AN ASIM MUKHTAR FILM

Sanjha Punjab

Stories of a United Punjab by Punjabi Men

CINEMATOGRAPHY
REWI AMOAMO & NIKO MEREDITH

STORYWRITER
TEENA BROWN PULU

SANJHA PUNJAB

Stories of a **United Punjab** by Punjabi Men

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2025

Te Ara Poutama

Editor

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Abstract

Sanjha Punjab: Stories of a United Punjab by Punjabi Men merges fiction and documentary filmmaking styles to create a hybrid documentary, a term that I use interchangeably with nonfiction film. This artefact along with the exegesis, or the written explanation of the filmmaking process, together form a practice-oriented doctoral thesis. Made in several dialects of the Punjabi language with English subtitles, the visual language of the film is shaped by social realism cinema seen in a selection of works by Punjabi film artist Gurvinder Singh, and Iranian film artists Jafar Panahi, Abbas Kiarostami, and Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Social realism reflects a visual style seeking to be culturally authentic by showing the reality of ordinary people's lives in minimalist cinematography and sound. However, the storywork of *Sanjha Punjab* draws inspiration from Punjabi social memory in the fiction writings of Nadir Ali, Zubair Ahmad, Khushwant Singh, and Waryam Singh Sandhu.

Sanjha Punjab is structured by eight arrangements assembled into Punjabi short stories on-screen. These stories contribute to a larger narrative of Punjabiyat or the Punjabi spirit after the 1947 partition of the Punjab, much of what exists beyond the screen, but is encapsulated here in conversations and creative performances of poetry, music, song, and dance. Seven stories show migrant Punjabi men of India and Pakistan living in South Auckland and speaking and performing as themselves. The eighth story is a non-narrative interpretation of visiting Lahore city and Chiniot district in Punjab, Pakistan, as experienced by the filmmaker. Two themes are explored in the collective expressions of Punjabiness. First, the meanings and significances of *Sanjha Punjab*, a term for united Punjab seen in the everyday lives of migrant Punjabi men who believe the Punjabis are an ethnic and cultural community. Second is a broader reflection of how living beyond the India-Pakistan border rekindles social connections between Punjabis whose relationships might influence their land of origin. Could it be said that upon return visits to the Punjab, migrants see their homeland in a new light because they have built up a repertoire of experiences by existing beyond a linear border?

Video Sharing Platforms

The nonfiction film *Sanjha Punjab* is available free to the public on the YouTube channel of Asim Mukhtar.

YouTube	SANJHA PUNJAB – Official Film on YouTube
Thumbnail	
Synopsis	Eight stories combined into one film about Punjabis in South Auckland. The travelling narrative shows migrant Punjabi men from India and Pakistan restoring their cultural heritage and ancestral ties after eight decades of separation in their home countries.
Production Company	Punjabi Films Company Limited, New Zealand
Rating G	Suitable for general audiences, all ages.
Release Date	2024
Running Time	69:27:12
Festival	Maa Boli Punjabi International Film Festival, 2024.

Crew and Cast

Director Producer Editor	Asim Mukhtar	
Cinematography	Rewi Amoamo	Niko Meredith
Storywriter	Teena Brown Pulu	
Colour Grading	Jesus Rodrieguez	
Audio Engineer	Vitaliy Pusch	
Poetry Ek	Basharat Ali Jan	Onkar Singh
	Bashir Ahmad	Amrit Pal Singh
	Haseeb Arshad	Akif Rehman
Poetry Do	Baba Najmi	Satta Vairowalia
	Farooq Chaudhry	Jasdeep Sidhu
	Umar Javed Goraya	
Reflections Ek	Parminder Singh	Daljit Singh
	Naveed Hamid	Nasir Dhillon
Reflections Doo	Gurmeet Singh Sarkaria	Ali Shah
Friends Ek	Ajit Singh Randhawa	Saleem Zubair (Billa Ji)
	Rajinder Bajwa	

Friends Doo	N.V. Singh	Asim Mukhtar
	Amrik Singh	Amrit Jagayat
	Parminder Singh	Gagan Mangat
	Navdeep Gill	Devinder Chann
	Jasdeep Sikhu	Jasbeer Singh
	Umar Javed Goraya	Haseeb Virk
	Waqas Rasool	Rashid Wariach
	Melino Maka	Sylvester Tonga
	Fritz Filisi	
Compositions Ek	Nisar Mirza	Sukhbir Singh
	Amrik Singh	Amrit Jagayat
Compositions Do	Faisal Hayat Jappa	
	Government Islamia Postgraduate College, Chiniot	

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements) nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of another degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Asim Mukhtar

April 2025

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the tireless work and moral support my primary supervisor Teena Brown Pulu poured into my nonfiction film project, a doctoral journey of five-plus years. In many ways, I cannot help but feel the time and care that Teena put into this thesis outweighed mine because I am so indebted to her benevolence and humanity in standing by this student and his project through thick and thin. Teena was my film advisor and project collaborator. She was also my thesis editor who proofread, reworked, structured, and formatted the exegesis, turning the work around with speed and precision so I could make a deadline for examination; a deadline that had been extended four times stretching a normally four-year doctorate into more than five.

Significant to my wellbeing, Teena supported my decision to see a specialist doctor in neurodiversity. I have since been diagnosed with co-occurring conditions informed by trauma: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and mild anxiety. My primary supervisor offered me social acceptance without prejudgement, intolerance, or any kind of discriminatory presumption that I should not be in a doctoral programme due to neurological and developmental disorders that impact on my learning ability. Importantly, she ensured that I had wrap-around support to succeed in an education system designed for neurotypical students, but not so much for people like me. Without Teena's professional and creative expertise wrapped in generosity and care, it would have taken me another five years to refine the film and wade through the English language sensemaking and grammatical corrections in the exegetical writing.

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seem inadequate for expressing my sincere appreciation for everything they have given to see me safely through this degree programme from admission in September 2019 to submission for examination in October 2024.

Te Ara Poutama was my home faculty at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) where this doctoral thesis was based. I have great respect for the academic staff and my PhD peers who are mostly ngā iwi Māori o Aotearoa, meaning the Indigenous tribes of this land, New Zealand. The supportive environment offered to postgraduate research students is second-to-none. I am grateful to the retired Dean of Te Ara Poutama, Professor Pare Keiha, and the Acting Dean, Professor Hinematau McNeill, for their tremendous aroha and kindness in welcoming a migrant Punjabi filmmaker into the faculty's whānau Māori. My Tongan colleague Sylvester Tonga and Sāmoan colleague Fritz Filisi are also doctoral filmmakers in Te Ara Poutama: I thank them for their abiding friendship and camaraderie as fellow migrants to Aotearoa.

I could not have made a hybrid documentary without the love, support, and valuable contributions of my people, the Punjabis who agreed to be characters in the film. To the artists who expressed meanings of *Sanjha Punjab* in poetry, music, song, and dance – Basharat Ali Jan, Baba Najmi, Satta Vairowalia, Farooq Chaudhry, Gurmeet Singh Sarkaria, Ali Shah, Amrik Singh, Amrit Jagayat, Nisar Mirza, Sukhbir Singh, Faisal Hayat Jappa and the students of the Government Islamia Postgraduate College in Chiniot – thank you for performing with all your heart.

To the discussants who showed up for the land of Punjab, our land of five rivers and her people, through their tenderly crafted words and sentiments about our past, present, and future relationships – Parminder Singh Papatoetoe, Nasir Ali Dhillon, Daljit Singh, Naveed Hamid, Ajit Singh Randhawa, Rajinder Bajwa, and Saleem Zubair (Billa Ji) – I thank you for leaving your wisdom for our younger generations. To N.V. Singh and my Punjabi, Tongan, and Samoan friends who combined their creative talents into making *Friends Doo*, the one fiction story performed on-screen – *shukria, mālō 'aupito, fa'afetai tele*. To the staff and students of the Government Islamia Postgraduate College in Chiniot, Bhawana Tehsil, my appreciation for inspiring Punjabi people everywhere to elevate our language and culture in tertiary education spaces.

My deepest appreciation and admiration goes to Rewi Amoamo, a Māori and Tongan moving camera operator, and Niko Meredith, a Samoan, Tongan, and Fijian static camera operator and location sound recordist who teamed up as the main film crew to plan and shoot almost the entire film. I am inspired by your cinematography and humbled by your social acceptance of my people in Aotearoa New Zealand society: *ngā mihi aroha ki a kōrua*. Ali Taheri and Negar Shirazi, my fellow practice-oriented doctoral candidates from Iran filmed the sixth story, *Friends Doo,* with Rewi Amoamo as the sound mixer: *sepasgozaram*. Jesus Rodriguez, a digital intermediate colourist from Mexico, colour edited the final cut of the film: *muchas gracias*. Vitaliy Pusch, an audio engineer from Belarus, now living in Poland, enhanced the sound quality: *dziakuj, obry dzien*.

My Punjabi Pakistani peers, Nasir Dhillon and Tohid Cheema, allowed me to include their videos in this film: I acknowledge our brotherly bond. To the big-hearted Punjabi cast who gathered for a special screening of *Sanjha Punjab* at Nathan Homestead in Manurewa and welcomed our AUT guests, the Polynesian film crew, and Blessen Tom, a Radio New Zealand journalist, your warmth and hospitality will remain with me as the kindest of memories.

Lastly, this work is dedicated to my dear father who told me as a child to always remember we have friends on the other side of the border in India. I know this is true because finally, nearly eight decades after partition, I have found a place in South Auckland where Punjabis coexist peacefully and supportively, *Sanjha Punjab!*

Figure 2. Father and son.

Ethics Approval

An application for research ethics for *Sanjha Punjab – United Punjab* was made in two stages to the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC). On 23 March 2022, stage one of the documentary project was approved by AUTEC: ethics application 22/42. AUTEC approved stage two on 5 October 2023.

Third Party Copyright

There are video and music excerpts used in this nonfiction film, which belong to other people. I have attributed the video and music content I have borrowed to their rightful owners in the final credit roll of the film and the exegesis list of references. The content was provided to Asim Mukhtar, the researcher, for making this nonfiction film with the appropriate signed permission.

Figure 3. Entering Takanini Gurdwara Sahib. South Auckland suburbs of Takanini, Manurewa, and Papatoetoe form the Māori tribal land of Ngāti Te Ata Waiohua. The larger share of Punjabis in Aotearoa New Zealand have settled in these suburbs.

1
BACKGROUND

Languaging

By Asim Mukhtar

I speak six languages

Punjabi

Saraiki سرائیکی Hindko ہندکو

Hindi हिंदी Urdu اُردُو

English

I speak them differently

Punjabi, my mother tongue

Saraiki and Hindko, younger sisters of Punjabi

Hindi and Urdu, distant cousins

English

At a western university

I stumble on English with a Punjabi accent

I think in Punjabi

I will write an exegesis in English

while thinking in Punjabi

and connecting to my close family, Saraiki, Hindko

and distant relatives, Hindi, Urdu

Excuse me Sir, excuse me Ma'am

This might be a difficult marriage

Figure 5: When I first came to Auckland in 2014.

Introducing myself

My name is Asim Mukhtar. I am Janjua, an ancient Vedic *jāti* of the Punjabi Rajput. *Jāti* is a kinship group and the Rajput is a tribal confederacy of clans and kinship groups spread across western, central, and northern India, and central-eastern Pakistan. I was born in 1980 and raised in Punjab. I often use my *jāti* name Janjua as my family name, Asim Mukhtar Janjua, which is a Punjabi social convention of acknowledging our bloodlines binding us to old mother India where parts of the Indian subcontinent are looked upon as our customary mother, and her diverse peoples, our kith and kin. *Panj Aab* is a Persian term for the land of five rivers. Nowadays, Punjab refers to a province of Pakistan and a state of India. The ancient Sanskrit name was *Sapta Sandhu* or seven rivers, a name which was first recorded in the *Rigveda*, the oldest Vedic text of more than a thousand poems written in Sanskrit 3,500 years ago.

I was born in west Punjab on the Pakistan side. What I can tell you about being a son of the soil, an expression of the Punjabi Jatt tribal confederacy for a male born in our native land, born to cultivate the land by planting and harvesting crops, is that it is an odd thing to come from a small village, Johday, a few kilometres away from the Pakistan border with India, but to have never actually visited India. In my forty-fifth year of 2025 when this hybrid documentary and exegesis was examined, I was meant to be living my best life in Aotearoa New Zealand. In my heart and mind, the best year would come when I finally set foot in India because the older I got, the more awkward it felt not to have visited, and paid homage to, the mother who gave birth to my Rajput kind, so to speak (Jhala, 2010, 2012).

In 2014, I boarded two flights from Islamabad to Auckland with a hundred dollars in my pocket, the only cash in my possession. I made an 8,146 mile journey to live in a country I did not know and had no relatives in, when I had never ventured across the border from Lahore to Amritsar, a road distance of 50.2 kilometres. What stopped me crossing the border? India was not merely the closest country to my country of origin, but the country that my country of Pakistan was carved out of at the time of the partition of British India in mid-August 1947.

Figure 6. A map of Punjab before the 1947 partition of British India.

I cannot begin to imagine what it was like for our elders fashioned in every shape and form but intertwined in a colourful mosaic of Punjabiyat or Punjabi culture – Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Christians, Atheists, Agnostics, Communists – to have to live through the year of 1947 when the Punjab was severed into separate countries. What I do know from my own lived experience is that the division of our ancestral homeland, the herding of Punjabis into the east or west sides of the border depending on religious affiliation, and the forced migration of millions of villagers, coupled with the deaths of a million people who perished by violence while stampeding to get to the other side, has left a permanent scar in our social memory (Ahmad, 2023).

Lamentably, forced separation has maimed the body of oral history that we have shared for centuries by injuring the relationships of Punjabi people; people who

are deeply connected to one another and their ancestral roots and language. As a result of dividing the land and her people, our language has declined and Punjabis have suffered displacement and disconnection, knowing only detachment and distance from a pre-1947 past (El Sharkawi, 2020). Kamran Asdar Ali's essay on "what remains unsaid and silenced in national histories" with respect to gender inequality in Pakistan stressed the long-term damage of the 1947 partition slaughter (Ali, 2020, p. 56).

> Entire communities that until recently had lived together turned against one another, and the carnage that followed undermined long held practices of shared existence and tolerance (Ali, 2020, p. 43).

How then, might we reconcile the past break-up of our land and people? In what ways can we seek atonement for the horrifying carnage the 1947 partition of British India caused in our modern times; an episode that if looked at close up for too long, compels the Punjabi conscience to question their people's humanity. There were two main regions in the subcontinent that had their lands divided between the modern states of India and Pakistan on the basis of religious affiliation, whereas most territories remained intact and untouched. Punjab was one such region that was cut into pieces along with Bengal. No political leader sought consensus from the ordinary people on the ground, the Punjabis and the Bengalis, for this act of power in divvying up land and resources was done to them in the name of political independence from the British empire. What sets the Punjab apart is that it has been recorded in history as the epicentre of partition violence in 1947; the place on the map where seventy-eight years ago factions reacted brutally to being split and fell into bloodshed (Sultan, 2018).

One childhood memory I have held on to was from when I was a boy of twelve. My father told me to always remember we have friends on the other side of the border in India. Maybe he said this to give me hope that the militarised border separating west Punjab in Pakistan from east Punjab in India did not stop the ordinary Punjabi from holding tight to their shared ethnic and cultural identity. His sentiments stuck in my head until adulthood, becoming a longing, if you like, to meet people from India

and make friends with them. It was the Indian Punjabis with whom I yearned to have abiding friendships. In my judgment, they were kinfolk to the Pakistani Punjabis shaped by the same language and heritage, the same geographic origin of villages and districts, the same rulers and chieftains in history to whom our major tribes – Jatts, Rajputs, Gujjars, Arains, Awans, Khatris, Aroras, Brahmins – trace our common descent.

Since I was a child, I have always wanted to be friends with Punjabis from India. For my entire life in Pakistan, I was hindered from pursuing any such friendships not just because of the hard border, but rather, the unresolved resentment and mistrust originating from the 1947 partition that for almost eight decades had plagued our country-to-country relationships. Then something happened to me in my thirties, altering the direction my life was travelling. More than a decade ago, I experienced a harrowing incident that altered my thinking: I wanted to escape my native land of Punjab and leave the country of my citizenship, Pakistan.

My recollection of this time is patchy, or perhaps my memory has cut away parts and details to protect my heart from pain. In 2013, there was a spate of suicide bombings in Quetta and Karachi targeting Afghan refugees from the Hazara Shia minority. Although Islamabad was by no means spared from the rise in terrorism that had certain cities in Islamic and Muslim majority states in a stranglehold, naively, I assumed the capital was securer. This was not to be the case. The building that housed an American non-government organisation I worked for was attacked by a suicide bomber leaving co-workers dead.

The Punjab I knew abruptly changed for me. My spirit was drained to almost empty. The life I had toiled to make as a university educated professional in the IT communications sector, a home owner in a middle-class neighbourhood in Islamabad with a young family, was built on a rickety foundation if deprived of safety and peace of mind. I felt the intergenerational trauma of the past: the partition killings and deaths of 1947 were closing in on me, suffocatingly haunting me. When I slept at night, my nightmares were soaked in pictures of bloodshed. In my heart, I knew that to seek emotional repair involved hurriedly leaving my land, my people, and all the things I had

been politically coerced by governments, military, and media to think were true to start life over.

Beyond the linear border

> There can be no rebirth without a dark night of the soul, a total annihilation of all that you believed in and thought that you were (Khan, 2000).

It is a feeling like no other to create another life for yourself and along the way refashion your cultural identity. When you are living outside your land, you experience the world differently from when you were living inside the only world you ever knew. Inayat Khan's verse from *The Sufi Path of Awakening* (Khan, 2000) echoes my emotional and somewhat vulnerable state when I migrated to Auckland in 2014. A thirty-five year old Punjabi male travelling on a green-covered passport with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan printed in gold lettering, I arrived on a temporary visa for study-and-work in New Zealand. I had enrolled in a business management doctoral programme at the University of Auckland and after one year of struggling with study, isolation, and finances, withdrew from the programme to work full-time.

Without an income to support myself, my elderly parents, and my young family back in Pakistan, staying focused on doctoral research that I no longer found relevant to what I dreamed of doing with my talents, coping with loneliness on campus, and keeping a clear head and conscience was not realistically doable. I quit and took up project managing in the broadband telecommunications sector amidst the kind and convivial company of work colleagues who were Punjabis from India and Pakistan. With their encouragement, I decided to apply for New Zealand permanent residency and was successful in 2018, enabling me to bring my family from Pakistan to live in Auckland.

In mid-March of 2019, migrant life was falling into place. I had been elected to the executive council for the Pakistan Association of New Zealand. I had established

trusting relations with Punjabi peers from India through community collaborations for Punjabi Multimedia Trust and Radio Spice 88.0 FM. I was doing part-time portrait photography of Punjabi families who had migrated from India and Pakistan. Then, the unthinkable happened. On the afternoon of March 15th, a terrorist attack during the Friday *Salat-al-Jum'ah* at Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch saw fifty-one Muslims killed by a lone gunman with forty others injured. Nine of the martyred were Pakistani nationals and from these nine people who were slain, seven were ethnic Punjabis.

In the role of Pakistan Association's general secretary, I was responsible for establishing clear lines of communication with families in Pakistan seeking information about their loved ones who regularly attended either one of the two *masjid* in Christchurch, and connecting them with the New Zealand authorities. Undertaking this duty to the Pakistani community was not only agonizingly heart-breaking but stirred unresolved anxieties about past events that I thought I had left behind in Punjab. From that turbulent time some comforting memories emerged too, remembrances that stood out and stayed with me. With my doctoral supervisors, I co-authored a journal article detailing some of the experience while laying emphasis on the *aroha* (te reo Māori for compassion) of the Punjabi Sikhs (Brown Pulu, Mukhtar, and Singh, 2019).

From my recollections, the first people to call me and offer their support were the Sikhs who managed Gurudwara Singh Sabha in Woolston suburb of Christchurch. The Sardar (referring to a Sikh male) on the end of the phone greeted me in Punjabi. Hearing my language spoken by a stranger offering sympathy and hope, truly freed my heart and mind. He said the Gurudwara was open for Pakistani Muslims and other ethnic communities that were largely Muslim and needed shelter, food, and safety. His simple words of sincere affirmation and care spoken in our mother tongue brought me to tears and I knew, in the transience of our momentary exchange, that this community of Sikh migrants from the Indian Punjab were my kith and kin whom I could turn to for help in unsettling times.

On the evening of April 27th, 2019, the Punjabi Sikhs of South Auckland hosted a community dinner to celebrate the Punjabi festival of Vaisakhi. The organisers invited

me to attend and speak about the community work that Pakistan Association had embarked on after the March 15th terrorist attack on Muslim worshippers in the two Christchurch *Masjid*. What I gained from that evening left a lasting impression. This community of Indian Punjabis were no different from Pakistani Punjabis concerning my attachment to and affection for them. Religious affiliation was secondary to being Punjabi. If anything, our shared language and cultural values dictated emotional ties to spirituality and a common humanity. In an article published elsewhere, I recounted some of that experience (Brown Pulu, Mukhtar and Singh, 2019, p. 180).

> I thanked the Sikh community for generously donating money, resources, time and help to the families of the victims of the March 15 Mosque attacks. I was touched that the Sikhs opened the doors of the Christchurch Gurudwara, the Sikh temple, for Muslims to live and sleep in peace, stay under their protection, during this time of stress, anxiety and need (Asim Mukhtar cited in Brown Pulu, Mukhtar and Singh, 2019, p. 180).

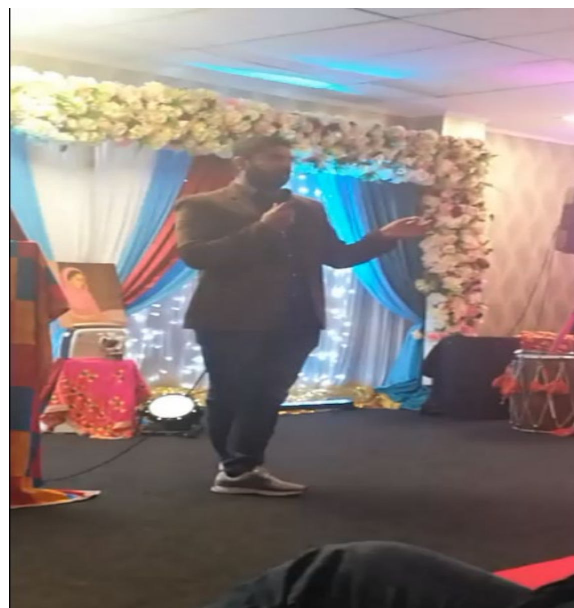

Figure 7. “Evening of 27 April 2019” (Brown Pulu, Mukhtar and Singh, 2019, p. 180).

Looking back at those early years before I had visa security through permanent residency, day-to-day existence was about finding my feet in South Auckland, a long distance from my past life in Islamabad. A first-time migrant, I grappled with the realisation that my habitus, a Bordieuan term referring to the social structure and

conditions of my life (Bourdieu, 2020), had moved to a new people and place of predominantly Punjabi Indian migrants in South Auckland. At the time, I imagined that I would be returning home to my ancestral land in Punjab, Pakistan. However, there was a culture of newness generated by migrants entering lands that were remote from their origin roots; lands that existed way beyond a linear border, the India-Pakistan militarised border to be exact. Newness had touched me, transforming my understanding of the social world (Bhabha, 2004; Buden and Nowotny, 2009). A great part of journeying outside what I had known by moving the furthest I had been from home was living among Punjabis who were mostly Sikhs from the Indian Punjab for the very first time in my life.

In order to thrive in South Auckland, a popular expression for Manukau city, I was inspired by the Punjabi Sikhs to develop the capacity for accepting difference, being flexible, embracing tolerance, and adapting to fit. I saw in them the spirit of the Punjab, this borderless hinterland and her openness to all that I had been told in my father's stories had existed before partition. Manukau city where we now dwelt was youthful, first established in 1965, and learning to live harmoniously amidst the cultural diversity of one-hundred and sixty-five ethnic groups cohabiting the cityscape propelled me to grow without the India-Pakistan border delineating my existence, dominating my consciousness, and infiltrating my personhood. For if I had clung to this burdensome border, allowing an inflexible fence line to control my thinking, I would not have been able to open my consciousness and unlock my heart and mind to anything or any place new. In this migrant social context, these terms and their meanings – delineating, dominating, infiltrating – were symbols of a colonial past pointing to the history of British India (Tharoor, 2016, 2018).

The dissolution of British India resulting in the Punjab being partitioned undoubtedly compounded the prolonged effects that colonial systems of power have had on hardening India and Pakistan's competing nationalisms and battle-ready borders since 1947 independence. These monumental episodes of colonisation, partition, and adverse nationalisms, I needed to reconcile for myself to repair the emotional damage so that I could learn to adapt and thrive in a changing world.

Arriving at a place of self-realisation that in the South Auckland habitus, mental and physical borders obstructed the evolvement of meaningful relationships for our Punjabi people, along with accepting that the old psychological borders we had carried inside us had to be collapsed in favour of social cohesion mutually beneficial to us all, was the breakthrough that willed me to free myself and move forward. Immersed among Punjabi migrants whose cooperative work was focused on building a new place for themselves and their descendants to stand together and collectively move forward as a people of common origin, history, and culture became my identity work too. I was reborn as a fully-fledged and functional member of a flourishing community of New Zealand Punjabis.

Project origins

In September of 2019, I returned to study a new doctoral topic at a different tertiary provider, Auckland University of Technology. Purposely I enrolled in a practice-oriented thesis. I wanted to expand my photography skills to create a visual artefact portraying the everyday social interactions of Punjabi migrants through the widely accessible medium of film to reach mainly Punjabi audiences, and to some extent, non-Punjabi audiences interested in social realism film and South Asian diasporas.

Based in Te Ara Poutama, the Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Development, I was under the primary supervision of a Tongan and Māori (Ngāti Awa) anthropologist and visual ethnographer, Teena Brown Pulu. This faculty that housed the doctoral research of Māori students producing practice-oriented theses in their Indigenous language, te reo Māori, alongside Pacific students producing practice-oriented theses in their Indigenous languages, Tongan and Samoan, seemed an appropriate cultural location for myself as a Native Punjabi filmmaker.

Māori were the Indigenous people of this land, Aotearoa; the land on which Punjabi Indians and Punjabi Pakistanis had relocated themselves and built new communities. Tongans were the Indigenous people of Tonga, and Samoans the Indigenous people of Samoa, remembering that the larger portion of their ethnic

populations had relocated to western countries, such as Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. My people were Indigenous to the Punjab, even if indigeneity took form in a different way to Māori tribes of Aotearoa; a notion that I touch on in *2 Positioning* and *4 Design*.

What I mean to say is that although I was working in a Punjabi language and cultural space, I could relate to my Māori student peers, my Tongan and Samoan student peers, and the Māori academic staff of Te Ara Poutama faculty. Especially, I was captivated by the stories of Māori staff and postgraduate students about their history of resistance against the colonial shackles of British empire, and their contemporary resilience in making brighter, optimistic futures for generations of highly educated, digitally savvy, socially confident young people; new generations who were proud to speak their Native language and carry their cultural heritage upward and onward throughout the twenty-first century.

Teena's Punjabi Sikh colleague, Harminder Singh in Business School was my secondary supervisor. He possessed the necessary cultural competencies of being ethnically and culturally Punjabi, a migrant to Auckland, a Native speaker of Punjabi, and an academic who supported a doctoral artefact of a Punjabi language nonfiction film. During this passage of time from starting to completing a full-length hybrid documentary and exegesis over five years, Harminder provided a treasured source of cultural connection in the institution through his ability to exchange ideas and Punjabi wisdom in our Indigenous language.

Universities can be lonely places for doctoral students from distant homelands and on a deeply personal level, it was essential that Harminder was that one Punjabi professor in Aotearoa, the land of the long white cloud, who would stand by me in believing that a Punjabi language nonfiction film would make a valuable practice-oriented thesis. To be truthful, some of my encounters have been discomfiting when attempting to engage with Punjabi Pakistanis either working as academic staff or studying at postgraduate level in various New Zealand tertiary providers. A few uneasy exchanges made me feel as if I had been singled-out as the problematic Pakistani national because I was plucky about speaking Punjabi first and foremost, rather than

defaulting to Urdu or English, and totally at ease in the company of Punjabi Indians, whom I treated as my language community, my ethnic and cultural group, my people from the Punjab region.

I accept that some Punjabi Pakistanis may have grown up in families where parents and grandparents refused to speak Punjabi to their children and grandchildren, largely because they had bought into the ideology that Urdu was the national language of the Islamic state founded in 1947, and therefore the only language that mattered. But that very decision to relinquish one's Native language was, I believe, politically motivated. In their minds, the Punjabi language was imagined as a threat to any form of Muslim nationalism due to being a regional language that belonged to clans and tribes of common ancestry. Punjabi signified an Indigenous identity marker, if you like, that was deeply bound to the Native people of the land of Punjab; Natives with an ancient history far longer than the monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism.

What I had difficulty fathoming was why Pakistani nationals who were working in the New Zealand tertiary sector, or undertaking postgraduate research degrees, declined to adopt reflexivity in twenty-first century academic life within a western university system. From my perspective, it would be logical for highly educated people to first examine their own biases, prejudices, and assumptions, much of which could be observed as learned behaviour from childhood social conditioning and Pakistani public institutions that have become increasingly Islamized and theocratic, and decreasingly secular and democratic (Parvez, 2016; Ziring, 1984).

Vital to the project design, Teena transferred creative research knowledge and knowhow from different fields, showing me how to synthesise what I had learnt: that being, story writing grounded in cultural knowledge and an ethnographic approach to developing a Punjabi centred methodology that could organise my filmmaking methods (Archibald et al, 2019; Chambers and Higbee, 2021). She gave consistent and constructive feedback on the artefact and exegesis as it came together, and helped on the technical production side by taking still images on film sets and operating sound recording equipment, such as the boom pole and Zoom microphones. Teena edited the

film’s screen titles and subtitles and the exegesis, spending countless hours correcting the English grammar and structuring the chapters so I was making sense on-screen and on the page. She put time and effort into guiding me through the application process to *Te Mana Whakaatu* Classification Office in Wellington, and how to put together a press kit and make online submissions to national and international film festivals.

Directing me to a world of literature and film brimming with meaningful ideas, philosophies, and paradigms, my primary supervisor encouraged me to see the social world through multiple lenses that I had not been introduced to before my doctoral journey in a faculty that specialised in Māori and Indigenous development. In the final credit roll of *Sanjha Punjab*, I have named Teena as the storywriter, screenwriter, and associate producer for interlinked reasons. Foremost, without this extraordinary supervisor, my project and I would not have made it to the finish line. It was also important that I showed respect in a meaningful way for the continuous and conscientious work she contributed over five years to craft eight Punjabi screen stories. Resultingly, it was her knowledge-sharing and expert supervision that worked up the quality of the film for doctoral examination and for submitting to festivals that screen low-budget independent films.

Importantly, and this should not be downplayed, Teena took the time to explain in painstaking detail te reo Māori [Māori language] nuances and allegories of Indigenous cinema created by Māori filmmakers, guiding me to writings by Māori academics, so that I could gain an appreciative understanding of the deeper meanings and finer details of Māori storywork on-screen, the cinematic depictions of complex social worlds skilfully crafted by filmmakers who have used a host of thinking and practice processes (Barclay, 2003, 2015; Ings, 2021, 2023; Henry-Ryan, 2022; Milligan, 2017; 2022; Pouwhare, 2019, 2023; Rangiwai et al, 2023; Waititi, 2007; Williams, 2023, 2024; Wilson, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2023).

Reading Welby Ings and Toiroa Williams on their personal filmmaking protocols and practices helped me to understand that my Punjabi values and beliefs had shaped my filmmaking approach in ways that were culturally exclusive to ethnic Punjabis born

and raised in the Punjab region who speak their Indigenous language as their mother tongue or first language (Ings, 2023; Williams, 2023, 2024). Reading Kahurangi Waititi, Robert Pouwhare, and Jani K. Wilson encouraged me to see that culturally exclusive methodologies, such as kaupapa Māori [Māori principles and practices] in screen production where having whakapapa Māori [Māori ancestry] permits one to practice this system of research methods, philosophically related to the style of Punjabi film practice that I was crafting (Pouwhare, 2019, 2023; Waititi, 2007; Wilson, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2023). In *4 Design*, I mention cross-cultural and contextual linkages between Indigenous approaches to screen production and the style of Punjabi film practice I implemented when designing, and putting into practice, a culturally exclusive methodology and set of creative methods (Archibald, 2008, 2019; Christian, 2017, 2019; Kovach, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

I came to doctoral filmmaking in a Māori and Indigenous faculty without any intention to culturally appropriate Māori cultural content and visual storywork, or to compete with Māori filmmakers in the small New Zealand screen and media industry. After five years of doctoral study in a Māori and Indigenous faculty, kaupapa Māori and Indigenous screen production, particularly cultural techniques of working with and for one's own community, have influenced my thinking and practice of which I acknowledge and pay respect to in *2 Positioning* and *4 Design*. At the 2018 census, the New Zealand population numbered at 5,231,800 with the ever expanding Asian demographic of 15.1 percent perched almost side-by-side to the Māori population of 16.5 percent. Due to the swelling Asian population of mainly migrants from China and India, recent criticism was pointed at NZ on Air, the national broadcasting commission, for supposedly not allocating sufficient funding for Asian visual media targeting Asian audiences (Draper, 2021). Tensions over public funding have been compounded by the lack of screen content made in New Zealand in the languages of the Asian region.

Different to migrant filmmakers in this country who trace their ancestry to the expansive Asian region, I have harboured no personal desire to be located within an Asian sub-category of film made in New Zealand (Zalipour, 2019). The kind of cultural politics where Asian ethnic groups compare themselves to, and then rival against,

Māori and Pacific ethnic groups for limited resources and recognition in New Zealand's creative industries did not serve my Punjabi language filmmaking interests, or my people's aspirations to be sincere allies of Māori people, the people whose land we were living on as uninvited *manuhiri* (guests, visitors in te reo Māori).

As a Punjabi filmmaker who is Indigenous to Punjab and a migrant residing in South Auckland, I did have high hopes that *Sanjha Punjab* would contribute a novel film to the broad category of Punjabi language film; a category dominated by filmmakers in the Punjab region of India and Pakistan along with Punjabis residing in the northern hemisphere diaspora of Canada, America, and the United Kingdom. The southern hemisphere diaspora of Australia and New Zealand, by comparison, was under-represented in Punjabi cinema despite having burgeoning populations of Punjabi language speakers. This diverse genre, which included categories of fiction, non-fiction, and documentary had one connecting thread, *maa boli Punjabi*, our mother tongue of Punjabi.

Clearly the methodology designed for this project had to be context-specific by way of balancing the insider knowledge of cultural principles and protocols used to gather together Punjabi people and create a hybrid documentary with them in their mother tongue, alongside the structural and technical methods used to select and weave the content into a full-length portmanteau film. In this case, the applied meaning of portmanteau was that the seventy minute hybrid documentary comprised of eight short films with each smaller arrangement connecting to the overarching theme of *Sanjha Punjab*, meaning commonplace expressions of unity and social harmony among Punjabis.

Drawing me to the portmanteau structure was the fact that Punjabi expressions of allegorical storytelling, borrowed and adapted from the Sufi tradition in medieval Persianate society (Asani, 1988; Buxi, 1994; Heath, 2011; Mannani, 2010), fitted and knitted effortlessly into *Sanjha Punjab*. In a metaphoric context, the outward facing narrative was a united Punjab while the eight sequences of everyday life symbolised inward facing stories existing behind the exterior story. Some of the smaller stories are personal utterances of grief over the partition of Punjab and the ensuing cultural loss,

prompting characters to contemplate how they might influence their places of origin in India and Pakistan to soften the border as a practical means to relationship repair (Chakraborty, 2020; Chakravarti, 2015). *4 Design* discusses allegory as a central component of Iranian cinema and Ashvin Kumar's short film *Little Terrorist* (2004), which cleverly unfolded a lesson about the psychological border outweighing the physical border. *5 Commentary* is the chapter that alludes to allegoric expression in the narrative and non-narrative stories of *Sanjha Punjab*.

Aside from the allegorical nature of Punjabi storytelling, captured in our folk culture of orally transmitting stories, songs, and poetry, and in literary genres of short stories and novellas, the other factor propelling me towards a portmanteau hybrid documentary were examples of Asian, Aboriginal, Māori, and Pacific cinema adopting this arrangement. Four films from the Pacific region where I now live have had a profound impact on the film structure I have chosen to go with: *Kāinga* (2022), a compilation of eight tales of Asian immigrants finding a fit in Aotearoa; *We Are Still Here* (2022), a collection of eight Australian Aboriginal and Aotearoa Māori stories themed around colonization; *Vai* (2019), an assemblage of eight Pacific and Māori stories of women and migration; and *Waru* (2017), eight stories connected to the death of a Māori boy in a small community.

Additionally, *Words With Gods* (2014), seven stories exploring personal experiences of religion and directed by a group of international film artists, including Indian American filmmaker Mira Nair, moved me to embrace the screen as more than storytelling apparatus. Rather, the filmmaker can reconstruct the screen as a culturalized space to connect the world with aspects of their social world that they want to make meaningful and memorable for the purpose of cultivating public awareness and the acceptance of difference.

At the commencement of my doctoral journey, there were two interwoven research goals I wanted to achieve. Firstly, to create a hybrid documentary in my mother tongue by assembling short stories on-screen of life beyond the border for Punjabi migrants. Secondly, to draw in Punjabi language audiences to see how rekindling relationships between Punjabi Indians and Punjabi Pakistanis in South

Auckland could potentially inspire our communities in the Punjab. In the diaspora, Punjabis often contemplate what softening the border and restoring bonds between our people might look like (Rafiq, 2022). From one angle, the question that was begging to be asked was: can our collective storywork influence Punjabis back home to consider a soft border for Punjabis to easily cross back-and-forth and repair relationships? However, from another angle the question could be framed quite differently: do our collective experiences as migrants existing beyond a linear border, a linear identity, influence us to see the Punjab, the land of our ancestors, in a new light?

I realise that it would take quite some time until after the thesis was examined to tell whether, or not, *Sanjha Punjab* has reached Punjabi audiences worldwide and if the film message of uniting Punjabis through everyday social interactions in our mother tongue had any audience impact. However, the question of who is the audience was central to the project design. In this sense, "the sociological imagination" (Mills, 1959) prompted me to envisage my own people, Punjabis in the Punjab region of India and Pakistan and residing in diasporic settlements, to be the principal recipients benefitting from this hybrid documentary. I am (perhaps naively) optimistic that in the eyes of Punjabi viewers, the visual storytelling couched in social conditions favourable to co-constructing unity irrespective of our diversity, will stir hope in their hearts with regard to softening and repairing people-to-people relationships.

What is Punjabi storywork?

Storywork, when producing an Indigenous language documentary tied to the voluntary contributions of time and knowledge sharing of community participants, was a concept and practice I borrowed and modified from Native Canadian *Secwepemc* and *Syilx* documentary filmmaker, Dorothy Christian (Christian, 2017, 2019). Perhaps this process of adopting and adapting principles that resonate with *Punjabiyat*, Punjabi culture, presents a form of transcultural cinema where ideas and aesthetics move beyond cultural boundaries (MacDougall, 1998). Christian adopted an ethical approach to working with and for Indigenous people from the Native Canadian *Stó:lō* educator,

Jo-Ann Archibald (Archibald, 2008). While Archibald focused on cultural principles essential to how Indigenous researchers approach the Native Canadian practice of storytelling as the collective work of honouring the past in the present, Christian examined the storytelling context when it moved from tribal gatherings to screen production among diverse Native Canadian and Native American tribal nations: "the *Anishnabe-Cree, Cree-Métis, Haida, Haudenosaunee (Seneca), Hopi, Inuit, Métis,* and *Secwepemc*" (Christian, 2019, p. 42). Specifically, she wanted to find out "whether or not visual storytellers could maintain the "power" and the cultural context of the oral story" (Christian, 2019, p. 41).

My approach to visual storywork centred *Punjabiyat*, the spirit or ethos of the Punjab and her people at the core of the creative process. Different to Dorothy Christian, I was not so much fixed on the way that storytelling acts change from being transmitted person-to-person to being told on-screen. Nor was my focus solely anchored on the need to preserve the structure and process of "the oral story" in a screen production (Christian, 2019, p. 41). Instead, I desired to assemble short stories that did not make it to the screen because they appeared to be indicative of the everyday routine and habitual exchanges between people of a shared language and culture. Essentially, I wanted the filmmaking process to be community oriented by positioning the camera inside my community and asking my people to be themselves, to engage in regular conversations depicting their lived reality (Brown, 2016, 2018). But there was an anticipated twist because what seemed ordinary in the Punjabi diaspora of South Auckland was in fact an extraordinary level of social contact to our respective families and communities back home separated on either side of the India-Pakistan border (Clini and Deimantas, 2021).

I had to design a context-specific project that made the mundane of daily routine beyond the border seem real to Punjabi migrants in the diaspora and a sought after reality to Punjabi people residing in the two Punjabs divided by a militarised border (Chatterjee, 2023). One option would have been to adopt the realism style of an accomplished Punjabi film artist, Gurvinder Singh (Edgar et al, 2018; Jain, 2018). Renowned for adapting Punjabi short stories and novellas to screen, a portion of

Singh's internationally acclaimed screenography includes reworking some of the short stories from Waryam Singh Sandhu's book, *The Fourth Direction and Other Stories* (Sandhu, 2019) to create the film, *Chauthi Koot: The Fourth Direction* (Singh, 2015). He also modified Gurdial Singh's novellas, *Alms in the Name of a Blind Horse* (Singh, 2016) to produce the film, *Anhey Ghorey Da Daan: Alms for a Blind Horse* (Singh, 2011), and *Adh Chanani Raat: Night of the Half Moon* (Singh, 1996) to produce the film, *Adh Chanani Raat: Crescent Night* (2022).

Anhey Ghorey Da Daan: Alms for a Blind Horse, the first Punjabi language film to be screened at the 68th Venice Film Festival and the 64th Cannes Film Festival, saw Gurvinder Singh innovate Punjabi cinema with a critical and artistic style of projecting Punjabi social reality for the poorer, landless caste of Mazhabi Sikhs surviving on the social periphery in the Indian Punjab (Singh, 2011; Dulai, 1974). It could be argued that an overlapping reality was also true for people forced to the bottom of the social-economic hierarchy in the Pakistani Punjab (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). The difference was that occupying the lowest rung of Pakistan's political and societal ladder were non-Muslims, expressly Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians. As well, Pakistan's establishment had contrived a Muslim pecking order: Shi'a Muslims were regarded as somewhat inferior to the larger-in-number Sunni Muslims, while the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was legislated into constitutional law as non-Muslim and denied the fundamental human right to practice their faith (Dashtipour, 2012; Gualteri, 1989; Hanson, 2007; Malik, 2011).

Looking outwards to the global diaspora, one contemporary rap artist and writer whose work I was intrigued by was Amrit Singh, a Canadian-born Punjabi Sikh of Brampton, Ontario. I thought about whether I could adapt aspects of his memoir, *Keep Moving On: The Migration of a Punjabi-Sikh Family*, into a screenplay for producing a scripted film (Singh, 2020). His personal narrative recalled experiences of the migrant generation of his family who left the Indian Punjab for Canada in 1987. Pushing his parents to emigrate was the aftermath and unrest caused by the Indian Army's execution of Operation Blue Star in June of 1984, a planned military attack on Gurdwara

Harmindir Sahib, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, during the Indian National Congress government of Prime Minister Indira Ghandi.

In Australia there was Roanna Gonsalves, an academic and literary writer who originally migrated from Goa state in India to Australia as an international student. Her earliest collection of sixteen short stories was *The Permanent Resident* of which I toyed with the idea of adapting some of the work to screen (Gonsalves, 2016, 2018). The Australian Indian migrant experience of toiling and overstressing to acquire permanent residency and family reunion visas for spouses and parents was a persistent theme in Gonsalves writings that resonated with my lived experience as a New Zealand Punjabi migrant.

Instead, I chose to stay in my lane. I saw that I needed to tell my own story as a Punjabi migrant and a middle-aged son, nephew, brother, cousin, father, uncle, and friend; a story interlinked with the familiarity and cognizance of Punjabi men who have emigrated from Punjab to South Auckland, rather than interpreting other people's stories that did not belong to me. In terms of cultural ethics, the thought of reworking Amrit Singh or Roanna Gonsalves' words and sentiments into my form of visual storytelling sat uncomfortably on my conscience. I was not the son of Punjabi Indians who fled to Canada escaping the aftershock of an Indian army attack on the Golden Temple and subsequent pogrom. Nor was I a daughter of Goa state in India publishing literature on the Goan Catholic migrant story of settling in Australia (Gill, 2021).

But I was Asim Mukhtar, a son of Punjab who was born and raised on the Pakistan side of a militarised border; a partition erected to instil fear in the Punjabis and keep them permanently separated, isolated, and scared of one another. By simply migrating beyond the Radcliff line of 3,323 kilometres of barbed wire, flood lights, and armed border guards placed along a metal fence forcing ordinary Punjabis apart for eight decades, "I learned the significance of my own insignificant life," to quote the Irish writer Frank McCourt (Grimes, 2009).

While there are documentaries produced by women directors about the long-term repercussions of partitioning British India (Ahmed, 2015; Kaur, 2017), the

parameters of my creative research are defined by social exchanges between migrant Punjabi men. As a consequence, there are multiple voices and groups who do not appear on camera: specifically, migrant Punjabi women and children, and migrant Punjabi men who identify as followers of either Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, or a number of religions. Also observable is the omission of Punjabi atheists, secularists, and gender fluid people. *Sanjha Punjab* has given voice and visibility mostly to men, that is, Punjabi Sikhs and Punjabi Sunni Muslims who have migrated to South Auckland. Also included is a folk dance performance by adolescent males from a high school in Chiniot district of west Punjab, Pakistan. The generations therefore range from 18 to 39 years, men in their middle adulthood aged 40 to 60, and senior men who are elders over sixty years.

4 Design and *6 Reflection* is where I consider the contours and confines of the project. Purposely I have filmed a select group of men's voices and views that are much like my own, while knowing that *Punjabiyat* – the spirit, language, and culture of the land of Punjab – belongs to an extensive pool of diverse people, especially the voices of women (Parsafar, 2020, 2022). In *6 Reflection*, I make a case for furthering my Punjabi filmmaking in a context-specific area: that is, a culture-informed exploration of social and gender groups performing folk music and dance in border villages of Punjab Pakistan and Punjab India. Film analyst Trent Griffiths noted that "saying things without appearing to have said them" was Jafar Panahi's form of "artivist [artist-activist] intervention" when creating films that navigated around film censorship laws and rules in his home country, Iran (Griffiths, 2015, p. 28). In Iranian realism film, speaking back to social and gender hierarchy is therefore performed through allegorical storywork, or unfolding a story that contains a deeper, hidden meaning (Jahed, 2022; Neshat, 2009; Sadeghi-Esfahlani, 2021; Zargar, 2016).

Wilfully then, I have travelled a roughly cut and risky route of my own making. The path I tramped and often tripped on was nonfiction filmmaking of a social realism genre, rather than adapting Gurvinder Singh's fiction filmmaking style in which parts of his film oeuvre employs cinematic realism to visually convey the short stories of Punjabi writers. At the outset, there appears to be little difference in the methods used

to create a film whether the work is classified as non-fiction or fiction. But upon closer inspection, and I am borrowing the argument put forward by Carl Plantinga in saying this (Plantinga, 2015), the difference is that nonfiction film uses ideas and techniques from "observation, implication, interrogation, and indeed fictive representation" to make an "assertive stance" about reality (Williamson, 1999, p. 189).

Fiction film does not necessarily claim to be real, whereas nonfiction expressly attaches itself to reality by creating an impression of reality. Whether or not nonfiction film can be considered real in the way that documentary employs journalistic or historical methods to present actual and factual stories on-screen is not the point here. The nonfiction genre, by contrast, takes a position on what reality looks and feels like for the characters who constitute the film, and mirrors first-hand experiences of this kind of social reality back to viewing audiences (Higbee, Martin, and Bahmad, 2020; Khan and Ahmad, 2016).

Having said that, my role as a Punjabi male creating nonfiction film, which I also refer to as hybrid documentary despite there being some distinction between these filmic modes noted in *2 Positioning*, has been fittingly defined and confined by the Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi (Rahbaran, 2012, pp. 6-7).

> But when I say that I am a social filmmaker, I mean that I express society in the way that I have felt it by living in it. I do not give any opinions about what is good and what is bad. I do not make any political statements or give any moral lessons (Panahi cited in Rahbaran, 2012, pp. 6-7).

Expanding on Panahi's affirmation of a "social filmmaker," it would be naïve of me to declare that my positionality as a Punjabi social filmmaker is neutral because neutrality forms a politically motivated stance in itself (Panahi cited in Rahbaran, 2012, pp. 6-7). What I can claim is that my nonfiction film of short stories, *Sanjha Punjab*, paints an intimate picture of the social world I live in due to communicating mainly in my Indigenous language. For me, Punjabi is the language and culture of first priority. Instinctively, I favour speaking my mother tongue over the five other languages I have learned at varying levels of proficiency.

Essentially then, who I am and how I see myself in the world is embodied in being a Punjabi language speaker and an ethnic Punjabi. Whether or not producing a doctoral film in Punjabi, the language of my people, can be considered a political act is a debate fixed in South Asian language regimes where Hindi is favoured in India and Urdu in Pakistan; a type of language rivalry fuelling their antagonistic nationalisms, which I particularize later in *Making Meaning*, a section of this chapter *1 Introduction* (Kamran, 2007).

Undying spirit of Punjab

Punjabi is an ethnonym referring to the Indigenous people of the Punjab region; people who are ethnically Punjabis by ancestry, and culturally Punjabi due to speaking this Indigenous language as their mother tongue and practicing customs and social behaviours associated with Punjabi speaking people. It is here that I must familiarise the reader with the historical idea of *Punjabiyat*, the spirit and ethos of the Punjab and her people; an idea that has re-emerged in different periods of time through Punjabi configurations of "history from below" (Thompson, 1966). By history from below, I am adapting a concept and practice written about by British historian E. P. Thompson to suggest that a people's history can be retained and remembered by retelling oral narratives (Thompson, 1966, 2013).

For ordinary Punjabis in the Punjab region of India and Pakistan, while being mindful that notable numbers of people from the poor, rural, farming class are illiterate, with most being farm labourers and not land owners, collective history preserved in memories and experiences have been passed down from generation-to-generation in forms of storytelling and folklore. Rather than dominant figures in Punjabi politics and society, as in powerful leaders and wealthy families who hold positions of authority controlling history from above, history from below symbolises the folk culture of common people; a Punjabi folk culture favouring oral recollections, recitals of poetry and song, and accounts of the past rather than the written word (Thompson, 1966, 2013).

To begin with, I have cited an excerpt from Rana Nayar's oral account of King Porus, the King of Punjab from 326–321 BCE. In his recollection Nayar, a retired professor of Punjabi literature, attributes the origins of *Punjabiyat* or the collective spirit of the land and people to the historical period of Vedic civilisation, possibly around the Nanda dynasty of the fourth century before the common era (BCE).

> Even after being defeated, even in defeat, he [King Porus] continued to actually assert his own pride, self-pride. That is what I call the spirit of Punjabiyat, the undying spirit of Punjab. Even when you are down and out, you refuse to accept defeat, and you continue to take pride in who you are. This is exactly the kind of inherent rebelliousness that we Punjabis have and sense of self-pride we have. Now, when we talk of Punjabiyat, Sikh historians tend to associate this pride, this kind of an attitude of defiance and rebelliousness with the Sikh martyrs or with the Sikh Gurus. The point I am trying to make is, that this Punjabiyat was always present in the land, in the soil, in the Vedic times, and even thereafter (Nayar, 2021, 8:39–10:00 minutes).

Rana Nayar made two important and interrelated points when reinterpreting the historic origins of *Punjabiyat* and popularly applied meanings, particularly by Sikh historians (Singh, 2018; Singh 2012; Singh 2020; Taylor, 2014). Firstly, the speaker suggested that the Punjabi spirit connotes "rebelliousness," meaning to exhibit boldly defiant behaviour when an authoritative system of power imposes itself as the new regime of language, culture, and ideals on the Punjab and her people (Nayar, 2021, 8:39-10.00 minutes).

In the face of being controlled by an outside culture, the quintessential attribute is to outrightly dismiss the proposition that historically the Punjabis have been flattened in battle on their own land by invading forces. Nayar's example was King Porus refusing to accept he had been conquered by Alexander the Great of the Greek kingdom of Macedon at the Battle of Hydaspes in 326 BCE. Punjabis therefore see the Punjabi spirit to be symbolic of the inner-self that evades defeat. The logic being that if the essence of our people cannot be crushed, then they will never allow themselves to be subjugated by, and enslaved to, a dominant power.

Secondly, and related to the first point, Nayar associates *Punjabiyat* as an ever-present, unstoppable force that emanates from "the land, in the soil," echoing the identity expression of the Punjabi Jatt tribe, to be a son of the soil (Nayar, 2021, 8:39 – 10:00 minutes). These references to land and soil resonate with the communal sentiments of Indigenous peoples from the United States, Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand, who in the present day perceive themselves as people of landed identities: people who have communed on, and cultivated, the same areas of land for thousands of years before the recent arrival of foreigners, usually in the form of European settlers, colonial administrators, and Christian missionaries. In the case of Punjab, when generations of kinfolk maintain a close connection to land, which is personified as our earth mother, along with a group consciousness of being direct descendants of the sacred soil, the sacred mother, it affirms the indigeneity of originating from the Punjab region. Based on this, Nayar's *Punjabiyat* represents the Indigenous spirit of the original people, language, and culture of Punjab.

Taking a considerable leap forward to our current times, there are two sets of social circumstances that Punjabis from India and Pakistan find themselves positioned in, depending on their geographic location, with regard to upholding "self-pride" and "*Punjabiyat*, the undying spirit of Punjab" (Nayar, 2021, 8:39 – 10 minutes). Firstly, for Punjabis in the Punjab region, their cross-border interactions and connections are thwarted by government-to-government "relations [that] have deteriorated" because modern political arrangements of religion and nationalism have become hard-edged and unrelenting (Soper and Fetzer, 2018).

Yasmin Khan in her book, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (Khan, 2017), argued that these days Indian and Pakistani affairs have worsened due to fundamentalist movements enveloping the neighbouring states: put bluntly, "Islamic militancy" versus "Hindutva" far-right nationalism had eroded relationships almost beyond repair (Khan, 2017, p. xxv). The recurring problem was that fundamentalism on both sides of the militarised border has fed off one another with each needing the other as a nemesis to validate their ideological beliefs propelling the pursuit of power and dominance (Sen and Wagner, 2009; McLane, 2010; Sulehria, 2022).

> Sadly, relations have not improved between India and Pakistan in the past decade; indeed, many would argue that relations have deteriorated, and prospects for reconciliation seem even more remote. Pakistan is deeply afflicted by Islamic militancy and sectarian violence, whilst India's government under Narendra Modi has continued to hitch neoliberal development to a vision of a Hindutva future (Khan, 2017, p. xxv).

Secondly, for Punjabi migrants, while the linear border reproduces rival and antagonistic nationalisms in our countries of origin, nationalisms trapped in seeing one another as the enemy, we do have prospects in living abroad to repair relationships and heal the intergenerational trauma of past hurts. Through our friendships and kinships as migrants of the Punjab region, irrespective of which side of a linear border one has journeyed from, opportunities abound to establish new communities of common language, culture, and heritage (Gupta, 2021).

Punjabi Pakistani writer, Saadia Ahmed, described the jubilant feeling of living overseas in Dubai city in the United Arab Emirates and forging close and abiding ties with Punjabi Indian friends. Reuniting after two generations of being intentionally kept apart had its limits though: the downside was the fact that within these neighbouring countries, India and Pakistan, it has been difficult, if not near impossible, to cross the border to visit with friends and meet their families. Consequently, some Punjabi migrants have resigned themselves to believing that in order to meet Punjabis from the other side of the border, one must "travel thousands of miles" away from India and Pakistan to come together as people of shared ethnic origins and cultural identity (Ahmed, 2022).

> When I was leaving Dubai for Australia, we had tears in our eyes. We knew that despite being just a few kilometres away from each other in our home countries, we might never be able to visit each other. To see each other we had to travel thousands of miles. Perhaps we would never have known the joy of our precious friendships had we not lived together in Dubai. These walls would have never come down had we not stepped away from home and met on these foreign lands. For each of us, the future is brighter now, but we still must travel a thousand miles to hug our friends from the other side of the border (Ahmed, 2022).

Was there an alternative route, a third way to navigate around the social reality that geographic location predetermined whether or not a person could socially interact and normalise relationships with Punjabis from the other side of the border? Pushpinder Syal, a former university professor of English and cultural studies at Panjab University in Chandigarh, wrote of "other ways to seek renewal and healing" that Punjabis in Pakistan, India, and the diaspora had become increasingly immersed in. If anything, the Covid-19 lockdown period from 2020 to 20222 accelerated meaningful cross-border relationships via social media platforms (Syal, 2023).

> However, we may yet find other ways to seek renewal and healing. The spirit of a great culture does not die so easily. The advent of technology gives us pathways to find connections beyond borders. Recently there has been a proliferation of groups on the internet that are seriously engaged in bringing together vital elements and high points in the culture of Punjab, recognising a shared history, language, folklore, literature, music and many integral areas of our life and culture (Syal, 2023).

Syal's argument intimated my deeply held belief that "the Punjabi language [is] the thread that binds Punjab spiritually and culturally," and in spite of "political boundaries [that] have torn Punjab asunder," the "Punjabi language can renew and heal spirits and reopen our connections with one another" (Syal, 2023). The social media platforms that Syal noted, *Jeevay Sanjha Punjab* and *Lyallpur Young Historians Club* were dedicated to claiming a shared Punjabi space on the internet to bridge the physical divide and make cross-border connections.

Aside from these internet sites, another popular YouTube channel *Punjabi Lehar* was doing the identity work of reuniting elderly Punjabis forced to leave their villages in 1947; elders, who in their twilight years, yearned to meet and talk with kinfolk and friends left behind when they fled across the border to escape violence and maltreatment. The Punjab was forging her own pathway to cultural restoration. And it was here in the third space of digital media, a space that reached above and beyond borders, where I could etch out a small space for my Punjabi nonfiction film to contribute visual storytelling of repairing our relationships.

Khan Noonien Singh

Reflecting on the creative choices I have made in anchoring myself in hybrid documentary, I must be honest in saying that I have no childhood memory of, or professional background in producing a minimalist nonfiction film linked to the social realism cinema of filmmakers in the Punjab region, as in Gurvinder Singh, and Iran, to name Jafar Panahi, the late Abbas Kiarostami, and Mohsen Makhmalbaf (Bordwell and Thompson, 2009). On the same note, my academic background was not oriented in modern Punjabi literature either composed in English or translated from Punjabi into English with regard to the short story and novella writers, Nadir Ali, Zubair Ahmad, Khushwant Singh, and Waryam Singh Sandhu. I mention this because travelling a creative pathway to studying these film artists and writers was a considered and deliberate direction that I took during doctoral research in my late thirties and forties.

During my boyhood and adolescence in Narowal district and my adulthood in Islamabad city, I spent generous amounts of time consuming Punjabi Lollywood cinema made in Lahore of Punjab, Pakistan, and Punjabi Pollywood cinema made in Amritsar and Chandigarh of the Indian Punjab. I had rural, lower class Punjabi tastes and interests in movies indicative, I believe, of my rustic farming ancestry traced to Johday, a border village of Narowal. My preference was for commercial Punjabi cinema that was non-elitist popular culture and did not require audiences to be literate. At the cinema with my peers, I behaved like the poorer classes who were illiterate; commenting on the characters loudly and laughing at inappropriate moments. If anything, I loathed the fact that classic Indian arts in Hindi, Indian-Muslim arts in Urdu, and Iranian arts in Persian were exclusive to the upper-class metropolitan culture of posh suburbs where only the wealthy resided; Greater Kailash in New Delhi, Park View in Lahore, and Mahmoodieh in Tehran (Worth et al, 2016).

Immersed in the cinema of Lollywood and Pollywood, I sought not only escapism and enjoyment but role models and character examples to admire. When I surveyed television and cinema in the English speaking west, the only fictional figure in

American popular culture where I saw myself, a Punjabi male, and my kind, Punjabi males born in the Punjab region and separated at birth into two countries, India and Pakistan, was in the science fiction franchise of Star Trek (Lalvani, 1995). In 1967, Mexican American actor Ricardo Montalban played the character Khan Noonien Singh who was the leader of the Augments, a terrorist regime of planet Earth in the 1990s. The Augments were genetically engineered humans with superior strength who during the eugenics wars of the late twentieth century had overtaken the eastern world of Asia and the Middle East with Khan as their king. After being deposed in 1996, Khan and eighty-four of his people fled planet Earth aboard a hibernation space ship, the SS Botany Bay, where they were frozen in suspended animation.

In episode twenty-two of season one, *Space Seed*, Khan awakes on board the USS Enterprise in the year 2267, a starship of the United Federation of Planets. Due to their herculean strength, seventy-two of his crew survived in hibernation for two-hundred and seventy-one years. Identified by the crew’s historian Maria McGivers as a Punjabi Sikh, she helps Khan revive his crew so together they can attempt a coup. Khan faces off against the Star Trek hero and captain of the Enterprise James T. Kirk but Captain Kirk regains control of the starship and sentences Khan and his people, along with Maria McGivers who becomes his woman, to life on an uninhabited planet, Ceti Alpha Five.

Image 8. Khan Noonien Singh and Captain James T. Kirk (1967).

As a boy watching pirated videos of the original series of Star Trek, Khan Noonien Singh looked suspiciously like a Latin American man wearing a Nehru jacket with the buttons undone to expose his hairless chest. The fact that he did not fit the stereotypical phenotype of Punjabi men portrayed in Lollywood and Pollywood as hulking and hairy was a dead giveaway that Khan was a phony trying to pass as one of us. My social awareness as a Punjabi child taking in western culture on television concluded that this performance was fake: the actor was anything but Punjabi. If Khan was supposed to be based on the nineteenth century maharaja of Punjab, Ranjit Singh, who was Sikh, then the characterization was erroneous and somewhat offensive. To make matters worse, the popularity of Khan Noonien Singh as the Punjabi archvillain with American and global audiences meant the character, played by the same actor, was resurrected fifteen years later for the motion picture, *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan* (1982).

Figure 9. Khan Noonien Singh in *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan* (1982).

This Star Trek anti-hero of Punjabi Sikh origin did not come to an end in America's 1980s science fiction film genre. Revived a second time by the Star Trek franchise in the 2013 Hollywood feature, *Star Trek: Into Darkness*, the bleak, despairing circumstances for humans of planet Earth in the year 2259 arose from Khan Noonien Singh's return in an alternate timeline of the universe. The Khan legacy has continued

to be reinvented up until the present day: in seasons one and two of the series, *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* (2022, 2023) set in the original timeline of 2259, Lieutenant La'an Noonien Singh who serves as the security officer aboard the USS Enterprise under the command of Captain Christopher Pike, is a direct descendant of the original Khan Noonien Singh. In episode two of season two, *Ad Astra Per Aspera*, La'an's personal anguish over whether or not she had inherited Khan's genetic augmentation played out. If found to be an Augment it would signal the end of Lieutenant Noonien Singh's Starfleet career, seeing that in the twenty-third century the United Federation of Planets had enforced strict laws making genetic modification illegal and imprisonable.

The scenario I am relating is that a specific western-centred discourse in the science fiction genre has built up over decades around the Augments. The idea of genetically modified terrorists ruling a quarter of planet Earth during the eugenics war from 1992 to 1996 was propelled by naming difference through explicit categories of culture, colour, religion, and violence embodied in Khan Noonien Singh. This Punjabi Sikh who carried a Punjabi Muslim first name from the Mughal era was the goliath of all terror emanating from the east. He personified the franchise's trademark scoundrel; an extremist's profile drawing social energy and popularity from a body of western ideas, impressions, and accounts about the east that the late Edward W. Said referred to as *Orientalism* (Said, 1978). Subsequent to this, when people from eastern societies and cultures outrightly criticise American cinema for misappropriating, misrepresenting, distorting, and exoticizing characters and aspects of their cultural and religious heritages, their voices are no match for the commercial power and global influence of western popular culture (Dabashi, 2021; Jhally, 2006).

Professor of Iranian Studies, Hamid Dabashi, explained the cultural politics of American Orientalism showcased in the Hollywood cinema industry. Speaking back to Arab and Muslim critics of director Denis Villeneuve's film treatment of *Dune*, the first novel of six in the science fiction series written by Frank Herbert, Dabashi drew attention to the tropes used for storying an American epic novel on-screen (Dabashi, 2021).

> "Arabs" are not real people in these works of fiction. Arrakis in Dune are not Iraqis in their homeland. They are figurative, metaphoric and metonymic. They are a mere synecdoche for a literary historiography of American Orientalism. They are tropes – mockups that are there for the white narrator to tell his triumphant story.

The Augment terrorist leader, Khan Noonien Singh, whom I suspected as a child to be a fake, and whose Star Trek descendant La'an Noonien Singh irked me as an adult for continuing the genetically modified Punjabi trope, represented a synecdoche of American Orientalism. As part of the American science fiction genre, these characters, Khan and La'an, their genealogical connection as the patriarch and his female descendant, and the origin story of genetically modified Punjabi Sikhs fighting against the western world in the 1990s eugenics wars, gesture to a much larger historical narrative of American impressions of the Orient, the East. Hamid Dabashi's cautioning to Arab and Muslim scholars was clear-cut when he argued that Hollywood's manufacturing of the east is make-believe (Dabashi, 2021).

> I watched most of Hollywood's fantasies about the Muslim world and I found nothing in them that is remotely about me as a Muslim or an Iranian. Nothing.

The factor to be taken seriously from this, I believe, is that the American commercial film industry has the financial capacity and distribution chain to portray others in unreal ways that are conjured up from script to screen for audience approval. But so too can the Bollywood industry of Hindi language fiction, and its smaller grossing offshoots of Pollywood and Lollywood produced in the Punjabi language, invent unreality as the popular film platter for public consumption. It could be said that the distinction between Hollywood and Bollywood as global moneymaking enterprises is that the latter and to a lesser extent its South Asian branches, such as Tollywood or Telugu cinema, Kollywood or Tamil cinema, and Sandalwood or Kannada cinema, have in many respects kept to an original twentieth-century format of long-running films

combining melodrama, dance, and musical performance with romance and a feelgood ending.

For the Punjabi derivatives of Pollywood and Lollywood, however, the action genre has eclipsed the conventional music and dance melodramas of the Hindi Bollywood industry. Beneath the exterior violence, carnage, and bloodletting of Punjabi action films lies the cinematic lure of the narrative, plot, and theme by which audiences judge a movie's worth with regard to how closely the storyline evokes their perceptions of the past and how history casts the future. But profit-driven action cinema can be highly problematic and political in project design, distribution, and audience reception, as I abruptly realised when my childhood favourite of the silver screen *Maula Jat* (Malik, 1979) was remade and released for contemporary Punjabi audiences in Bilal Lashari's *The Legend of Maula Jatt* (Lashari, 2022).

Maula Jatt

In mid-to-late December of 2022, an online spat erupted in New Delhi over the December 30th release of *The Legend of Maula Jatt* (Lashari, 2022). A Punjabi language film made in the Lollywood cinema industry of Lahore, it was the first Pakistani motion picture in eleven years to be permitted by India's central board of film certification to screen in certain parts of the country. This 153-minute feature cost USD $2.4 million and was ranked Pakistan's highest grossing commercial film at USD $10 million collected at the box office. The screenplay presented a new digital version of the 1979 cult classic *Maula Jat*, which had popularised Punjabi action cinema in Pakistan and India more than four decades ago (Malik, 1979).

In the build up to the screenings in the Indian Punjab and a few theatres around New Delhi with Punjabi language communities, Hindutva far-right political parties bellowed their discontent (Raheja, 2022, 2023; Singh, 2011). Ameya Khopkar, a politician from the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena party, took to Twitter threatening that in the case of the film's lead actor Fawad Khan, an ethnic Pashtun, his "fans, [who are] traitors may very well go to Pakistan and watch the film" and that "we will not let this

film release anywhere in India" (ANI, 2022; Hussain, 2022a). In the end, *The Legend of Maula Jatt* (2022) was postponed indefinitely with neither the central board or the film distributor clarifying reasons prompting the cancellation (Hussain, 2022b).

Figure 10. A film poster for *The Legend of Maula Jatt* (2022).

Undoubtedly Punjabi movie-goers grasped that heated pushback from Hindutva nationalists had put a stop to the movie release. An unofficial statement from inside India's broadcasting and information ministry confirmed that although "there is no official ban on the release of Pakistani films in India, no Pakistani film has been released in the country in the wake of the dastardly Uri and Pulwama attacks" (Dawn, 2022). Instantly, I breathed a sigh of relief to be in South Auckland, a long way from crushing under the geopolitical weight of the Indian and Pakistani establishments and the merciless manufacturing of mistrust and enmity. The South Asian region was notorious for far-right politicians weaponizing popular cinema to ignite hostility among Indian and Pakistani nationalists. Put bluntly, the nationalists were snared in the social imaginary of a forever war between Hindus and Muslims, bullying all others associated with an Indian and Pakistani background who did not fit these blanket religious categories to become trapped in the treacherous political crossfire.

To be specific, the danger of Hindutva far-right nationalism, argued Pieter Friedrich, was twofold (Friedrich, 2023). Firstly, the Sangh Parivar, a collective of vigilante political groups of which the forerunner was Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

(RSS), the Hindu paramilitary organisation allied to the political party of the Indian government Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), possessed a rising global reach of Hindutva links in the west, particularly the United States. Secondly, and reinforcing the first point, the rest of the world which did not have an Indian and Pakistani background was completely oblivious to the upsurge of Hindutva far-right nationalism and its discontents. Friedrich posed a straightforward query: “That lack of awareness, why is it present?” (Friedrich, 2023, p. 2).

The author asserted that foremost, the collective work of Hindutva nationalists aimed to conceal the violent, politically motivated actions of paramilitaries and vigilantes driving this far-right ideology (Friedrich, 2023). Underpinning this contention was a sub-argument that underlined my personal experience of what was considered “the West,” or New Zealand, a state whose political and cultural allegiances were tied to the United Kingdom and Western Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia.

> Up until the present day, to generalize but by and large, the typical person in the West still tends to view India through that rose-tinted lens of Ghandi, Bollywood, and yoga – and that India consists of nothing more. They’re not aware of the intricacies of the society, the diversity of the languages and cultures, the complexities of the politics, and so on (Friedrich, 2023, p. 2).

Despite my physical and psychological distance, I felt unsettled by the use or misuse of the word “traitors” in Ameya Khopkar’s tweet (Hussain, 2022a). It served as an example of the inescapable cultural politics and prejudices subjugating my Punjabi Sikh peers in South Auckland. Some of my Sikh friends had confided that they were repeatedly accused by Hindutva groups in New Zealand of being traitors to India (Singh and Purewal, 2013). By supporting Punjabi Pakistani actors, musicians, writers, poets, and filmmakers in the arts industry, they were allegedly pro-Punjabi. Conversely, being pro-Punjabi is a redundant charge, by my estimation, for the simple fact that it makes perfect sense for a Punjabi person to be encouraging of themselves and their own kind, so to speak. The difficulties involved in pushing back against Hindutva nationalism, expressly for Punjabi Sikhs who risked further exclusion from Indian

society for their Punjabiness, an identity classification associated with Punjabis across the Radcliffe line marked as the enemy, seemed too complicated a matter for ordinary New Zealanders to apprehend.

When I was growing up in Punjab, I truly believed that Yunus Malik's *Maula Jat* (1979) was based on a real figure in Punjabi history. My older male cousins said that Maula Jatt was from a village in Gujranwala district, right next door to Narowal district where my family and our ancestors hailed from. The village head Maula Jatt had made the farming tool of the Punjab region, a *gandasa* (long-handle axe), world famous; the *gandasa* that doubled up as a lethal weapon to be swung in defence of family and village honour was believable in a young boy's imagination (Farooqi, 2013).

Figure 11. A film poster for *Maula Jat* (1979).

Fast forward to Bilal Lashari's *The Legend of Maula Jatt* (2022), the film's remaking had acquired a completely different taste to me in my fourth decade. It was not simply that I was no longer a wide-eyed boy, an impressionable youngster who trusted the opinions of cousins whom I looked up to. But rather, this popular action film had mutated into a political football to be kicked around an arena of competing flag-waving jingoisms replete with their own social constructions of xenophobia. For Punjabis in India anticipating the release of a Punjabi classic revamped for

contemporary tastes, disallowing the film to be publicly screened because of Hindutva complaints was a sharp reminder that *The Legend of Maula Jatt* (2022) would not be treated as popular cinema available on the open market. The film was forbidden merchandise assembled in Pakistan and worse yet, exhibiting Punjabi speaking actors who were citizens of Pakistan.

Ultimately, I have taken comfort in Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi's remarks on the egalitarian nature of cinema in his home country and the role and responsibility of the social filmmaker. To a great extent cinema symbolises, somewhat idealistically, an open space where people, no matter their culture, class or literateness, illiterateness, can see something of themselves, their values and beliefs, mirrored back on-screen. For the social filmmaker then, and I am speaking from experience, the audience is central to the creative process because hearing one's language spoken by characters carries and connotes reality, authenticity, and validity. As Panahi has reflected on, making a social film becomes collective work in the way that the social world, which the film brings to audiences, signifies aspects of day-to-day life the filmmaker knows to be genuine because they have lived and felt that reality.

> Moreover, in Iran cinema was and still is largely the opposite of an 'elitist' art, in the sense that it does not require its audience to possess literacy and 'intellectuality' in order to enjoy it. In this respect, [Jafar] Panahi sees cinema as a 'classless' or 'egalitarian' realm, where people can realise themselves. Nevertheless, he believes that this should not make the filmmaker a slave to the market or the 'masses.' The 'broad' and 'egalitarian' nature of cinema should only make the filmmaker aware that, unlike, say, a poet, the creation of their art is a collective project existing within the reality in which they operate (Rahbaran, 2012, p. 6).

Making meaning

The poetic arrangement of *Languaging* was purposefully positioned as the doorway to my exegesis *Introduction*. I wanted to provide the reader with some insight into the problematic undertaking of making meaning in the English language from my mother tongue, Punjabi. It would have been easier for me to do justice to translating Punjabi concepts and styles of storywork into Saraiki and Hindko, my closest kinfolk, or

even Hindi and Urdu, distant relatives in the Indo-Aryan family of languages that I speak, and can make meaning in, without losing too much of the original Punjabi context.

In my mind, English is a foreigner that enters into Indigenous peoples' homelands and lives uninvited, carrying the colonial apparatus of superiority. I say this as a Native speaker of Punjabi who grew up in a country where Urdu is the national language, English is an official language, and Punjabi, the mother tongue of more than fifty percent of Pakistan's national population of two-hundred and thirty million people, is still to this day unrecognised, unofficial, and seemingly unwanted since the colonial era of British India.

From birth, Punjabi has been the language of my family that I was raised to speak and express myself in. From listening to my parents and grandparents' stories, I was socialised to think and behave according to cultural principles and ethics carried in our language. Therefore, it is the vernacular that I can truly say is my first language. At school, university, and working life in Pakistan I was re-socialised, or colonised, to understand that the establishment – the education system and the state bureaucracy – did not approve of my Indigenous language existing outside the confines of private life. In public life, Urdu and English were the high status languages of officialdom and the elite class ruling over the country. Alternatively, when being with my parents, my kinfolk, my friends, my community, especially in the rural villages and districts of Punjab, the language that I lived, breathed, and even dreamt in when sleeping was Punjabi.

Tariq Rahman, a linguistics professor and dean of education at Beaconhouse National University in Lahore, has published on the colonial politics influencing the way that the Punjabi language is treated in modern-day Pakistan (Rahman, 2007, 2016). In his article, *Language and Politics in Pakistan*, he made a critical observation: Indigenous languages in Pakistan are viewed by the establishment with deep suspicion as political "symbols of ethno-nationalism" (Rahman, 1996, p. 234; Torwali, 2022). A relic of Pakistan's colonial past in British India, the purge of Indigenous languages could also be applied to the political language-scape of contemporary India where the Hindi

language associated with Hindutva nationalism seeks to dominate and displace all others. Be that as it may, Rahman argued that Punjabis have secured a position of dominance within Pakistan's political and economic sectors. Therefore, Punjabi "ethnicity," as in ethno-nationalist lobbying organised around the strengthening of language and culture, "would only threaten" to undermine their control (Rahman, 1996, p. 238).

> …Punjabis already have power which ethnicity would only threaten. This is why the Punjabi movement mobilizes people not for instrumentalist but for sentimental reasons. The pre-modern sentimental attachment to a distinctive way of life, conveniently symbolized by Punjabi, is really what is at stake. The domination of Urdu, no matter how useful for the elite, does take away the language and literature of the Punjab from the Punjabis. The activists feel that this is a price which should not be paid: the others do not take it seriously (Rahman, 1996, p. 238).

I am not in complete agreement with Rahman's dated 1990s interpretation of the motives driving Punjabi language activism in Pakistan whereby the Punjabi language movement has been located in Lahore city and supported by Lahori Punjabis for five decades (Shackle, 1970). Speaking as an ethnic Punjabi of Narowal district, in our present times there is no stark separation between Punjabi language, ethnicity, and culture on the part of Punjabi language advocates. Contrarily, the opposite may well be true, especially so for Punjabi Pakistani migrants in places like South Auckland where opportunities to intermingle at will with Punjabi Indians revitalizes a profound conviction about the importance of protecting and preserving our mother tongue because this is the vehicle that transports our oral history and folklore, our customs and traditions into present and future Punjabi communities. Maintaining our centuries old Indigenous language is believed to be a cultural legacy that migrants can bequeath to overseas-born generations to ensure they have a secure sense of ethnic and cultural identity, and knowledge of their shared heritage in Aotearoa New Zealand, irrespective of what side of a linear border their parents, or grandparents, or great-grandparents may have emigrated from.

Over the last fifty years of Punjabi language advocacy, bearing in mind that *The Punjab Official Language Act 1967* was amended in 2021 to allow the Gurmukhi script to be the official written language of Punjab state in India, Punjabi social consciousness has evolved with regard to recognising that language retention forms a cultural priority (Amoamo, 2024). In Punjab, Pakistan, the variation in Punjabi language fluency reflects the rural and urban social-economic divide. As a result of this, Punjabis living in rural districts and villages maintain their mother tongue, compared to metropolitan residents of the economic centres, Lahore and Islamabad, prioritizing Urdu and English, the language of commerce and state institutions, over and above the Indigenous language of Punjabi. The disquieting effect of the language divide is that it has caused a literacy divide.

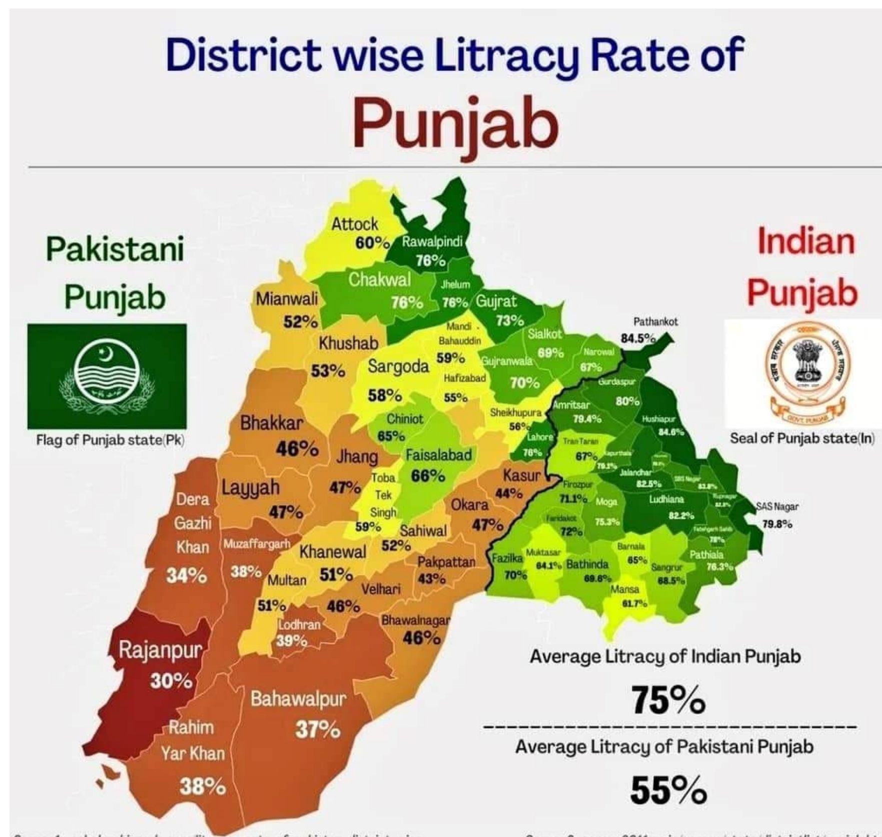

Figure 12. A map of the current literacy rate in the Punjab region.

In my native land of Punjab province in Pakistan, fifty-five percent of a population of 110-plus million people can read and write with seventy-plus million of that figure living in rural areas. The forty-five percent who cannot perform these tasks are mainly poor, rural, farm labourers and their families. Seventy percent of the

population, mostly rural Punjabis, speak Punjabi as their mother tongue. One argument that Punjabi language campaigners assert is that given the rural Punjabi population have access to literature in their own language, there would be a greater chance for their literacy rates to improve.

As a Punjabi filmmaker, my humble contribution to language preservation is to make every effort to reach out across borders and a literacy divide to my people with a meaningful screen production that allows them to think and feel in the language, music, and images in which we make sense of the world and our place in it. These eight short stories of ordinary, everyday Punjabi men who have moved away from borders and barbed wire express a certain semblance of serenity and wellbeing they could not find back home in the Punjab. Put simply, this is captured in their social freedom to gather in one another's company and share the closeness and camaraderie of being the people of the land of Punjab – *Sanjha Punjab*, united Punjab.

Nota Bene

I write this small story *Nota Bene* for readers to take special note of a personal breakthrough I had when coming to terms with how the 1947 partition of Punjab and resulting separation of Punjabis has impacted on my life. In November of 2023, ten months before submitting my practice-oriented doctorate for examination in October of 2024, I sought a series of health consultations with a specialist doctor in neurodiversity. My primary supervisor encouraged and supported this decision, seeing that a medical diagnosis would help me to make sense of the learning challenges I have struggled with from thesis inception through to completion. From undergoing neuropsychological tests, I have since learnt of my neurodiverse co-conditions of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and mild anxiety. The underpinning context of my neurodiversity, I believe, has been trauma related.

There were three main areas where these co-conditions have manifested in my learning and cognitive abilities. Firstly, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder predetermined the problematic terrain I inhabited in *not* knowing how to explain or

understand what had triggered my intense emotions and mood swings, especially feelings of anger, frustration, and sadness. Constantly I have wrestled not only with my own feelings but with figuring out what other people were meaning when they communicated their feelings. In social settings, my behaviour could be described as rambunctious, at times to the point of being disorderly. I have experienced difficulty with listening, taking instruction, and refraining from talking when others are talking. Knowing that interrupting conversations and speaking over others was inappropriate social behaviour, I had failed to apprehend from childhood right through to my adult life. Secondly, ADHD predestined my inability to concentrate for long periods of time, and to list and complete tasks in order of priority. In the case of my doctoral project, I would begin work on new parts of the film before completing unfinished tasks, which continually happened whenever I felt under pressure to meet deadlines and milestones.

Thirdly, I have lived these past five years with anxiety and dread that my efforts to complete a doctorate were not only inadequate but would end in failure and social humiliation. In fact, my anxiety condition exacerbated my angst to the extent that everyday thesis tasks, such as proof reading what I had written the day before, stirred feelings of panic and fear. Subsequently, I have had to read and re-read passages from texts over and over again to grasp the message. Also with such learning difficulties, I often write words with a capital letter that do not require capitalising, and use a lower case letter for words that start with a capital letter. Throughout the whole thesis journey, one of the toughest challenges was fathoming how to systematise my frame of thinking and methods of practice in a clear and coherent style of writing so that these critical sections of the study, theory and methods, are having an ongoing conversation that connects them.

In linking my neurodiverse co-conditions to personal trauma, more than two decades ago when I first entered university in Rawalpindi to study a bachelor’s degree in computer science, I sensed that something was amiss. Deep down, I had bottled-up an enormous amount of grief and sorrow. My suppressed sadness stemmed from the burden of carrying intergenerational trauma transferred through family and

community stories about the Punjab before 1947, along with deep-rooted regrets about the partition of our land and people. Border villages, like mine, were thoroughfares for groups fleeing to India and midpoints for cruel and inhumane acts of partition violence. Without a doubt, the wounding effects of violence can be seen in the mental health challenges and developmental conditions affecting not only myself but my people living in villages peppering the border of west Punjab in Pakistan.

More so, I have grown to realise that the erasing of partition history in Pakistan, rather than facing and learning hard lessons from the past, resulted in crippling consequences. Innately, I felt that during my time in Pakistan I had been denied social license and creative opportunity to acquire communication skills and methods that I needed to articulate my feelings through creative practice. This monumental part of Punjab history, my history, I was not supposed to speak, think, and create about in ways that critically re-examined the widely held narratives about Muslim nationalism. Hence, there was one thing more agonising than sensing the horrors and long-suffering harm of inheriting the partition past. That was, being forbidden to speak honestly of how the past had moulded the present in the hope of recovering peace of mind, healing, and a common humanity among one's own people, the Punjabis.

I write this small story for readers to appreciate that intergenerational trauma, developmental disorders, and learning difficulties are part-and-parcel of who I am. I accept the forty-five year old me. But twenty years ago, I was a young man who did not have the resources, knowledge of clinical health services, and supportive surroundings to attain self-acceptance of being neurodiverse. I did not know that I needed to work on understanding myself in relation to Punjabi history and the environment in which I had been socially conditioned. I carry a complex, heavy past in the contemporary world. Therefore, by taking the wounds of history and telling small screen stories about relationship repair, I am moving the Punjabi story, my own story, beyond psychological borders into a new space. This newness, unequivocally offers a novel way to see ourselves with fresh eyes, open minds, and hopeful hearts as ethnic Punjabis who despite separation continue to be connected to one another and our shared culture and heritage.

Chapter-by-chapter breakdown

1 Background, establishes my personal story from the onset. By contextualising my personal and cultural background in respect to the complex social history of Punjabis since the partition of British India in 1947, I outline the rationale for making a hybrid documentary, a nonfiction film about Punjabi migrants from India and Pakistan living in South Auckland, New Zealand.

2 Positioning, situates the researcher and the research project in a broader field of community filmmaking using hybrid documentary; a visual style merging fiction and nonfiction film techniques. This chapter discusses Punjabiyat, the Punjabi spirit and ethos as a hybrid and composite culture evolving and adapting from generation-to-generation and location-to-location. I put forward the idea that some Punjabi language films are positioned outside the national cinema produced in Pakistan and India, and are located in a cinema of cultural sovereignty.

3 Review, surveys the contours of knowledge in literature and film contributing to the conceptual exploration of *Sanjha Punjab* in a nonfiction film. I discuss ways in which the eight arrangements in *Sanjha Punjab* were inspired by Punjabi storywork and social memory found in the fiction writing of Nadir Ali, Zubair Ahmad, Khushwant Singh, and Waryam Singh Sandhu. I also analyse the ways in which the visual language developed in this hybrid documentary is oriented in an eastern tradition of social realism cinema seen in a selection of film by Punjabi filmmaker Gurvinder Singh, and Iranian filmmakers Jafar Panahi, Abbas Kiarostami, and Mohsen Makhmalbaf.

4 Design, presents the research process used for producing, *Sanjha Punjab,* united Punjab. A Punjabi centred methodology was designed in which the culture-specific methods placed in the toolkit were the Punjabi language in various dialects, and established community relationships between the researcher and documentary characters. The creative methods of film inquiry and reflexivity were by no means separated out from the culture-specific ones. A conscious practice of reflecting on my relationships with the characters, and the Punjabi symbols of social identity that we

were co-constructing in stories, songs, music, poetry, and dance on the screen, shaped the artistic arrangement of the film and curated the deeper meanings conveyed to audiences. The underpinning inquiry into how Punjabi social cohesion manifests and takes hold among South Auckland's Punjabi migrants from India and Pakistan was therefore articulated by emotionally investing in a shared culture and common values.

5 Commentary, provides a summary of the documentary project and considers the cultural and creative contexts underpinning the storylines and filmmaking process; contexts that have defined and confined the project's location within practice-oriented research as a synthesis of Punjabi ways of knowing the social world and filmmaking approaches. Each of the eight short stories assembled on-screen are explained. Included for each story is a diagram outlining the film crew roles and equipment, and an explanation on the process of preparation, production, and post-production.

6 Reflection, recounts the filmmaker's contemplations on the project as well as the project's limits and areas for future creative research. The conclusion reiterates the main concept, *Sanjha Punjab*, and its exploration in a New Zealand Punjabi nonfiction film structured as eight short stories of everyday life for Punjabi Indians and Punjabi Pakistanis rekindling their relationships in South Auckland. The exegesis returns to the inquiry that began my doctoral learning journey: do the social connections between Punjabi migrants from India and Pakistan in South Auckland influence our people and place of origin? Alternatively, is it more a matter of Punjabi migrants visiting the Punjab and seeing their homeland in new ways due to the repertoire of experiences they have built up over time from existing beyond a linear border?

7 References, lists the literature, internet media, and film cited in the text. *8 Appendices*, compiles the participant information sheet and consent form, which film characters were required to sign for research ethics approval at Auckland University of Technology. Also appended is the Third Party Copyright permission form, which allowed me to use music and excerpts of film produced by other Punjabis in my doctoral film project.

2
POSITIONING

ونڈ – Separation

By Basharat Ali Jan

ونڈی پا کے کی لبھیاا ے

یار گوا کے کی لبھیا اے

What have we achieved by separation?

What have we achieved by losing companions?

وتھاں پیاں سنگی بھُل گئے

ماں پے مر گئے بچے رُل گئے

اکھ دے تارے ککھاں تُل گئے

مار مرا کے کی لبھیا اے

یار گوا کے کی لبھیا اے

The distance in relationships has widened and friends forgotten

Our parents lost their lives and our children's future destroyed

The twinkle in the eyes was darkened

What have we achieved by killing each other?

What have we achieved by losing companions?

حُقّہ قصے یار چوپالے

بیہہ جاناں سب آل دوالے

دُکھ سُکھ ونڈناں یاراں نالے

سانجھ مُکا ا کے کی لبھیا اے

یار گوا کے کی لبھیا اے

Tobacco pipe, stories, friends, gatherings

Everyone sat around each other

Sharing pains and pleasures with friends

What have we achieved by breaking the alliance?

What have we achieved by losing companions?

منجی ، کنکاں،چھلیاں،گنے

رُکھ ، کھلیان تے کھالے بَنّے

سانجھے رہ کے سانجھے منے

وِتھاں پاکے کے کی لبھیا اے

یار گوا کے کی لبھیا اے

Bed, wheat fields, corn, sugarcane

Fields, orchards, water ways, embankments

All these things were shared when we were united

What have we achieved by the swelling distance in our relationships?

What have we achieved by losing companions?

سکھیاں نیں جد مل کے بیہنا

کناں دے وچ دُکھ سُکھ کہنا

رنگ مذہب فیر کُجھ نہ رہنا

ہتھ چھُڑا کے کی لبھیا اے

یار گوا کے کی لبھیا اے

ونڈی پاکے کی لبھیا اے

Womenfolk would sit together

Sharing their pains and pleasures in each other's ear

Warm interactions disregard religious differences

What have we achieved by letting go each other's hand?

What have we achieved by the swelling distance in our relationships?

What have we achieved by losing companions?

Context of telling your story

This chapter explores the concept and practice of positioning. By this, I am positioning the creative research within a Punjabi cultural context of community-oriented filmmaking by examining my own positionality. Positionality points to the manner in which my worldview as a migrant Punjabi male, my tastes, interests, and perspectives on *Punjabiyat*, Punjabi culture, have sculpted the creative research and influenced the protocols and processes undertaken to carry out the film project.

Expressly, I have synthesised documentary and fiction techniques with the intention that *Sanjha Punjab* can be categorised as nonfiction and hybrid documentary: that is, a screen production that decisively blurs the boundaries between what parts of the short stories are made-up and acted by characters, and what parts of their actions, interactions, and reactions are spontaneous, voluntary, and real. I acknowledge that although I have used nonfiction and hybrid documentary interchangeably in this exegesis, there are slight distinctions made between these modes of filmmaking. Generally both filmmaking approaches deal with, in their own way, social reality and relating what is real from the filmmaker's perspective to the audience. The difference has more to do with style, I believe, in which nonfiction film is the social construction of reality: hence, a good-faith attempt to convey reality but not by a method of narrating straight facts. Hybrid documentary, on the other hand, shifts between documentary and fiction by using experimental techniques, like non-linear narrative and improvisation.

Considering my positionality as an insider of the South Auckland Punjabi community, I discuss how personal experience and insider knowledge have informed the filmmaking process of eight stories connecting to a central theme of *Sanjha Punjab*, united Punjab. Hence, this chapter provides a context-specific interpretation of *Punjabiyat*, the spirit of Punjab, a concept that I have broadened to include Punjabis living in new diasporas, like South Auckland where I now reside (Kirk, 2020; Rahman et al, 2023). Further to this, by framing *Punjabiyat* as a hybrid and composite culture evolving and adapting from generation-to-generation and location-to-location, I reflect

on the way that *Sanjha Punjab* aspires to capture what Rana Nayar has referred to as the spirit of Punjab (Nayar, 2021). By integrating *Punjabiyat* into visual storytelling, my practice-led project along with the work of other filmmakers consciously locates Punjabi stories outside the body of national cinema produced in Pakistan and India. To knowingly position a film outside the parameters of national cinema is a notion I have borrowed from the late Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay (Barclay 2003, 2015). Centring *Punjabiyat* on-screen is both a symbolic and conscious act of cultural sovereignty; a nonconforming act in many ways, which social realism film or new cinema in other regions and countries, particularly in Iran, has advanced (Ahmad and Khan, 2020; Akrami, 2018; Ali, 2020; Athanickal, 2020; Bashkar, 1998; Chambers and Higbee, 2021; Jahed, 2022; Khan and Ahmad, 2016; Nagib, 2016; Saer and Higbee, 2012; Sidhu, 2020).

I must confess that the conventional identity category I have carried from birth, a Punjabi Muslim male born and raised in Pakistan, comes with a set of social controls, both ideological and political, with regard to my experience of being Punjabi and understanding the history of the Punjab region (Ziring, 1984). I am not a historian by trade but I have applied my own cultural truth to the work of British historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger in *The Invention of Tradition*, who argued convincingly that "'traditions' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, p. 1).

Rana Nayar is perhaps the one professor of Punjabi literature who has read into the invention of tradition in relation to recent constructions of Punjab history (Nayar, 2006, 2012, 2016; Nayar et al, 2023). In an online lecture on *Punjabi literature through the prism of history*, Nayar reasoned that during the establishment of the British empire in India from 1858 to 1947, writing a total Punjab history was conflated with writing a particular social history of the Sikhs in the Punjab region, a leading trajectory that has continued from the colonial period up until the present day (Nayar, 2021). Hence, specific epochs and influences of the pre-Vedic and Vedic past were "pushed away," leaving out pieces of the entire picture. These vital pieces of the historical picture were no longer wanted for fashioning a "Punjabi society and culture" that fitted with the sociopolitical conditions of the colonial episode in British India, and beyond this point

into the modern age of independent India and Pakistan (Nayar, 2021, 0:21 secs to 1:17 mins).

> Sanskrit culture, Prakhyat culture, Persian and Arabic culture: these are the cultures that have formed the psyche, the society, and the mindset of Punjabis. So, you can see all kinds of footprints on [the] Punjabi psyche. So, Nas Jogis have been there. They also have a very rich repertoire of poetry, but it seems to have been pushed away, almost in the same manner in which Vedic past has been pushed away; footprints of Ramayana have been pushed away; the very important mention of Mahabharata is not really made because we are trying to construct [a] history of Punjabi society and culture in a particular way because it suits us and fits into our ideological pattern (Nayar, 2021, 0:21 secs to 1:17 mins).

By my own admission, the repertoire of intergenerational stories on the pre-Vedic and Vedic eras of Punjab history I possess is scanty to say the least. My interpretive reading of post-1947 Punjab in the wider political setting of Pakistan is that the influences of Persian and Arabic cultures were ranked highest by state and society with aggressive zeal as a means to wilfully discard remnants of old mother India. Apart from stories passed down by my father about King Porus of fourth century Punjab who battled against Alexander's Macedonian army at the crossing of the rivers Jhelum and Chenab, while researching my thesis I realised that I have retained little about the ancient Punjabi world to hand on to my children and grandchildren. Even the ancestral origins of my clan name, Janjua, derived from the fourth century Pandava dynasty recorded in a principal Sanskrit epic *Mahābhārata*, I have sparse knowledge of.

These gaping memory holes were a direct result of the environment in which I was immersed in Pakistan through schooling, tertiary education, and public institutions, including Sunni Muslim religious institutions. Large chunks of my history have therefore been deliberately erased from public life, while the time before the 1947 inauguration of the Islamic state remains cloudy due to rarely, if ever, being mentioned in the education system. This deliberate expunging of memory was motivated by the fact that historical eras, if studied carefully, evidence that the Punjab was once a multicultural, multilingual, religiously syncretic, pluralist society. Fundamentally, the justification for the establishment of the Muslim state, an Islamic republic, a system of

government for a single religion country and citizenry was the exclusion and segregation of people who were not Muslim, and consequently assumed to be alien to Muslims and their way of life (Adraoui, 2017).

I have used the word alien instead of different for an explicit reason, which I must explain. Diversity, I contend, was the mainstay of *Punjabiyat* prior to the 1947 partition of British India. One fundamental tenet connected eighteen dialects of the Punjabi language that belonged to tribal and clan groups throughout territories in the Punjab region; including Saraiki, which the Pakistan census recognised as a language in 1981 and Hindko, which acquired language status in 2020. This principle, I believe, existed in an intrinsic appreciation of difference to the extent that the diversity of people of the land, the sons and daughters of the soil, was customary to being Punjabi and practicing Punjabi culture. Alien, by contrast, reflects a systematic process of imposing laws, regulatory mechanisms, and social norms that explicitly privilege and benefit Sunni Muslim groups over other citizens in Pakistan labelled as minorities; a categorization that not only insinuates that minorities are inferior to, and lower than, the Sunni Muslim majority, but one where segments of the dominant population have been emboldened over time, plus compounded by the rise of the military and the demise of democratic, secular government, to treat minorities as irrelevant, unrelated, and threatening to them and their kind.

On noting that, I do applaud Punjabi Sikh writers such as Khushwant Singh for integrating *Punjabiyat* into Sikh social history when storying how, for five hundred-plus years of their history, Sikh communities have stood up to cultural and religious persecution (Singh, 2018). Particularly, the fifth and sixth Sikh Gurus Arjan and Tegh Bahadur who were martyred by seventeenth century Mughal rulers on political grounds of refusing to renounce their faith, and standing for social equality and religious pluralism, have been memorialised as an important juncture in Sikh history. Outside the scope of this study crouches a stinging question about the status of non-Sikhs in Sikh readings of Punjab history (Moliner, 2007). More often than not Punjabi Muslims are left out of the narrative because the Mughal rulers, who were Turko-Mongol descendants of central Asian Khanates (empires), were Sunni Muslim. By virtue

of religious classification, Punjabi Muslims were swept into an all-encompassing Muslim class and kind, irrespective of whether they resisted against the Mughals or submitted to the status quo of that time.

By this line of reasoning, how have historical factors caused a decline of cultural syncretism in formations of *Punjabiyat*? With Punjabi syncretism now in rapid decline, how did this give rise to the hardening of religious borders between Punjabi communities within, and between, the two Punjabs of India and Pakistan? (Oberoi, 1994). While I have no definite answers in my repertoire of learning and lived experience, I do believe that borderlines, frontiers, boundaries, edges, and peripheries were not merely ideas but tangible manifestations in the history of Punjab that predate the 1947 demarcation of the Radcliffe line.

This fixation with securing and shielding a closed border around the perimeter of an open hinterland accustomed to the circulation of peoples, languages, cultures, and goods travelling to and from urban markets inside ancient walled cities, such as Multan and Lahore, was reasoned to be for security reasons. Rana Nayer characterised the Punjab as a "security guard," a kind of watchman on the lookout for "marauders," looters, and invaders to provide protection and defence measures for India (Nayar, 2021, 17:13 to 18:22 mins).

> Punjab, as we all understand, is like a sentry, is like a security guard, outside your society. Punjab has been guarding your borders all along. We have faced invasions from outside. We have faced marauders from outside. We have faced all kinds of aggressions from outside. As a result, all the foreigners before they entered any other part of India, they first came to Punjab. That in itself will tell you why Punjabis are so liberal and open minded because historically, we have always thrown our gates open to all kinds of foreigners. Sometimes we were forced to do it, and sometimes we did it willingly and we did it with open arms. (Nayar, 2021, 17:13 to 18:22 mins).

Nonetheless, deep-seated contradictions surface from this popular discourse that the "Punjab has been guarding your borders all along" (Nayar, 2021, 17:13 to 18:22 mins). Nayar was correct to point out that in the past, Punjabis rose up to protect

their vast alluvial plain from attackers infiltrating from modern day Afghanistan and further afield in the central Asian states of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Much of the veneration of Ranjit Singh, the nineteenth century Sikh maharaja of Punjab, transpired from the fact that he was the first Punjabi ruler to capture Peshawar city and push the border out to the western boundary to close off the Punjab plain to Afghan Pashtun tribes (Lambah, 2012). However, the border established in 1947 splitting the Punjab between India and Pakistan extensively ruptured history and social memory in critical places (Chatta, 2021).

Foremost, the Punjab that guarded India's borders in the past included the Punjabis of west Punjab in Pakistan. To further complicate the story, since the establishment of the 1947 border, speculation and fear has prevailed over reason. Fear is underlined in the assumption that Punjabi Indians have a duty to shield India with a population of 1.4 billion citizens from Punjabi Pakistanis numbering at 1.9 million who are their closest relatives. Herein lies the persisting conflict of the past seventy-seven, almost eighty years. If there is cultural truth in Rana Nayar avowing that "we have always thrown our gates open to all kinds of foreigners," then in what ways has the fact the Punjabis are no longer permitted to open our gates to one another damaged the very social fabric of *Punjabiyat*?

Positionality and positioning

To speak of my positionality, as the creative researcher, and the positioning of this doctoral study at the crossroads of the Punjabi social world and cultural film is an involved process of unpacking layers of historical, ideological, and emotional complexity. In my situation as the human product of a fragmented past, one where I have attempted to mend this social fracture in the present, demanded that I make a transformational learning journey to the other side of the world to live in South Auckland. The cultural signpost that consistently pointed the way ahead in the filmmaking process was my insider positionality, or should I say living with a complex identity, and an intense personal and social relationship to the stories and characters

in *Sanjha Punjab*. Because of this relationship and my emotional investment in crafting the film, coupled with the fact that I knew or knew of the characters off-screen in community life, I found myself adopting a mode of community-oriented filmmaking that merged two procedures. Firstly, positioning the camera inside the community, and secondly, cultivating a favourable environment to tell our stories with ease and trust in one another's company as a collective of migrant Punjabi men in South Auckland (Barclay, 2003, 2015).

Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf remarked that the story a person wishes to create exists as ideas or what they believe to be an ideal concept or belief on which to base a film. In my case, it was the practical work of bringing Punjabis together, filming them as characters engaged in meaningful conversation, and capturing the ambience of these social exchanges in South Auckland settings that allowed *Sanjha Punjab* to become "more real as it [was] shot, and finally edited" (Mohsen Makhmalbaf cited in Dabashi, 2018, pp. 88-89).

> Film is a very idealistic thing . . . it only becomes more real as it is shot, and finally edited. But it all emanates from that first idea. If I had allowed anyone else to take control of producing my films, they wouldn't be my ideas which made up the film (Mohsen Makhmalbaf cited in Dabashi, 2018, pp. 88-89).

It is here that I want to put forward an alternative position, one that mimics Makhmalbaf by presenting an "idealistic" reading of *Punjabiyat,* meaning the Punjabi spirit and ethos of our land and people (Mohsen Makhmalbaf cited in Dabashi, 2018, pp. 88-89). For the purpose of making *Sanjha Punjab*, *Punjabiyat* signifies a hybrid and composite culture that has endured in spite of partition, social fracture, and the fragmentation of history and memory (Sarkar and Mukherjee, 2020). The ability of Punjabi people to evolve in, and adapt to, difficult circumstances, foreign interlopers and rulers, unstable environments, and in more modern times, unfamiliar peoples and places through the course of migration, has led to cultural hybridity being normalised over centuries and epochs of history. As a result, in the South Asian creative arts

industry, some Punjabi language film operates as strategically independent of national cinema produced in Pakistan and India for the reason that the content transmits a Punjabi social world (Langah and Sengupta, 2022).

In the Punjabi habitus, meaning the Punjabi conditions of existence, people in the present day recall the grief and pain of partition and intergenerational trauma in conversation. Through acts of expressing regret over the 1947 border that came to be, cultural loyalty and collective hope have a place to live and breathe. Hope is therefore expressed as allegiance to what belongs to us and is most precious, but is also vulnerable and at risk of being harmed or disappearing. That being, our relationships to one another and connections to land, our earth mother, combined with Punjabi language, heritage, and culture. Hence, this kind of Punjabi cinema wittingly side-steps the linear national identities manufactured from the aftermath of the 1947 partition of British India and the subsequent construction of two independent states, India and Pakistan.

In the case of my nonfiction film *Sanjha Punjab* and other filmmakers such the body of work by auteur Gurvinder Singh (Singh, 2011, 2015, 2022) there is, as I see it, a deliberate embrace of what Rana Nayar called the spirit of *Punjabiyat*. Albeit in different storytelling forms, some Punjabi films are intricately contextualised by geographic location, language and dialect, heritage and history, as opposed to a kind of nationalism derived from the post-partition, independent nation-state: to be concise, a militarised, nuclear armed nation-state (Nayar, 2021). I am signalling to the postcolonial construction of nationalism in India and Pakistan, which Partha Chatterjee maintained in his seminal book, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, has a direct relationship to the colonial epoch of British India (Chatterjee, 1993a, 1993b).

Chatterjee argued that in the nation-state of modern India, there was no such thing as a homogenous, standardised national culture and identity (Chatterjee, 1993a). An Indian national was a distinct social construct, one that anchored itself in maintaining self-determination and sovereignty over the spiritual, religious, and cultural world. Hence, "an authentic postcolonial nationalism begins [and might I add ends] with culture" (Juergensmeyer, 1994, p. 1021). With this point in mind, Chatterjee

asserted that as long as Indian nationalism is "not western," or rather, not perceived to be western, then it wielded the power to persuade the masses that nationalism is real (Chatterjee, 1993a, p. 6).

> Here nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a modern national culture that is nevertheless not western (Chatterjee, 1993a, p. 6).

Borrowing from Mohsen Makhmalbaf's claim that "having an idea of what it is you want say" takes precedence over the practical and logistical aspects of filming and editing, there is a complex detail about visual storytelling located outside the national cinema (Mohsen Makhmalbaf cited in Dabashi, 2018, p. 61). In relation to Partha Chatterjee's contention that Indian nationalism, and in my case Pakistani nationalism, revolves around religious, spiritual, and cultural identity, Punjabi social realism film has to a certain extent mimicked this trajectory over time and space (Chatterjee, 1993a). By no means am I claiming that the eight stories in *Sanjha Punjab* are apolitical or neutral. What I am advocating through filmmaking is that representation and voice matter. In this sense, creating a nonfiction film in the Punjabi language indicates to South Asian audiences that politically, the filmmaker is making a stand to prioritise their mother tongue over and above what is normally perceived to be the national languages of India – Hindi, and Pakistan – Urdu.

Sanjha Punjab in South Auckland

In South Auckland, *Sanjha Punjab*, united Punjab, can be conceived as a social system that organises and gives form and meaning to Punjabi life beyond borders. The notion of beyond borders, however, is to be distinguished from the postcolonial framing of existing beyond partition (Langah and Sengupta, 2022; Chatterjee, 2023; Manto, 1997). *Sanjha Punjab* in South Auckland, or the unifying bond between South Auckland Punjabis, operates within the confines of, and in spite of, partition. In this

sense, one consequence of partition has been the mass migration of Punjabis to western states and societies, a direct product of dividing the land and people of the Punjab region.

Intentionally then, I have opened this chapter with Basharat Ali Jan's image and poem, ونڈ – *Separation*, the poem he performed in the first story of *Sanjha Punjab* called *Poetry Ek*, where *ek* or *ik*, depending on the phonetic spelling, means one in Punjabi. The burning query that urged me to undertake this practice-oriented thesis was simple: what lies beyond separation? Beyond the linear border, what did everyday life look and feel like for Punjabi migrants? The answer was not straightforward but entangled in my own personal story of migration. Assembling fragments of a common past reflected in the present day lives of my people in South Auckland compelled me to emotionally invest my own Punjabi spirit into my filmmaking practice. What I learned was this hybrid documentary moved with me as I walked the path of restoring and repairing *Sanjha Punjab*, a united Punjab. Bit-by-bit and piece-by-piece I patched together eight glimpses into Punjabi life beyond the border, and by doing so, the tenacious road to rekindling relationships and healing intergenerational trauma came into view on-screen.

In *Poetry Ek*, Basharat Ali Jan's touching sentiments of mourning for what was lost in the separation of Punjab and regretting the loss of life, culture, and social bonds, personifies the poignant and painful past that Punjabis transfer from one generation to the next. Irrespective of whether his emotional attachment to pre-partition Punjab before our people were separated and alienated from one another takes a romantic view of the past, his poetic sentiments resonate in historical studies. One example is the work of the late Kamaljit Bhasin-Malik. A Punjabi scholar who died while studying for a doctoral degree at Oxford University, Bhasin-Malik's research overlaps with Basharat Ali Jan's original poem.

From a single book of essays published after her death, Bhasin-Malik's examination of history becomes clear: she wanted to know if Punjabis today had retained some semblance and appreciation of their past syncretic culture where their ancestors blended rather than separated traditions, and practiced religious, societal,

and political pluralism with a collective resolve for tolerance. In today's fast-shrinking Punjab region where bouts of sectarian violence and religious militancy have relentlessly harmed social relations and narrowed the scope of human experiences, was there anything left of Punjab prior to partition where people not only accepted but normalised linguistic and cultural diversity, and religious syncretism?

> The composite culture of Punjab comprising of shared religious practices in Sufi shrines, romance narratives, ballads, poems, etc. is of special interest to her. She has sought to historicise the survival of these shared continuities alongside the reactive processes of Islamicisation, Sikhisation, and Hinduisation in pre-partition Punjab (Manchanda, 2013, p. 105).

Situating Bhasin-Malik's research within the South Auckland diaspora of Punjabi Indian and Punjabi Pakistani communities, it is "the survival of these shared continuities" between peoples, cultures, and heritages that is highlighted in *Sanjha Punjab* for pragmatic reasons (Manchanda, 2013, p. 105; Singh, 2023). Fundamentally, the belief in maintaining "shared continuities" is an aspirational value that has been put into practice by community organisers in Blessen Tom's feature article, *Kiwi Punjabi duo uniting communities across borders* (Manchanda, 2013, p. 105; Tom, 2023). Tom interviewed my colleague Navtej Randhawa and myself about the "fluid network of friends" we call on in South Auckland to publicise *Sanjha Punjab*, referring to unity through a "shared Punjabi heritage" (Tom, 2023).

Over the past decade, Randhawa and I in collaboration with our peers have used community radio and social media to attract Punjabi interest in attending regular events of "poetry sessions," documentary screenings, and art exhibitions (Tom, 2023). As a group, our primary aim has been to bring Punjabis together and stimulate social connections and friendships between Punjabi Indians and Punjabi Pakistanis. In all honesty, Punjabi community organisers are more concerned with learning about and sustaining the internal diversity of the Punjab region, which as migrants from India and Pakistan, we have the cultural capacity to nurture, grow, and pass on to new generations born and raised in South Auckland.

By comparison, in the northern hemisphere Parminder Bhachu contextualised the “migrant creativity” of Punjabi and other South Asian migrants in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States as a collective story that takes on a global discourse (Bachu, 2021). With this in mind, Bachu claimed that in the Punjabi diaspora “migrant creativity is *the* story of the global economy” where artists and filmmakers draw on the interdependence of audiences and markets at home and abroad to influence tastes, styles, and trends on an international level (Bachu, 2021, p. 3).

> The story of the diaspora and migrant creativity is *the* story of the global economy. Never able to take anything for granted, migrants are accustomed to living as artisans and improvisers of every aspect of life. Today, the knowledge and expertise they are generating, and sharing, increasingly define contemporary global landscapes across a great range of fields (Bhachu, 2021, p. 3).

One example of migrant creativity of a South Asian kind is seen in Amardeep Singh’s book, *The Films of Mira Nair: Diaspora Verite* (Singh, 2018). The author examined the film treatment of the Indian and Pakistani diaspora in the United States by Odisha filmmaker Mira Nair in respect to how she had manufactured a particular brand of South Asian realism. Singh observed that Nair had transferred her origins in documentary filmmaking to her unique style of social realism cinema, an approach that he believed skilfully bridged film art and commercial cinema. The author impressed two points that were not mutually exclusive. Firstly, Mira Nair “has continued to remain invested in a documentary realist aesthetic… that aims to document the lives of ordinary people from a diverse range of racial and class backgrounds” (Singh, 2018, p. 3). And secondly, that her films and filmmaking style are “not wholly defined by any singular national or linguistic tradition in cinema; rather, they reflect a wide range of geographic and cultural contexts” (Singh, 2018, p. 4).

Given that the globalising effect is the hallmark of contemporary South Asian film made in northern hemisphere diasporas, then in the global south of Aotearoa the focus has been on the local. By exploring the internal diversity of not singly within the

national categories of Indian and Pakistani, but that which lies beneath the ethnic category of Punjabi – cultural distinctions between dialects, kinship groups, and territories in the Punjab region – is indicative of the Aotearoa migrant experience. To explain, the contemporary setting of Aotearoa society is one marked by a cultural and intellectual shift "towards decolonization… shaped by the principles set out in legislation aimed at honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi)" (Showden, Nairn, and Matthews, 2022, p. 663). Decolonization in this context primarily alludes to re-examining the power dynamics between the Pākeha descendants of British settlers and Māori *iwi* (tribes) and *hapū* (smaller tribes) of Aotearoa with regard to relationships being consistent with principles of social equality and "social justice underlined in the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi between the British Crown and *ngā hapū* (the tribes) (Showden, Nairn, and Matthews, 2022, pp. 664).

Outside the scope of this study is a Treaty of Waitangi discourse on changing attitudes and increasing social acceptance of the Treaty principles, which were first introduced by the 1989 Labour government under the leadership of David Lange (Treaty Resource Centre, 2019). Developed from the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi agreement, the five principles in our current times are: *kawanatanga* (government); *rangatiratanga* (self-determination of Māori tribes); equality; co-operation between government and Māori tribes, and; government responsibility to provide a reparation system for land and resource grievances of Māori tribes (Treaty Resource Centre, 2019).

Relevant to this study is the manner in which decolonization in an Aotearoa social and cultural environment has had an effect on migrant Punjabis in South Auckland in respect to focusing their ethnic identity formations on the internal diversity of people with ancestral ties to the Punjab region. Without a doubt, the proliferation and presence of Māori artists in the creatives industries – visual and cinematic arts, traditional performance arts, digital storytelling on social media and short-form content streaming – is influential over the way in which Pacific and ethnic minority communities conceptualise and practice their culture-specific artforms.

In many ways, my own practice has been inspired and sculpted by Māori filmmakers in documentary and fiction genres, especially the fourth cinema philosophy of Barry Barclay (Barclay, 2003, 2015). Barclay strongly believed that Māori filmmakers should be targeting their own people as the audience, and to effectively achieve this, "we need to be talking to our own people first" as the film characters (Barclay, 2015, p. 76). Among my contemporaries who are Māori film practitioners and creative researchers, Toiroa Williams of Te Whakatōhea *iwi* (tribe) explained the cultural responsibility of *whānau* (family) ties that he carried into his creative practice of making a doctoral artefact concerning the significance of his principal *tipuna* (ancestor) named Mokomoko to the identity of his people (Williams, 2024).

> Ultimately, the responsibility falling to me as the youngest in my whānau is a testament to the faith and trust placed in me by my elders and family members (Williams, 2024, p. 12).

Williams' personal sentiments around "faith and trust" being invested in him by "elders and family members" speaks directly to the ideal of social reciprocity among a kinship group (Williams, 2024, p. 12). Hence, the researcher was duty-bound to create an artefact, which in Williams' case were photographs and video narratives, bearing in mind that this work represents the *whānau* and is a practical way of giving back to the community who raised him (Williams, 2024). The philosophical underpinnings of Barclay's motivations for making documentary and fiction film, coupled with Williams' inspiration for creating photographs and video narratives, is grounded in their *whakapapa* (ancestry) connections to *whānau* and community.

In view of this, it makes sense that I would embark on a personal journey of weaving my identity narrative into eight stories of *Sanjha Punjab* stressing the introspective and reflective nature of looking at ourselves, our internal diversity and desire for unity through the culture of everyday life. Different to Māori creative researchers, Barry Barclay, Toiroa Williams and others like them, I am not by any means Indigenous to Aotearoa (Barclay, 2003, 2015; Williams, 2023, 2024; Amoamo,

2024; Henry-Ryan, 2022; Ings, 2021, 2023; Milligan, 2017, 2022; Moewaka Barnes, 2018; Pouwhare, 2019, 2023; Rangiwai, 2023; Waititi, 2007; Wilson, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2023). Rather, my positionality as a migrant Punjabi filmmaker in Aotearoa has made me sensitive and responsive to the historical and deep emotional attachment between people and their ancestral place of belonging, which for me is the land of Punjab.

Hybrid documentary

Using the format of hybrid documentary where non-actors play themselves to take audiences on a poignant journey into a realistic depiction of their everyday lives is by no means new to world cinema (Daniels, 2019; Ferrarini, 2020; Merewether, 2009; Miner, 2021; Landesman, 2008; Svetvilas, 2004; Waldron, 2018). The 1922 silent film *Nanook of the North: The Story of Life and Love in the Actual Arctic* directed by American filmmaker Robert J. Flaherty has been reassessed by contemporary anthropologists and film analysts as something of a first in hybrid documentary, albeit perhaps by accident (Flaherty, 1922; Grimshaw, 2014; Matheson, 2011). I make reference to an accidental hybrid because when it was released, the husband and wife production crew of Robert Joseph Flaherty and Frances Hubbard Flaherty appeared to be passing the film off as an authentic narrative of an Inuit man Allakariallak known as Nanook, and his family living a happy life in their natural, serene surroundings of Ungava bay, Quebec (Marcus, 1995).

Categorically, the work would not fit today's consensus on journalistic or essayistic documentary, nor would it be accepted as visual ethnography. The reason being that the content was believed to be staged and acted by Inuit people whom Robert Flaherty recruited for the film. The cultural lens through which the American filmmaker viewed the exotic other informed the way that *Nanook of the North* was packaged and marketed to American and western European audiences (Lalvani, 1995; Flaherty, 1922). As a consequence, Flaherty's production has been called out by sterner critics for not being entirely truthful about asking characters to perform scripted scenes in a documentary format and his motives for doing so.

Anthropologist and filmmaker Anna Grimshaw theorised that Flaherty's motive for staging in the nonfiction film, *Nanook of the North*, was to pull white American audiences into a spectacular visual story about an Indigenous group whom they would consider to be incredibly different to themselves (Grimshaw, 2014). Yet it was historian and documentary practitioner Alan Marcus who explained the effects of films like *Nanook of the North* on the social construction of "Inuit society" and a fictional "Arctic paradise" (Marcus, 1995, p. 289).

> White perspectives of an ideal, "traditional" Inuit society were conditioned by images of self-reliant Eskimos living in an Arctic paradise, in keeping with the scenes of Inuit life presented in the films of *Nanook of the North, Land of the Long Day,* and *Savage Innocents* (Marcus, 1995, p. 289).

Marcus' book, *Relocating Eden: The Image and Politics of Inuit Exile in the Canadian Arctic*, sent a serious message about the long-term consequences that hybrid documentary can have over moulding public perception (Marcus, 1995). Contrary to "the symbolic representation of the Inuit hunters in Canadian and American films and literature," in reality, Inuit groups were subjected to Canadian state relocation in the 1950s (Marcus, 1995, p. 28). The state believed that isolation would preserve Inuit culture, language, and way of life at risk of defilement by modern western influences. The result of the relocations was that Inuit people died from what they reported as extreme isolation and "hardships," like the lack of food and basic necessities needed to survive the harsh Arctic environment (Marcus, 1995, p. 25).

An "Arctic paradise" of contented Inuit living in harmony with nature and untouched by modernity was a false narrative (Marcus, 1995, p. 289). Subsequent to this, its fabrication for white American and Canadian audiences had been uncritically believed to the point where the state relocation of entire Inuit communities caused needless fatalities, and geographic and cultural alienation from ancestral lands and fishing and hunting grounds (Marcus, 1995). The power and persuasion of *Nanook of the North* therefore lay in the creation of images and a narrative, which audiences could

not see past and accepted as true, particularly the Canadian state bureaucrats who at the time assumed the removal of Inuit people from their lands would culturally and morally save them (Marcus, 1995).

Marcus' critical examination of the Inuit case in *Relocating Eden* connects, in part, with the analysis of *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film* by Carl Platinga who argued that: "Nonfiction films are not imitations or representations, but constructed representations" (Platinga, 2015, p. 37; Marcus, 1995). Relatedly, was Platinga's suggestion that the elements of nonfiction, specifically the semblance of stories that construct real life scenarios, alter and adjust according to the historical period in which they are produced. Underpinning the historical period is whether or not "nonfiction film" has a certain amount of social approval with audiences (Platinga, 2015, p. 37).

> The history of staging in nonfiction shows that the set of features, or family resemblances, we associate with nonfiction film constantly recede and expand, as practices gain and lose acceptance. In light of this, it is most fruitful to think of nonfiction not in terms of unchanging or universal intrinsic properties, but as a socially constructed category that is fluid and malleable; it changes with history (Plantinga, 2015, p. 37).

A second point raised in Platinga's analysis is the collective nature of nonfiction film in being "a group project" made for various purposes and shown in different settings, as opposed to strictly at the cinema (Platinga, 2015, p. 1). According to the author, the result of this diversity is that each nonfiction work needs to be considered within the social, cultural, and political context in which the filmmaker and the film are located.

> [The] work of nonfiction is a group project, which, after its initial release, can be used for a variety of purposes depending on the context of exhibition. One of the tasks of the nonfiction student or scholar is to investigate how producers, distributors, exhibitors, and audiences employ films and videos in the realm of human action. However, if the uses of nonfiction are as varied as the films themselves, theory alone cannot circumscribe the

work's possible uses, or determine *a priori* the ideological effect of a text or genre. History and criticism must place movements, filmmakers, and individual films in their contexts. Theory at best supplies conceptual tools (Plantinga, 2015, pp. 1-2).

With regard to Platinga's commentary on making sense of a nonfiction film and its meaning as part of the social environment in which it was created, *3 Review* contextualises the knowledge traditions that *Sanjha Punjab* has drawn from. Explicitly, the review of the knowledge centres on mapping the contours of three kinds of literary and nonfiction film approaches in Punjabi short stories (Ali, 2022; Ahmad, 2022; Singh, 1989; Sandhu, 2019), Punjabi social realism film (Singh, 2011), and Iranian social realism film (Panahi, 2015; Kiarostami, 1997; Makhmalbaf, 1996).

Related documentary methods

It is here that a brief explanation on related documentary methods is necessary to connect the study with, and locate it among, the broad field of documentary studies and nonfiction film (Barnouw, 1993; Barsam, 1992; Bruzzi, 2000; Corner, 1996; MacDougall, 1998; Macdonald and Cousins, 1996; Nichols, 1992, 2001; Renov, 1993, 2004; Rosenthal and Corner, 2005; Winston, 1995). One insightful book, *The Adventure of the Real*, by visual anthropologist Paul Henley, examines the oeuvre of ethnographic film by French filmmaker Jean Rouch (Henley, 2009). Relevant to the cultural protocols and creative processes used for *Sanjha Punjab* is Henley's observation that Rouch was a "self-taught" filmmaker who was not altogether bound to any particular school of thought or methodological approach (Henley, 2009, p. 231). Rather, Henley observed that Rouch "thought of himself primarily as a poet and always emphasized the overriding importance of improvisation, of spontaneity, and more generally, of freedom from any form of constraint in filmmaking" (Henley, 2009, pp. 231-232).

By no means am I comparing the community-oriented and collaborative approach used to create *Sanjha Punjab* to the legacy of Jean Rouch. More accurately I am suggesting that an organic process of allowing this hybrid documentary to

naturally evolve according to voluntary exchanges between characters strengthened the cultural authenticity and believability of the collective storywork. The filmmaking approaches of docudrama, docufiction, and ethnofiction all contain to differing degrees overlapping features with hybrid documentary, especially blurring the boundary between documentary and fiction methods and techniques. However, as a hybrid documentary and a nonfiction film, I attempt to clarify that *Sanjha Punjab's* closest connection lies with ethnofiction.

Methodology wise, docudramas generally present scripted and fictional screen stories performed by actors, which are based on what can be considered real events that actually happened (Rosenthal, 1999; McLane, 2012). Often docudramas merge hybrid documentary and drama through fictional reenactments of characters and events, which incorporate historical details, or reconstructions of previous experiences filmed on location where incidents took place. Comparably, docufiction captures a certain form of documentary reality. Methods can include filming interviews with people and finding historical footage, and then assembling the material with reenactments and dramatisations of past occurrences performed by actors (Rhodes and Springer, 2005; Cahill and Caminati, 2021).

Ethnofiction in reference to the blending of ethnographic film and docufiction is the closest approach to that of the hybrid documentary *Sanjha Punjab* for an express reason: that being, the use of improvised dialogue among non-actors playing themselves on camera (Evans and Glass, 2013; Close, 2018; Gruber, 2023). Although conflating documentary and fiction techniques can often call into question the authenticity and accuracy of ethnofiction (Gruber, 2023), *Sanjha Punjab* is one such hybrid documentary that has prioritised culture-specific sensemaking by filming in the Punjabi language with the intention of appealing to Punjabi language audiences. The positionality of the researcher as an insider of the migrant Punjabi community in South Auckland, and the spontaneous exchanges between non-actors in their mother tongue, has meant that the emotional and contextual sense of what is said and why has been perceived by Punjabi audiences as symbolising cultural truth and social reality.

3
REVIEW

Contours of knowledge

This chapter presents a contextual review of knowledge that I have drawn from, and synthesised, to give shape to the set of cultural ideas underpinning the hybrid documentary, *Sanjha Punjab*. In many ways, the chapter makes a case for the contours of knowledge I am surveying in the short stories and film created about the Punjab and her people to be conceptualised as moving back-and-forth between what is real and what is imagined into existence; or alternatively, the present time we live in and the social memory that we are socially condition by during childhood and adolescence via our parents and grandparents stories and as a consequence carry with us, sometimes burdensomely, throughout our adult and senior years.

Lived realities and social imaginaries can collide and collapse into a blurry, hazy entanglement of what we are socialised to believe according to dominant narratives controlled by popular media and populist politics. Comparatively, what we make of truth by relating our lived experience and understanding of the social world we create and inhabit is shaped by language. For Punjabi language speakers, there is a catch to acquiring a personal sense of laying to rest the partition violence and bloodbath by believing in, and committing to practicing in everyday life, relationship repair between Punjabi Pakistanis and Punjabi Indians.

To take practical steps, I believe, requires of human beings to propel themselves beyond real life borders that are both physical and psychological barriers in the Punjabi social world of post-partition times. I do accept that this proposition is informed by my subjectivity and identity with respect to “spatial experiences” as a Punjabi Pakistani male who has moved across borders to settle in a community of predominantly Punjabi Indian migrants in South Auckland (Worth et al, 2016, p. ix). However, the fundamental idea behind making *Sanjha Punjab* was to explore the cultural truth of Punjabi males who had emigrated from India and Pakistan to Aotearoa New Zealand. Through acts of migration and movement, I was interested in how migrant Punjabi men had arrived at a place where physically and psychologically they found themselves in a favourable

position to rekindle ties to one another (Dashtipour, 2012). How might these new relationships have refashioned their social identity?

By restoring relationships, and in the process, renewing collective identity and enlarging the parameters of community, a shift in group thinking and social behaviour occurs. Therefore, social identity as British sociologist Peter J. Hemming has argued is not static and fixed in time, but rather, flexible and changeable across “space and place” (Hemming, 2016, p. 55).

> Social identities are thus subject to continual negotiation and are performed across a range of social spaces and at different stages of the life course. They are also structured through interaction with other social identities via complex processes of intersectionality (the interplay between social differences, often resulting in multiple forms of (dis)advantage). This is why identity is so enmeshed with space and place. It cannot be understood as fixed and ascribed, but rather fluid and socially and spatially contingent (Hemming, 2016, p. 55).

On noting that, this chapter reviews literature through an interpretive reading of Punjabi social memory in the selected fiction of Nadir Ali, Zubair Ahmad, Khushwant Singh, and Waryam Singh Sandhu. Secondly, it reviews film by drawing out the visual language in a variety of eastern realism cinema created by Punjabi filmmaker Gurvinder Singh, and Iranian filmmakers Jafar Panahi, Abbas Kiarostami, and Mohsen Makhmalbaf. My interpretive view on visual language refers expressly to the four practice components of positioning, emphasising, framing, and representing the characters *in* their stories and surroundings (Edgar et al, 2018; Mottahedeh, 2008). The emphasis on *in* suggests the characters of *Sanjha Punjab* dwell within the narratives and places they tell about themselves in relation to how they experience and know the Punjabis, as their cultural priority, or their preferred cultural and language group with whom they identify (Amoamo, 2024).

The contours of *Sanjha Punjab* therefore incorporate the lives of generations before us in silhouettes of lived experience and meaning captured in the social memory of Punjabi writers who are discussed in this chapter. However, the film adapts the visual language of Punjabi and Iranian filmmakers, of which a selection of film is

discussed in this *Review*, to reconfigure the meaning of *Sanjha Punjab*, a united Punjab, in a contemporary, diasporic setting.

I will explain what I mean here by drawing from Iranian film critic Negar Mottahedeh and a certain position she takes in her book, *Displaced Allegories: Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema* (Mottahedeh, 2008; Metz, 1975, 1982). Put simply, the author argues that the visual language of what is now called Iranian new cinema emerged after the expulsion of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979 and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran first led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. It therefore presents a cinematic language that is not universal or dictated by American Hollywood cinema. Rather, the visual language of new cinema as it is often referred to is context-specific to post-revolution times of state censorship and regulation. Hence, this style of film manufactures a cinema language informed by the national identity of the Iranian Islamic Republic.

To relate her discussion to western film theory, Mottahedeh borrows from Christian Metz's book *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Metz, 1982) to argue that: "Metz maintains that while film is traditionally presented as a narrative or a story, it is the film's discourse and the very principle of that discourse's effectiveness that obliterates traces of filmic enunciation and hence imbues film with coherence and continuity as "story" (Mottahedeh, 2008, p. 171). Film theorist Mary Ann Doane writes of Christian Metz's notion that cinema language embodies *The Imaginary Signifier* (Metz, 1975, 1982) that for Metz, "the image is defined primarily by an analogy with the real" (Doane, 2018, p. 285).

My interpretation of Mottahedeh's centring of "the film's discourse" is that Iranian new cinema, similar to new cinema genres in India and Pakistan, are introspective screen stories focused on creating authentic insider accounts of living *in* the story, or being situated *in* the discourse (Mottahedeh, 2018, p. 171). Discourse in the Foucauldian sense gestures to the social and culture-informed system that constructs and regulates knowledge, meaning, and truth in that given community, society, or state in which new cinema is produced (Foucault, 2010). By no means am I saying that Iranian realism cinema , or new cinema as Mottahedeh puts it, is the same

as social realism film created in India and Pakistan (Nair, 1989, 2012; Ray, 1955, 1956, 1959; Sadiq, 2022; Singh, 2011, 2015, 2022). To a certain extent, I am suggesting that an overlapping approach can be seen in positioning the story or the discourse *in* an authentic setting and time to accurately reflect the social world and power structures, and a highly stratified general public governing over ordinary people's lives.

In my home region of South Asia, Elora Halim Chowdhury and Esha Niyogi De edited a collection of essays called *South Asian Filmscapes: Transregional Encounters* where the key theme of transregional cinema was inspired by synthesising family and filmic stories of the 1947 partition of British India and the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war (Chowdhury and De, 2020). The situation my own people, the Punjabis, have found themselves in is that no matter what academic discipline and genre of literature and film we are working in, ingrained in our social psyche is partition, the origin moment of a modern history underlining that very point in time when descendants of partition survivors were deliberately cut off from their past.

Notably, post-partition generations do not possess direct memory and lived experience of the devastating event of partition. Rather, they live with the trauma of a militarised hard border, one designed to permanently separate families, communities, and ethnic groups who speak dialects of Punjabi rooted in tribal, clan, and kinship based territories. Undeniably, maintaining a linear border counts on the perpetual manufacturing of fear among ordinary people. In my lifetime of forty-plus years, aggravating the anxiety of a full-scale war erupting between India and Pakistan, two nuclear armed states, were Islamist and Hindutva bodies bolstered by a constant barrage of news reports stressing armed conflict and terrorist attacks (Khan, 2017).

Reflecting on Chowdhury and De's book, *South Asian Filmscapes*, the critical question is, how have Punjabi filmmakers challenged and changed attitudes, outlooks, and ways of thinking by crossing physical and psychological borders in their visual storywork? (Chowdhury and De, 2020). By no means am I delimiting this rich collection of essays to simply putting a number on Punjabi filmmakers who have actually filmed human beings in villages and cities on either side of the India Pakistan border. However, I am suggesting the "cinematic imagination" the authors speak of when

asserting linear national identities are disrupted by films and filmmakers moving across borders, thereby impacting audiences with their "cross-fertilisation" of cultures and ideas, can operate in a slightly different manner in social realism cinema (Chowdhury and De, 2020, p. 3).

For example, Ashvin Kumar's short film *Little Terrorist* went beyond visualising the border seen in a barbed wire fence and armed border guards in a watchtower (Kumar, 2004). The point of making *Little Terrorist* was not about audiences seeing on-screen how the India Pakistan border has demarcated desert land in Rajasthan, India, from the Thar desert in Sindh, Pakistan (Kumar, 2004). In their article *Humanizing the line*, T. S. Gangothri and P. Boopathi explained the social realism context of visualising the physical border in *Little Terrorist* for audiences to witness and take in (Gangothri and Boopathi, 2024; Kumar, 2004). An allegorical element appears where a small story of beyond the fence line is revealed.

> Jamal's bonding with Bhola and Rani in a very brief period explicates how the "psychological border" constructed between the people of the two nations should be demolished to inculcate the past relationships that existed before the birth of borders (Gangothri and Boopathi, 2024, p. 6).

Essentially, the film's message was the psychological border between people outweighs the physical boundary (Tripathi, 2016). Further to this, the main character Jamal is a Pakistani Muslim boy who shows the audience that "children can be the agents in rebuilding peace and relationships" (Gangothri and Boopathi, 2024, p. 6). Reaching beyond the psychological border of social conditioning, this child freely embraces Bhola and Rani, a Hindu Brahmin father and daughter, for helping him to climb through the fence line that he crossed to retrieve a ball and back to his family living in a Pakistani border village.

Social realism cinema therefore does not necessarily play to the cinematic imagination that Chowdhury and De mention (Chowdhury and De, 2020), one where the social world is meticulously orchestrated for viewer experience (MacDougall, 2019;

Singh, 2018). On this point, filmmaker Jafar Panahi explains the case of Iranian social realism, or what Negar Mottahedeh discusses as new cinema made after the 1979 Islamic revolution (Panahi, 2019; Mottahedeh, 2008).

> The Iranian cinema treats social subjects. Because you're showing social problems, you want to be more realistic and the give the actual, the real aesthetics of the situation. If the audience feels the same as what they see, then they would be more sympathetic. Because you're talking about the humanitarian aspects of things, it will touch your heart (Panahi, 2019, pp. 55-56).

Given that social subjects is an interchangeable term for social problems projected on-screen, the filmmaker's task is to reveal how the reality of the people is socially constructed through their daily conditions of existence (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). The point of difference then for social realism cinema is, in Panahi's words, "if the audience feels the same as what they see" (Panahi, 2019, p. 55). Hence, the film is not being staged for the audience to passively receive, but rather, similar to documentary realism the audience is expected to engage with and mentally process "what they see" by using the contents of their own lives as sensemaking tools (Panahi, 2019, p. 55).

When speaking about the reasons motivating him to make *Little Terrorist*, Ashvin Kumar stressed the present-day absurdity and irony of two countries of people whom are each other's closest relatives in terms of heritage and culture, "pointing nuclear weapons at each other" (Kumar cited in Bichu, n.d.).

> I have always felt strongly about the tensions between India and Pakistan. It is absurd and ironical that these two countries with such similar customs and cultures end up pointing nuclear weapons at each other. I wanted to reflect this irony through my film and wanted to show there is hope at the end of the tunnel (Kumar cited in Bichu, n.d.).

In Kumar's eyes, the "hope at the end of the tunnel" is symbolised in children who potentially can be resocialised by a new generation's desire for peace and

amicable people-to-people relationships (Kumar cited in Bichu, n.d.). Notably, and paraphrasing Jafar Panahi's sentiments, the distinctiveness of social realism cinema is the filmmaker's will to present "social subjects" they have personally grappled with to audiences whose everyday reality is constructed by comparable "social problems" (Panahi, 2019, p. 55).

Punjabi short stories

The fiction genre of literature where Punjabi writers have thrived is the short story in Punjabi and English, compositions that sit between fifteen hundred to seven thousand words. In spite of several theories as to why short story writing is the favoured literary field (Murphy, 2008, 2021), T. S. Tasneem made a stand-out observation of Punjabi fiction: the style of writing "has been inclined to engrossing the mind of the reader in a story well told" (Tasneem, 2002, p. 55). My belief is that the short story genre epitomises "a story well told," and does this by storytelling methods that appeal to not only the Punjabi writer but their intended audience, Punjabi readers. To explain what I mean, Rana Nayar described the Punjabi fiction of a celebrated Punjabi writer Gurdial Singh in a context-specific way.

> What I'm suggesting is that the real significance of Gurdial Singh's narrative art lies in fact that it bridges the gap between the pre-colonial, oral forms and their colonial or post-colonial articulations in the written form (Nayar, 2012, p. xi).

From my perspective, the short stories reviewed here by Nadir Ali, Zubair Ahmad, Khushwant Singh, and Waryam Singh Sandhu do more than connect the art of oral storytelling in Punjabi to written storying. It could be argued that the written form embodies the approach to traditional storytelling. For example, T. S. Tasneem argued that in terms of narratology, the structure and function of the story, Punjabi writers are "indifferent to the narrative devices [and] disdainful of formalism and structuralism" (Tasneem, 2002, p. 11). Instead, Punjabis prefer to focus solely on the storytelling

methods they will deploy to effectively and persuasively "tell their tales" (Tasneem, 2002, p. 11).

> The story is generally told from the omniscient point of view. It is supposed to have a conscious moral purpose also. …Techniques differ and the methods of narration vary but the aim has always been to spin an authentic plot (Tasneem, 2002, p. 11, 55).

For Punjabi short story writers, the way the story is carried to reach readers – that is, through social exchanges between characters and their relationships, surroundings, and memories – is more important than how the narrative is arranged and works on the page. With that said, the selection of short stories that I relate here have been interpreted through a certain lens: the role of social memory in recounting the past in the present. For each piece, the main theme or the moral of the story has been reworked in part to fit different stories in *Sanjha Punjab,* which I discuss further in *5 Commentary*.

Nadir Ali's *Saint of the Sparrows*

The late Nadir Ali was a prominent Punjabi poet and novelist. His collection of short stories in *Hero and Other Stories* was translated from Punjabi into English by Amna Ali and Moazzam Sheik for the express purpose of reaching worldwide readership (Ali, 2022). My personal experience of reading an English translation of a Punjabi text first, and then cross-referencing by reading the original Punjabi version, is that more often than not the English translation loses the culture and language specific essence of the story. An English translation does, however, allow people who do not speak and read Punjabi to look at literature that has been written to keep stories of the old Punjab alive; stories of the Punjab before partition; stories which are diminishing in both oral and written formats. In saying that, I do feel that the English translation is secondary to the Punjabi text the story was composed in (Filisi, Tonga, and Mukhtar, 2024). This is because the English sensemaking of the story does not naturally or

automatically translate into the collective sense that Punjabi audiences take from the Punjabi language version.

As a Punjabi writer, Nadir Ali was known among fellow writers and literary critics for drawing inspiration from real people whom he met or real events he lived through, which filled his storywork with a deeply personal touch and a believable quality. The characters in *Hero and Other Stories* are a diverse cross-section of Punjabi society ranging from heroes, landlords, peasants, wrestlers, lovers, murderers to bandits (Ali, 2022). Importantly to Punjabi readers, the characters come across true-to-life and their respective communities unpretentious, an aspect of characterisation that Ali portrays with critical insight into the social reality of people's lives in past and present times.

Ali's short story *Saint of Sparrows*, or *Pir Kaawan Aala* in the Punjabi text, shines a light on the social consequences of abrupt cultural transformation in the Punjab (Ali, 2022, pp. 37-43). The author is concerned about the rapidly vanishing *Punjabiyat* or Punjabi culture, along with deeply held beliefs and practices around saints and Sufis. Ali does not starkly separate folk culture from Sufi culture for his Punjabi social world sees folk and religious traditions as intertwined and mutually supporting. He tells the story of Nurpur, a Punjabi city and the fading legacy of the city's saint, Shah Sheikhu. Once known as a vibrant place of grand festivals and fairs, Nurpur's charm is dying. Once the saint's tomb was the city's centrepiece. Now, the tombstone is perched on the periphery and has lost all importance as a monument of cultural identity. The yearly festival that was commemorated the saint has ceased from being celebrated, emphasising the loss of cultural traditions that have given way to the modernity.

The Sufi saint is a mysterious but simple character. A solitary man who lived on goat milk and millet, his compassion and healing powers were legendary. The people of the city believed the spiritual power he used to heal the sick had helped the city to prosper and grow. Equally respected and revered by Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, the saint symbolises unity and harmony among the city's communities. This account of Shah Sheikhu is a relatable tale aligned with the way in which the Punjab has been

described as not only the land of five rivers but the land of saints, Sufis, and gurus (Shamil, 2016).

The story does take a turn, however, when the daughter of a wealthy, influential man becomes romantically attracted to the saint. Tragically she dies and the saint abandons society, seeking comfort in solitude, silence, and nature, which can be perceived as an alternative version of the Punjabi folk tale of *Heer Ranjha* (Kochar, 2021; Mann, 2010). At the story's conclusion, the author explains that the saint's enduring legacy continues to inspire people, particularly in the poetry of Khadim Husain, one of his devotees. Depicting a fast changing society where modernisation and tradition coexist but not without tension and loss, Ali's underlying message is to remind readers of the diverse social tapestry and religious pluralism of the Punjab region before partition.

Zubair Ahmad's *The Estranged City*

Translated into English by Anne Murphy, an associate professor of history at the University of British Columbia, *Grieving for Pigeons: Twelve Stories of Lahore* is Zubair Ahmad's collection of short stories dedicated to being Lahori, a denizen of Lahore city (Ahmad, 2022). Ahmed is a popular short story writer in Punjabi who captures the lives and experiences of the Punjab and her peoples in post-partition communities. Born in Lahore in 1958, Ahmad was the son of partition refugees who fled from east Punjab in modern day India to west Punjab in Pakistan.

A story from this collection called *The Estranged City* takes readers on a walk through the writer's memories of Lahore, an ancient city once considered to be the urban centre of Punjabi politics, arts, and culture in bygone eras (Ahmad, 2022, pp. 97-109). Lahore is portrayed as a city undergoing significant modernisation. Old familiar haunts are vanishing and being built over with new structures leaving the writer feeling alienated and at a loss.

The story opens with the writer, whom I believe is the main character narrating the story, reflecting on the last of Lahore's old buildings and social groups that over time have faded away, creating an opening for an up-to-date, contemporary looking Lahore. Mall Road in particular stirs childhood memories that Ahmad now carries with him as an older man. There are places that no longer exist, such as Appha's tea stall in Gol Bagh, which was a popular venue for political rallies to gather. There were everyday Lahoris, like Yousafi and Jeejj, with their peculiarities and habits who paint a realistic picture of Lahori denizens. To lift his spirits, Yousafi would ride his bicycle wearing new clothes from his humble abode on Deve Smaj Road to the airport, while Jeejj would stroll from Charing Cross to Alfalah in Gol Bagh in the pouring rain.

The writer reminisces about Tollinton market's two famous coffee shops, Kabana and Capri, where people would be absorbed in conversation at all hours, writing their next poem or book, or daydreaming in the bustle and noise of city life. Ahmad fondly remembers passing by Peeju's tea house and restaurant on his way to Gol Bagh from the main post office, where the shop's upper level allowed customers to imagine they were in a Parisian café as they observed the traffic and foot-travelers moving below.

Lahore was a different city in the 1970s, a place where adolescence and young adulthood was founded on friendships, and peers would wander the neighbourhoods talking and laughing late into the evening. The writer and his friends hailed from modest backgrounds but would eagerly join acquaintances at Peeju's, an establishment for the upwardly mobile. These familiar places where locals would socialise have gone – Tollinton market, Peeju's, Cheeny's restaurant, the library. In their place stands mosques and shops. Remembering a past city of riveting conversations and warm friendships accentuates the method by which unrestrained commercial enterprise in modern times has altered and hardened the urban psyche. Walking the lanes and alleys saturated in rain, the writer longs for what is no longer there – a kind of innocence, a kind of freedom.

What we see in *The Estranged City* is an inextricable bond between the city-scape and Lahori identity where one cannot be read without the other. The writer's character

mirrors the city's character from a past era when Lahori young adults wanted to move away from the political and physical divide created by the 1947 partition. Although Lahore is an icon of the heterogeneity of Punjabi culture, as a descendant of partition refugees the writer is sensitive to conflict, which he senses in property disputes and an atmosphere of uncertainty that seizes the city of today. The main theme that Zubair Ahmad articulates is that his home city is like a writer's draft manuscript, continually being edited to add layers upon layers of post-partition history and social change. Lahore is therefore a microcosm of, and a metaphor for, the Punjab region.

Khushwant Singh's *The Voice of God*

The late Khushwant Singh was a distinguished Punjabi short story writer in English, admired for his sharp wit and direct manner of speaking cultural truth on the page. He was a keen observer and social critic of Punjabi society, and during the latter half of the twentieth century was an influential figure in Punjabi literature who crafted short stories to critique social stratification, religious fundamentalism, and corrupt politicians.

The short story *The Voice of God* is set in a made-up village of Bhamba divided into two areas of Bhamba Khurd and Bhamba Kalan. Hindu shopkeepers, Muslim labourers, Sikh peasants, and Christian domestic servants coexist peacefully in this small town (Singh, 1989, pp. 33-39). Exciting events in Bhamba are the occasional police visit and the annual gathering at the tomb of Syed Bulhey Shah, a famous Sufi poet. People from the neighbouring villages, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, attend the festivities in celebration of the Sufi poet because Bhamba was a place where irrespective of one's religion, people lived in harmony.

One afternoon, a brown station wagon arrives in Bhamba driven by Mr Forsythe, the British deputy commissioner with a special passenger Sardar Sahib Ganda Singh, a powerful landowner and honorary magistrate. Ganda Singh, a man of strategy and political ambition has come to ask for the endorsement of local authorities for his candidacy to stand in the Punjab legislative assembly elections. He

speaks highly about himself and his power, influence, and wealth, promising the town folk favours for their votes. Given his reputation for cunning and corruption, Bhamba residents are cautious but optimistic about the material benefits of having Ganda Singh as their local member of parliament.

The following day, Nationalist party candidate Kartar Singh arrives in a large off-white coloured vehicle with posters and loudspeakers, making a flamboyant denouncement of Ganda Singh and his corruption. The wealthy Nationalist party leader Seth Sukhtankar and lawyer Kartar Singh make every effort to swing the villagers to their party by criticising the rival candidate and promising to change the status quo.

As the election draws near a third candidate, Baba Ram Singh of the Kisan party, arrives in Bhamba riding a white mare. Baba Ram Singh is a revered and pious man who has spent years behind bars for his involvement in social justice movements for farming peasants and the poor. Held in high regard, the villagers listen intently as he talks about battling dishonest landlords and foreign exploitation. His morality and integrity are admirable, but despite the sincerity of his campaign he makes little headway with voters. Baba Ram Singh decides to give one last speech the day before the election, which the authorities find seditious. Immediately he is arrested and put behind bars. The villagers go to the polls on election day swayed by the material benefits promised by Ganda Singh, and changes to the status quo promised by Kartar Singh.

Ten days later, Mr Forsythe returns to Bhamba to announce the election results: more than ten thousand votes went to Ganda Singh with eight-plus thousand votes going to Kartar Singh. Baba Ram Singh lost his election candidate deposit and received seven-plus hundred votes. Forsythe proclaims that god speaks through the people's vote and the election result is god's decree. The story ends with the moral of the story being a critique of the social and political conditions that cultivate and grow absurdity in abundance. By this, Bhamba voters knowingly elected a corrupt leader while the candidate with integrity who could be trusted was rejected and arrested.

Waryam Singh Sandhu's *The Fourth Direction*

Waryam Singh Sandhu is a Punjabi writer whose short stories unpack complex social and political issues, and the human condition of struggle and resilience facing Punjabis living in rural and urban areas. His storying surveys life in east Punjab, India, against a backdrop of violence and upheaval contextualised by the partition and post-partition history of the region.

One such short story is *The Fourth Direction*, which is set amidst the civil unrest of the 1980s and 1990s in north India (Sandhu, 2019, pp. 9-29). Punjabis were living in a social and political climate of constant fear, which had escalated from a harrowing historical event: the 1984 military attack at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, a holy shrine of Sikhism, where India's armed forces killed Sikh leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his followers (Singh and Purewal, 2013). The anti-Sikh riots and killings of Punjabi Sikhs in north India that ensued after Prime Minister Indira Ghandi was murdered by her Sikh bodyguards Satwant Singh and Beant Singh for authorising the army attack on the Golden Temple is outside the scope of this study (Mandair, 2015). However, Sandhu situates *The Fourth Direction* within this despairing environment of brutality, hostility, and crisis (Sandhu, 2019).

The main character is Raj Kumar, a Punjabi Hindu who works as a clerk for the state bureaucracy in Chandigarh. Raj regularly commutes across Punjab state to Amritsar, his home district, and finds that during the train and bus trips he is consumed by anxiety. His travelling companion is Jugal, a Punjabi Sikh. Whenever they ride the bus after sunset, they understand full well that they are at risk of being attacked by militants and anti-government vigilantes. One time, half the passengers on the evening bus were wearing turbans, a religious headdress associated with Sikh militants. Even the sight of turbaned men stirs fear.

Raj remembers reading a letter from his cousin Rakesh who lives in Delhi. Rakesh writes he is afraid of visiting the Punjab as it is a place known only for bloodshed. His grandmother advised him not to travel in the fourth direction after dark for the fourth direction leads to the centre of violence. The fourth direction explains the

danger and peril that Raj and the other passengers put themselves through when commuting at night. One evening, Raj and Jugal miss the last bus and are forced to seek passage on the train. Trains are the main target of armed attacks. Raj is frightened by the sight of two Sikh men standing on the train. If a fight were to break out, he would be physically overpowered.

Just before Amritsar, the train suddenly breaks and passengers are ordered to disembark quickly without a reason. The two Sikhs are afraid and confess they are terrified of being mistaken for militants and murdered. Their vulnerability and fear highlights that irrespective of religious orientation, all Punjabis had been subjugated by state violence and militant violence, and that violence begats violence. The story ends with Raj regaining a personal sense of moral fortitude to press forward in treacherous times. No matter how petrified he feels, he must learn to control and move past an irrational fear of others. Raj comes to his own self-realisation that judging another human being based on their physical appearance and attire is not the way he wants to be, nor will prejudice ever be the cornerstone for peace.

Punjabi cinema

Iftikhar Dadi's book *Lahore Cinema: Between Realism and Fable* asserted that from the 1970s onwards in Pakistan, there were more Punjabi language films being made in Pakistan than Urdu language films (Dadi, 2022). Hence, the Lollywood cinema industry in Lahore became a commercial centre of Punjabi screen production in the post-partition era. However, due to its language-specific and regional appeal across borders, Punjabi cinema was never integrated into a national cinema that stressed Pakistani national identity, an identity that stood in direct conflict with Indian nationalism. Dadi characterised entangled elements constituting Punjabi cinema, which signify an emotional response to social change and volatile political climates sculpturing society in pre-partition and post-partition Punjab (Dadi, 2022, p. 20).

> Realism and fable, history and myth, narrative and lyric, and past and present, all are inextrcably entangled across resonating aesthetic and political sensibilities (Dadi, 2022, p. 20).

My interpretive, or should I say personal reading of the selection of Punjabi and Iranian cinema that follows, is not concerned with re-telling the film story. Alternatively, I am looking closely at the practice components of visual language, a distinctive language associated with social realism in eastern cinema contexts; cinema that is not produced in English or filmed in western communities, societies, and countries. To reiterate, practice components can be seen in the way that the filmmakers have positioned, emphasised, framed, and represented characters *in* their stories and surroundings for the purpose of revealing the authentic and real conditions of their existence (Edgar et al, 2018; Mottahedeh, 2008). Aspects of practice components from each of the Punjabi and Iranian films have been partly adapted in various stories of *Sanjha Punjab,* which I expand on in *5 Commentary*.

Gurvinder Singh's *Anhey Ghorey Da Daan*

Gurvinder Singh's Punjabi language film *Anhey Ghorey Da Daan* or *Alms for a Blind Horse* is a screen adaption of the novella *Alms in the Name of a Blind Horse* by the esteemed Punjabi writer Gurdial Singh (Singh, 2011; Singh 2016). In my view, Gurvinder Singh makes a distinct contribution to Punjabi realism cinema for interconnected reasons. Firstly, the social subject is everyday life for a marginalised Dalit community in rural Punjab confined to intergenerational poverty at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Secondly, the film treatment in a similar vein to the novella is a critique of social stratification embedded in India's caste system. By unfolding the interplay between social hierarchy, structural inequality, and the resilience of the human spirit, *Alms for a Blind Horse* offers critical insights into caste and class in Punjabi society.

The film lays bare the grim reality that Dalit farm labourers in today's world are entirely dependent on powerful landowners for income and leased land on which to live. The harsh reality that upper caste landowners can remove lower caste Dalits from

their properties at a whim is aligned with a body of social realism cinema or new cinema on class discrimination and wealth disparities (Ray, 1955, 1956, 1959; Ghatak, 1969, 1965, 1973; Mehta, 1996, 1998, 2005). *Alms for a Blind Horse* unravels two stories contained in one narrative about the uncertain fates of a Dalit father and son from a rural village in Bathinda district, east Punjab. The elderly father wakes one morning to find his humble abode is being demolished because the landlord has sold his land plots: he refuses to be evicted with his family. Meanwhile, his son who works as a rickshaw driver in the city learns the rickshaw drivers have taken strike action.

Described as slow cinema, *Anhey Ghorey Da Daan* utilises non-actors, long takes, non-narrative scenes, and minimal dialogue to draw viewers into the Dalit social world to witness the gruel of scratching out a living, poverty, and the hereditary burden of systematic oppression (Singh, 2011). The piercing silence in non-narrative scenes is used to intensify the sense of loneliness and hopelessness experienced by Dalit men and women. Singh pushes audiences to look closely at hardship and despair without a solution in sight. In parts, Dalit rickshaw drivers who have migrated to the city for waged work appear to welcome death as a practical answer to a life of misery.

The land and village setting in rural Punjab is personified as a character with a dual nature: captivating beauty and confinement to the lowly station of farm labourers. Through wide angle shots the landscape looks enchanting filmed in natural light, revealing a sense of agelessness and timelessness. But the land and the village call attention to the Dalit community being trapped by their social circumstances. The characters appear small in stature against the expansive fields of green, emphasising their helplessness within the hierarchical structure of Punjabi society.

Gurvinder Singh's *Alms for a Blind Horse* employs minimalist cinematography to illustrate the rawness of rural Punjab (Singh, 2011). Visually, the frames and sequences enhance the story’s examination of social inequality in a caste system that divides people by class, culture, and gender. The enduring strength of the human spirit to sustain family and community life in spite of subjugation is fleeting and tempered against the drudgery of day-to-day survival. Detailed and meticulously planned camera shots are carried throughout the film to maintain the power differences between

upper and lower castes. The larger share of scenes are focused on the Dalit community for the story to be told from below, from their perspective as the lower caste, and to underline their vulnerable existence and inferior social position. Contrastingly, the upper caste is shown from an elevated perspective, suggesting that this group holds a superior social position in the Punjab.

Iranian cinema

Film analysts Negar Mottahedeh and Michelle Langford have couched Iranian new cinema or cinema made after the 1979 Islamic revolution within a system of cultural change that has intensified, and in some respects normalised, the use of allegory or stories masked within a story (Mottahedeh, 2008; Langford, 2019). Langford's theory on *Allegory in Iranian Cinema* develops the conventional argument that Islamic state censorship has triggered forms of allegorical expression in film (Langford, 2019). The author suggests that allegory is not singly a political act but represents modes of expression and interpretation traced to Persian poetry and cultural traditions of imparting deeper meaning on social subjects by indirect forms of communication. Hence, Iranian filmmakers such as Jafar Panahi and Mohsen Makhmalbaf use allegory in cinema modes of expression and interpretation to critique state laws and social norms.

By comparison, William Brown captured the essence of Jafar Panahi's *This Is Not a Film* by applying his theory of non-cinema (Panahi, 2011; Brown, 2018, pp. 213-224). A nonfiction film shot partly on an iPhone, *This Is Not a Film* was set in Panahi's Tehran apartment while he was under house arrest for allegedly making anti-government films (Panahi, 2011). Non-cinema alludes to what Brown terms "'oppositional' film making in the digital age," or rather, the "deliberately non-mainstream practices of filmmakers" who are descendants of diverse peoples and places in the world (Brown, 2016, p. 105). Non-cinema is therefore cinematic by methods of the production and post-production of no-budget and low-budget digital film, or poor people's film made on inexpensive digital cameras, iPhones, and smartphones, and without or with very

little capital (Brown, 2018). Also, as Brown stresses, non-cinema filmmaking is a conscious position by which the filmmaker is deliberately dealing with social subjects that are "excluded from cinema" for "political/ideological" and cultural reasons (Brown, 2016, p. 104).

Trent Griffiths connects the theoretical approaches of allegory and non-cinema to analyse, in a similar way to William Brown, Jafar Panahi's *This Is Not a Film* through the practice of reflexivity (Panahi, 2011, Griffiths, 2015). Here, the author suggests that filming in an environment of strict state censorship has meant that Panahi has perfected the art of "saying things without appearing to have said them" (Griffiths, 2015). Griffiths explains that in the case of Iranian new cinema reflexivity, or the self-examination of how one's beliefs and values impact on the creative project, serves two roles. Firstly, reflexivity forges an imagined space between the film narrative and the reality of people's lives, and relatedly, the practice of "reflexive distance" categorises the film as "the product of" the environment in which the work was created (Griffiths, 2015, p. 31).

> …their distinct neorealist style affords a reflexive distance between the stories told and the social reality that serves as their backdrop, muting or qualifying any political elements running through those stories as 'just' stories; on the other hand that same reflexivity implicitly codes the films as the product of a politically restrictive culture (Griffiths, 2015, p. 31).

Without a doubt, the Iranian social and cultural context in which social realism cinema is created in the Farsi language is different to and distinct from Punjabi language film. Nevertheless, some overlapping aspects do emerge in the practice components of how characters *in* their stories are framed and represented to niche audiences of Farsi speakers in Iran, irrespective of their ethnicity – Persian, Lurs, Azerbaijani, Turkmen, Baloch, Kurds, Dari, Pashtun, Tajiki. In *5 Commentary* I particularise overlapping aspects, but the point I am making here is that relating to a niche audience *in* their language with screen stories that are culturally authentic is a vital aspect of social realism film.

Jafar Panahi's *Taxi*

The Farsi language film *Taxi* by Jafar Panahi has been carefully crafted to allegorically express two stories in one. At the forefront, audiences encounter the social reality of living under the Islamic regime in present-day Tehran, the capital of Iran, from the perspective of a taxi driver played by Panahi himself. Behind the front story lies a social commentary on the production of digital film and rules on what can and cannot be filmed – a critique of state prohibitions placed around filming reality. In addition, the commentary extends to looking at reasons behind an increased consumption of American Hollywood cinema sold on the black market. The mobile studio where filming takes place is inside Panahi's taxi weaving through dense traffic in the streets of Tehran. A small dashboard camera allows audiences to look out the windscreen and see ordinary Tehranis passing by in everyday street scenes, while cameras set up inside the moving vehicle turn viewers into something like surveillance operators who are watching, listening to, and analysing personal conversations in the cab.

Panahi is no stranger to confrontational social strategies for making film. As Judit Pieldner has argued, three of his films made under house arrest, *This Is Not a Film* (Panahi, 2011), *Closed Curtain* (Panahi, 2013), and *Taxi Tehran* (Panahi, 2015) exemplify Panahi's will "to reformulate the relationship between cinema and the "real" [by] defying the limitations of filmmaking in astounding ways" (Pieldner, 2018, p. 103). Focusing on *Taxi*, the line drawn between reality and fiction is indistinguishable by the filmmaker casting and framing himself as the main character. The diverse characters and social interactions bring Iran's social problems to light, especially a conversation with human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh. Sotoudeh, who was sentenced to serve thirty-eight years in Qarchak women's prison and one-hundred and forty-eight lashes, leaves Panahi with hopeful sentiments (Choat, 2024). Before disembarking the taxi, she places a red rose stem on the dashboard and remarks: "This is for the people of cinema because the people of cinema can be relied on" (Panahi, 2015, 1:13:00 mins). Her passing words are intended to highlight the critical role of realism film.

The appearance of using a covert method of filming adds a sense of urgency to Panahi's social commentary. At one level, it draws attention to camera surveillance in closed societies, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the separation of powers between the state, the military, and the Sharia judicial system is obscured. Although in another way, covert filming on digital cameras and mobile phones, even in Islamic countries where public use of the internet is tightly controlled by the state, shows the power of digital technology in the hands of people from below, the masses.

The practical method of using non-actors and integrating improvised dialogue into different sequences and scenes enhances what Farsi speaking audiences would consider authentic and real, thereby creating an immersive experience for Iranian viewers. *Taxi* affirms the resilience of artistic expression under adverse living conditions with Panahi risking his personal safety to do what is within his power to create and distribute his film. *Taxi* verifies that arthouse cinema and social criticism can be part-and-parcel of one another. Panahi goes out of his way to make the daily exchanges, struggles, and simple joys of Iranian people relevant to his own people, and accessible to western audiences interested in an insider's story. By doing so, *Taxi* contests western media assumptions about Iran by showing Iranians are real people, where most have ordinary everyday lives but are knowledgeable of their surroundings.

Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry*

Taste of Cherry is a Farsi language film by Abbas Kiarostami, which uses certain techniques to ask philosophical questions about the meaning of life on the one hand, and the meaning of taking one's life on the other (Kiarostami, 1997). The narrative resembles a folktale interwoven with principles of Sufism. Freeing the human spirit from sin and acquiring saintly qualities to reach the divine oneness of god resonates through the main character's internal battle over whether or not to take his own life.

The storyline is simple but powerful: Mr Badii, a middle-age, middle-class professional drives his Range Rover around the outskirts of Tehran searching for the right person whom he can ask to help him. He intends to commit suicide by overdosing

on pills, and has dug himself a grave in the side of a hill. The problem is he needs someone trustworthy to check on whether he has gone through with his plan in the morning. If so, they are to bury him properly. As Badii drives and searches, he meets three prospective helpers whom he offers a large sum of money for their work.

The first prospect was a Kurdish soldier, the second an Afghani seminarian, and the third an Azeri taxidermist. The arrangement of characters representing different ethnic groups and fields of work is deliberate and meaningful. Primarily, the ethnicities of the characters is a reference to displaced peoples, or identity groups who have been alienated from homelands due to war or national borders cutting through their territories. Concomitantly, their vocations are signposts that point to functions of Iranian state and society: the soldier signifies nationalism, the trainee Imam denotes religion, whereas the taxidermist who agrees to bury Badii because the cash will help his sick son, represents the real material world.

Kiarostami's visual storytelling carries the audience along a deep-thinking trail by challenging people to examine their beliefs about life and death, explicitly religious doctrines on suicide and cardinal sin. Elements of Sufism are ingrained in Badii's proposed burial by way that he laboriously seeks out the right person to fill in his grave and give him a proper burial, so to speak. By utilising minimalist cinematography, Kiarostami engineers a deep meditative atmosphere with long shots following Badii's car driving a circular circuit over and over again, until viewers are left to their own devices to decide on where they stand.

Notably, the closing scene of Badii lying in his grave and looking up at a full moon is ruptured by breaking the fourth wall or in this case, crossing over the invisible divide between non-actors and audiences. In this sense, the last frame fades out to a camcorder recording of Badii played by Homayoun Ershadi smoking a cigarette on the set with Abbas Kiarostami, Jafar Panahi, and the rest of the film crew operating their camera and sound equipment. A young troop of Iranian soldiers, including Afshin Khorshid Bakhtiari who played the Kurdish soldier, are taking a break from training.

Long shots of the hills encircling Tehran with Badii's car rolling along the ridges and slopes manufactures intrigue among viewers, which complements the mood of questioning the truth about human existence. By connecting audiences to the main character's existential journey, close-up shots of Badii's face bear a resemblance to the tortured soul. Using the Range Rover as a mobile studio from which to film Badii and other characters in their stories and surroundings brings the probing question of whether Badii will end his life into sharp focus. Frequently the camera cuts back and forth from the driver to the passenger to not only draw attention to the different perspectives and positions of characters, but so audiences have time getting to know them in a familiar setting, the front seat of a moving vehicle. *Taste of Cherry* is a poetic exploration of life's big questions in which audiences are invited to meditate on the human condition. The minimalist approach to visual storytelling elevates the film's message, transforming the images into philosophical film art.

Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *A Moment of Innocence*

A Farsi language film by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, *A Moment of Innocence* hazes the line distinguishing between reality, fiction, and documentary realism (Makhmalbaf, 1996). The film is centred on Makhmalbaf reconstructing his past as a young man in the late 1970s who joined the Islamic revolutionary movement of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini against the Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The Islamic revolution, as it is popularly called, led to regime change and the instatement of Ayatollah Khomeini as the supreme leader of Iran in 1979. During this period, Makhmalbaf stabbed a police officer who survived the attack, and was sentenced to five years imprisonment.

Makhmalbaf undertook a unique storytelling approach by firstly, casting himself and the retired police officer Mirhadi Tayebi whom he attacked and injured twenty years ago to play themselves reconstructing the past. He also recruited non-actors to play himself and Tayebi as the young men who had experienced the attack and lived with the consequences, albeit in different ways. The dividing line between the past and present was effectively collapsed on-screen with Makhmalbaf and Tayebi training their

younger selves, the non-actors, on separate occasions to perform their distinct perspectives on how the incident played out two decades ago. Significantly, they offer different views on what actually took place that day as the reenactment unfolds on camera. As the plot develops, Tayebi is bothered by what he perceives to be a secondary role in the film. Irking him most is having to learn the truth of the matter: the girl whom he liked and was with Makhmalbaf that day was party to his plan to attack the police officer. The multi-layered message communicated through the reenactment of events is reconciling the truth, the partiality of memory, and the emotional pain of forgiveness.

A Moment of Innocence received critical acclaim mainly because of the method by which the film was socially constructed around exploring the past in the present, and the tension between personal views and political ideologies (Makhmalbaf, 1996; Mills, 2000). The film practice is deeply reflexive in which the filmmaker literally revisits on-screen the reasons behind his past actions in an attempt to answer why he succumbed to religious political ideology. Audiences see the intricate process of reconstructing the past alongside the personal struggles of Makhmalbaf and Tayebi in reliving their social reality of two decades ago. For example, viewers see clapperboards and Makhmalbaf directing the set and while looking at what is in front of them the line blurs between filmmaker, storyteller, and main character.

The frames and sequences used to make *A Moment of Innocence* are mainly long takes and handheld tracking shots to follow characters through the streets of Tehran, which intensify the social realism style and storying (Makhmalbaf, 1996). Makhmalbaf's decision to cast non-actors engenders cultural authenticity in the sense that the screenplay is raw and appears in part to be improvised dialogue. Moreover, filming in real locations allows Farsi speaking audiences to identify and connect to places, street scenes, and markets in Tehran by a minimalist approach that concentrates on the characters in their living environment.

4
DESIGN

Creative research system

> How does meaning get into the image? Where does it end? And if it ends, what is there *beyond*? (Barthes, 1977, p. 32).

In his book chapter on the *Rhetoric of Image*, Roland Barthes posed a critical question, which is a recurring theme in the nonfiction film *Sanjha Punjab* and the exegetical explanation of ideas and practices used to create the film. Essentially Barthes asked: what is beyond the meaning we see, the meaning that makes sense of in an image? (Barthes, 1977, pp. 32-51). As Barthes argued, images present a system of signs. But in the case of *Sanjha Punjab,* the knowledge required to decode and make sense of the signs contained in images "is heavily cultural" (Barthes, 1977, p. 34). Having said that, this chapter details the creative research system that was designed to make *Sanjha Punjab* with the explanations and sensemaking being limited to the system of signs encompassed and comprehended in the images.

The perimeter around the idea that a much larger story exists beyond the screen means that this very claim is dependent on Punjabi audiences and their willingness to utilise "heavily cultural" knowledge to connect what they see to intergenerational social memory retained in family and community stories (Barthes, 1977, p. 34). In many ways, the relationship between the Punjabi characters *in* their stories and the Punjabi audiences who are making sense of what they see and hear constructs a reflexive process. In this regard, Trent Griffiths argued that the distinguishing feature of Iranian new cinema is reflexivity (Griffiths, 2015, p. 30).

> Reflexively considering the process of film-making and playing with the lines between life, fiction, reality and fabrication has become a hallmark of Iranian cinema since the 1979 revolution (Griffiths, 2015, p. 30).

Relevant to *Sanjha Punjab*, reflexivity plays out through the concept and practice of consciousness or self-awareness. I refer here to myself as the filmmaker and creative researcher where knowingly and intentionally I have endeavoured to collapse the border separating documentary and fiction. That being so, I am mindful of the filming techniques that have been organised to make the film realistic and true-to-life for Punjabi audiences. Subsequently, reflexivity also incorporates one particular part in the film that attempts to make viewers, whether they be Punjabi or general audiences, aware of the camerawork process.

Specifically, I am drawing attention to the ending of *Sanjha Punjab* where the final credit roll is brought up on-screen. Alongside the credit roll, a scene plays of myself with the film crew, Rewi Amoamo and Niko Meredith. We appear to be filming at Takanini Gurdwara in South Auckland. Rewi, with a GoPro action camera in hand, rotates in a full circle capturing the circumference of the Sikh holy place where we are standing, and then stops to frame a shot of the three of us gesturing through the camera to the audience. Whether we were conducting a real film shoot or not is secondary to the fact that breaking the fourth wall by looking at the camera, and acknowledging that audiences will be looking at the screen was a reflexive strategy aimed at initiating self-awareness.

Having said that, this chapter emphasises the methods selected for the methodological toolkit, methods that performed the work of community-oriented filmmaking with migrant Punjabi men in South Auckland. The project design was organised by a Punjabi-centred methodology named after the film title, *Sanjha Punjab*, whereby culture-specific methods were applied at three distinct stages in the project: preparation, production, and post-production. The primary methods comprised of the Punjabi language in various dialects combined with well-established and warm community relationships between the me as the researcher, and community members playing themselves as film characters. Other creative research instruments of collective sensemaking and reflexivity were not detached from the culture-specific methods, but rather, synthesised within the methodology toolkit.

Explicitly in terms of reflexivity, I was mindful to reflect on my relationships with each of the characters before and during the filmmaking process, and outside of these experiences to contemplate how their personal lives along with mine had informed the markers of Punjabi social identity we had co-constructed in stories, songs, music, poetry, and dance. These signposts of social identity – storytelling, singing, reciting poetry, dancing – shaped the artistic arrangement of the film and communicated deeper meanings to Punjabi language audiences; meanings that came from a greater narrative that endured beyond the screen in memories and stories that have survived within families and communities.

The inquiry driving the project, which was how social cohesion through everyday interactions can foster relationship repair between South Auckland Punjabi migrants from India and Pakistan was, in effect, expressed through each and every one of us – the characters and the filmmaker. By making an emotional investment in what we felt was our shared Punjabi culture and common values, and performing this composite culture on-screen, enabled us to be conscious of, and heal to some degree, social fractures and sorrowful stories of the past, the partition, and the pain of being parted by a militarised border.

Structurally, *Sanjha Punjab* is a seventy-minute hybrid documentary that is non-linear, meaning that the artefact consciously does not take on the form of a chronological narrative. Comprising of eight short stories, the structure resembles a portmanteau film in which small stories resembling snippets of everyday life contribute pieces of the bigger picture when imagining what rekindling relationships looks and feels like for Indian Punjabis and Pakistani Punjabis living as a community in a diasporic setting. A total of thirty-five Punjabi migrants who reside in South Auckland feature on-screen throughout the film.

In the eighth story, *Compositions Doo*, most of the filming was carried out in Lahore and Chiniot district of west Punjab in Pakistan. As a result, these sequences feature street scenes of people milling around the walled city of Lahore, and the staff and students of Government Islamia Postgraduate College in Chiniot gathered to watch the principal and senior students perform a *jhoomar* folk dance. Additionally, the

sixth story, *Friends Doo*, set in a local Punjabi restaurant of Manurewa was fiction. This was the only place in the film where non-Punjabis are shown: two migrant Tongans and one migrant Samoan to Aotearoa New Zealand who appear in non-narrative roles. By assembling a hybrid documentary, I have created a full-length nonfiction film in which fiction and documentary approaches to filmmaking have been meticulously fused, primarily to give an impression of seamlessness, and in a related manner to invite audiences to weigh up whether or not the people in the film were acting or being themselves.

If the question is whether the characters were acting, then the short answer is the characters were acting as themselves. A longer response is entangled in making sense of what giving a performance of myself actually looks like and means to the performer and the audience. What do we see, hear, and understand when a performance of ourselves going about the business of everyday life is presented before us? Understanding what is visualised and heard uses a distinct set of cognitive abilities different to reading words on the page. I say this as a visual learner who in my forties found myself having to figure out how I learn best to be able to get over the finish line with a practice-oriented doctoral thesis. I discovered a key to knowing me, which for most of my life I had given a lower profile to because as a child in Punjab, Pakistan, I was institutionalised by a public school system to think these attributes did not amount to intellect and cleverness. That is, I learn effectively by observing people in their daily surroundings. I grasp deeper meaning from listening intently to people converse in Punjabi through variations of dialect. I make sense of complex concepts when decoding dialects, accents, facial expressions, and body language in my mother tongue.

Reconfiguring storywork

It is here that I want to explain, from my perspective, the concept of Indigenous storywork by Jo-ann Archibald, a Native Canadian *Stó:lō* professor of Indigenous education at the University of British Columbia. Archibald envisaged storywork to be a

culturally appropriate way for insiders of Indigenous communities to conduct research with their people, especially in her case as a member of Coast Salish communities of British Columbia in Canada (Archibald, 2008). The author learned from her elders that storywork or shared acts of storying the past, recalling ancestors and their deeds, and making collective sense of what the stories mean and how lessons can be applied in the present-day is exactly that – collective work. Storywork as a methodological approach constituted seven research principles put into practice: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (Archibald, 2008, p. ix).

Critically, storywork among Native Canadian tribes and clans is organised around rules of ethical conduct in research practice that require seeking approval from tribal authorities to gain access to their territories and domains, and "respecting" the conventions and customs of communities (Archibald, 2008, pp. 143-146). As a result, the researcher is expected to treat the shared knowledge "responsibly" by acknowledging the right of Indigenous communities to check and validate their own stories, and practicing social "reciprocity" by gifting the research back to the people to whom the knowledge belongs (Archibald, 2008, pp. 143-146).

Dorothy Cucw-la7 Christian, a Secwepemc and Syilx documentary filmmaker from British Columbia in Canada, adapted Jo Ann Archibald's theory of practice to visualise Indigenous storywork (Christian, 2019, pp. 40-55). By developing a system of visual storytelling grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems, she argued that the aesthetics of "place-based identities" construct "visually sovereign films and videos" (Christian, 2019, p. 41). In essence, Indigenous storywork in screen production creates visual content that embodies and enacts the self-determination and autonomy of Indigenous peoples with regard to their "land, story, and cultural protocols" (Christian, 2019, p. 45-48).

As a Punjabi filmmaker, applying storywork meant reconfiguring the original concept designed by Jo-ann Archibald and adapted by filmmaker Dorothy Christian to visual storytelling of another kind (Archibald, 2008, 2019; Christian, 2019). To fit the markedly different social and cultural circumstances of my people, migrant Punjabis in

South Auckland, took a leap of imagination in some respects, especially when it came to collective sensemaking around the identity marker, Indigenous.

Elsewhere, I have co-authored a research summary with my doctoral peers, Fritz Filisi, a filmmaker from Si'umu in Sāmoa, and Sylvester Tonga, a filmmaker from Leimatu'a in the Vava'u islands of the Kingdom of Tonga (Filisi, Tonga, and Mukhtar, 2024, pp. 1-19). Together we questioned our relationship to an Indigenous identity marker as immigrants to Aotearoa New Zealand who are descendants of the original inhabitants in our lands of origin. Our collective inquiry rested on the fact that in Aotearoa, the host country to where we have migrated and settled, ngā iwi Māori or Māori tribes form the Indigenous population of almost eighteen percent of 5.2 million people. Given that the term Indigenous is a political construct in many respects, and one that is globally enshrined in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, it makes sense that migrants and their descendants in Aotearoa think carefully about how they see themselves as Indigenous peoples in respect to Māori tribes whose lands they are living on, and speaking from (United Nations, 2007).

Within a Punjabi cultural paradigm, the term Indigenous is not a self-reference commonly used to denote and describe who we are in relation to others. This is mainly due to the 1947 partition of British India having been sentimentalised as the origins of independence for modern India and Pakistan. However in the Punjab region, a deeply embedded social psyche endures among Punjabi language speakers where our language is perceived to be subjugated by the dominant languages of Hindi, Urdu, and English, and for that very reason is at risk of no longer being passed on to and spoken by younger generations. In light of these circumstances, Punjabis worldwide strongly believe that their ancestors were the original groups to migrate along the Indus river and settle permanently in the Punjab hinterland where they took up farming the land. Therefore, Punjabi collective movements both historically and in modern times have revolved around expelling imperial invaders and rulers from their lands – Aryans, Persians, Greeks, Egyptians, Afghans, Mongol-Turks – to the point of seeing the British Raj from 1858 to 1947 as the last straw in being directly ruled over by a foreign empire (Singh, 2020).

Returning to a modified concept of storywork relevant to filming with and for my people, migrant Punjabis in South Auckland and west Punjabis in Punjab, Pakistan, straightforward principles guided the creative research process. Above all, authenticity in the context of a social realism film fixed on articulating the reality of migrant Punjabi life beyond borders to Punjabi language audiences. Moreover, social reciprocity by means of gifting the film artefact back to the South Auckland Punjabi community and associated communities in the Punjab region and wider diaspora through open access platforms, such as AUT Tuwhera Open Access and Vimeo.

Sanjha Punjab as methodology

> A non-Iranian might place the camera differently from an Iranian filmmaker. The camera's point of view inevitably shows my Iranian historical background and the influence it has on the image I convey. The angle from which your camera looks at the world and gives an image of the world immediately reveals your background (Panahi cited in Rahbaran, 2012, p. 9).

The methodology, referring to the creative research system in which the methods are organised, is named after the nonfiction film *Sanjha Punjab*. As the interview excerpt from Jafar Panahi in conversation with Shiva Rahbaran explains, this is an introspective approach to filming and something of a closed system (Panahi cited in Rahbaran, 2012, p. 9). In this sense, the images and sound of characters and performances not only unveil my point of view and social origin but have been intentionally assembled for Punjabi audiences. I have therefore anticipated that the niche audience of Punjabi language speakers will decode and gain meaning from the images and sound, and by doing so, their visual experience may stir personal memories, stories, and questions of their own.

Sanjha Punjab as methodology is a synthesis of three systems of creative practice: hybrid documentary or collapsing the boundary between documentary and fiction, social realism or the reality of migrant Punjabi men in a culture-informed

context, and a style of introspective storytelling called "talking in," which I have borrowed and modified from the late Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay (Barclay, 2003, 2015). Barclay describes the introspective process of talking in on camera for his own people, ngā iwi Māori, by likening this practice to "marae" style communication (Barclay, 2015, pp. 76-77).

> I have come to believe we need to be talking to our own people first – to be "talking in." …And our supporters in the majority culture, a policy of "talking in" might seem a proposal to close off Māori culture to anybody who is not Māori. …As I see it, the way to keep the spirit of the young communications marae strong is to be absolutely rigid about operating it along marae lines. "When you enter this space, you will hear our people talking in their own way to their own people" (Barclay, 2015, pp. 76-77).

Allowing Māori people "to be "talking in"" by filming "along marae lines" means that the participants are talking to one another in their own language and in familiar and natural settings for gathering and conversing, rather than speaking outwards to the camera for an audience of viewers (Barclay, 2015, pp. 76-77). Precisely, the reference to a marae style of relational talk is modelled on the function of a marae, a meeting place for Māori tribes and communities to convene cultural activities, such as tangihanga or funerals, and hui or group meetings. Inside the marae space, there is a time and place for formal proceedings, such as pōwhiri or welcoming ceremonies, and whaikōrero or speechmaking. As well, there is a time and place for social exchanges like informal conversation between kinfolk, or group meetings on matters concerning families and community members affiliated to the marae.

Barclay's notion of talking in has been tailored for informal Punjabi gatherings and conversations in a local park, at a friend's home, or in a restaurant (Barclay, 2015, pp. 76-77). As well, social institutions such as a Gurdwara and a Masjid, and a Punjabi radio station in South Auckland, plus a rural secondary school for senior students in Punjab, Pakistan, were also places and spaces where Punjabis were filmed in everyday activities and familiar environments that were normal to them. The process of introspective filming in Punjabi social contexts of get-togethers and daily routine

connects with Barclay's assertion that "we need to be talking to our own people first" for our social reality to be narrated by us, rather than outsiders speaking over and about us (Barclay, 2015, p. 76).

Punjabi language

In terms of positionality as a Punjabi language filmmaker and an insider of the community being filmed, the ideals and values of my ethnic and cultural group have influenced why I believe the Punjabi language was an essential research method. Put simply, I truly feel that the film could not have been made in English, not by the same measure of depth and insight that is. For me, *Sanjha Punjab* is a testimony to the significant role that language plays by enabling audiences to engage with the social exchanges placed before them, thereby prompting them to form an intense connection with the characters and stories. Moreover, building a genuine rapport between the non-actors was dependent on the fact that they were Native speakers of Punjabi, and possessed the language competency and cultural knowledge to relate to one another across dialects and regional diversity.

A decision to use the vernacular to make *Sanjha Punjab* was deeply personal but also practical when I considered the critical role of language in sustaining Punjabi social cohesion and community life. Language is not merely a communication medium but the vehicle carrying cultural knowledge systems that facilitate the identity maintenance and relationships between people in the Punjab and the diaspora, and among Indian Punjabis and Pakistani Punjabis in migrant cities like South Auckland. Language therefore plays a vital role in fashioning and sustaining ethnic and cultural identity for Punjabis at home and overseas.

With eighteen dialects, the Punjabi language is as diverse as her people, and it was these variances in language dialect that created a unique feature of *Sanjha Punjab*. Although the distinctions may seem subtle, Punjabi language speakers irrespective of where they come from in the Punjab can instantly hear and recognise dialect

difference. Generally among Punjabi Pakistanis, Punjabi speakers from east Punjab in India are considered to possess greater expertise in maintaining their cultural and linguistic diversity and authenticity. My own personal experience in South Auckland has proven that east Punjabi migrants hold west Punjabi dialects in high regard too, seeing that western dialects embody the spirit of *maa boli Punjabi*, the mother tongue. Personal encounters such as this, illuminate the range of perceptions within a shared heritage language, and how habitus or the social conditions of existence for any group can sway their insights and observations.

Fundamentally, I approached language as a research method from personal experience, believing that the Punjabi language intertwined with cultural heritage had the power to rise above religious, political, and geographic boundaries. There were interlocked reasons motivating my decision to create a nonfiction film by employing several Punjabi dialects. I mean that the language prioritised Punjabi speaking audiences worldwide, inviting them to take in the nuanced dialogue, expression of emotion, and culture-informed storying. In turn, language was an enabler, allowing Punjabi speakers to engineer a deeper, personal connection with the film's central message, unity amidst diversity, which is another way of articulating *Sanjha Punjab*.

For all intents and purposes, the creative research process was more than a straightforward method of information gathering. Right from the start, consulting and collaborating with characters during the film preparation stage was carried out in Punjabi, accompanied by appropriate protocols of hospitality – respectful language, offering refreshments or a meal – for the purpose of building meaningful relationships. To truly engage the interest, time, and knowledge contribution of non-actors demanded that I spend quality time with them to not only become better acquainted but to gain an appreciation of their tastes and preferences on the subject or theme on which they were being asked to discuss or perform. Multiple pre-filming conversations were held with groups of non-actors assigned to the eight stories, and never once did participants opt to speak any other language but our mother tongue. To carry an overarching narrative of *Sanjha Punjab*, united Punjab, for seventy minutes screen time

necessitated that we made use of every opportunity in each other's company to speak Punjabi and listen attentively to a range of dialects different to our own.

Punjabi dialects

An important stage of employing Punjabi as a research method was the translation, or English interpretation and screen subtitling that was involved. I say English interpretation for a specific reason as I found in most instances that a literal, word-for-word translation did not altogether make English language sense. Due to the metaphoric nature of speaking to a topic among peers, reciting a poem, or singing a folk song, I adapted the English subtitling of Punjabi to ensure that the meaning of the message was clear and accessible to general audiences. The spoken Punjabi in *Sanjha Punjab* showcases the richness of a regional language that has grown branches of dialects in geographic locations of tribal confederations, clans, and kinship based communities. Conversely, the English interpretation does not capture the aural richness of dialect diversity, nor would non-Punjabi speakers be able to hear and comprehend the multiplicity of voices and vernaculars.

The Punjabis featured in *Sanjha Punjab* are non-actors or people who are not professional or trained actors with the larger share hailing from my home region in the Punjab called the Majha region; a region that was divided between India and Pakistan during the 1947 partition of British India. In saying that, most characters were from the Majha districts of Faisalabad, Sialkot, Sheikhupura, and Gujrat in west Punjab, Pakistan, as well as the districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur, and Ludhiana in east Punjab, India. As expected, the dialect that is more commonly spoken in the film is the Majhi dialect belonging to my people from Majha region, a reflection of our shared regional background, linguistic heritage, and kinship ties. But there are subtle variations in words and the intonation of words, which almost implies that within the broader Majhi category, there exist sub-categories of variation within the dialect itself.

The second region whose dialect was often heard was Doaba, the ancestral Punjabi homeland of Daljit Singh, Parminder Singh, Satnam Singh, and Amrik Singh. The Doabi dialect further diversified the language-scape (a play on landscape) of *Sanjha Punjab*. While Majhi and Doabi are said to linguistically derive from the same branch of Punjabi, these dialects have similarities and differences. They may have a common core vocabulary and grammatical structure reflecting their regional roots but spoken Doabi from the Doaba territory between the Beas and Sutlej rivers is pronounced differently, and has certain words that are not found in the Majhi dialect. Punjabis refer to a spoken dialect different to their own as an accent, and will speak with admiration about an accent different to their own if they hear one in conversation, a social indicator of their valuing of regional diversity. The Doabi accent to my ears, a Majhi speaker, is distinct along with the Doabi vocabulary which is unique to their people and place in the Punjab region.

Further enriching the film's linguistic and social tapestry, *Friends Doo* features N.V. Singh as the main character who comes from Patiala district in Malwa region of the Punjab. N.V. Singh speaks with a broad Malwai accent, which non-Malwai Punjabis believe is a very distinct dialect. Unlike Majhi and Doabi, Malwai features a unique *ū* sound used instead of the standard Punjabi *ā* sound in verb endings. Malwai often replaces an *i* sound with an *r* sound in some words, which stands out to non-Malwai speakers. In addition to this, Onkar Singh, a character in *Poetry Ek*, had a unique hybrid dialect that arguably was a product of his ancestors being relocated from west Punjab in Pakistan to east Punjab in India during the 1947 partition. His grandparents had migrated from the Majha region in west Punjab to Haryana in east Punjab, which prior to 1966 was part of Punjab state in India. His hybrid way of speaking fused the Majhi and Haryanvi dialects, resulting in a distinct sound and intonation to the ears of Punjabi speakers who do not share his Majha and Haryana mixed heritage.

Saleem Zubair from Chakwal district in west Punjab was a character in *Friends Ek* who speaks with a unique sounding Dhanni dialect. While the school principal and students performing the *jhoomar* folk dance in *Compositions Do* speak the Jhangvi dialect of Chiniot and Jhang districts in west Punjab. The Dhanni and Jhangvi dialects

along with the cultures and customs are inimitable and rare, setting the peoples and places apart from what has now become standardised Punjabi – the Majhi dialect. As a son of Punjab's Majha region in Narowal district, I have to admit that I struggled to comprehend spoken Dhanni and Jhangvi during our film preparation conversations. At times, I felt like I was listening to another language because I did not have the experience and knowledge to quickly decipher the vocabulary and intonation. In some instances, I found myself plucking up the courage to politely ask Dhanni and Jhangvi speakers if they could slow down their speech for my benefit and understanding. With intense concentration and much practice at listening attentively, I developed a first-hand, appreciative understanding of these unique regional dialects.

I carried out the English subtitling of dialects that were not my own with meticulous and painstaking care to avoid altering intended meanings and essential messages that Doabi, Malwai, Haryanvi, Dhanni, and Jhangvi speakers were communicating. Metaphorically, the depth of the Punjabi language, irrespective of dialect, can be powerful and profound. Hence, a single word can encapsulate layered and textured meaning, making interpretation and subtitling work challenging with regard to capturing its true sense in English. English subtitles were therefore meant to enable non-Punjabi speaking audiences to grasp the narrative while concurrently viewing images and listening to spoken Punjabi.

The back story, however, was that I worked diligently with speakers of different dialects in the film to seek their wisdom and guidance on how to subtitle their dialogue effectively and succinctly for the screen. Every character whom I approached for help was happy to assist, generously giving their time and views on writing accurate English subtitles. They explained cultural nuances and connotations distinctive to their dialect and culture-specific meanings, which if simplified and de-contextualised in the subtitles, would risk losing the value or moral of what was being articulated altogether.

It was my hope that the English subtitles would go some way to making several dialects of the Punjab region relatable to Punjabi audiences, while for general audiences, I wanted the English captions to provide insights into small pieces of

everyday Punjabi life, principally among regionally diverse migrants. The quality of the subtitles, I felt, should provide an opening for viewers to look through and comprehend that language and meaning exist in a cultural world constructed by the people to whom the language belongs (Abdelaal, 2019).

Community and connection

Visual anthropologist and Punjabi documentary filmmaker Harjant Gill has published on the transnational reach of Punjabi cinema (Gill, 2012, 2020a, 2020b, 2021). However in Gill's article, *Before Picking up the Camera*, he lays emphasis on fostering community-oriented relationships between the filmmaker and characters (Gill, 2014). Building social acceptance among characters, and collective belief in the project, in many ways are essential ingredients for developing an authentic narrative in which non-actors feel liberated to speak their truth in their own voice. Relationships are more than pointing cameras and microphones at people, and if anything, Gill affirmed that the real work is performed in the preparation stage of initiating genuine interactions based on mutual respect and trust (Gill, 2014).

My research priority was engineering connection between characters over technical considerations. With that, my primary role became cultivating a safe cultural space for open dialogue and shared storytelling on-and-off camera. The richness of conversations enacted by non-actors on-screen was not by chance, but rather, the direct result of the filmmaker and the storywriter, or the student and the supervisor's commitment to ensuring that the filmmaking process was founded on trust and mutually respectful and beneficial relationships. To the project's advantage, I had an established social network in and among South Auckland Punjabi circles. Therefore, I tapped key relationships to community leaders and figures to obtain their recommendations for non-actors I could approach to gage their interest in contributing to *Sanjha Punjab*. Most of the South Auckland Punjabi characters in the film were peers, or men who were friends of people I knew in the community.

Collective sensemaking

Throughout the stages of preparation, production, and post-production, the consistent work ethic was co-constructing a shared understanding of concepts and practices of *Punjabiyat,* Punjabi culture. Hence, collective sensemaking involved supporting the non-actors to add to the story in which they were featured by improvising their dialogue and making their poetry, song, and dance performances natural, as opposed to staged or practiced, and authentically realistic. Preparatory work required countless meetings to discuss the storyline of each story, and reason out each character's role in connection to the overarching narrative of *Sanjha Punjab*, united Punjab. These social exchanges encouraged the characters to share personal stories, which they felt resonated with the screen story they were contributing to: thus, their combined experiential knowledge determined how they wanted themselves acting as themselves to appear to Punjabi audiences. As a result, there was an urgent sense of collective ownership and representation among the cast, where they took on a form of social responsibility to perform their parts with integrity and genuineness.

On the production day or evening of each film shoot, I set time aside before filming commenced to talk with the cast and crew. We went over the story they were performing, emotional responses that it could draw out from Punjabi audiences, and how their piece connected to *Sanjha Punjab*, the overarching theme weaving eight pieces together as one narrative. This pre-filming talk was an enabling process that motivated the characters to apply their talents to bring out the story's meaning with spontaneous creativity. By comparison, once the filming was underway I was tasked with the role of making sure that scenes and shots matched up with the shot list, while staying open-minded about changes, suggestions, and new ideas that cropped up.

During this time, I learned first-hand that an important task was upholding the narrative arc of each story, or the ways that Punjabi audiences could grasp every story's plot. As I had anticipated, it was best achieved by using emotion and expression, regardless of whether the scenes were narrative or non-narrative. For

example, in the non-narrative story *Reflections Doo* emotion was seen in the devotional singing and expression of Gurmeet Singh Sarkaria and Ali Shah driving in their respective cars to Takanini Gurdwara and Masjid Ayesha in South Auckland. My role then, evolved with the filmmaking process. By no means was I playing the part of a conventional director giving instructions to cast and crew members on a set. Alternatively, I was a project facilitator whose primary focus was maintaining and protecting a nurturing and supportive environment for the exploration and improvisation of eight stories told by Punjabi non-actors acting, as it were, as themselves.

This collective sensemaking approach was embraced by the film crew who not only comprehended the importance of cultural sensitivity and paying respect to the characters *in* their stories, but behaved according to these principles. Incorporating the characters' suggestions about the way they wanted the storyline to unfold on-screen ensured that a socially inclusive and culturally safe filming environment was co-constructed by myself, the cast, and the film crew. The cast and crew's roles extended beyond technical expertise: in fact, they were my collaborators alongside my primary supervisor; collaborators who articulated and acted on ideas, and listened considerately to other's views for the express purpose of making *Sanjha Punjab* real. In turn, the crew adapted their filming techniques to accommodate the improvised nature of every setting, every shoot, remaining flexible and responsive to change as each scene evolved up until the final take.

Vitally, the eight stories of *Sanjha Punjab* were not simply about coexistence within a South Auckland Punjabi community made up of Punjabi Indians and Punjabi Pakistanis, and the ways by which we maintain connectedness with our place of origin, the Punjab region. More so, the stories were created with and for the community. In saying that, the applied theory of collective sensemaking connects with current ideas that community-oriented film projects integrate a reflexive process of co-design principles by which participants are treated as collaborators from the outset to accurately and authentically embody their shared experiences.

Two angles: public and private spaces

Sanjha Punjab engaged with theories of spatial identity, that being, the notion that identities are formed through emotional attachments to places and peoples. However, spatial identity can also examine the situatedness of being located some geographic distance from a place and people of origin, like an urban centre compared to a village, and how experiences informed by living in a new space reconfigure group identity (Damayanti and Kossak, 2016). The project design deliberately constructed film settings that played with ideas of public and private spaces in Punjabi cultural contexts. Hence, the film was structured by couplets (metaphorically speaking) of which I am gesturing to two different ways, or angles, from which to view one theme.

Poetry Ek and *Poetry Doo* therefore represented a couplet of two distinct stories related to the theme of Punjabi language poetry. In *Poetry Ek,* the setting was a public space of the Auckland Botanic Gardens in Manurewa suburb of South Auckland. In one way, it could be said that the open space of a public park looked as if the story was filmed in the Punjab region. My main focus, nevertheless, was to connect Basharat Ali Jan's emotional performance of his original poem, *Separation*, to feelings evoked by the 1947 partition of the Punjab region: vulnerability; a lack of security; a loss of personal control over living circumstances, land, possessions, and the spiralling political events. Using a public park for filming *Poetry Ek* was a deliberate decision aimed at deepening the mood and feeling of Basharat Ali Jan's poetic sentiments. Equally, there is another way of looking at the spatial relationship between a park and the characters *in* their story. Meeting in a public space offered the characters an opportunity to connect and relate to one another meaningfully through poetry, regardless of where in the Punjab region each person descended from.

In *Poetry Doo*, the home of a friend was a private space for the characters to sit under a patio and converse openly about the significance of Baba Najmi's Punjabi language poetry. A private setting out of the public eye signified a space to relax and engage in a riveting, intimate social exchange on language and cultural loss identified in Baba Najmi's words. The idea of a private space intended to show that the level of

trust between characters, along with a collective sense of belonging to the Punjab region, intensified in spaces concealed from the outside world.

Reflections Ek and *Reflections Doo* expressed the idea that Punjabis take time in their everyday lives to critically reflect by various means, ranging from radio shows discussing social subjects (in the sense that Jafar Panahi referred to this as social problems), to singing devotional songs while commuting to their holy places for prayer (Panahi, 2019). An attempt was made to collapse the boundary between private and public domains by filming the two stories in somewhat hybrid spaces containing elements of both private and public. In *Reflections Ek*, the live sound booth at a Punjabi community radio station in the Papatoetoe suburb of South Auckland was small and confined, allowing the non-actors to feel physically and emotionally close in one another's company. A radio host facilitated the first conversation between two South Auckland Punjabi community leaders in this safe space, a sound booth, where they could share personal narratives on the nature of their people's relationships in Aotearoa and the Punjab region. The second conversation, by comparison, saw the radio host interviewing a community figure speaking on Facebook Live from his home in Faisalabad in west Punjab, Pakistan. Visually, Punjabi audiences could see some of the shots had been framed by what Facebook Live viewers were seeing in the moment, signalling that the discussions formed a public episode of a regular radio show.

In *Reflections Doo*, the characters' vehicles became mobile studios where most of the filming took place. Although this was a private space where the characters could listen to a YouTube playlist of devotional music and sing along enroute to pray at places of worship, the public space encircled them. The social landscape visualised by looking out the car window – churches, temples, road signs, houses, shops – highlighted the significance of living in a pluralist society where religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence is lived reality. Hence, the Gurdwara and the Masjid symbolised places of belonging and deep connection amidst the multi-cultural, multi-religious city of South Auckland, allowing Punjabi audiences to witness Punjabi migrants actively preserving their spiritual roots.

Friends Ek and *Friends Doo* encapsulated hybrid spaces by integrating private and public domains where friendships are enacted between Punjabi men in South Auckland. Both stories were filmed in *Love Punjab Indian Eatery* in Manurewa suburb of South Auckland with *Friends Ek* played by three senior citizens meeting for *chai* (tea) and a chat one morning, and *Friends Doo* played by two younger generation migrants, N.V. Singh and myself, catching up over an evening meal. The main distinction between these groups of friends was their age and how this moulded their conversation topics and behaviour in the company of peers. In *Friends Ek*, the conversation was confined to the privacy of the three friends' table. By this, the setting only became visibly and aesthetically public when they were walking along a street of shops to and from the eatery. Their discussion covered a range of social issues relevant to the South Auckland Punjabi community: the impact of Covid-19 and closed international borders for Punjabi migrants; the history of Punjabi migration to Aotearoa; softening the border between Punjab, India, and Punjab, Pakistan; and, the emotional attachments that Punjabis feel toward one another, regardless of which side of a militarised border history has put them.

Contrastingly in *Friends Doo*, the location and atmosphere was the public domain of a busy, bustling eatery filled with evening patrons. The twist in the plot was performed by the main character, a high-spirited N.V. Singh, who kept weaving in and out of private and public conversations. One minute, he was engaged in a one-on-one discussion with his friend at their table, and the next, he was on his feet lambasting customers at an adjoining table for allegedly staring at him. While this was a scripted story intended to be funny, there was a serious tone to the main discussion between the two friends: that was, the plight of Punjabi temporary migrants stranded in the Punjab during Covid-19, unable to return to Auckland to resume work and study.

Compositions Ek and *Compositions Doo* comprised of private and public spaces filmed in South Auckland and west Punjab in which the stories stressed the relationship between music, dance, and Punjabi cultural identity. In *Compositions Ek*, the setting was a private home in Manurewa where a friend had invited his musician peers to share their performance styles of Sufi and folk music. Within this concealed space, the

characters were comfortable to sing their genre of Punjabi music, praising the other's rendition of Sufi or folk, and joining in by clapping, singing along, or playing an accompanying folk instrument.

By comparison, *Compositions Doo* was set in the public domain of walking through the walled city of Lahore, and then travelling to a secondary school in Chiniot district where senior students performed a *Jhoomar* folk dance with their principal (Schreffler, 2014). The old city, first established more than a thousand years ago, is revered by west and east Punjabis as a cultural capital of the region, renowned for artists, musicians, dancers, and poets. Purposefully, the camera pans the iconographic landscape capturing Gurdwara Dera Sahib, Hazuri Bagh gardens, Badshahi mosque, Delhi gate, Lahori bazaar, Wazir Khan Masjid, and Fort Road food street. The song *Shehar Lahore Ander* by Jagmohan Kaur was deliberately synched into the Lahore scenery to amplify the emotional attachment that Punjabi audiences place on the ancient capital.

Equal attention was paid to a Chiniot district high school in rural Punjab to exemplify that the Punjabi heartland remains in villages dotted across the fertile plains. It is here in rural farming communities where humble families, like mine, who continue to cultivate their ancestral lands have retained the Punjabi language as their mother tongue. Understandably, it was important that I ended the west Punjab scene in a rural village, followed by a sequence of me returning to Auckland international airport with the folk song *Heer Ranjha* sung by a schoolboy synched into the images (Sheeraz, 2013; Tehseem, 2021). I wanted to impress on Punjabi audiences that my deepest connection to the Punjab region lies in my village roots as the grandson and son of farmers.

Polynesian crew

For professional and personal reasons, the most workable relationship for producing *Sanjha Punjab* came from recruiting a young Polynesian film crew of Rewi Amoamo, a Māori and Tongan moving camera operator, and Nikolase (Niko) Meredith,

a Samoan, Tongan, and Fijian still camera operator and location sound recordist. On a professional level, they appealed to me as digital content creators proficient at working in culture-specific spaces with their communities. Growing up in multicultural Auckland and being the grandchildren of immigrants from Pacific countries, Rewi and Niko possessed a cross-cultural aptitude for developing fresh perspectives on cultural filming in Auckland, shot lists, and editing for niche audiences. Together, they symbolised a new generation of digital storytellers or non-cinema and social media creatives, pushing the boundaries of inclusion and acceptance in Aotearoa society with stories aimed at elevating the experiences of young people.

On a personal and more complex level, Rewi and Niko brought to the project a rare kind of social acceptance and calm composure that I believe had evolved from being situated within intergenerational families and communities descended from western Polynesia, namely Tonga, Sāmoa, and Fiji; people who held on to their small island roots in the Pacific Ocean, while adapting to urban lifestyles and social change in Aotearoa. The migrant Punjabi non-actors whom they filmed saw that Rewi and Niko accepted and embraced Punjabi cultural difference, often remarking that these young Polynesian men were not merely skilful at their camera work, but enriched the filmmaking process with culturally sensitive and respectful behaviour toward myself as the director and the cast (Filisi, Tonga, and Mukhtar, 2024). In many respects, this Polynesian film crew was my preferred choice.

To explain, during the preliminary stages of making a test film for *Sanjha Punjab*, I had trialled Punjabi camera operators and sound mixers. This experience taught me critical lessons. Perhaps unwittingly, they tended to conceptualise males in Punjabi language film according to cultural stereotypes portrayed in commercial Lollywood and Pollywood cinema. For example, the hulking, hairy, ultra-masculine *Maula Jutt* created by Yunis Malik in 1979 and his contemporary reenactment in Bilal Lashari's *The Legend of Maula Jatt*, or the comical, quick-witted Punjabi characters in *Chal Mera Putt* directed by Janjot Singh in 2019 (Malik, 1979; Lashari, 2022; Singh, 2019; Sulehria, 2018). When conversing with them about Punjabi social realism in Gurvinder Singh's *Anhey Ghorey Da Daan*, and the cinematic style I had envisaged on-screen, I could not break

past the foundational structure of Bollywood film and its offshoots, like the branch of Bollywood commercial cinema made in Lahore in west Punjab, or in Amritsar, Ludhiana, Mohali, and Chandigarh in east Punjab.

At this early stage in my doctoral journey I spoke candidly with my primary supervisor, opening up about my reservations in bringing on a male Punjabi film crew whose perceptions of Punjabi language cinema were restricted to Bollywood derivatives and hyper-masculine characterisations of Punjabi men. She advised me to approach her eldest son Rewi, and Niko who she taught during his postgraduate years in the Master of Creative Technologies and whom she thought of as a nephew. I had established a warm collegial relationship with Niko, whom my primary supervisor had approached before I enrolled in the doctoral programme to ask if he would show-me-the-ropes, so to speak, by letting me tag along with him on film shoots with Pacific communities in the Auckland region. Rewi was happy with this work arrangement, as he held Niko in high regard as a pioneering digital content creator for young Polynesian visual storytellers.

As a team, Rewi and Niko combined their technical skill-sets and through their in-depth appreciation of diverse approaches to cinematography were able to make the realism genre come to life in production. Their talents were complementary: Rewi had expertise in camera movement techniques, like tracking and following, and could gather shots effortlessly on a small action camera with coordination, balance, and steady hands, which made the stabilisation process uncomplicated for post-production editing. Niko had extensive expertise in using multiple digital cameras and systems, and had no difficulty working with two different camera brands for static shots and multiple microphone brands for location sound recording. Quietly, he coordinated and manned the technical equipment with great ease and calm.

Importantly, their competency at reading shot lists and knowledge of fundamental practices – shot type, camera angle, camera movement, sound notes, frame rate – gave me confidence to concentrate on my project facilitator role. Not once did I need to intervene in their workflow, which freed me up to talk the non-actors through the filming and encourage them on the sets. An important culture-informed

factor influencing Rewi and Niko's Polynesian approach to community-oriented filmmaking is that their respective ethnic and cultural identity groups have strong oral storytelling traditions. Thus, younger generation Polynesians, like them, who have grown up as descendants of Pacific immigrants in cities of Aotearoa, Australia, and America have invested in visual and performance arts as storytelling tools to maintain their cultural identities in the contemporary world.

Figure 16. Film crew shooting *Poetry Ek* in Manurewa, Auckland.

5
COMMENTARY

Eight stories explained

This chapter presents a commentary on the nonfiction film *Sanjha Punjab* by relating the cultural and creative contexts contributing to the practice-oriented research process. These contexts have defined and confined the project's location in an interdisciplinary field that synthesises a cultural paradigm of the social world from the perspective of migrant Punjabi men with a form of hybrid documentary situated in eastern traditions of social realism: that is, realism film influenced by Punjabi and Iranian new cinema movements. The eight stories and the final credit roll are detailed in individual sections with each piece connecting three interrelated components: firstly, the story's meaning; secondly, the roles of the film crew and the equipment used for filming; and thirdly, the processes employed throughout the preparation, production, and post-production stages.

With regard to decoding the overarching narrative of *Sanjha Punjab*, this nonfiction film has used a non-linear approach where the eight stories are not positioned in a chronological order. That being said, the eight pieces have been crafted into distinct stories contributing meaning to the idea of Punjabis being and feeling united through their linguistic and regional diversity. By the same token, every piece adopts the unity of time in the way that a story can be filmed in one specific location, or a story can give the impression of taking place at one time.

This commentary chapter therefore contextualises an idea that was introduced in *4 Design*: that is, there are two storytelling and filming angles indicating public or private space, or alternatively the mixing of public and private space. Another way of explaining this is to think of the stories as couplets. For example, *Poetry Ek* and *Poetry Doo* can signify two ways to see and hear the same theme of Punjabi language poetry being discussed and performed in different ways by different characters. Moreover, the allegorical expression of each story is explained, or the story within the story. Viewed in this way, each story is discussed with reference to the short story and film that the storyline and visual storywork has drawn from and modified to fit the central theme of *Sanjha Punjab*, Punjabi unity.

Purposely, the roles of the film crew and camera and audio equipment used for each story is diagrammed to underline that *Sanjha Punjab* is a minimalist low-budget film that only required basic equipment. Based on this, I cannot stress enough that although the equipment was minimal, the actual crew possessed a high level of camera operating knowledge and skill. For example, in the fourth story *Reflections Doo* filmed by Rewi Amoamo on a GoPro action camera attached to a mini extension pole, there was no camera stabilizing mount for the moving shots (Schleser, 2021). The entire filming depended on the smooth eye-and-hand coordination of the camera operator, plus their confidence to film and hold the camera steady while physically moving from a standing to a sitting position in one long shot. Not to be downplayed, the film crew had to be comfortable with, and competent at operating within, a setting dictated by a language and culture which did not belong to their own people, as it were. Culture-specific protocols defined the social interactions that took place on-and-off camera between the film characters and I as well as the film crew's technical mode of operation, which was expected to bode well with Punjabi communication and custom.

Given what has been said, I note here that the post-production work of colour editing was carried out by Jesus Rodriguez, a digital intermediate colourist running his small company in Mexico. Rodrigeuz's colour correcting and grading work enhanced the image richness and sharpness, which he completed in ten days. The film was then transferred to Vitaliy Pusch, an audio engineer running his small company in Poland, who completed the sound editing in five days. Pusch's priority goal was to improve the sound quality to cinema standard and remove unwanted noise and static. As well, post-production elements, such as background music, were integrated into the version of *Sanjha Punjab* submitted for doctoral examination (Altman, 1992; Chion, 2009, 2019; Kassabian, 2001; Weis and Belton, 1985).

Story 1: Poetry Ek

The first short story *Poetry Ek* or poetry one was filmed at the Auckland Botanic Gardens in Manurewa, South Auckland. At 8:05 minutes screentime, the story featured

six characters; a poet named Basharat Ali Jan, and five Punjabi friends whom he met in the park, Onkar Singh, Bashir Ahmad, Amrit Pal Singh, Haseeb Arshad, and Akif Rehman. The introduction to Basharat Ali Jan composing a poem on a park bench, along with the cordial conversation between him and the gathering of friends, constructed an atmosphere conducive to the poetry performance. The climactic scene was a poem detailing the aftermath of separation, a direct reference to the 1947 partition of Punjab. This original poem echoed the sentiments of grandparents and great-grandparents who have passed on from this world, but who during their lifetime held direct memories and experiences of 1947 and the after-effects of partition; memories that were instilled in the grandchildren of partition, like the poet and his peers (Mehta and Mookerjea-Leonard, 2015).

Figure 18. Film shoot for *Poetry Ek* in Manurewa, Auckland.

The storyline for *Poetry Ek* portrayed a personal impression of village life in the Punjab, drawing from Khushwant Singh's short story, *The Voice of God* (Singh, 1989, pp. 33-39). By this, I mean that the lives of Punjabis in the past similar to our present time are riddled in double meaning. While the poet personified in Basharat Ali Jan speaks his

cultural truth with wisdom and sincerity, who is truly listening apart from a close circle of friends? The visualisation drew on emotional vulnerability seen in one person's struggle to come to grips with what has been done to their own people. Hence, aspects of Gurvinder Singh's film *Anhey Ghorey Da Daan* were borrowed and adapted (Singh, 2011). Explicitly I sought to reconstruct the powerlessness of the main character Melu, son of a Punjabi Dalit named Mal Singh, who could not alter his family's predicament of being forcibly removed from their home by a landowner to whom they provided farm labour, and who sold the land they lived on to a commercial enterprise (Singh, 2011).

Poetry Ek was filmed in a single location and a public space, a park that intentionally gave Punjabi audiences the impression that the scene could have been in the Punjab. When thinking about the distinctive treatment of Punjabi language poetry in this first story, there are intertwined factors that set it apart from *Poetry Doo* or poetry two. Firstly, the original composition of Basharat Ali Jan's poem and relatedly, that the topic of discussion is directly related to the long-term social and cultural consequences of separating Punjabi people during and after the 1947 partition.

Equipment

Crew	Cameras	Sound
Niko Meredith: Camera, sound.	Panasonic Gh6 SLR Magic 17mm Canon 24-105mm	Rode Wireless Go II Boom Mic
Rewi Amoamo: Moving camera.	Atomos Ninja V	Rode Lavalier Lapel Microphone
Asim Mukhtar: Director.	Tilta Pro Camera Cage Small Rig Handle	GoPro Media Mod
	Sony Alpha a7 III Sony 16-35mm f/2.8	Rode VideoMicro On Camera Mic
	GoPro Hero 9 GoPro Shorty	Zoom H4n Pro Recorder Zoom Hn1 Digital Recorder

GoPro Hero 10

Max Wide Lens Mod

Stills: Canon M50

Canon EF-M 11-22mm

Process

The preparation stage was developed as a standard procedure that could be easily replicated across the eight stories and the final credit role. The first step involved in-depth conversations with my primary supervisor to draft a storyline with characters and their respective roles. Secondly, I engaged in numerous conversations with potential characters to gage their interest in being part of the story, and importantly to acquire insights and feedback on how they felt the story should be performed. Normally, group conversations took place with the characters to ensure that participants were on the same page, so to speak, and had an opportunity to adjust the storyline as a work-in-progress right up until the time of filming. Thirdly, I facilitated discussions with the film crew on shot lists and technical aspects of how we would operate on the set with myself in the director's role and Rewi Amoamo and Niko Meredith coordinating their roles on moving and static cameras to gather the visual and sound data.

The production stage was standardised across every shoot to maintain consistency of filming, and especially so the Polynesian film crew became accustomed to the culture-specific environment of working with Punjabi characters. It would be an understatement to say that film work is a collaborative effort because the production of *Sanjha Punjab* was wholly dependent on the willingness and ability of the director, crew, and cast to work together. The *Poetry Ek* shoot had distinctive qualities: it was filmed in winter and demanded that the characters and film crew braved five hours of bracing Auckland weather in which there were three retakes per scene. Furthermore, although these were non-actors who were friends in real life, it took some coaching on

the set to encourage them to loosen up and talk to one another how they would normally talk off-camera. At the end of this shoot and every other shoot, I took the secure digital (SD) cards from the cameras home to transfer the data to my personal gaming computer. In five hours, the film crew of Rewi Amoamo and Niko Meredith had recorded one-hundred and sixty-nine gigabytes (GB) of data, amounting to twelve hours of raw footage.

The post-production stage followed a uniform format for the entire film. The first step was reviewing the complete data set of twelve hours raw footage and selecting shots that had the clearest image and detail, alongside the highest quality sound recording. As a first-time film editor, the challenge lay in cutting down raw footage into an eight-minute visual narrative. While the filming did progress at a steady pace across eight stories, the editing work became no less difficult. What did change was my ability to grasp the meticulous process of editing and plan ahead regarding the time needed for the first step of producing a rough cut, and the second step of editing and re-editing four subsequent versions until I reached the fifth and final cut. Every story had a record of shots that were used and frequently this log was fine-tuned with replacement shots. For *Poetry Ek*, special attention was paid to the poetry performance scene. Since Basharat Ali Jan's poetry reading was central to putting across the *Poetry Ek* narrative to Punjabi audiences, I was vigilant about making certain that the camera detail highlighted the visual storytelling.

Story 2: Poetry Doo

The second story *Poetry Doo* or poetry two was filmed at a private home in Manurewa, South Auckland. At 8:20 minutes screen time, the story featured five characters. Opening the story was a video excerpt of the esteemed Punjabi poet Baba Najmi performing at the Lyallpur Young Historians Club in the Pakistani Punjab. Following Baba Najmi was a poetry exchange as well as a conversation that took place between friends regarding the poet's influence on modern Punjabi poetry and Punjabi

language activism. The Baba Najmi poetry enthusiasts were Satta Vairowalia, Farooq Chaudhry, Jasdeep Sidhu, and Umad Javed Gorya.

In *Poetry Doo*, the pinnacle scene was Farooq Chaudhry reciting selected lines from a Baba Najmi poem lamenting the decline in Punjabi language speakers. Farooq's rendition of a well-known verse stimulated an exchange of Baba Najmi's poetry with Satta Vairowalia, himself a respected song composer and poet, and a breakdown of key messages in the particular lines that were performed.

Figure 19. Film shoot for *Poetry Doo* in Manurewa, Auckland.

I have kept the ocean in my heart.

I am Iqbal of Punjabi.

I have placed the lamp of Punjabi in the shrine of languages.

The sparkle of glass doesn't fade by rubbing it against the ground.

No matter how well you speak Urdu, you are a child of Punjabi.

(Farooq Chaudhry reciting Baba Najmi poetry in *Sanjha Punjab*, 2024, 11:23-11:50 mins).

The storyline echoes and evokes a moral lesson found in Nadir Ali's short story *Saint of Sparrows* where the Sufi saint Shah Sheikhu of the city of Nurpur has been forgotten, along with his tomb which is no longer visited and venerated in this modern age (Ali, 2022, pp. 37-43). On a personal level, I have interpreted Baba Najmi of Lahore city as a symbol of the current health and wellbeing of the Punjabi language; an old language of the past, a language that is not embraced or spoken by generations of young Punjabis in Lahore.

By comparison, the visual storywork was inspired by a scene in the Abbas Kiarostami film, *Taste of Cherry*, where a moral conversation on suicide takes place in Mr Baddi's vehicle between himself as the central character, and an Azeri Iranian taxidermist (Kiarostami, 1997). The Azeri passenger in Mr Baddi's car firmly instructs him to change his view of and attitude to life, so that causing his own death will not seem like a solution to personal troubles. From Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry*, I have borrowed and modified cutting back-and-forth between the characters faces to stress the intensity of reciting the Baba Najmi verses, and conversing on a sensitive topic concerning the demise of one's mother tongue (Kiarostami, 1997). The trigger of social anxiety among Punjabi language speakers is noted in Satta Vairowalia's observation that Baba Najmi avows that people who choose not to raise their children in *maa boli Punjabi* are traitors to the Punjabi language and cultural heritage.

Poetry Doo was filmed in a single location and a private space to impress on Punjabi audiences that in the safety and comfort of friends, people can and do speak freely about language loss and the social anxiety of witnessing the subjugation of the

Punjabi language. Within politically driven hierarchies of South Asian countries, language is equated with national identity – Urdu with Pakistani Sunni Muslim nationalism and Hindi with Indian Hindutva nationalism. For that reason, the poet Baba Najmi is considered by ordinary Punjabis like Farooq Chaudhry to be "the father of Punjabi," a cultural icon who has kept *maa boli Punjabi* alive by placing "the lamp of Punjabi in the shrine of languages" (Farooq Chaudhry reciting Baba Najmi poetry in *Sanjha Punjab*, 2024, 11:23-11:50 mins).

Equipment

Crew	Cameras	Sound
Niko Meredith: Camera, sound.	Panasonic Gh6 SLR Magic 17mm Canon 24-105mm	Rode Wireless Go II Boom Mic
Rewi Amoamo: Moving camera.	Atomos Ninja V	Rode Lavalier Lapel Microphone
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	GoPro Hero 9 GoPro Shorty	Zoom H4n Pro Recorder Zoom Hn1 Digital Recorder
	GoPro Hero 10 Max Wide Lens Mod	
	Stills: Canon M50 Canon EF-M 11-22mm	

Process

The preparation stage commenced with focused conversations between my primary supervisor and I with regard to developing a storyline by selecting poetry verses from the complete works of Baba Najmi's poetry published in four volumes: *Akhran Wich Samundar: Ocean in Words* (Najmi, 1986), *Sochan Wich Jahan: World in Thoughts* (Najmi, 1995), *Mera Naam Insaan: My Name is Human* (Najmi, 2005), and *Mein Iqbal Punjabi Da: I am Iqbal of Punjabi* (Najmi, 2019). The next phase was refining the storyline through in-depth consultations with the characters in one-on-one, face-to-face meetings, and then online group discussions. The group conversations teased out the deeper meanings behind the poetry excerpts that would be performed by Farooq Chaudhry and Satta Vairowalia in respect to how Baba Najmi's poetry and a conversation about his work could be convincingly captured on the day of the film shoot. Online meetings with the film crew about shot lists and equipment were natural, unforced conversations that easily knitted into the production workflow at the film shoot.

During production, the film crew of Rewi Amoamo and Niko Meredith recorded one-hundred and thirty-five gigabytes of data or eight and a half hours of raw footage. Before the characters seated themselves on the veranda to be filmed, a lengthy conversation ensued over a shared meal in the dining room. One of the main points of discussion was the Lahori intonation of Baba Najmi in which Punjabi speakers of Lahore are identified by other Punjabis as speaking the Majhi dialect with a particular accent associated with their city. The main characters, Farooq Chaudhry and Satta Vairowalia, were filmed in four to five takes to ensure that they were satisfied with their performance and commentary on the lines they had recited. In addition, Farooq and Satta were completely at ease to perform Baba Najmi's poetry in their respective dialects, which I felt would be appreciated by Punjabi audiences as an illustration of the reach that this Lahori poet has over a diverse language group of eighteen dialects.

Post-production was a straightforward review of the data and building up the cuts of footage on the editing bay while frequently updating the register of preferred cuts. Once the rough cut of the story had been assembled, this eight-minute piece went through four subsequent rounds of editing until the fifth and final cut was

produced. For *Poetry Doo*, time and concentration was given to editing Farooq Chaudhry reciting lines from Baba Najmi's *I am Iqbal of Punjabi* (Najmi, 2019). This was the scene that compressed the storyline into a verse; the scene that motivated me to dedicate liberal amounts of attention to bringing out the sharpest visual detail. In my view, for Punjabi audiences the quality of detail in Farooq's facial expression would stir an emotional bond between language speakers and their mother tongue.

Story 3: Reflections Ek

The third story *Reflections Ek* or reflections one was filmed in the studio of a Punjabi community radio station *Radio Spice 88.0 FM* in South Auckland. At 8:06 minutes screentime, the story featured four characters; a veteran Punjabi broadcaster Parminder Singh Papatoetoe and three community figures, Daljit Singh and Naveed Hamid speaking on live radio from Papatoetoe, and Nasir Dhillon speaking online from Faisalabad in the Pakistani Punjab. Parminder's introduction of the panellists and discussion topic is the only place in the entire film where reference is made to *Sanjha Punjab* or Punjabi unity.

Daljit, Naveed, and Nasir advocated for softening the militarised India Pakistan border to make international border-crossing simpler and trouble-free for ethnic Punjabis. However, they articulated their support for this idea in slightly different ways, which suggests their positions were informed by personal experience of borders. A critical scene is Naveed Hamid's impression of the positive effects of residing in South Auckland. Purposely, he drew attention to the fact that close relationships between Punjabi Indians and Punjabi Pakistanis are created from living with one another and enjoying everyday interactions perceived to be a normal way of life.

Importantly, Daljit Singh builds on Hamid's discussion by pointing out that: "Living here [in South Auckland], we don't feel Gurdwaras and Masjids are all that different" (Daljit Singh in *Sanjha Punjab*, 2024, 19:50 mins). Singh elaborated on what he meant by explaining: "With our brothers, Asim and Naveed, we feel we're the same

people" in the sense that Punjabi language and culture allows people to closely interact as one community, much like being "part of the same household" (Daljit Singh in *Sanjha Punjab*, 2024, 20:01 mins).

Figure 20. Film shoot for *Reflections Ek* in Papatoetoe, Auckland.

The third crucial scene is Nasir Dhillon's comparison of Wagah international border and the Kartarpur corridor designed for Punjabi Sikh pilgrims to cross visa-free. The duality of borders in the Punjab region is brought to light by Dhillon. Wagah international border embodies endless enmity on an international level between the Indian Hindutva state and the Pakistani Islamic state. Kartarpur corridor, by contrast, represents kinship and cultural ties between east Punjabis and west Punjabis who are essentially the same ethnic and language group in the South Asian region.

Thus, the storyline rewrote the moral of the story in Waryam Singh Sandhu's, *The Fourth Direction*, when Raj Kumar comes to the self-realisation that religious bigotry is not morally and ethically justified in modern society (Sandhu, 2019, pp. 9-29). Instinctively, this lesson was applied in *Reflections Ek*. By investing in the *Sanjha Punjab* theme, the characters were presented in their true light as community leaders whose collective work was about removing borders and barriers between Punjabis by practicing open-mindedness, social acceptance, and inter-faith tolerance.

Visually, the storywork for *Reflections Ek* interpreted and reworked a scene from Mohsen Makhmalbaf's film, *A Moment of Innocence*, where Makhmalbaf casts a seventeen year old non-actor to play himself at that age (Makhmalbaf, 1996). In the casting scene, the film director who is Makhmalbaf acting as himself asked the adolescent male about his aspirations in life. Candidly, he responded that his goal was to "to save poor people, innocent people" by whatever means he had available to him (Makhmalbaf, 1996). Hence, the concept of naïve idealism or wide-eyed optimism is reproduced in a panel discussion of Punjabi community leaders. What Punjabi language audiences see and hear is Punjabis from different sides of the militarised border proposing that softening the border is in fact an act of common humanity for the benefit of all Punjabis.

Filmed in two locations, Papatoetoe in South Auckland and Faisalabad in west Punjab, *Reflections Ek* was couched in a hybrid space. By this, the story used public domains of broadcasting the panel discussion live on radio, and video livestreaming on social media platforms. But there was also a sense of private space in a confined studio setting at *Radio Spice 88.0 FM*, especially among real life friends Daljit Singh and Naveed Hamid. The genuine warmth and rapport between Daljit and Naveed was evident in their willingness to reflectively listen and craft their commentaries in support of each other's views and insights.

Contemplating the context-specific treatment of *Reflections Ek*, there were interlinked factors at play. Primarily, the live radio panel had been meticulously orchestrated between the host interviewer and contributing speakers to align with the content of this community radio station's programming. Collectively, the non-actors and I perceived *Reflections Ek* to be an opportunity to shift the public discussion towards an interest topic beneficial to Punjabi radio listeners and livestream viewers. With that being the case, the characters were also conscientious about conversation boundaries to avoid inflaming the religious fundamentalist beliefs of factional groups of Hindutva, Muslim, and Sikh ultra-nationalists.

Equipment

Crew	Cameras	Sound
Niko Meredith: Camera, sound.	Black Magic Pocket Cinema Camera 6K Pro	Rode Boom Pole Pro
Nasir Dhillon: Camera, sound.	Sony Alpha a7 III	Rode NTG1 Condenser Shotgun Microphone
Asim Mukhtar: Director.	Canon EOS R Canon RF 24-105mm f/4L	Zoom H4n Pro Recorder
	Stills: Samsung S22	Rode Lavalier Lapel Microphone
		Rode Video Mic Pro+

Process

Preparation for filming *Reflections Ek* involved developing a radio interview schedule with my primary supervisor that gave adequate time and space for the panellists, Daljit, Naveed, and Nasir to respond to the questions on their own terms and in their authentic voices. I arranged a series of online conversations with the radio host and discussants to gain their insights and feedback on adjustments and improvements to allow the discussion to flow openly and unpretentiously. The film crew were well familiar with our workflow of filming in the South Auckland Punjabi community and effortlessly drafted up shot lists, sound notes, and editing plans.

The live radio show lasted forty-five minutes. In that time, Niko Meredith and I recorded one-hundred and thirty-five gigabytes of data, which amounted to two-hours and thirty-minutes of raw footage. Filming and livestreaming went according to plan, which made the post-production editing process unproblematic across five cuts to the final version. The scene that I put concentrated effort into working up the visual detail

was Daljit Singh's discussion where he highlighted the fact that South Auckland Punjabis are an ethnic and cultural community in Aotearoa, and due to our shared origins, language, heritage, and kinship ties we should not be boxed into being singly defined by religion.

Story 4: Reflections Doo

The fourth story *Reflections Doo* or reflections two was filmed enroute to Takanini Gurdwara and Masjid Ayesha in South Auckland. At 8:02 minutes screentime, the story showed two characters, Gurmeet Singh Sarkaria and Ali Shah, singing devotional songs and driving to their holy places. The principal scenes were the characters arriving at their destinations. Deliberately the camera gave prominence to how they entered their places of worship. For example, Gurmeet removed his shoes and socks, folded his hands together in a prayer gesture, and touched the ground before walking inside the Gurdwara. Ali on the other hand removed his *Peshawari Chappal* sandals, walked inside the masjid and performed a *ruku*, a bow, and *sujud*, meaning to prostrate.

The *Reflections Doo* storyline was inspired by sentimentalities in Nadir Ali's short story, *Saint of Sparrows*, expressly the description of the saint's demeanour (Ali, 2022, pp. 37-43). In regard to this character's disposition, Ali explained that:

> The Saint of Sparrows was one of a kind. …People share a peculiar story about him. Supposedly he hailed from a large city, but barely uttered a word, except to little children and goats and sparrows (Ali, 2022, pp. 38-39).

In terms of creating *Reflections Doo*, the author's idealisation of the *Saint of Sparrows* was applied in a modern day, diasporic environment with migrant Punjabis embodying a saintly image (Ali, 2022). Gurmeet Singh Sarkaria and Ali Shah were peers of mine whom I had befriended in the South Auckland Punjabi Sikh and Punjabi Muslim communities. From my own sentimentalised viewpoint, their sincere commitment to

upholding their faith in a democratic and secular western society revealed an everyday reality for devout Sikh and Muslim migrants from the Punjab region.

Figure 21. Film shoot for *Reflections Doo* in Manurewa, Auckland.

Visually, the storywork borrowed and adapted the practice of a vehicle being used as a mobile studio, which was seen in Jafar Panahi's *Taxi* (Panahi, 2015). Peering out the car window, Punjabi audiences take in sites and scenes of South Auckland that bring Manurewa and Takanini suburbs into focus; places where large communities of migrant Punjabis have been established. The story also allowed viewers to feel they were watching Gurmeet and Ali close-up in a reflective space of preparing themselves spiritually and mentally to worship at their local Gurdwara and Masjid.

Reflections Doo was largely filmed inside moving vehicles travelling through public spaces. Surveying the sets in which the filming took place within the two cars, it could be said that the drivers were located in a private space. Private, in the sense that driving to Gurdwara and Masjid and singing along to devotional music constructed a deeply personal space; one in which the characters felt secluded and safe to act naturally and be themselves. Essentially, the non-narrative treatment of *Reflections Doo*

meant the story was edited in a certain way to give the impression that Gurmeet and Ali were commuting to their holy places at the same time.

By design, holy places in South Auckland were filmed through a car window, like the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Temple in Flat Bush, the Auckland New Zealand Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints in Manukau, and Gurdwara Nanaksar in Manurewa. Intentionally, this footage was assembled to look as if the characters were driving past the same holy places but coming from different directions, that is, driving on opposite sides of the road. Crucial to *Reflections Doo* being the only non-narrative story was that the visual images needed to convey the key message about two characters who do not speak for eight-minutes of screen time. That very message was simple: faith is universal when seen as a means of human reflection.

Equipment

Crew	Cameras	Sound
Rewi Amoamo: Moving camera, sound.	GoPro Hero 9 GoPro Shorty	Rode Lavalier Lapel Microphone
Asim Mukhtar: Director.	GoPro Hero 10 Max Wide Lens Mod	GoPro Media Mod
		Rode VideoMicro On Camera Mic
		Zoom H1n Digital Recorder

Process

Preparation for *Reflections Doo* consisted of purposeful conversations with my primary supervisor to develop a non-narrative storyline using images, emotions, and devotional music to relate routine visits to the Gurdwara and the Masjid as experienced by the characters. I then conducted separate one-on-one conversations with Gurmeet

Singh Sarkaria and Ali Shah at their homes to gather their feedback and ideas on how they would feel most comfortable to be filmed while driving and entering their holy places. Lastly, the online meetings with Rewi Amoamo, the sole camera operator and location sound recordist gave us an opportunity to exchange ideas on moving camera sequences, especially for Ali entering Masjid Ayesha, as well as camera angles for filming inside the vehicles and out the window. The shot lists were compiled by Rewi taking into consideration our discussions on maintaining consistent filming inside the vehicles but then adding diversity by accentuating Ali's *ruku* and *sujud*.

Reflections Doo was filmed on two GoPro cameras by Rewi Amoamo. During production, he recorded one-hundred and thirty-five gigabytes of data, which amounted to three hours of raw footage. The characters' unique personalities came through during filming: Gurmeet took an outgoing and performative approach to his part, while Ali was modest about singing but confident and composed when performing *ruku* and *sujud* inside Masjid Ayesha. Post-production followed the standard procedure of reviewing and selecting data to build the eight-minute story on the editing bay over five rounds of editing. My editing efforts were concentrated around bringing out the cinematic detail of Ali's closing scene because he visualised the storyline: here, *Reflections Doo* was simply about the ubiquity of human faith.

Story 5: Friends Ek

The fifth story *Friends Ek* or friends one was filmed in the morning at *Love Punjab Indian Eatery* in Manurewa, South Auckland. At 8:19 minutes screen time, the story featured three Punjabi elders, Ajit Singh Randhawa, Saleem Zubair also known as Billa ji, and Rajinder Bajwa. Central to the story was the Punjabi cultural belief that the wisdom of elders can be heard in the quality of their talk and proficiency at recounting history. In some respects, there was a main character in Ajit Singh Randhawa who was asked to take the lead role for narrating a historical account of migration from the Punjab region to Aotearoa New Zealand. After a commentary by Rajinder and Billa Ji regarding the social impact of the Covid-19 lockdown and international border closure

on migrant Punjabis, many who found themselves stranded in the Punjab region, Ajit began unfolding a history of Punjabi migration to the southern antipodes.

Figure 22. Film shoot for *Friends Ek* in Manurewa, Auckland.

> Facing difficulty is in our blood. We've faced many difficulties to migrate here (Ajit Singh Randhawa in *Sanjha Punjab*, 2024, 37:47 mins).

The central scene was Ajit unravelling an allegorical story, or a story concealed within a story. Without having to elaborate in detail, Punjabi language audiences would apprehend from his indirect manner of speaking that at one point, Ajit was referring to the late twentieth century, a time when the Indian Punjab was embroiled in civil unrest. During the 1980s and 1990s, the primary reason driving the outward migration of Indian Punjabis had been triggered by the Indian army's 1984 military attack on the Golden Temple Sri Darbar Sahib in Amritsar. Carried out under the second term of Indira Gandhi's leadership – Indira being the mother of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi

who succeeded her – this military invasion of one of Sikhism's holiest shrines was known as Operation Blue Star (Tully and Jacob, 2006).

> India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited New Zealand. Sorry, 1986. He told the New Zealand government the situation in Punjab was bad; people were upset. He asked that Punjabis be allowed to migrate so the situation improves (Ajit Singh Randhawa in *Sanjha Punjab*, 2024, 37:00 mins).

Ajit's recollection of this first wave of Punjabi Indian migration to New Zealand is significant for context-specific reasons. Fundamentally, the heart of his discussion identifies that the 1980s and 1990s period of mass migration was due to political circumstances impacting on the personal safety of Punjabis in their place of origin, rather than economic migration strictly for livelihood (Mandair, 2015; Ranjan, 2020). Relatedly, as an example of social memory the excerpt revealed a deep-seated political rationale of the time. It was believed that permitting Indian Punjabis to migrate to New Zealand could act as a safety valve in the Indian Punjab: that is, a course of action whereby removing "upset" people from a "bad" situation would hypothetically lead to the end of the civil unrest and a return to normal everyday life (Ajit Singh Randhawa in *Sanjha Punjab*, 2024, 37:00 mins).

The *Friends Ek* storyline was influenced by the turning point in Waryam Singh Sandhu's short story *The Fourth Direction*, when the main character Raj Kumar came to his Punjabi senses and sensibilities, so to speak (Sandhu, 2019, pp. 9-29). Right at the end of Sandhu's story, a Sikh elder asks Raj Kumar to let himself and two Sikh youth walk with him on their way home. The elder believed that because Raj was Hindu and not a turbaned Sikh, the police and security forces would not kill them. Sandhu describes Raj's emotional response upon listening to the Sikh elder talk (Sandhu, 2019, p. 29).

> While he was talking, the fog that had covered my mind with tensions and fear began to ease out. The frozen blood in my veins has started flowing again (Sandhu, 2019, p. 29).

Deliberately, *Friends Ek* attempted to rework Raj Kumar's feelings described by Sandhu into a conversation between three elders led by Ajit Singh Randhawa, especially so that my people, Pakistani Punjabi audiences, could hear an account of Indian Punjabi migration during the tumultuous years of civil discontent. Billa Ji, the one Punjabi Pakistani elder in *Friends Ek*, concluded the *chai* (tea) and chat with an unscripted and unexpected line that astoundingly resonated with the ending in Sandhu's story.

> We should meet regularly. It will encourage people to overcome their fear (Billa Ji in *Sanjha Punjab*, 2024, 40:05 mins).

The visual storywork borrowed and reworked the cultural aesthetic of a specific scene in Mohsen Makhmalbaf's film, *A Moment of Innocence,* when Mirhadi Tayebi, a former police officer under the Shah of Iran, knocks on Makhmalbaf's door looking for him (Makhmalbaf, 1996). Twenty years earlier as an Islamic militant youth, Makhmalbaf knifed this officer and had served time in the Shah's prison for his offence. He was released when the Islamic republic was born and the supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini authorised for political prisoners to be set free. In this opening scene, Mirhadi Tayebi explains who he is to Makhmalbaf's daughter Hana. His reason for visiting was to ask for the role of acting as himself in a film about being wounded by Mohsen Makhmalbaf.

The complexity of having to speak, without giving away explicit detail, about a traumatic experience that had happened decades ago was the visual message, mood, and tone conveyed in a conversation between elders. Although the cultural and political context of the 1984 Golden Temple attack and the aftereffects on Punjabi Sikhs form a different and distinct episode in history, Ajit Singh Randhawa's skill in describing the event in relation to migration encapsulated the essence of the *Friends Ek* story: that being, the wisdom of elders can be heard in their talk.

Friends Ek was filmed in one location and set in a hybrid space of a Punjabi restaurant, a place where public and private space is conflated. The conversation at the table inside the restaurant engineered a shared feeling of mutual trust and respect in which the social exchange was a personal and somewhat private gathering between friends of the same age, gender, and ethnicity. But there was a public domain that surrounded Ajit, Rajinder, and Billa Ji, seen in the restaurant worker who served them *chai*, *jalebi* (sweets), and Punjabi potato *samosa*, and the Manurewa street scene where these friends walked to-and-from Love Punjab Indian Eatery. Visually, the story fused public and private space with the intention of showing Punjabi audiences that our shared language and culture is the connector, the social glue, which bonds people when they converse and relate in their mother tongue.

Equipment

Crew	Cameras	Sound
Niko Meredith:	Panasonic Gh6	Rode Wireless Go II
Camera, sound.	SLR Magic 17mm	Boom Mic
	Canon 24-105mm	
Rewi Amoamo:	Atomos Ninja V	Rode Lavalier Lapel Microphone
Moving camera.		
	Tilta Pro Camera Cage	
Asim Mukhtar:	Small Rig Handle	GoPro Media Mod
Director.		
	Sony Alpha a7 III	Rode VideoMicro On Camera Mic
	Sony 16-35mm f/2.8	
		Zoom H4n Pro Recorder
	GoPro Hero 9	
	GoPro Shorty	Zoom Hn1 Digital Recorder
	GoPro Hero 10	
	Max Wide Lens Mod	
	Stills: Canon M50	

Canon EF-M 11-22mm

Process

The preparation stage commenced with in-depth conversations between my primary supervisor and I to develop the storyline, giving careful consideration to how to capture a Punjabi cultural aesthetic of hearing wisdom in the conversation of elders. I conducted one-on-one and group conversations with the characters to seek insights and suggestions on the conversation topics, which revolved around Punjabi migration throughout various events and historical periods, along with Billa Ji's impression of relationships between Punjabi Indians and Punjabi Pakistanis. Online meetings with the film crew had progressed to a high level of efficiency and cross-cultural proficiency whereby shot lists, sound notes, and equipment inventories were organised without difficulty or lengthy, drawn-out discussion.

During production, the film crew of Rewi Amoamo and Niko Meredith recorded sixty gigabytes of data or one-hour of raw footage. In hindsight, the filming went smoothly with the larger part of the conversation between Ajit, Rajinder, and Billa Ji shot in one take. In fact, at one point in the film, the crew left the static cameras recording and seated themselves with me at a table behind the characters to make the restaurant look as if other customers were present. The three elders who were immersed in conversation continued talking undisturbed by the crew leaving the cameras unattended.

Post-production followed the routine practice of reviewing, selecting, and constructing the eight-minute story through a series of five cuts. A concentrated effort was put into editing Ajit Singh Randhawa's discussion, paying special attention to working up the camera detail to accentuate his calm demeanour, facial expression, and hand gestures. That being said, the selection of shots included a mix of one-person, two-people, and three-people frames aimed at highlighting the warm, sincere interactions and camaraderie between Punjabi elders and peers.

Story 6: Friends Doo

The sixth story *Friends Doo* or friends two was filmed in the evening at *Love Punjab Indian Eatery* in Manurewa, South Auckland. At 8:09 minutes screen time, this story featured a cast of seventeen Punjabi, Tongan, and Samoan men who were migrants to Aotearoa New Zealand, including myself: N.V. Singh, Asim Mukhtar, Amrit Singh, Amrik Jagayat, Parminder Singh Papatoetoe, Gagan Mangat, Navdeep Gill, Devinder Channa, Jasdeep Sidhu, Lakhdeep Sikhu, Jasbeer Singh, Haseeb Virk, Vakas Ali, Rasheed Variach, Melino Maka, Sylvester Tonga, and Fritz Filisi.

Figure 23. Film shoot for *Friends Doo* in Manurewa, Auckland.

The main character was N.V. Singh, a spirited Punjabi man who had migrated from Malwa district in the Indian Punjab a decade ahead of his friend, Asim Mukhtar of Narowal district in the Pakistani Punjab. With the kind of self-confidence that could be taken as cockiness, N.V. Singh instructs Asim at a local Punjabi eatery that because of

his years spent in South Auckland, he can tell any person's ethnic and cultural group by just by looking at their face. The conversation leads to N.V. Singh laying into the adjoining table of three Polynesian friends, one in particular who had set down on the table a plastic bag of ground *kava Tonga*. Punjabi audiences are never told what happened to the *kava* powder or the three Polynesians for that matter. Instead, the story was constructed around N.V. Singh's extroverted personality where he characterised that one Punjabi uncle in an extended family whose opinions of others are unreserved, and at times, somewhat out-of-step with reality.

There was a serious side to *Friends Doo* that turned out to be the final exchange between N.V. Singh and Asim while settling into their evening meal. After Asim relayed his story of making a documentary on stranded Punjabis who were unable to return to their families, jobs, and lives in New Zealand due to the Covid-19 border closure, N.V. Singh shared a personal observation. In his eyes, the government was responsible for separating families and kin groups, much like the authoritative decision made in 1947 to partition the land of Punjab and her people. However, his closing remark softens the social trauma of the 1947 separation of Punjabis by underlining that their common ancestry unifies them and is the founding principle of allegiances to family and friends.

> Despite being in different countries, our bloodline is the same. We're all Punjabis. We're united as one people. We've moved to New Zealand now. But a friendship with a Punjabi Jatt is an unbreakable bond, never to be broken (N.V. Singh in *Sanjha Punjab*, 2024, 48:10 mins).

The storyline for *Friends Doo* reworked Zubair Ahmad's short story, *The Estranged City*, particularly when the author reminisces about spending his younger days drinking tea and talking with friends at Anarkali bazaar inside the walled city of Lahore (Ahmad, 2022, pp. 97-109). Based on this, Ahmad describes how he remembers the atmosphere of those gatherings of yesteryear (Ahmad, 2022, p. 108).

> Tea was served all night, a flood of words, mirth and laughter. Someone would get teased, and if it had an effect, the news would scatter through all the groups. But nobody ever got angry or left in anger. There was a leader of every group who would take care of everything and ask everyone to contribute money for tea at the end of the session. …What mattered was who said what, who was the most educated, and who was the wisest (Ahmad, 2022, p. 108).

Intentionally, the line suggesting that "nobody ever got angry or left in anger" was adapted and altered (Ahmad, 2022, p. 108). Hence, the query that *Friends Doo* addressed was, what kind of scenario would unfold if one friend who considered themselves "a leader" actually "got angry?" (Ahmad, 2022, p. 108). By design, the story was set in a Punjabi restaurant in South Auckland where the main character became infuriated, not with his own ethnic group, but due to a cross-cultural misunderstanding with a group of Polynesian friends dining at the same eatery (Ahmad, 2022, p. 108). After N.V. Singh's outburst, he regains his composure and explains himself to the Polynesian friends in a gesture of peace, without tendering an outright apology for being what he considers a true Punjabi Sikh of the Jatt tribe: one who is faithful to his Punjabi kith and kin as a son of the soil.

The visual storywork redrafted a scene in Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* (Kiarostami, 1997) by adding inter-cultural tension in a comedic way between ethnic Punjabis and Polynesians in South Auckland. Kiarostami's film had an actual scene where a Kurdish soldier escapes from Mr Baddi's car and flees on foot after listening to the main character talk about ending his life, but first needing someone to check on him in the morning to make sure he is dead. If Mr Baddi was dead, the person checking was to bury him for a sum of money. The sight of the soldier bolting down a steep hill to run away from Mr Baddi occurs abruptly and almost unexpectedly.

Refashioning the concept of a sudden exchange between characters that happens in the heat of the moment involved constructing a realistic social environment where such a scenario could play out. The visualisation of three Polynesian friends entering a Punjabi diner, including two Tongans dressed in a *ta'ovala* (handwoven mat) with one of them throwing down a bag of *kava Tonga* on the table, was a social

indicator to Punjabi audiences. By this, Punjabi viewers would anticipate an exchange of some sort between the neighbouring tables, especially with the high-spirited N.V. Singh looking them up-and-down.

Friends Doo was filmed in one location categorised as a hybrid space; a setting that consciously collapsed the boundary between public and private areas. Without a doubt it was the main character N.V. Singh who consistently crossed the public and private boundary by first conversing with Asim in the privacy of their table, and then calling out boisterously across the room to address other Punjabi characters and the Polynesians at the nearest table. Through his actions toward and interactions with Asim and others, the visual distinction between the public and private domain gave way to an in-between space that was neither one nor the other.

Equipment

Crew	Camera	Sound
Ali Taheri: Camera. Negar Shirazi: First assistant camera, lighting. Rewi Amoamo: Sound. Asim Mukhtar: Director.	Black Magic Pocket Cinema Camera 6K Pro Sony Alpha a7 III Sony 16-35mm f/2.8 Stills: Canon M50 Canon EF-M 11-22mm	Rode Boom Pole Pro Rode NTG1 Condenser Shotgun Microphone Zoom H4n Pro Recorder

Process

The preparation stage encompassed in-depth conversations with my primary supervisor to develop, draft, and finalise a script for N.V. Singh as the main character and other Punjabis in support roles. The Tongan characters, Melino Maka and Sylvester Tonga, and the Sāmoan character Fritz Filisi had non-speaking roles. The script was circulated to the cast and at the first rehearsal, it was collectively decided that the

characters would not perform the script word-for-word. Alternatively, the various scenes would be acted out in an impromptu manner where characters were free to talk spontaneously. The cast agreed that as long as a character was performing their role according to the scene they were part of, then the camera would film in two to three takes. The shot lists and sound notes were prepared by my primary supervisor and I with technical advice from Rewi Amoamo.

An Iranian husband and wife film crew of Ali Taheri and Negar Shirazi who were Persian international students and my doctoral peers, along with Rewi Amoamo as the sound mixer, recorded one-hundred and eighty gigabytes of data for *Friends Doo*, a total of three hours of raw footage. Overall, the filming went smoothly, the sound was captured at a high quality, and the lively cast eagerly participated in every scene.

Post-production covered the standard procedure of reviewing, selecting, and building the eight-minute story in five editing stages to arrive at the final cut. The vital scene that caused a sudden turn in *Friends Doo* was N.V. Singh's rant directed mainly at Melino Maka who had the bag of *kava Tonga* in front of him. Ample amounts of time, work, and care went into careful editing to create a realistic outburst in a restaurant by cutting back-and-forth between the lead character, the Polynesian friends, and the packed table of Punjabi onlookers cheering on the sideline.

Story 7: Compositions Ek

The seventh story *Compositions Ek* or compositions one was filmed in a private home in Manurewa, South Auckland. At 8:13 minutes screen time, the story featured four characters, Amrit Singh, Amrik Jagayat, Nirsa Mirza, and Sukhbir Singh, who gathered one evening to share their performances of Punjabi folk music and Punjabi Sufi music. The story communicated a plain and simple message: given that music is a universal language, Punjabi heritage music shares a common attribute of storytelling the human condition through song.

Figure 24. Film shoot for *Compositions Ek* in Manurewa, Auckland.

The storyline for *Compositions Ek* reworked an idea inspired by an opening passage in Khushwant Singh's short story, *The Voice of God* (Singh, 1989, pp. 33-39). Introducing Bhamba village and her people. Singh impressed on readers that life is organised around mundane routine, and because of this monotonous existence the people and place have remained the same (Singh, 1989, p. 33).

> Nothing that is important ever happens in Bhamba. Once a year there is a gathering at the tomb of Syed Bulhey Shah when people from the neighbouring villages – Moslems, Hindus, and Sikhs alike – come to the fair. …life in Bhamba has little change. In the morning, while men work in the fields and boys graze cattle, women work at home grinding corn, cooking or spinning. After midday they all relax (Singh, 1989, p. 33).

Purposefully *Compositions Doo* altered the impression of village life that Khushwant Sing's story of Bhamba had envisioned (Singh, 1989). While Singh recounted the village as an unchanging place stuck in time, *Compositions Doo* looked at

the way in which migrant Punjabis from rural districts venerate their village roots when sharing song, irrespective of whether the music genre is Sufi or folk. Hence, the Punjabi lyrics written in English subtitles on-screen give non-Punjabi audiences an opportunity to glimpse overlapping themes captured in these distinct musical genres; lyrics which speak directly to the human condition of ordinary, everyday villagers.

For example in the closing song Nirsa Mirza, a Punjabi Pakistani Sufi performer, sang the story of a village woman spinning clothe and contemplating her unrequited love in the closing song (Nirsa Mirza in *Sanjha Punjab*, 2024, 55:40 mins).

> Oh my beloved!
>
> I placed my spinning wheel in the street to catch a glimpse of you.
>
> People may think I'm spinning cotton.
>
> In reality, I'm threading your memories.

By comparison, the father and son duo of Amrit Singh and Amrik Jagayat performed a folk song, accompanied by the *tumbi* (single-string guitar) and *tabla* (hand drum), which instructed Punjabis on the moral code governing the social fabric of village life (Amrit Singh and Amrik Jagayat in Sanjha Punjab, 2024, 51:05 mins).

> Never eye up single women.
>
> Never leave your spouse.
>
> This is the way your parents raised you.
>
> Never cheat good people.
>
> Never betray your friends.

Visually, the storywork was inspired by the cultural aesthetic of the village and fields in Gurvinder Singh's *Anhey Ghorey Da Daan* (2011). It could be argued that this

very space – rural village, fields of crops – was in fact a non-narrative film device employed by Gurvinder Singh to underscore the hopelessness and helplessness of Dalit Sikhs in the Indian Punjab (Rana Nayar in Singh, 2016). In another social context of migrant Punjabis remembering the Punjab through song, the space of enculturation where people acquire the values and norms of their environment is the village and surrounding farm lands. Hence, the Sufi and folk compositions performed in *Friends Ek* transmit a romantic view of village life as the fundamental symbol of the ancestral homeland.

Compositions Ek was filmed in a single location, which was the private space of a residential home. Within the privacy of a friend's living room, this informal gathering of Sufi and folk performers were comfortable in one another's company and vitally, confident to exchange songs and support their fellow artists. This private space put across to Punjabi audiences that at times, meaningful manifestations of music and song are simply impromptu recitals shared among peers.

Equipment

Crew	Cameras	Sound
Niko Meredith: Camera, sound.	Panasonic Gh6 SLR Magic 17mm Canon 24-105mm	Rode Wireless Go II Boom Mic
Rewi Amoamo: Moving camera.	Atomos Ninja V	Rode Lavalier Lapel Microphone
Asim Mukhtar: Director.	Tilta Pro Camera Cage Small Rig Handle	GoPro Media Mod
	Sony Alpha a7 III Sony 16-35mm f/2.8	Rode VideoMicro On Camera Mic
	GoPro Hero 9 GoPro Shorty	Zoom H4n Pro Recorder Zoom Hn1 Digital Recorder

	GoPro Hero 10 Max Wide Lens Mod Stills: Canon M50 Canon EF-M 11-22mm

Process

The preparation stage consisted of extensive conversations with my primary supervisor to develop the *Compositions Doo* storyline. Group meetings organised with the cast were productive and insightful where characters provided concise information on Sufi and folk ballads they would perform, and we discussed possible collaborations on certain songs and how the filming would run. At this stage of filming the seventh story for *Sanjha Punjab*, online meetings with the film crew were efficient and followed a set format of finalising shot lists, sound notes, and specific details about the setting where the camera operators would be working.

The film crew of Rewi Amoamo and Niko Meredith recorded two-hundred and forty gigabytes of data, which amounted to four hours of raw footage. There were two takes for every song and scene, and the characters were convivial in each other's company and comfortable in front of the camera. Post-production included the standard procedure of selecting, cutting, and building the eight-minute story and five rounds of editing to arrive at the final cut. The editing process paid attention to the cutting back-and-forth between characters during their performances appear smooth and seamless on-screen. Moreover, single shots of the characters' singing brought out the camera detail of facial expression and the gesturing of hands.

Story 8: Compositions Doo

The eighth story *Compositions Doo* or compositions two was filmed in three places and two countries: Lahore city and Chiniot district in west Punjab, Pakistan, and

Auckland International Airport in South Auckland. The entire story was 9:33 minutes screen time. At 5:04 minutes, most of *Compositions Doo* presented the senior students of Islamia Postgraduate College in Chiniot district performing the *jhoomar*, a Punjabi folk dance originating in Multan city and the *Rachna Doab* region of Punjab, Pakistan. Accompanying the students was their college principal Faisal Hayat Jappa who at one part danced with them, along with two community members who each played a *dholak*, a two-headed hand drum, and together sang a folk ballad.

Figure 25. Film shoot for *Compositions Doo* in Lahore, Punjab.

A total of 6:28 minutes was dedicated to a non-narrative interpretation of my visit to Lahore city and Chiniot district in Punjab, Pakistan, while the remaining 3:05 minutes showed me arriving back at Auckland International Airport and recounting my travels to Gurmeet Singh Sarkaria driving his taxi. By a non-narrative reading, I mean that deciding on images and frames to weave together a visual story of west Punjab that I had seen and experienced was highly interpretive work. This was not, by any means, an objective and detached presentation of video clips resembling a trip to

Punjab, but rather, a visual story that was deliberately planned and sculpted by my perceptions of, and emotional entanglements with, the subject of visiting home as a migrant Punjabi living in South Auckland.

The *Compositions Doo* storyline was influenced by a nostalgic image of 1970s Lahore described in Zubair Ahmad's short story, *The Estranged City* (Ahmad, 2022, pp. 97-109).

> Lahore in the mid-1970s was nothing like it is today. Evening would wander in slowly and descend softly on the edges of the heart. All that matters in youth is friendship; there is nothing more (Ahmad, 2022, pp. 98-99).

The non-narrative sequence of Lahore orbited around iconic sites of the walled city. Thus, the iconographic landscape of old Lahore contained architectural and cultural symbols that were instantly identifiable to Punjabi audiences: Gurdwara Dera Sahib, Hazuri Bagh gardens, Badshahi mosque, Delhi gate, Lahori bazaar, Wazir Khan Masjid, and Fort Road food street. Further to this, the opening lyrics of Jagmohan Kaur's *Shehar Lahore Ander* were intended to stir deep-seated emotional ties to Lahore as the ancient capital of the Punjab (Jagmohan Kaur in *Sanjha Punjab*, 2024, 57:00 mins).

> *Tell me, in the city of Lahore,*
>
> *how many windows and doors are there?*

Beneath the architecture and built environment lies the perplexity of Zubair Ahmad's critical observation that the Lahore of today resembles nothing of the past because everything has changed (Ahmad, 2022, p. 98). Precisely, it is the people-scape or the social landscape that has been completely transformed in eighty years of

dividing and disconnecting west Punjab from east Punjab and vis-à-vis. Hence, Punjabi audiences from the Indian Punjab would be more sensitive to the fact that vital social elements erased from the Lahore landscape are them: in a nutshell, Punjabi Sikhs, Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis, Christians, and atheists.

The visual storywork drew inspiration from the social classes of people who featured in Jafar Panahi's film, *Taxi* (Panahi, 2011). Although there was little ethnic distinction between different characters who were predominantly Farsi speakers of Persian identity, apart from Panahi's conversation with a childhood friend from his old Azeri Iranian neighbourhood in Tehran, class was the defining category (Panahi, 2011). For example, in the opening scene of *Taxi*, two passengers in Panahi's vehicle disagree over the Shari'a law enacting the death penalty for theft: the school teacher opposed the death penalty, while ironically, the street mugger argued in favour of death as the punishment for petty theft (Panahi, 2011).

The visualisation of class took on a different expression in *Compositions Doo* in which the built environment versus the rural farm lands distinguished urban from rural settings, rather than the people populating these distinctive settings who were the common class. Everyday people could be seen walking the streets of Lahore's walled city with some selling street merchandise, such as the dwarf selling sweets. In a similar vein, folk of average means could be seen in Chiniot district, as in the farmer tilling his plot of land in the village.

Filmed in public spaces, *Compositions Doo* moved across international borders and cultural and geographic boundaries from urban centre to rural village, and from Punjab, Pakistan to Auckland, New Zealand. Deliberately, the camera was fixed on the ordinary Punjabi, including myself, who despite migration and social mobility identifies with the common Punjabi beyond everything. That being said, the entire story was built around the central scene of senior students at a district high school dancing the *jhoomar* with their peers looking on in school uniform. For Punjabi audiences, this eighth story would be taken as the pinnacle of *Sanjha* Punjab. By this, taking a camera inside a district school to see a folk dance performed by young people incites emotions of pride and admiration in the cultural authenticity of village life.

Equipment

Crew	Cameras	Sound
Asim Mukhtar: Director, camera, sound.	Sony Alpha a7 III Sony 16-35mm f/2.8	Rode NTG1 Condenser Shotgun Microphone
Rewi Amoamo: Moving camera, sound.	GoPro Hero 9 GoPro Shorty	Rode Lavalier Lapel Microphone
	GoPro Hero 10 Max Wide Lens Mod	Rode VideoMicro On Camera Mic
	Stills: Samsung S22	GoPro Media Mod
		Zoom Hn1 Digital Recorder

Process

The production stage encompassed detailed conversations with my primary supervisor to develop the *Compositions Doo* storyline. For part of our dialogue, we planned how to film significant places in and around the walled city of Lahore that were to be mentioned in a conversation between Gurmeet Singh Sarkaria and I back in Auckland, as well as how to record high quality sound of the *jhoomar* performance, specially the *dholak* drumming and the song of *Heer Ranjha*. My discussions with Gurmeet in Auckland, and in Chiniot district with Faisal Hayat Jappa, principal of the senior secondary school where the *jhoomar* and *Heer Ranjha* sung by a student was filmed were meticulous and thorough.

By this, Gurmeet contributed in-depth insights on conversation points we could cover, while Faisal comprehensively explained the methods by which his school transferred cultural knowledge of folk dance and music to senior students as part of their education. The online crew meetings with Rewi were useful and well-organised, where he not only prepared shot lists and sound notes for his filming of Gurmeet and I

conversing inside Gurmeet's taxi, but also advised me on technical methods for the visual and sound recording of Lahore's walled city and the *jhoomar* performed in Chiniot district. Upon reflection, if I had been able to afford an extra airfare and accommodation expenses, I would have asked Rewi to travel with me to west Punjab to film moving shots of Lahore and the *jhoomar* dance scene.

Rewi Amoamo and I recorded ten hours of raw footage, which was a total of six hundred gigabytes of data. Post-production included the usual workflow of selecting, cutting, and building the nine-and-a-half minute story on the editing bay along with five rounds of editing to reach the final cut. Extending this last story out to more than nine minutes was an editing decision that in my opinion added value to the overall film. Personally, I included lengthy footage of the *jhoomar* dance, a five-minute bracket, for the purpose of communicating to Punjabi audiences that the village setting of adolescent boys at a local high school represents a deeper self-image of how I see myself when reminiscing about the Punjab and my emotional attachment to homeland, family, and community.

Credit Roll

Rewi Amoamo filmed the credit roll on a GoPro camera at Takanini Gurdwara in South Auckland. At 2:88 minutes screen time, this short piece attempted to achieve two objectives on-screen. First, on the right side of the screen, the cast and crew's names were floated up, allowing them an adequate spell in which to see their names. Personally, I felt this was an important gesture in appreciation of the time and work the cast and crew had contributed to *Sanjha Punjab*. Subsequent to this, on the left side of the screen was a long take of the film crew outside Gurwara Takanini in South Auckland. Rewi, who was filming, walked around the perimeter of where Niko and I had set up our cameras and appeared to be talking through shots. He stopped right in front of us, turning the camera in a 360 degree angle to capture a selfie as the final frame: at that point, the film crew gestured to the audience watching the film.

Figure 26. Film crew in the final frame.

Visually, the storywork for the credit roll borrowed and reworked a specific scene at the end of Abbas Kiarostami's film, *Taste of Cherry*, where the director deliberately sets out to break the fourth wall (Kiarostami, 1997). Put simply, this means to transgress a convention more commonly found in theatre. Here, an invisible wall is constructed between actors and the audience to maintain distance between the stage, where the play is being performed, and the spectators. A clear-cut method of breaking the fourth wall is acknowledging the audience by addressing them. Different to Kiarostami's film where the fourth wall was collapsed by showing video camcorder footage of the main character and film crew, including Abbas Kiarostami and Jafar Panahi, I took a simpler approach of one long take (Kiarostami, 1997). Hence, by taking a selfie for the last frame, Rewi, Niko, and I were communicating directly with the audience. We were amplifying the audience's awareness that this was a film, and one that had blurred the boundary between fiction and reality.

The credit roll was filmed in one location in a public space. Rewi recorded sixty gigabytes of data, amounting to one hour of raw footage, which included five long takes that were uninterrupted by people walking in front of the camera, or coming over to warmly greet us and chat. The final take was integrated into the credit roll. After five years of filming inside the South Auckland Punjabi community and deepening my friendships and social networks, I had anticipated before the shoot that it would take an hour or more to get a smooth take for the closing scene. In a community setting like a local Gurdwara, Punjabis would naturally be curious and therefore would want to talk to find out what, exactly, were we filming for the doctoral project.

Equipment

Crew	Cameras	Sound
Rewi Amoamo: Moving camera, sound.	GoPro Hero 9 GoPro Shorty	GoPro Media Mod
Asim Mukhtar: Director.	Stills: Canon M50 Canon EF-M 11-22mm	

6
REFLECTION

Reflecting on the artefact

This chapter presents some introspective reflection on my part, plus a selection of responses to the film from audiences in South Auckland and west Punjab in Pakistan to whom the work was screened. Audience reactions were written from my journal notes and are my personal observations of what I heard, saw, and experienced of others engaging with the film and myself as the filmmaker. While the audience feedback was not necessarily a critique of the screen production, nonetheless it does represent a record of first impressions (Staiger, 1992). The chapter begins with annotated field notes on the five audiences who attended screenings in community and institutional locations and images of these gatherings, which are cited as groups of photographs according to page numbers in the *List of Figures*.

I have made *Sanjha Punjab* from the standpoint that centrally the artefact was created for my practice-oriented doctorate but essentially this nonfiction film pointed to a larger narrative of *Punjabiyat* after the 1947 partition of Punjab, much of which exists beyond the screen. Having said that, there were limitations in this approach linked to the fact that I have deliberately constructed the experience of migrant Punjabi men in Aotearoa New Zealand, a southern hemisphere country in the Pacific region. In *Project limits*, I candidly discuss the theoretical confines of representation when a male voice of migration and resettlement becomes centred on-screen.

Punjabi Film Participants, South Auckland

A special screening of *Sanjha Punjab* for the Punjabi film characters and crew, along with invited guests from Te Ara Poutama, my home faculty at Auckland University of Technology, was held on Saturday 3 February 2024 from 2-5pm at Nathan Homestead in Manurewa, South Auckland. Also in attendance was Blessen Tom, a migrant from Kerala state in India and a journalist for Radio New Zealand, and radio broadcasters from Radio Spice 88.0 FM, a Punjabi community station in Papatoetoe. I wanted to show my gratitude to the Punjabi cast and Polynesian film crew, Rewi Amoamo and Niko Meredith, and my primary supervisor Teena Brown Pulu and

secondary supervisor Harminder Singh for standing with me over five years of this creative project. The event provided an opportunity for the cast and crew to witness their collaboration on-screen and see eight pieces of Punjabi life woven together to unfold a story about us, the Punjabis of South Auckland.

Purposely I set up the community hall to create a hospitable space to welcome attendees. I thought about seating arrangements, tablecloths, and flowers, so that the guests were comfortable and felt this was a special occasion. The hall had black curtains to darken the room, and a large screen with a clear view from the tables in the room. We started with a Punjabi meal served before the screening allowing the participants to share food and talk informally. The evening's host was Navtej Singh Randhawa, a Punjabi community figure and community radio broadcaster. After the meal, Navtej asked everyone to be seated in their designated seats so the film could begin. He warmly welcomed the guests and made a special mention of Professor Pare Keiha, who at the time was the Dean of Te Ara Poutama faculty at Auckland University of Technology, thanking him for attending and supporting the project. The cast and crew had waited years to see the finished film. I felt nervous at first, mulling over what I might say to the audience if *Sanjha Punjab* did not meet their expectations, especially if the Punjabi cast were not happy with the way they had been portrayed.

As the first story rolled, the audience appeared to be glued to the screen. During the second story, it became clear to me that they were enjoying the film: smiles, nods of approval, clapping. I could hear murmurs of appreciation and at one point, a member of the cast stood up from his seat and clapped like he was giving a standing ovation a third of the way through the film. The looks of satisfaction and pride on the faces of cast members and the way they were captivated with what they saw was evidence that the story deeply resonated with them and had struck the right chord.

The theatre hall became lively with the Punjabi attendees immersed in the moment, nodding their heads in agreement, reciting lines of poetry, singing along with the songs, performing *jhoomar* from their seats. When the final credit roll ended, applause and cheering transformed the room into a shared celebration of *Punjabiyat*, from Punjab to South Auckland.

To wrap up the evening, audience members were asked to share their insights and feedback. Professor Pare Keiha highlighted that the decision to migrate overseas is fundamentally driven by hope for a better life. He remarked that the film had meaningfully captured the life of Punjabi migrants and their efforts to rekindle relationships beyond a militarized border, adding that because it takes a whole village to raise a child, the film – similar to raising a child – required the Punjabi community's involvement, care, and cooperation. The Punjabi audience showed their appreciation and applauded the collaborative effort of the cast and crew. They acknowledged the dedication of the Polynesian crew and thanked them for the hard work they had put into making this film a reality. Additionally, Blessen Tom published a feature article on the website for *Radio New Zealand*, which was reposted on *The Indian Weekender* (Tom, 2024a, 2024b).

RESERVED

FIRE ALARM
Push bar to open

Lahore University of Management Sciences

On Friday 3 May 2024, a film screening at the Gurmani Centre for Language and Literature at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) was attended by around fifty people who were staff and students of all ages. Following the screening, a panel discussion sparked rich feedback and insights from the audience on Punjabi language and cultural identity. The LUMS panellists, professors Farrukh Khan and Nadhra S. Khan, praised the collaborative effort of the film characters and crew, lauding the unique approach to researching *Punjabiyat* across borders in a practice-oriented doctorate. I noticed that Professor Farrukh watched the film closely, taking down notes to ask questions about the research methods and the film's eight stories relating to the culture of everyday life. Professor Khan remarked that the film did not represent Punjabi women, emphasising that a sequel should include women telling their stories.

The audience asked critical questions concerning how a practice-oriented thesis is different to a traditional thesis. One student commented that the film will go some

way to raising critical awareness among Pakistani Punjabis who are slowly abandoning their language and often feel uncomfortable about their Punjabi heritage and cultural identity. Another student who was studying film questioned the use of the technique often referred to as breaking the fourth wall. Deliberately this had played out in the final credit roll to impress on the audience that the characters were not professional actors, but rather, ordinary Punjabi men performing out of love and loyalty for the land of Punjab and her language and people. A young woman asked about the Māori people of Aotearoa New Zealand and sought to understand the commonalities between Punjabis and Māori. My response was that Punjabi and Māori peoples are both Indigenous to their ancestral lands. Despite experiencing British colonisation in different contexts, they share strong emotional attachments to land, ancestors, Indigenous language, and cultural traditions.

film crew at takanini gurdwara
rewi
māori, tongan
niko
sāmoan, tongan

To the Māori tribes of
Aotearoa New Zealand

A-16
SANJHA PUNJAB

Quaid-e-Azim University, Islamabad

The Punjab student council at Qaid-e-Azim University in Islamabad hosted a film screening and panel discussion on Wednesday 8 May 2024, naming the event: *Unveiling the Punjabi Spirit: Folk Wisdom, Sufism, and Identity*. The panellists were myself and the esteemed Professor Syed Ahmed where the professor was asked to talk about folk wisdom and Sufism, and I was given the topic of Punjabi language and cultural identity. I believe the organisers put together an exceptional event attended by more than three hundred students and staff. It was heartening to witness a large student audience enthused about a doctoral project that created a Punjabi language film. Worth noting is that Quaid-e-Azim University is the institution that educates Pakistan's bureaucrats and technocrats recruited to work for the state bureaucracy. I kept an eye on the auditorium space as people started filing in and was surprised to see that it became so packed with students standing in the aisles just to watch the film. The audience conveyed appreciation for the resolve of the cast to perform their stories as a way to unite people from the Indian Punjab and the Pakistani Punjab.

Overall the attendees commended the film, commenting that eight stories transported them on a visual journey beyond borders; one that showcased the vibrant culture, peaceful coexistence, harmony, and timeless folk stories of the Punjab. They saw that the film captured the genuine beauty of the Punjabis in that their internal diversity defines their culture and heritage. Afterwards I was approached by individual students requesting my WhatsAapp number and Facebook page link: they wanted to follow my practice-oriented PhD Journey. Remarkably, some students voiced interest in pursuing doctoral study in the Punjabi language with an express focus on a Punjabi centred research topic.

In one exchange with a Saraiki speaking student, he questioned why his people were left out of the film. He believed that Saraiki was a distinct language to Punjabi, as opposed to the conventional view that Saraiki is a dialect of Punjabi. I responded to the student's inquiry by saying that in my opinion, and in light that I am able to speak

Saraiki, this is a dialect of Punjabi and not a separate language. Further to this, I did not know of any Saraiki speakers living in South Auckland, otherwise I would have befriended them and asked if they wanted to be part of *Sanjha Punjab*.

Government College University, Faisalabad

In many ways, the film screening at Government College University in Faisalabad was special to me because it was hosted by Dr Tohid Ahmad Chattha, a professor of Punjabi history. As an academic who had inspired me during my doctoral study, I held him in high regard for his social activism for the Punjabi language and Punjabi unity across borders. Dr Tohid reached out on social media when I was screening *Sanjha Punjab* at Lahore University of Management Sciences. Inquiring as to whether I would visit Faisalabad, he noted that many of the students at his university traced their ancestral roots to the Indian Punjab, the land of their ancestors before they were forced to migrate at the 1947 partition. Dr Tohid impressed that the students would love to see a film with Punjabis from the other side of the border as they believed that their dialect, culture, and heritage originated in the Indian Punjab. Immediately, I asked him to organise a session in Faisalabad and within an hour he replied that the screening would take place at Government College University on Thursday 9 May 2024 at 1pm.

I arrived by bus from Islamabad at noon to find Dr Tohid waiting at the station to drive me to the university. We talked like old friends about the history of Faisalabad city where he lived. He pointed out historic buildings and pondered the contributions of Faisalabad and her people to the preservation of Punjabi culture and language in post-partition times. Dr Tohid remarked the Faisalabad people were proud Punjabis who had retained their language and culture, and that they were more tolerant and accepting of Punjabis from the Indian Punjab than people from other districts in the Pakistani Punjab. Faisalabad people, he believed, wanted to reconnect with their Punjabi roots in the east Punjab by learning how Indian Punjabis are managing to hold on to their language, culture, and heritage.

A good number of students attended the screening: some wore traditional Pakistani Punjabi clothes, and some female students wore hijabs. Outstandingly, more female students attended the event than male students, which made me feel optimistic

to see that the younger generation of educated Punjabi women wanted to learn about Punjabis living overseas and how they were rekindling their relationships. The first question put to me came from a young female student who asked whether Punjabis from India respected Punjabis from Pakistan. By this, she meant were the warm relationships among Punjabis depicted in the film real or just an act? My response was blunt: I told her that during my time living in South Auckland, I had received greater amounts of love, respect, and acceptance from Indian Punjabis than Pakistani Punjabis. In my experience, Indian Punjabis were not only sincere about restoring our relationships but more willing to help Pakistani Punjabis than vis-à-vis.

Another student showed an interest in meeting and making friends with Indian Punjabis. He asked if I could share his contact details with Punjabis who wanted to visit the Pakistani Punjab. He said he would love to host a Punjabi visitor from Aotearoa New Zealand or India, and would show them the sights of Faisalabad city. Moreover, if they wanted to go see their ancestral village in Pakistani Punjab, he would be happy to take them. *Sanjha Punjab* attempted to show that many Indian Punjabis who had migrated to South Auckland actually have ancestral origins in villages of the Pakistani Punjab, which the first story *Poetry Ek* expressed. The screening was concluded by a faculty Dean, Dr Abdul Qadir Mushtaq, who applauded the unique storytelling method of the film and supported implementing a practice-oriented thesis format for doctoral students at Government College University Faisalabad.

Film Screening
Sanjha Punjab
by
Asim Mukhtar
Join us for a screening of "Sanjha Punjab," a film exploring the lives of Punjabi migrants in New Zealand
Panel Discussion
Prof. Abdul Qadir Mushtaq
Chairman, Department of Pakistan Studies GCUF
Asim Mukhtar
Auckland University of Technology
Dr. Tohid Ahmad Chattha
Historian
AN ASIM MUKHTAR FILM
SANJHA PUNJAB
PUNJABI LIFE BEYOND BORDERS
May 9, 2024 (Time: 01:00pm)
at Video Conference Room,
Zakir Block
Department of Pakistan Studies,
Govt. College University Faisalabad
The documentary film weaves together eight stories of migrant life in South Auckland for the Punjabis, a people who have been separated into different countries, India and Pakistan, for eight decades.

Sanjha Punjab
by
Asim Mukhtar
SANJHA PUNJAB
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at
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Department of Pakistan Studies,
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Government Islamia Postgraduate College, Chiniot

It was important that I made every effort to screen *Sanjha Punjab* at Government Islamia Postgraduate College in Chiniot, as it was here that part of the eighth story *Compositions Doo* was filmed of students dancing the *Jhoomar*. The performers had been patiently waiting for over a year to see themselves on-screen. On the morning of Friday 10 May 2024, the college principal Dr Faisal Hayat Jappa organised a film screening. A teacher was to take me from Faisalabad city to the college on the back of his motorbike. Arriving early to pick me up from the hotel where I was staying, I could tell he was eager to see *Sanjha Punjab*. This young male teacher talked continuously, asking question-after-question about the film and what Indian Punjabis were like. I talked while snapping photographs as we rode the bustling roads of adults on their way to work and children walking to school. The motorbike dashed through villages and farmlands from Faisalabad to Jamia Muhammadi Shareef Chiniot, which took an hour and thirty minutes.

Arriving at the college at 9am, Dr Faisal Hayat Jappa was waiting in his office. He welcomed me with Punjabi hospitality by asking a staff member to arrange breakfast. During breakfast, students rushed over to greet me, expressing their affection and admiration. I was deeply touched and felt humbled by the overwhelming love and appreciation from young college boys whom I could see myself in when I was their age. A staff member came to tell us that the internet setup was ready. The student body had gathered excitedly in the hall, and could hardly contain their animated chatter when Dr Faisal introduced *Sanjha Punjab*, telling them that this was a practice-oriented doctoral film highlighting the warm relationships of Punjabis living beyond the India-Pakistan border in New Zealand.

When the film finally played, there was dead silence: every pair of eyes were fixed on the opening shots. Suddenly, the hall burst into loud clapping at the sight of Punjabi Sikhs wearing turbans and sitting in the park conversing with their friends, Punjabis from Pakistan. This simple scene from the first story, *Poetry Ek*, where Punjabi

men from India and Pakistan related to one another in their mother tongue had made a profound impact on young people who longed to experience such interactions for themselves. For the second story, *Poetry Ek*, the audience began reciting Baba Najmi's poem line-for-line. There was wild clapping and yahooing after every story ended and a new story started. Immersed in this social environment, I thoroughly enjoyed watching the audience reactions because it made me feel as if the arduous work and tireless hours I had put into making *Sanjha Punjab* had paid off.

The hall resounded with applause, whistles, and cheers when the *jhoomar* scene appeared in the eighth story, *Compositions Doo*. Students stood up from their seats and danced to the *dhol* drum while watching the screen. This was a proud moment of joy and happiness for everyone in the room, and the teachers looked amazed to see their students dancing the *jhoomar* in a doctoral film. When the dance sequence ended, thunderous applause filled the hall. Both students and teachers were elated with how the jhoomar had been filmed and edited, proclaiming that it was the first time they had seen a filmmaker do justice to filming their traditional performance art.

Overall, the audience commented that the quality of stories and the way they were seamlessly woven together was exceptional. Concentrating mainly on the *jhoomar* scene filmed at the college, the audience were impressed with the clarity of images and different camera angles used to portray the dancing. Audience attendants also remarked the facial expressions of the dancing students were well captured. Dr Faisal closed the screening by praising the film and the collaborative work of the crew and characters, thanking them for asking their college to take part. Lastly, he expressed his gratitude to Teena Brown Pulu for her story writing skill, commending her for authentically depicting Punjabi culture as a living, breathing, thriving culture.

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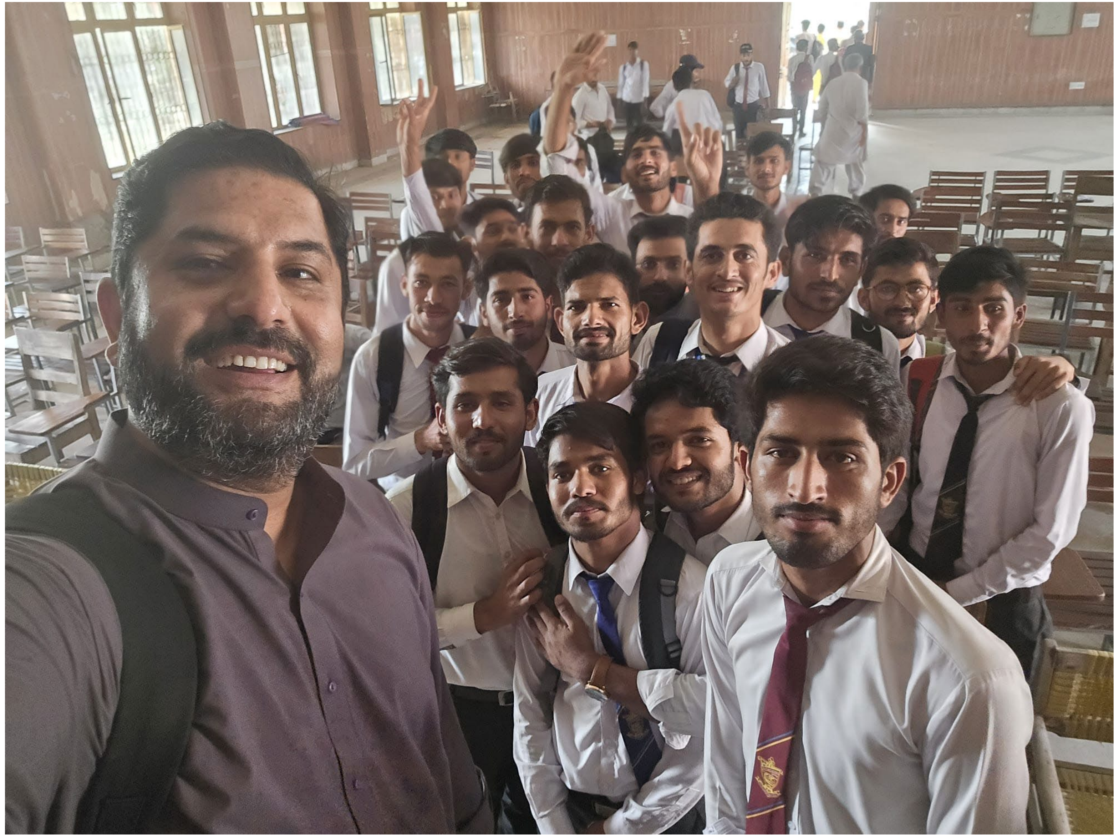


Project limits

Contemplating the limits of this hybrid documentary project, I believe this is linked directly to interrelated factors of voice and representation. Unequivocally I acknowledge that *Sanjha Punjab* embodied, enacted, and enabled the voice of migrant Punjabi males, largely adult men who were middle aged or senior community members; men who have jobs, families, homes, and relatively comfortable lives in suburban Auckland. Moreover, although the three elders who appeared in *Friends Ik* were retired, they were still active among their Punjabi people as leaders, advisors, and spokespeople. The film represented Punjabi life from a particular perspective, and as a consequence was filmed from a particular viewpoint belonging to a social group located within the Punjabi population in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This social group I have identified can be defined and confined by gender, class, and migration. I say class in the sense that as a category of migrants, most of the

Auckland based characters moved to New Zealand in the past two decades as skilled migrants entering the professional workforce in the information technology, internet communications, real estate, and business management sectors. Theirs is a story that can be looked upon, and critiqued, as one of male privilege. For even the financial resources and educational qualifications required to relocate one's life and family to a western developed country is a social indicator of privilege, and to some extent, patriarchy.

Comparatively, there are documentaries made by women on the social impacts of the 1947 partition of British India. One specific example is Samarth Mahajan's *Borderlands*, which focuses expressly on gendered stories of women, where most who were interviewed live in border states such as Manipur in northeast India, and Punjab in northwest India (Mahajan, 2022). As I see it, the main message of the film was to make audiences aware that the borderlands, the lands and peoples lining the borders, are couched within a precarious existence. Insecurity in this environment is compounded by eight decades of instability between governments and militaries, which effectively has become a normalised, if not traumatising, social condition.

The other constraint was a calculated risk that I knowingly took. *Sanjha Punjab* built an overarching narrative of life beyond borders grounded in eight stories of deeply nuanced Punjabi dialogue and visual creation. For the most part, the film is subsequently restricted to an audience of Punjabi language speakers. Naively, I had hoped this nonfiction film might have broader audience appeal. However, the screenings in Auckland and Punjab, Pakistan, taught me a valuable lesson: rekindling relationships after eighty years of separation was not necessarily a universal or familiar screen story outside of Punjabi language communities.

Appreciating that my thesis artefact had niche audience rather than general audience appeal, I had to critically reflect on who the film was for and what I intended for people to gain from their viewer experience. From the onset, I held firm to the ideal that *Sanjha Punjab* was for Punjabi community viewership and benefit. But the context of how Punjabis might benefit from the film had shifted somewhat from the artefact's inception to conclusion. Originally I considered the storytelling of Punjabi experiences

of living outside the Punjab region and having opportunities to mix freely, irrespective of whether one was from east Punjab in India or west Punjab in Pakistan, to be the pinnacle of the film.

In spite of what I thought audiences in the Pakistani Punjab provided me with clarity on the manner in which Punjabi language viewers had decoded the film, an aspect of audience reception I had overlooked. That was, they too held to similar values and beliefs regardless of their geographic location of residence. If anything, Punjabi Pakistani viewers generally applauded the high level of social interaction between migrant Punjabi communities from India and Pakistan, revealing that preferably this was their social ideal of *Punjabiyat*. The benefit of the film had morphed into something new. By this, *Sanjha Punjab* affirmed Punjabi beliefs and values on-screen, allowing audiences to see their inner selves and aspirational values reflected in the stories.

Future creative research

An area of future creative research I want to explore after my doctoral degree is conferred is a follow-up project, a kind of sequel to *Sanjha Punjab* if you like, set in and around my friend Mintu Sarkaria's village of Jethuwal in Punjab, India, and my village Johday in Punjab, Pakistan. Mintu's village is located fifteen kilometres away from the India-Pakistan border in Amritsar district of Punjab state in India, and my village is two kilometres from the border in Narowal district of Punjab province in Pakistan. This proposed project has grown out of my lived experiences that first brought me to make *Sanjha Punjab*, along with my deep emotional attachment to the Punjab region and her people, the Native Punjabis.

Formerly, I had planned the eighth and final story of *Sanjha Punjab* to feature Mintu, my Punjabi Sikh friend from India and a migrant to South Auckland, walking across the Wagah international border to meet me on the Punjab, Pakistan side. We were then to travel by car to his maternal grandfather's village, Chak 52-2L in Okara district, to visit the place where he was born and the kinship group with whom he was raised before the partition violence of 1947 forced him to flee to Amritsar (Mukhtar,

2020). Plans were dropped altogether due to New Zealand's protracted Covid-19 lockdown period from March to May 2020, which lasted intermittently in the Auckland region during August to September 2020, and again in February to March 2021. In effect, film work for postgraduate thesis students had come to a grinding halt, and filming overseas was further complicated by New Zealand's closed international border. Travel restrictions were gradually lessened from September 2022 onwards and in August 2023, the border was fully opened without Covid-19 requirements.

I could be justified in claiming that my thesis film work ran headfirst into the Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, doctoral research for practice-oriented students during this time was reduced, restrained, and regulated by the New Zealand government's Covid-19 protection framework. Despite setbacks outside of my control, I have chosen to read the experience in another way: that being, the pandemic restrictions prompted me to be creative and resourceful by limiting my film work to my immediate community and location in South Auckland. The storywork demanded that I realistically portray the ways that the Punjab region existed in, and was relevant to, our diasporic community and the place where we now lived in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The pathway I am proposing to travel with a follow-up nonfiction film building on *Sanjha Punjab* will have a regional focus in east and west Punjab. Specifically, I will be engaging in visual storywork that addresses the concern of Punjabi poet Nain Sukh who saw that "our thinking and constructs were made by the British" (Nain Sukh cited in Irfan Aslam, 2023).

> Punjab's history was not written by the Punjabis themselves since Rigveda. We feel proud that Rigveda was written in the Punjab region but never talk about what it contained. Rigveda does not present a good picture of the local people, rather it looks down on them for their physical features. According to Rigveda, Indra, Surya and Agni were the villains. All this history was interpreted by the British, our thinking and constructs were made by the British (Nain Sukh cited in Irfan Aslam, 2023).

In Mintu's village Jethuwal and surrounding villages of Fatehgarh Shukarchak, Makhan Windi, and Kotla Khurd, I plan to film various genres of folk music and dance.

Comparatively in my village Johday and surrounding villages of Kotha Kalan, Bhattian, and Mundiali, I also plan to film various genres of folk music and dance. The set of ideas I want to explore through folk traditions that have been maintained in border villages of Amritsar district of Punjab, India, and Narowal district of Punjab, Pakistan are straightforward. Principally, how do the local people of border districts represent themselves and their connections to cultural heritage through folk traditions? Subsequent to this, in the border districts of Amritsar and Narowal, what symbolises a shared Punjabi culture when we look closely at diverse folk traditions?

Added to the exploration of Punjabi folk traditions is gender and the role of women in transmitting and maintaining folk music and dance. Trent Griffiths observed that in the case of male directors filming women in the Islamic Republic of Iran, there were state restrictions on what could and could not be captured on camera (Griffiths, 2015).

> The most overt example of these restrictions was the 'rule of modesty,' which limited the representation of women on screen to primarily domestic spaces, and forbade any contact between men and women… These dictates of modesty presented obvious challenges, and increasingly Iranian film-makers abandoned trying to work within the double bind of the modesty rule and the conventions of realism, leading to the development of a unique cinematic grammar (Griffiths, 2015, pp. 30-31).

By no means am I suggesting that state film censorship in India and Pakistan has adopted the stance of Iran towards how women can and cannot be represented on-screen. In today's world, our internationally distinguished filmmakers from India and Pakistan are women – Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, and Iram Parveen Bilal (Bilal, 2020; Mehta, 1996, 1998, 2005; Nair, 1989, 2012; Obaid-Chinoy, 2015). What I am alluding to is the set of ideas informing modesty in respect to screen representations of women is not simply a reaction to rapid modernisation and western popular culture influence, but has deep-seated roots in the synthesis of folk culture and religious beliefs and values.

The cinematic grammar of women in Iranian realism cinema can be seen in the adoption of an Arab tradition, the black burqa or chaadar, chador in Pashto, associated with orthodox forms and fashions of Islam. On noting that, what would the cinematic grammar of Punjabi women in folk music and dance reflect about the way Punjabis visualise and perceive cultural heritage and performance arts? Realism language in Punjabi film, I am saying, is markedly different to Persian-centred views of Iran despite the historical fact that the Punjab region has been influenced by the Farsi language and Persian heritage, especially Sufism.

A follow-up film could possibly mean moving away from using static digital cameras and tripods to mobile filmmaking on GoPro action cameras and smartphones. My experience of working with a young Polynesian film crew competent at operating mobile cameras, bolstered by the key argument Max Schleser stressed in his book *Smartphone Filmmaking*, has made me curious (Schleser, 2021).

> …independent filmmakers need to reinvent themselves to tell their stories in a twenty-first century context" (Schleser, 2021, p. 24).

Schleser was signalling to the contemporary world of "emerging technologies and platforms" like the "short-form content streaming services" of YouTube Shorts, TikTok, Instagram Reels, Pinterest, and LinkedIn where three minutes of content is expected to inform and inspire online audiences (Schleser, 2021, p. 24). This a format that I find intriguing and challenging. Purposely, I had attempted to confine the eight stories of *Sanjha Punjab* to eight minutes each to hold the attention of Punjabi audiences.

On that account, the creative research question I will centre on after doctoral study is straightforward: how might Punjabi audiences benefit from a series of three-minute stories for distribution as short-form content? Aside from open-access content engineering accessibility and a broader audience reach, including non-Punjabi viewers, it is the film techniques that are applied to make each and every frame visually

meaningful and to convey a powerful message in minimal screentime, which I will need to give careful consideration.

Two semblances

Pānī Vagde Hi Rehn,

Ki Vagde Saundhe Ne

Kharaunde Busde Ne

Ki Pānī Vagde Hi Rehn.

May the waters keep flowing,

For while they are flowing they are beautiful

When stagnant they rot,

So, may the waters keep flowing.

This verse in Punjabi is taken from Diwan Singh Kalepani's 1938 poem that he penned in Lahore, *Vagde Pānī*, a reference to the flowing rivers of the Punjab region. Both the poetry excerpt and English translation appear in the closing of Radha Kapuria and Naresh Kumar's article, *Singing the river in Punjab: poetry, performance and folklore* (Kapuria and Kumar, 2022, p. 1072). The authors contend that in the twentieth century, central to the regional identity of Punjabis are acts of "singing the river," which entails composing and performing songs that liken the Punjab's riverways to a fluid emotion-scape capturing the very essence and nature of being (Kapuria and Kumar, 2022, p. 1071). Thus, in folk song the river is a metaphor for "regionally-specific understandings" and stories about the five rivers and their peoples, dialects, and cultures across the east and west Punjab (Kapuria and Kumar, 2022, p. 1073).

Importantly, Kapuria and Kumar drew attention to the social reality that for the Punjabis, "rivers subvert borders and push us beyond the very regional bounds of what is today understood as mainland Punjab" (Kapuria and Kumar, 2022, p. 1091). The

mainland Punjab they spoke of came into being after the "Greater Punjab region during pre-colonial times" and pre-independence times had been carved up and divided according to linguistic groups (Kapuria and Kumar, 2022, p. 1091). For example, in the case of Haryana in northcentral India, this particular state was separated out from Punjab state in 1966 to delineate Punjabi speakers in Punjab and Hindi speakers in Haryana. However, a simplistic demarcation of drawing up state lines on a map has proven to be problematic for Punjabi Hindu and Punjabi Sikh communities in Haryana, who number around forty percent of the state's population of thirty-plus million. Although these communities of Hindus and Sikhs speak the state language Hindi, ethnically and culturally they identify as Punjabi through their mother tongue, the Punjabi language.

Contemplating the notion that "rivers subvert borders," I close my exegesis with two semblances of me. I have likened these appearances to two intersecting tributaries of a river that coalesce and re-route on different paths but remain entangled and connected at points and places where they meet (Kapuria and Kumar, 2022, p. 1091). Embarking on my practice-oriented research journey allowed me to see that "rivers subvert borders," for the simple reason that manmade borders cannot stop the volume of fluid mass from crossing barriers and boundary lines (Kapuria and Kumar, 2022, p. 1091). Rivers carry social memory in the human psyche. Rivers can be likened to bloodlines, kinship ties, and relationships between people who continue to be emotionally attached to one another in spite of being physically wedged apart. Upon reflection, this is why Punjabis lay emphasis on the Punjab being the land of five rivers, and not the land of the long militarised border. Put simply, for sons and daughters of the soil, our rivers have a longer history and deeper meaning for us than an eighty year old barbed wire fence.

A decade ago when I arrived in Auckland from west Punjab in Pakistan, I thought that to be able to blend into New Zealand society my appearance had to resemble a western dress code – jeans, sneakers, collared shirt, suit jacket. I now know that my understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand was narrow, Eurocentric, and outdated. Back then, I did not want to look out of place and worried that Punjabi

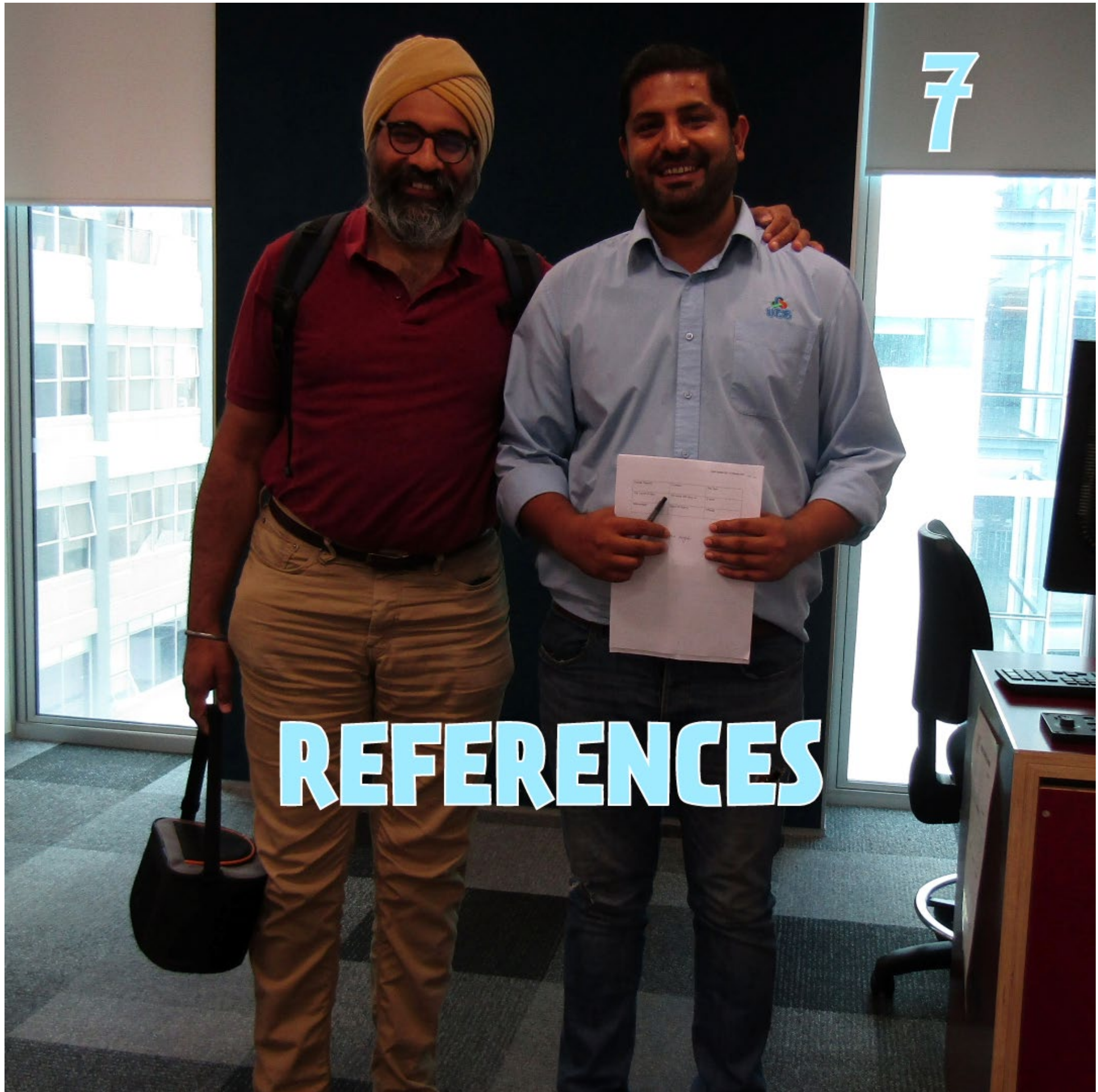
clothing could potentially make me appear to Pākeha New Zealanders, the descendants of British settlers, as another immigrant from the eastern world who landed in Auckland without an induction into western society. My heightened consciousness cautioned me that mainline perceptions of South Asian immigrants, our increasing numbers and growing communities, were viewed by others with a degree of scepticism. Ten years on in 2024, I am more than grateful that my doctoral project offered me a creative space and the time needed to come full circle to a culturally safe space of self-realisation.

Figure 28. Two semblances.

I close this exegesis with the queries that initiated my doctoral journey. Do the social relationships between Punjabi migrants from India and Pakistan in South Auckland influence our people and place of origin? Or do Punjabi migrants visiting the Punjab see their homeland differently due to experiences they have acquired from living beyond the India Pakistan border? A plausible answer is that these circumstances play out in relation to one another. The desire to share new ideas and ways of being Punjabi with people in the Punjab originates from experiencing life beyond borders. However, I have learned a third scenario while filming the last story for *Sanjha Punjab*:

our people back home in the Punjab are not emotionally distant and disconnected from the shared culture that we cultivate and take care of overseas.

For myself, I can honestly say that I have travelled eight-plus thousand miles from Punjab to Auckland to find a comfortable fit in my own skin, and to learn to appreciate that I was who I wanted to be all along: a son who is loyal to and proud of the motherland, the land of five rivers and her lineages; a grandson of humble, hardworking farmers who will always prefer to speak, read, and write in my mother tongue, Punjabi. As Diwan Singh Kalepani's poem advises the Punjabis of today: "May the waters keep flowing, for while they are flowing they are beautiful" (Kalepani cited in Kapuria and Kumar, 2022, p. 1072). What I take from this couplet and five years of creating a practice-oriented thesis is that the changing currents of migration and resettlement can lead you home, not as the exact same person, but as a migrant Punjabi who is capable of and skilled at adapting to change as lived experience and new circumstances require of us. *Sanjha Punjab!*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8
APPENDICES

Participant Information Sheet

For Video Recorded Interviews, Focus Groups, Performances

Date Information Sheet Produced:

14 March 2022

Project Title

Sanjha Punjab: United Punjab

An Invitation

Assalamo aleikum. Sat sri akal ji! My name is Asim Mukhtar and I am a Punjabi Pakistani from Narowal district who migrated to Auckland in 2014. Currently I am a PhD student at Auckland University of Technology, and my doctoral project researches and produces a nonfiction film exploring the cultural concept of Sanjha Punjab – a united Punjab, which refers to the shared culture of Punjabi communities. This is an invitation to participate in my research. If you choose to participate or not, it will neither advantage or disadvantage you. The research findings will be used for making a 70-minute documentary film and a 50-thousand-word written report for my Doctor of Philosophy degree. As well, the film will be entered in film festivals and I will publish a journal article about the filmmaking process.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to explore the cultural concept of Sanjha Punjab, a shared Punjabi culture. First, I want to find out how people from the Indian Punjab and the Pakistani Punjab relate to one another in respect to sharing a common language and culture. Second, I want to know how the concept of Sanjha Punjab, mutual feelings of Punjabis being connected through our language and culture, is maintained today.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You are an ethnic Punjabi who speaks the Punjabi language as your mother tongue. The researcher has emailed you about his doctoral film project, and has consulted with you either in person, over the phone, or via Zoom about the film and screenplay.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data will not be possible. The research is carried out either by group conversations or panel discussions, or performances of song, musical instruments, poetry, and dance. The discussants and performers will be filmed by the researcher and a film crew operating cameras and sound recording equipment. Some of the panel discussions will be recorded on the Zoom video platform. All of the group conversations and panel discussions, along with the performances are video recorded and conducted in the Punjabi language. By emailing the researcher your interest in participating in the research and by reading this information sheet and signing the consent form, you are consenting to participate in the research.

What will happen in this research?

For this research, the researcher will give you a short screenplay for the story you will be participating in: the screenplay explains what the story is about, who will be part of the story, and what you are expected to do. Some characters will respond to group conversation and discussion prompts, and others will perform a song, play a musical instrument, recite a poem they have composed or a poem someone else has written, or dance the jhoomar. There is no script and you will be asked to respond to interview questions, take part in a group conversation or panel discussion, or give a performance as yourself. However you wish to respond is your choice, as long as you are contributing to the story in the screenplay. The researcher and film crew will video record the discussions and performances, and take still photographs of you for the report write-up. You will have an opportunity to view the rough-cut of your video recorded content and withdraw any parts of the discussion or performance you have contributed if you do not want this used in the film. The researcher will use the

research findings to produce a nonfiction film and write an exegesis, which is an explanation of the film for a Doctor of Philosophy degree.

What are the discomforts and risks?

There should be no discomforts or risks in carrying out video recorded interviews and performances for this film as the researcher has consulted with you in person about the project and screenplay. You will be given a copy of the screenplay and the specific prompts you will respond to, or the specific theme you will perform about, before the date of filming takes place, and you do not have to answer any questions or comment on any topic if you do not want to. Also, you can withdraw from the research without giving a reason while the research is in the film production stage from March 2022 to November 2023.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

If you do experience discomfort or feel there are risks involved in discussing certain topics or performing about certain themes, you can choose not to respond to the prompts or topics that cause discomfort, or you can withdraw from the study without giving a reason during the film production stage from March 2022 to November 2023.

What are the benefits?

The benefits for the researcher is using the research findings to produce a documentary film and written exegesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The film will present the experiences of Punjabis from India and Pakistan, and how they understand and practice the concept of Sanjha Punjab in respect to their shared culture and living environments. The film will also be entered in film festivals. The benefits for participants who choose to participate in filmed interviews, panel discussions, and performances is that they are contributing information to a new area of documentary research on the experiences of Punjabis from India and Pakistan in respect to how they culturally relate to one another from the perspective of insiders of Punjabi language and culture.

How will my privacy be protected?

You will be named and identified in the nonfiction film and exegesis, which will be deposited online at the AUT library website for open theses and dissertations. Also the film, which fits into the category of a hybrid documentary, will be entered in international film festivals. However, you will have an opportunity to review the rough-cut of your video recorded conversation or discussion, or performance, and withdraw any part of your talk or performance you do not want included in the final cut.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The filming will take up to 3 hours or more of your time to complete. The time will vary according to the size of the speaking or performing role you have in the story that is being filmed, and whether there are reshoots of parts of the dialogue or the song, musical performance, poem, or dance.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have two weeks to consider this invitation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Once the PhD has been examined and conferred, you will receive an email copy of the exegesis in PDF format. You will also be invited to a special screening of the documentary film at a community venue in South Auckland for characters who have had a role in the film along with the camera crew and guests from AUT University. For overseas characters who cannot attend the South Auckland screening in person, you will be emailed a private link to the film hosted at an online platform and have two-days to view the content.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor:

Dr Teena Brown Pulu

Email: teena.brown.pulu@aut.ac.nz

Telephone: +64 9 921-9999 Ext. 5227

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the AUTEC Secretariat:

Email: ethics@autec.ac.nz

Telephone: +64 9 921-9999 Ext. 6038

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Name: Asim Mukhtar

Email: Asim@outlook.com

NZ Mobile: +64 27-700-0835

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Name: Dr Teena Brown Pulu

Email: teena.brown.pulu@aut.ac.nz

Telephone: +64 9 921-9999 Ext. 5227

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on: 14 March 2022.

AUTEC Reference Number: 22/42.

Consent and Release Form

For Video Recorded Interviews, Focus Groups, Performances

Project title: *Sanjha Punjab*

Project Supervisor: *Dr Teena Brown Pulu*

Researcher: *Asim Mukhtar*

○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 14 March 2022.

○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

○ I permit the researcher | artist to use the video recordings and photographs that are part of this project and/or any drawings from them and any other reproductions or adaptations from them, either complete or in part, alone or in conjunction with any wording and/or drawings solely and exclusively for (a) the researcher's | artist's documentary film and exegesis; and (b) educational exhibition and examination purposes and related design works; and (c) all forms and media for advertising, trade and any other lawful purposes as stated on the Information Sheet.

○ I understand that the documentary film and photographs will not be published in any form outside of this project without my written permission.

○ I understand that any copyright material created by the video recordings and photographic sessions is deemed to be owned by the researcher | artist and that I do not own copyright of any of the documentary film and photographs.

○ I consent to the researcher storing the film data and photographs in his personal archive.

○ I agree to take part in this research.

Participant’s signature :

Participant’s name :

Participant’s Contact Details (if appropriate):

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on: 14 March 2022.

AUTEC Reference number: 22/42.

Third Party Copyright Form

Asim Mukhtar

Auckland, New Zealand

Asim@outlook.co.nz

+64 27 700 0835

14 March 2022

Dear [name],

I am a postgraduate student at Auckland University of Technology and am making a documentary film and writing an exegesis on the concept and practice of *Sanjha Punjab*, a united Punjab, for a Doctor of Philosophy degree.

I am writing to request permission for the following works, for which I believe you hold the copyright, to be included in my thesis:

[Cite work/s].

A digital copy will be made available online via the University's digital repository Tuwhera. This is an open access research repository for scholarly work, intended to make research accessible to as wide an audience as possible. A small run of print copies will also be made.

I am seeking from you a non-exclusive licence to include these materials in my thesis. The materials will be fully and correctly referenced in the exegesis and I will acknowledge Radio Spice in the final credit roll of the documentary film.

If you agree, I should be very grateful if you would reply to me via email, or alternatively sign the form below and return a copy to me. If you do not agree, or if you do not hold the copyright in this work, would you please let me know.

I can most quickly be reached by email at Asim@outlook.co.nz or on WhatsApp +64 27 700 0835. Thank you for your assistance. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,
Asim Mukhtar

I ______________________________ agree to grant you a non-exclusive licence for an indefinite period to include the above materials, for which I am the copyright owner, in the print and digital copies of your thesis.

Date: ____________

STORIES OF A UNITED PUNJAB
BY PUNJABI MEN

SANJHA PUNJAB

AN ASIM MUKHTAR FILM

CINEMATOGRAPHY
REWI AMOAMO & NIKO MEREDITH

STORYWRITER
TEENA BROWN PULU