) the sector to retain and preserve a sense of morality.
- Opportunity for education, promotion, and market development of local artists
- Opportunity to hold donors and those whose names were posted above the museum doors more accountable for raising funding.
- Opportunity for smaller organizations to take stronger positions with silent donor support.
- The opportunity for integral openhearted curatorial process

Transpersonal: Societal

Imbalances

- Muslim community do not feel comfortable attending and visiting art events in the like openings.
- Limited exposure, exploration and representation of art by artists from Muslim communities particularly the female muslim voice.
- Shortage of curators, academics, and collectors from a Muslim background or sensibility on visual culture and practices via an Islamic/Muslim frame of interpretation
- Fewer South African Muslim students pursuing curating, arts administration, or gallery studies, most are discouraged by the nature of the art world
- Muslim run organizations trying to assist artists are frequently dismissed as being on the 'fringe' if they do not fit into a western cannon

Opportunities

- Opportunity to curate more exhibitions that create visibility and opportunities for Muslim artists and creatives, particularly females.
- Opportunity to develop pedagogical support mechanisms to nurture diversity and the growth of the creative environment on several levels.

- Opportunity to mobilize the community to support the growth of artists themselves.

Transcultural: Individual:

Imbalances

- ‘Othering’ and the deep rooted impact of colonial educational systems
- Limiting standards to European cultural centres
- Islamophobia and intergenerational trauma
- Limiting expectations on curatorial process

Opportunities

- Opportunity to learn from a variety of knowledge centres and identities
- Opportunity to co-create and curate from multi-dimensional, inclusive and evolving methods.
- Opportunity to utilise internal senses to instruct the outward senses on how to take in the world
- Opportunity to utilize the Muslim female curatorial voice

Transcultural: Organizational:

Imbalances.

- Historical divide, exclusion and misconstrued narratives for Muslims from an intentional subjugation of a culture from enslavement
- Problematic classification and interpretation of Islamic art and the Orientalist preoccupation with an unintelligible East
- Muslim artists existing in the ecosystem are represented in accordance with industry regulations and quotas instead of authentic engagement.
- Muslim artists frequently admonished not to be openly religious in their work
- Tensions between cultural appropriation and appreciation in the art world
- Historical dominance of white South African culture within organizations & imbalances in art organizational ownership structures

- Museum spaces and galleries thinking through and against spiritual practices of people of colour in ways that stage them for the purpose of spectatorship.

Opportunities

- Potential of forming partnerships across varied cultures that will transcend the particularities of slave and apartheid-era history.
- Potential to engage different value systems, lifestyles and languages without confining them to the obscure, exposing them to ridicule, or overburdening them with spectacle.
- Opportunity to curate cultures and represent communities with careful study, integrity, and collaboration & reclaim space for a normalization of spiritual and religious experiences.
- Opportunity to provide genuine visibility to previously marginalized local artists and arts practices
- Potential to harness the cultural and emotional intelligence of art organizations in cultivating new ideas and perspectives to reinvent the art world.
- Opportunity to raise awareness of the current paradigm and train diverse persons as future leaders on cultural and faith-based sensibilities.

Transcultural: Societal:

Imbalances

- Muslims commonly confront blockages in the struggle between faith and self-expression.
- An important middle ground exists for many Muslims that has been neglected in the art space
- Many Muslims in Cape Town are only aware of art because of a sense of prohibition.
- Major intellectual and theological force of religious leaders during the last two decades of apartheid has created biases and issues
- Many non-Muslims in Cape Town equate being Muslim to being Malay

therefore creating limitations and stereotypes.

Opportunities

- Opportunity to foster rather than hinder the emergence of new artistic forms as well as elaborations of older ones
- Opportunity to create a balance between social and religious commitment, national and religious identity, and cultural flair.
- Opportunity to consider Islam as a set of discursive traditions that guide Muslims throughout their lives and toward an examination of the everydayness

Transdisciplinary: Individual:

Imbalances

- Need to diversify skills and knowledge sources
- Fluctuating economy and career advancement
- Limitations in digital skills and resources for the development for students

Opportunities

- Opportunity to move laterally and flexibly between positions and individuals.
- Opportunity to broaden my perspective on the actual world, not only the art world.
- Opportunity to adopt an interdisciplinary and multi skilling approach to learning and growth,
- Opportunity to employ online and digital operational strategies as a curator.

Transdisciplinary: Organizational:

Imbalances

- Inadequate art infrastructure on the continent aggravates the lack of support for the growth of artists resulting in a talent and resource drain
- Only 5% of schools offer art as a subject and due to a lack of training teachers

frequently struggle to teach this subject.

- Domestic art market has to contend with global competition, the skills of youth are not prepared for this
- South Africa has some of the continent's highest data costs, as a result, students and artists may not always be able to conveniently access information on their mobile phones.
- Many outdated ways of thinking and acting in both the art world and the Muslim community in relation to art education.

Opportunities

- Opportunity for knowledge to be generated collaboratively among professions, fields, and decision levels.
- Opportunity for Art organizations, governments, academic institutions, religious bodies to collaborate to develop integrated innovative approaches to encourage more young Muslims to study, embrace, and communicate in the creative economy together.
- Opportunity to build a transdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach to learning about art
- Opportunity for Art organizations to educate themselves in areas such as religious literacy.

Transdisciplinary: Societal:

Imbalances

- Absence of community & industry support for young emerging muslim artists has isolated them and hindered them from developing further.
- South Africa is in a crisis and education is only focused on teaching students to earn profits rather than grow as individuals.
- Muslim religious leaders are not actively supporting more comprehensive education that incorporates alternative kinds of creative narratives.
- Internal factors such as incongruity and lack of harmony between Islamic

scholars and the political, social and educational practice need to be addressed.

Opportunities

- Opportunity for art engagement to foster independent, critical thinkers who offer value to society and strengthen democracy.
- The opportunity to foster and mobilize Intergenerational discourse.
- The opportunity for more solidly middle-class individuals of the community to assist the growth and patronage of the arts

Transformative: Individual:

Imbalances

- Understanding my cultural matrix and historical relationship, as well as the components of these cultural dynamics
- Spiritual freedom is challenged in the west, and intellectual freedom is threatened in the east
- North and Western knowledge centers effectively dominating

Opportunities

- Opportunity for social awareness, culture, and spirituality to actively redefine and reconstruct identity in accordance with new thinking and new knowledge.
- Opportunity to focus on development and advocacy to expand possibilities for Muslim artists.
- Opportunity to conceive exhibitions with new and unheard voices is a critical part of the process.

Transformative: Organizational:

Imbalances

- South Africa's dependency on the international economy to keep it afloat.
- Hierarchies determine who has access to artists, events, places, information, and funding.

- Levels of integrity sacrificed in order to be a part of the art world's inner circle.
- The need to create and apply higher curatorial standards.

Opportunities

- Opportunity to find the optimum use of technology, promote professional development, and broaden audience reach.
- Opportunity to recognise the need for a transformative change from "me" to "us," and not strictly transactional and align towards a common purpose of nurturing, caring, and inclusion
- Opportunity for Art organisations to balance with a more transformational and holistic approach where they learn from not about each culture.
- Opportunity for conversation, transparency and accountability, inclusivity, participatory decision-making, and a culture in which every voice counts

Transformative: Societal:

Imbalances

- The South African art industries and the Muslim community's shadow self is entangled in a traumatic and insidious past.
- South Africa's emerging field of contemporary art from the Muslim identifying artists is not well established or structured.
- The most frequently stated hindrance to success and development is a lack of funds. The vast majority of initiatives and money that supports Muslim artists are short-term or one-time endeavours

Opportunities

- Opportunity for Art from the Muslim community, to be given greater visibility and audibility such as at local and global art festivals, art fairs, and galleries,
- Opportunity for the past to be fairly remembered and rehabilitated, and racial discriminatory processes completely abolished.
- Opportunity to collaborate more closely with people who understand or are

willing to authentically understand the heart of Muslim culture, African culture, and the international world.

- Opportunity for human centred design principles championing inclusivity to previously disenfranchised communities
- Opportunity to facilitate the participation of new and emerging collectors of art in the continent's arts economy

Exemption From Ethical Clearance

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Date: 16 October 2023

Dear Ms Sara Bint Moneer Khan

Supervisor: Prof Alexander Schieffer

Ethics Exemption: (Student number: 8467)

Doctor Of Management in Technology and Innovation

This is to confirm that ethics approval was not required during the time when the student registered in 2015, but since then, it has been introduced as a requirement. Hence, a note has been made on your file in this regard, attaching the consent letters. During the examination process, the following notes will be shared with examiners:

The student collected data without ethics approval. Based on the motivations received from the student and supervisor(s), as tabled and discussed at a Research and Ethics Committee meeting held in 2023, the student was allowed to continue with the study. Considering the circumstances presented, the student and supervisor(s) were instructed to include a detailed explanation of how the study aligned to and dealt with all ethical principles and procedures impacting participants/respondents, the researcher(s), the institution, and the research methodology employed in the study.

Kind Regards,

Prof. P. Singh

Prof Paul Singh

Head: Postgraduate Programme

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Directors: B Anderson, NS Hadebe, FL Landman (Chairperson), MP Makhaya, R Steenberg

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Editor's Letter

The Editor,

23 Dipo Olubi Lagos, Nigeria

+2348062969797

Patrick.odimnfe@gmail.com

29th October, 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

It has been an exciting and enlightening experience editing and proofreading the research thesis of Sara Bint Moneer Khan titled **Islam, Arts and Renewal of Thought: An Integral Approach to Art Advocacy, Visual Literacy and Engagement in the Muslim Communities of Cape Town, South Africa**,

Sara's narrative storytelling approach sheds light on the intricate challenges faced by the Muslim art communities in Cape Town, which is an extension of the challenges in the broader global Muslim community.

With a focus of this doctoral journey on the context of Cape Town, South Africa, the thesis carries a vibrancy of faith, culture, identity, politics, and art, to shape an innovative emancipatory model that is inclusive, dialogical and empowering for Muslim artists.

I wish to state that this thesis was thoroughly edited and referenced accordingly.

Sincerely,

Patrick Odimnfe

Research Editor