
SOCIAL FABRIC

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SOCIAL FABRIC:

**A SUSTAINABLE
SOCIAL-ENTREPRENEURIAL
FASHION COLLABORATION
WITH FEMALE REFUGEES
IN NEW ZEALAND**

This paper describes a Master of Art and Design research project developing a social entrepreneurial design process in fashion.

This is a multi method approach focussed upon a Participatory Action Research methodology, to develop creative practice and a relational business model for female refugee outworkers and myself a fashion designer resulting in long term rewarding employment.

The project has two primary strands for discussion. Firstly, visual documentation and analysis of textile and garment development incorporating the refugees' cultural references. Using drawing, embroidery, dyeing and construction skills of the participants in a collaborative design and production process with the researcher, has resulted in the development of a womenswear collection of T shirts.

Secondly; the process findings and outcomes of the pilot study which often cross the boundaries of aesthetics, technology, craft, and ethics; drawing together western and developing world cultures in a creative dialogue will be presented.

In conclusion, the aims, objectives, outcomes of and potential of this socially sustainable design model, which could be applicable to refugee agencies and New Zealand fashion designers, will be gauged and discussed.

Acknowledgments:

I would like to formally acknowledge and thank my supervisors Dr Joan Farrer and Sue Gallagher. I have so valued your direction and encouragement.

I want to express gratitude to my parents who likewise continue to be encouraging. Thank you for your unwavering support Mum and Dad.

Thank you to the countless others who have contributed to my life and therefore my project over the last two years especially those in the refugee community for welcoming me and generously giving your time and friendship.

This text has been proof-read by Jan Hamen.

Preface:

This Masters of Art and Design project weighting is 20% Theory, 80% Practice.

Social Fabric has been granted ethics approval by the AUT Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

As an examination copy this text does not yet include the imagery and evaluation of my final work or the interviews I will conduct with the research participants reflecting on their involvement.

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 nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment is made in the acknowledgments.

Attestation of Authorship:

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KEYWORDS:

Collaboration

Fashion

Refugee

Social Entrepreneurial

Sustainable

Women

RESEARCH QUESTION:

Is it possible to create a social entrepreneurial process of working within fashion while maintaining my design aesthetic?

Definition of my design aesthetic:

My “aesthetic” is predominantly shaped by my interest in hybridization.¹ Whether through physical collage-like (bricolage) techniques in the combination of disparate elements, or by collaboration with people who have a vastly different skill set, life experience and approach in a design sense, I seek to create the new through the juxtaposition of the old, incorporating throughout an ethical approach.

What is a social entrepreneurial process?

“Social entrepreneurship is characterized by an emphasis on social innovation through entrepreneurial solutions” (Johnson, 2003, p.1).²

1 **Hybrid** n. 1 offspring of two different species or varieties. 2 thing made by combining different elements.
 Hybridize v. 1 cross-breed. 2 produce hybrids 3 interbred
 Hybridization n. (The Oxford Minireference Dictionary and Thesaurus).

2 Johnson, S. (2003). *Young Social Entrepreneurs in Canada*. Edmonton: University of Alberta.

How does this process manifest itself in fashion?

“Fashion is a process in two senses: it is a market-driven cycle of consumer desire and demand; and it is a modern mechanism for the fabrication of the self” (Breward & Evans. 2005, p.2).³ Both aspects can be adapted and conducted in a social entrepreneurial manner. Fashion’s seasonal drive provides a consistent framework which, when focused on ethical principles, has great potential to powerfully leverage a social cause. Likewise, our intimacy with fashion, its intricate relationship with our identity, results in the likelihood that garments with an explicitly ethical origin will be welcomed for the positive reflection on the image of the consumer.

What process do I use?

Operating in a localised manner, engaging with the need for employment of refugee women in my community, I intentionally apply fashion industry production conventions to see this need resolved. As stated by social entrepreneur, Nic Francis,⁴

We need to move beyond notions of charity and welfare...In fact, the market itself is one of the most powerful tools we have to deliver and effect social change on a large scale and support the values we want our society to advocate. (Francis, 2008, p.g.2).⁵

3 Breward, C., Evans, C. (2005). *Fashion and Modernity*. Oxford: Berge Publishers.

4 According to Radio New Zealand’s Katheryn Ryan, Nic Francis is one of the World’s leading social entrepreneurs. In his argument for a shift from charity to social enterprise he commented, “while it (charity) was lovely for me, we were meeting 1% of the need” (Radio New Zealand, 2008). Guilt appeasing charity-giving only encourages what Francis has labelled as a “cycle of separateness” (Francis, 2008. *The End of Charity: Time for social enterprise*. P.g.9). However, social enterprise offers empowerment and lasting change through the generation of employment, resulting in poverty reduction.

5 Francis, N. (2008). *The End of Charity: Time for social enterprise*. NSW: Allen and Unwin.

FOREWORD:

Both qualified and experienced in the fashion industry, it is this discipline within which my Master of Art and Design research resides as I apply my tacit understanding in both a design and production sense. However, on completing my undergraduate degree I realised that if fashion was going to be my life, I had to meet the needs of all people involved in the creative process and not just those of my 'target market', the client. Reflecting upon this dissatisfaction that became the motivation for my further research, I recall the time spent in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya when I was sixteen. It is near impossible to spend time with people such as those whom I was visiting; people who have dedicated their lives to meeting the needs of some of the world's poorest; and not be challenged to consider how you to can contribute. In stark contrast to this slum, I live my life in Auckland, New Zealand, studying and working in fashion. It is from my position here that I have come to consider what I can give, how and to whom. This Masters project is the starting point of that journey, developing a relational process working with refugee women in Auckland, New Zealand.

The two strands of the exegesis (the garment development and the findings) are also described in two parts. The first is a linear description which operates as a time line, contextualising the process. The second part provides an analysis of the outcomes of the research project.

PART 1:

Image 1.
OLPC⁶



At the forefront of this research was my introduction to the term ‘Social Entrepreneurialism’ by Dr Joan Farrer. “Fashion & Textiles can be used to communicate, not just an emotional ‘feel-good’ factor, but socio-political and ecological philosophies in order to ‘give shape or form to something’ including societal change”(Farrer, 2009).⁷ This concept was further reinforced whilst attending a lecture by Cynthia E Smith, the curator of Design for the other 90%⁸, at the Auckland Museum. This exhibition displayed the work of some of the world’s top socially responsible designers, such as Yves Behar, whose motivations are derived from recognising the needs of people other than the 10% for whom almost all products are created.

6 OLPC (One Laptop Per Child) is a non profit organisation dedicated to designing and distributing laptops specifically for children in developing countries. Initiated by Nicholas Negroponte, the founder of the MIT Media Lab, OLPC is a highly innovative approach to dramatically impacting education.

7 Farrer, J. (2009). *The ‘S’ Word: Fashion, Textiles and Sustainability* retrieved September 1, 2009 from <http://www.rmit.mobi/browse%3BID=cyj8t38wr7qk1>

8 An exhibition curated by Cynthia E. Smith and first held in 2007 at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, New York, *Design for the Other 90%* highlights both the extreme needs our world faces and some innovative responses.

Of the world’s total population of 6.5 billion, 5.8 billion people, or 90%, have little or no access to most of the products and services many of us take for granted; in fact, nearly half do not have regular access to food, clean water, or shelter. Design for the Other 90% explores a growing movement among designers to design low-cost solutions for this other 90%. Through partnerships both local and global, individuals and organizations are finding unique ways to address the basic challenges of survival and progress faced by the world’s poor and marginalized (Retrieved September 1, 2009 from www.other90.cooperhewitt.org <http://other90.cooperhewitt.org/about/>)

Image 2.

Freeset

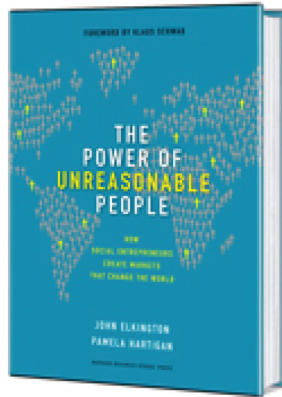


In 2008 I spent time in Kolkata, India, with a business called Freeset which similarly reinforced and informed my research through their total focus on the needs of marginalised people; these needs being met in business. Freeset approaches social enterprise through utilising the fair trade business model. Situated in Sonagachi, a small but highly populated red light district, Freeset gives prostitutes the opportunity to learn to sew and then employs them⁹. Such an option offers unimaginable freedom to women forced into prostitution through poverty, with no hope of removing the stigma attached to such a profession and the shame enforced through the rigid caste system.

⁹ Established in 2001, Freeset now employs over one hundred and forty women to predominantly make jute bags, paying them around twice as much as an equivalent job elsewhere. The women are also provided with health insurance, a pension plan, childcare facilities, budgeting advice, basic healthcare and a literacy program providing these previously unskilled women with not only a job but the assurance of a future for themselves and their families.

Image 3.

The Power of Unreasonable People



While working in this environment where hope is almost tangible, I began reading Harvard Business' *The Power of Unreasonable People* (2008).¹⁰ The title of this book was drawn from socialist writer George Bernard Shaw's statement, "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man" (1903, p.260).¹¹ The authors define social enterprise and describe today's significant social entrepreneurs; all of whom have created large scale, positive change through innovation and dogmatic persistence. As defined by the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, "Social entrepreneurship is about applying practical, innovative and sustainable approaches to benefit society in general, with an emphasis on those who are marginalised and poor" (Schwab Found).¹² What excuse do I have to not at least attempt to do the same? After all, "The impossible just takes a little longer" (Elkington & Hartigan, p. 207).¹³

10 Elkington, J & Hartigan, P. (2008) *The Power of Unreasonable People*. Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Publishing.

11 Shaw, G. B. (1903). *Man and Superhuman, Maxims for Revolutionaries*. New York: Penguin.

12 *Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship*. (n.d.). Retrieved June 26, 2009, from <http://www.schwabfound.org/sf/index.htm>

13 Elkington, J, Hartigan, P. (2008) *The Power of Unreasonable People*. Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Publishing.

Image 4.
*Antarctic Village-
Dome Dwelling*¹



Fashion designer turned fine artist, Lucy Orta, successfully combines ethics and aesthetics. Operating in a social activist manner, Orta constantly addresses community needs, generating work that raises questions and, “acts as a warning, an alarm bell or distress whistle to signal aspects of reality that the media ignore or simplify, before evacuating it completely” (Orta, 2003, p.9).¹⁵

14 The current climate of mass displacement of people due to conflict is considered in the *Antarctic Village-Dome Dwelling* series (2007), “a symbol of the plight of those struggling to transverse borders and to gain the freedom of movement necessary to escape political and social conflict.” (n.d. Antarctic Village-Dome Dwelling. Retrieved August 30, 2009 from www.studio-orta.com) An installation was created and documented in the politically neutral Antarctica. Tent like structures were covered in flags from many countries with references to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

15 Bourriaud, N. & Damianovic, M., Pinto, R. (2003). *Lucy Orta*. New York: Phaidon Press.

Image 5.
Ambimorphous



Similarly, fashion designer Hussein Chalayan's multicultural approach has been influential. Illustrated in *Ambimorphous*, the iconic black dress morphs into a traditional Turkish garment and then back into a (this time deconstructed) black dress.

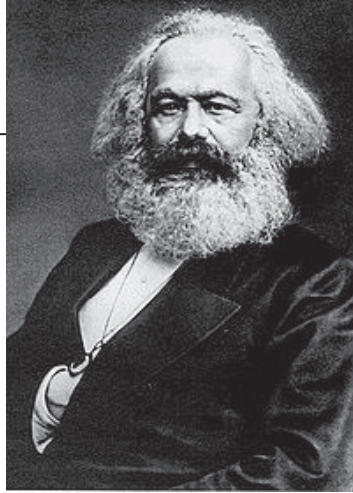
One discerns a respect which is far removed from fashion's previous borrowing (perhaps theft is a better word?) from non-western cultures. By positioning his own designs and the traditional costumes side by side, Chalayan seems to be saying "one cannot and should not, presume that one is superior to the other" (Polhemus, 2005, p.108).¹⁶

If anything has informed my design practice aesthetically within this project it is this collection of Chalayan's with its rich layering and hybridization of traditional and western. As I seek to work with marginalized people from cultures vastly different to my own I also look to adopt this sense of respect so evident in Chalayan's output.

¹⁶ Polhemus, T. (2005). *Hussein Chalayan*. Rotterdam: Nai Publishers.

Image 6.

Marx



Coinciding with the development of my thinking around socially responsible design practice was my introduction to Marx's Commodity Fetishism, described in *Capital*, (1867).¹⁷ The theory critiques the process by which a good produced (the commodity) is divorced from its relationship with the labor that created it. As a result, our understanding of its value is based on its relationship with other commodities like money. Social relations between people become relationships between things or, in a postmodern semiotic sense, "it assumes its meaning in its differential relation to other signs" (Baudrillard, 1981, p.g. 66).¹⁸ This theory challenged me to develop a production process beautiful enough to remain evident in the garments; this evidence creating value.

17 The continued relevance of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism is communicated in Billig's *Commodity Fetishism and Repression, Reflections on Marx, Freud and the Psychology of Consumer Culture*. "In consumer capitalism people's sense of personal identity is bound up with the regular acquisition of material possessions... to have is to be. This suggests more, rather than less, commodity fetishism" (1999, p.g 317).

18 Baudrillard, J. (1981). *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. St Louis: Telos Press.

Image 7.
Relinquished
Control¹⁹



I began to consider the concept of relinquished control and the shifting of the hierarchy of the designer, instead working in a collaborative manner. In this situation, encouraging visibility of those involved in the construction of the commodity is a necessary gesture, based on the principle that the participants are contributing on a design level and should be credited for this. The slower pace of this organic, collaborative practice is, in a sense, reactionary. Aligning with the values of the slow movement,²⁰ it seeks to bring normality back to the turnaround time of collections

19 On initial exploration of the concept of relinquished control I gave packages to friends containing a variety of parts of deconstructed garments, observing how they chose to recreate clothing.

20 The slow movement originated in Rome, 1986, in protest to the opening of a McDonald's in Piazza di Spagna. Originally in the form of slow food, the movement has since had many offshoots including slow design. The following is an argument made by sustainable design facilitator, lecturer, writer and maker Alastair Fuad-Luke:

Today, the general public often perceives designers as mere stylists to a (rampant) consumer economy. Designers have successfully converted financial, natural, human and social capital into a new anthropocentric focus of consumerism. In doing so they have been directly re-

as opposed to the ever increasing commercial whirlwind the fashion industry has become. “The post-recessionary world has reassessed its obsessions. Speed is no longer the key”(Slowdown, 2009).²¹

Members of a ‘civilised’ community or nation depend on the hands, brains and imaginations of experts. But however well trained these experts may be, unless they have a sense of ethical, intellectual and artistic responsibility, then morality and an intelligent, ‘beautiful’, and elegant quality of life will suffer in astronomical proportions under our present day system of mass production (Papanek, 1972, p.12).²²

sponsible for a catalogue of adverse environmental and social impacts and have assisted in encouraging new consumer habits.(*Slow Theory: Design in crises*. (2004). [online text]. Retrieved September 2, 2009 from <http://www.slowdesign.org/slowtheory.html>)

21 *Slow Down*. (n.d). Retrieved August 17, 2009 from <http://www.wgsn.com/members>.

22 Papanek, V. (1972). *Design for the Real World: Making to measure*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Image 8.
Travelling
Garment



In June and July of the first year of my project, these thoughts freshly realised, I traveled in both Europe and India. Taking a man's dress shirt with me, I encouraged those I met along the way to embellish it as they pleased, investigating the practice of relinquished control. Erica Sklenars, a graphic designer and film-maker, traveled with me and made a film depicting those involved as they worked on the garment. This was designed to be projected on to the finished shirt layering the embellishments and alterations made to the garment with an illustration of the identities of those who had contributed, acknowledging their role in this collaborative project.

Image 9.
Freeset T-shirts



While I had initially approached my project “Social Fabric,” in a fair trade sense, intending to develop garments with businesses in countries such as India while based in New Zealand, the satisfaction I found in the interactions that occurred through the travelling garment and teaching at Freeset informed my decision to localise the project. To retain the relational, I explored the potential of working with refugees relocated to New Zealand.

Image 10.
Run Still



In January 2009, a collaborative performance work called Run was created around the heavy and almost incomprehensible concept of being a refugee. Again Erica Sklenars made a film. In this, Sklenars juxtaposed contemporary pop culture images with newsreel clips depicting conflict that resulted in the displacement of people. This film was projected behind me and another designer as we dressed a model in layers of modular garments. These evolved out of our consideration of fleeing, owning only what you can carry. Some of these garments had been embroidered by refugees.

Image 11.
Emabet



As stated by The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),

Refugees have to move if they are to save their lives or preserve their freedom. They have no protection from their own state - indeed it is often their own government that is threatening to persecute them. If other countries do not let them in, and do not help them once they are in, then they may be condemning them to death - or to an intolerable life in the shadows, without sustenance and without rights.²³

UNHCR estimates that there are nearly ten million refugees worldwide. New Zealand first accepted refugees in 1944. Our quota program was established in 1987 and we currently accept seven hundred and fifty refugees a year plus asylum seekers. In pre-recession 2004 only 29% of these refugees were employed (Grogan, 2008).²⁴ Those that do have a job are rarely working within their field of expertise as their former qualifications are not recognised in New Zealand, and few have the necessary paper work to prove these. Statistically, older female refugees are the demographic who find it hardest to gain employment. However, as I considered the potential for working with refugees in a fashion context, it became evident that

23 *Refugees, Flowing Across Borders.* (n.d). Retrieved August 9, 2009 from <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c125.html>

24 Grogan, P. (2008). *Does a Rising Tide Lift All Boats? Refugee Resettlement, Integration and New Zealand's Settlement Strategy.* Retrieved July 10, 2009 from http://www.refugeeservices.org.nz/resources_and_links/research_papers

this is exactly the demographic who are most likely to have brought with them the craft skills which I could utilize. “Social Fabric” is an inquiry into the validity of working in such a manner with refugee women with the intention of creating meaningful job opportunities for them.

Ethnic people still experience discrimination and face issues different from the rest of New Zealand. While the needs of more recent arrivals focus on initial settlement, the concerns of Ethnic communities indicate that their priorities are:

- access to employment...

- effective participation to be able to contribute to New Zealand’s socio-economic prosperity

- greater support for the preservation of heritage, cultures, identity and languages.²⁵

(Briefing for Incoming Minister, Ethnic Affairs, 2008, p.g.5)

25 *Briefing for Incoming Minister, Ethnic Affairs* (2008). [online text]. Retrieved September 8, 2009 from [http://www.ethnicaffairs.govt.nz/oeawebsite.nsf/wpg_url/Policy-and-Guidelines-Index/\\$file/OEA_BIM_2008.pdf](http://www.ethnicaffairs.govt.nz/oeawebsite.nsf/wpg_url/Policy-and-Guidelines-Index/$file/OEA_BIM_2008.pdf)

Image 12.
Suit



Interested in both what craft skills refugees had brought with them, and their concepts of the appropriate compositional positioning of these, I initially approached working with refugees by encouraging a group of women to embellish a man's dress-suit as they saw fit. More recently, I looked again to hybridization in the design of sweaters and t-shirts. These are based on the way that the Somali and Ethiopian women involved typically construct garments.²⁶ A decision initially made on aesthetics; it also proved to be a successful form in resolving language barriers. The women understood the outcome of the garment with little explanation; this understanding often bringing an animated response.

26 Folding a length of fabric in half, sewing up the sides and cutting a hole for the neckline on the fold line creating a simple, draped top or dress (depending on the original length of the fabric).

Image 13.

Sweater



The embellished fabric is layered with references from both their country of origin and life in contemporary New Zealand. This contrast between old and new, African and western is a characteristic of the dress of the refugees themselves. There is a quirkyness derived from a vastly different understanding of clothing. It is this I looked to capture. I can't help but smile at the chunky woollen sweater, somehow worn both under and over various brightly coloured garments (or quite possibly just expertly wrapped fabric). This sweater was held closed by a small badge with "service" printed on it; an exact replica of the badges I strove for in my intermediate school years and wore with pride, attached in contrast to my uniform green sweat-shirt.

Image 14.
Somali Sewing
Group



According to Allman (2004), in *Fashioning Africa*, “Somali women have in their diasporic ethnic community chosen dress as an aid to integration, publically recalling and imagining their disintegrated nation and signaling its continual significance to each other and to the populations among which they live” (p.g. 228).²⁷ As conscious, or subconscious this motivation for dress may be, I am pleased to see the layers of tradition punctuated with the occasional pair of white high top Converse sneakers, perhaps a sign that life in New Zealand can have a role in informing their identities too.

Image 15.
Emabe Dying



The process simply involves working in tandem with the women. A garment is constructed and embellished by multiple people; each individuals input makes up a collective whole in a manner not unlike an Exquisite Corpse.²⁸ The difference occurs in the visibility of what has gone before, inevitably informing the following contribution in this participatory or co-design process. I have a degree of control in the sense that I have defined the format and parameters of each garment but, in essence, it is a joint approach. Yes, I am a designer, but my role is perhaps better understood as facilitator or director. I carry vision informed by trends and the nature of the market place but, as stated by Von Busch, “not the divine creator of the original and new, but a negotiator, questioning and developing design as a skill and practical production utility...A combination of designing material artifacts as well as social protocols” (2008, p.g.50).²⁹ Through trial and error the *Social Fabric* practice has evolved and will, I hope, continue to be developed, refined and adapted by others.

28 An Exquisite Corpse is a method originally developed by the Surrealists whereby an image is created in a collaborative process. A piece of paper is folded in such a way that those participating cannot see what has gone before until, once completed, the paper is unfolded to reveal a whole image; the outcome of each artists contribution to a section.

29 Von Busch, O. (2008). *Fashion-able, Hactivism and Engaged Fashion Design*. Gotenburg; Art Monitor.

Image 16.

T-shirt



Garments like sweaters and t-shirts are typically mass produced in a sweatshop environment. Utilizing these forms becomes ironic, as I look instead to apply a relational process working collaboratively alongside refugee women in creating one off pieces. To emphasise this contrast, these garments are photographed on the women who have created them rather than on professional models. Their signatures mark the neckline in place of a label, and swing tags are flick books, portraying in a stop motion sequence both the evolution of the garment and those involved.

Image 17.

Apuyai Leporole



In an attempt to distance myself from the typically digital, highly airbrushed, fashion photographic format which instantly turns all that it captures into a commodity, I explored the potential for photographing the women, wearing the garments they have made, in large format, contact prints. The tradition of large format photography lends itself to a depth of image and sense of realism; the product of an unequalled level of detail. The bulky camera and slow process of taking the images results in a contemplative approach aligning with the ideals I seek to encompass in my overarching practice. However, this sense of tradition invariably brings with it associations. Lyle Owerko's portraits of Tribal Kenyans (illustrated above) are beautiful, but clearly reference the ethnography that occurred alongside colonialism. In no way do I want to exploit my participants for their exoticism. How can I avoid this when photography from the very traditional to advanced digital processes has inevitably been used in such a way?

Image 18.

Suno



New York based, high end fashion brand Suno is one of the few labels actively operating in a social entrepreneurial manner successfully at this end of the market. Born out of a recognition of the need for employment in Kenya, since the recent post election conflict and resulting drop in tourism, Suno is 100% made in Kenya. At just one year old, Suno has generated significant publicity, from *Vogue* to *Time*, indicating that now is the moment for such an approach. Consumers, if spending money on themselves, want to know the cause is as worthwhile as supporting trade, not aid in Africa.³⁰ In encapsulating an essence of the eclecticism of African dress, further imbued by the nature of the origin of the construction, Suno has translated this aesthetic into garments that could easily be worn here or there, transgressing cultural barriers with clothing.

30 Spearheading the debate against aid, Dambisa Moyo, African born with a Masters degree from Harvard and a PHD in Economics from Oxford University, having been employed by both the World Bank and Goldman Sachs, argues with authority in *Dead Aid* (2009) that aid fosters dependency and corruption. Dramatically suggesting that all aid (except emergency relief) should be cut off to Africa in five years, she instead advocates pro-market measures, like micro-finance, foreign direct investment and trade. In a fashion context, clothes dumping, perhaps originating from a philanthropic motivation, has succeeded in causing much damage to local textile industries. It involves the selling of unwanted clothing from the west at cheap prices in places such as Africa, the negative impact of this practise supporting Moyo's claims.

(Africa has) 12% of the world's population had nearly half of its displaced people... It is ethically inconsistent to support the free movement of goods and services while restricting the free movement of people...Asylum in the end is not only about globalization, it is simply not possible to ignore the worlds dispossessed (Moorehead, 2005, p.g291).³¹

What then is the effect of the considerable increase in numbers of the African Migrant community in New Zealand in a fashion sense? Perhaps there isn't as much of an impact as there could be, a result of a degree of isolation. There are parts of Auckland where the atmosphere of a shop tangibly changes when someone like me, so clearly not a foreigner enters it. Similarly, it is too easy to live here and, depending on the suburbs that you frequent, to be unaware of the extent of our migrant communities. Any African influences on current fashion trends are more of a result of international forces than our engagement with the multicultural facets of our community, an attribute which is surely one of our finest untapped social resources.

31 Moorehead, C. (2005). *Human Cargo: A journey among refugees*. London: Chatto and Windus.

BRIEF:

1. THE GARMENTS CONSTRUCTED COLLABORATIVELY WITH REFUGEE WOMEN.

The final output is to be a series of five t-shirts depicting the progressive stages of a garment with five layers of input. These pieces have merit on the basis of their role in illustrating a potential outcome of the relational process I have sought to develop; this process being the definitive centre of my research.

2. VISUAL DOCUMENTATION.

Participant ethnography will be utilized as I work relationally with the refugee women to establish how they have perceived the experience. The process will be recorded with illustrations and photographs. This imagery will function in two ways. Firstly, as a means of analysis, informing my research. Secondly, as material from which I will create a visual step by step progression, conveying the design and production process in the form of a series of flick books.

3. THE RESULTING DISPLAY OF THE GARMENTS TO THE PUBLIC.

The t-shirts will be displayed in a shop window for examination, a more appropriate context for garments than in a gallery setting. The window will be blacked out except for a gap replicating the view Muslim women have through the visor in their hijab. The display inside will be viewed in a manner similar to a diorama, the interior containing all five t-shirts, with the projection of a film that corresponds with the development of these garments. Located on Dominion Road, this display

is in an area which functions as a cultural intersection, frequented by both migrants and New Zealand born Aucklanders.

Reflecting the 80% practical, 20% theory weighting, a dissertation will be written. This is to be informed by the above practice, and by interviews with the women involved, to gauge their perspectives. These will be informal and conversational, conducted using interpreters where necessary. Recordings will be made with note taking and an unobtrusive dictaphone to maintain a casual atmosphere. Those with a more extensive understanding of the refugees involved will be consulted as I analyze the resulting data, to aid my understanding of the women's perception of the process described above.



Image 19. Fatama



Image 20. Jacket, Venice



Image 21. Jacket, Paris



Image 22. Lucia
(Film Still)



Image 23. Lucia and Flag
(Film Still)



Image 24. Leaning Tower





Image 25. Italy
(Film Still)



Image 26. Geoffery
(Film Still)



Image 27. Geoffery 2

(Film Still)

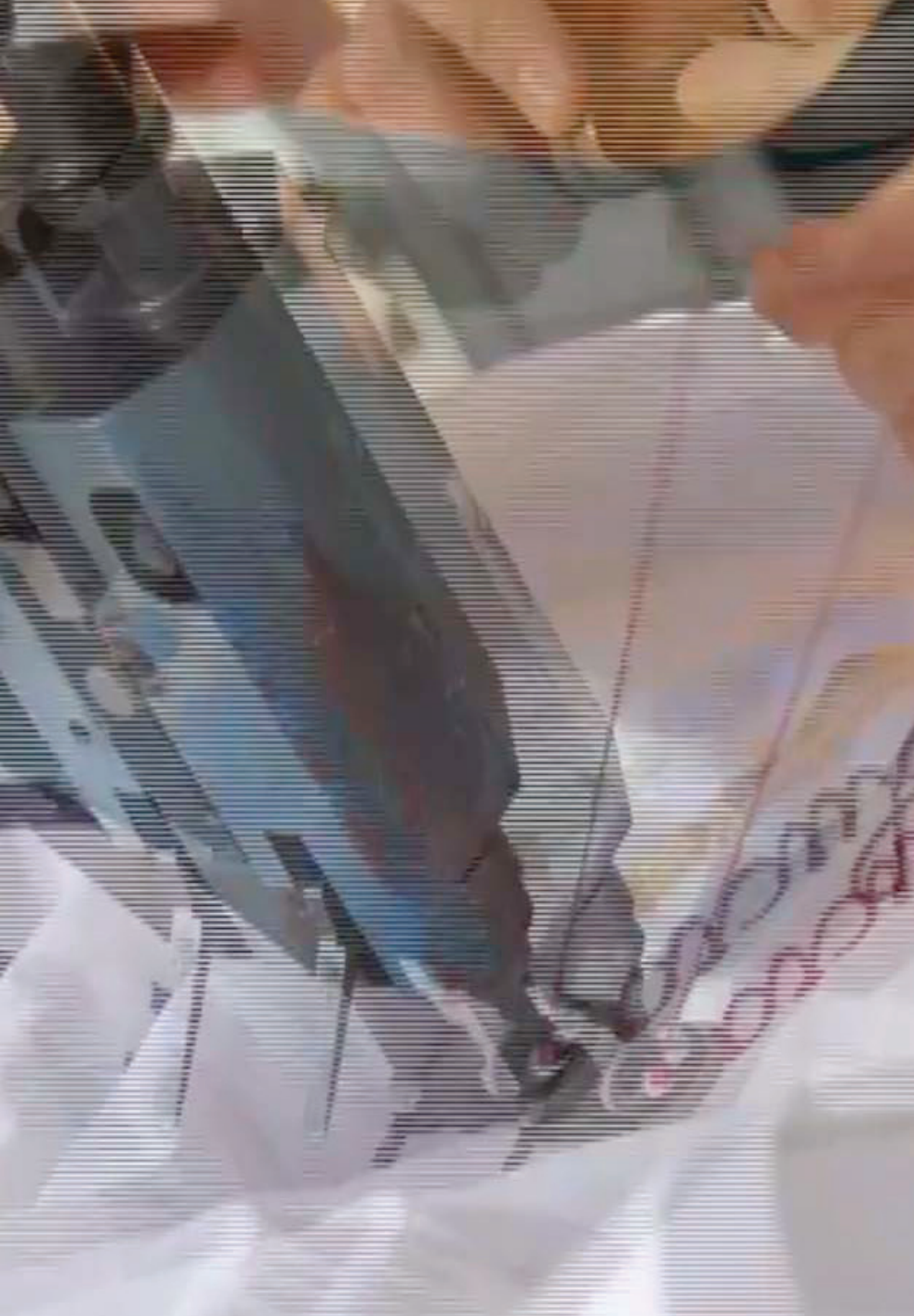


Image 28. Lucia 2
(Film Still)



*Image 29. Street Painter
(Film Still)*



*Image 30. Embroidered Tagging
(Film Still)*



Image 31. Woman, India



Image 32. Indian Street Art



Image 33. Woman, India 2



Image 34. Washing, India



Image 35. Man, India



*Image 36. Travelling Shirt
(Film Still)*

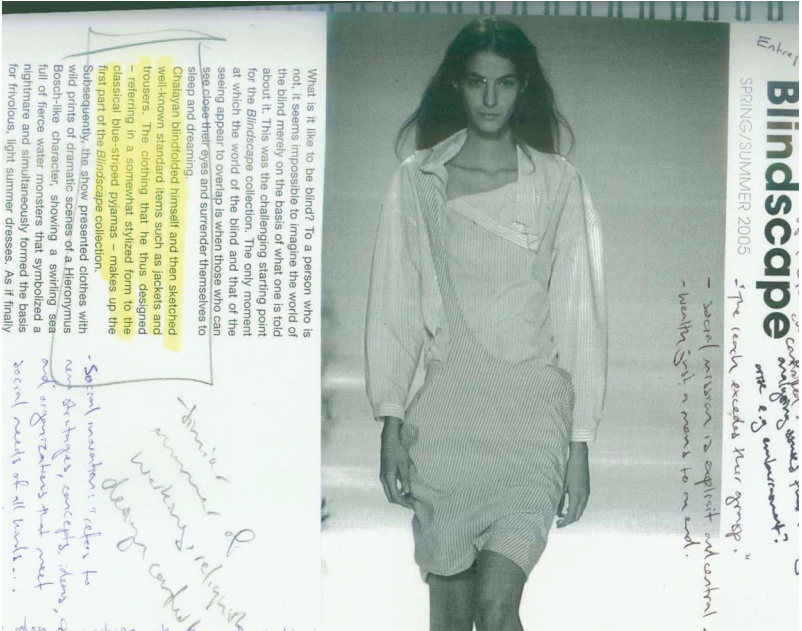


Image 37. *Blindscope*, Workbook



Image 38. Embroidery Example



Image 39. Emabet



Image 40. Emabet 2



Image 41. Run
(Film Still)
/62



Image 42. Run 2
(Film Still)



Image 43. Travelling Shirt
(Film Still)



Image 44. Run 3
(Film Still)

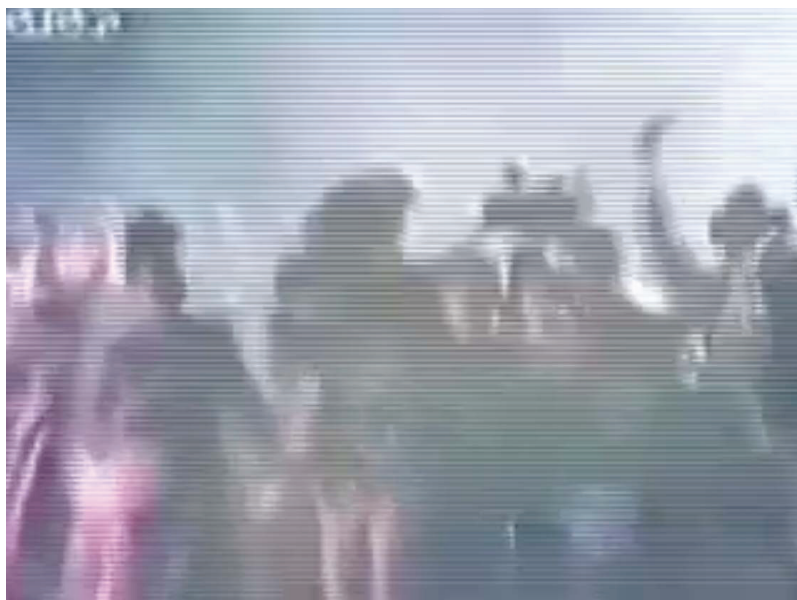


Image 45. Run 4 (Film Still)



*Image 46. Run 5
(Film Still)*



Image 47. Run 6 (Film Still)



*Image 48. Run 7
(Film Still)*



Image 49. Run 8

(Film Still)

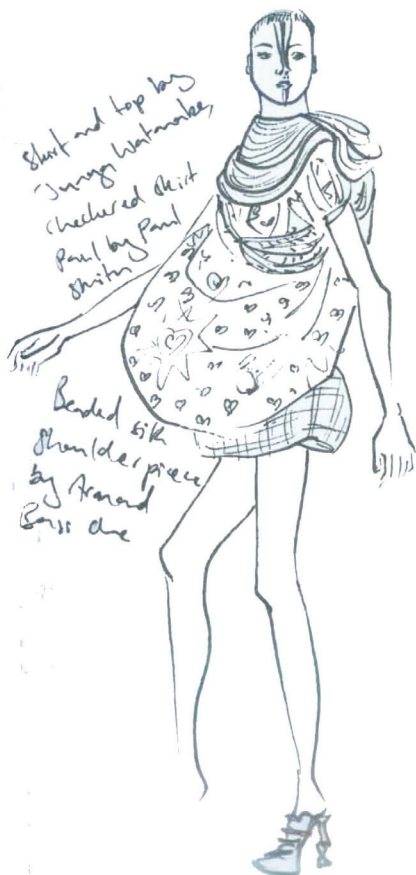
Enquiry

Evaluation

holders - anyone who has an
interest - people aware of what I'm
doing within the community

of the method of inquiry,
producing product, the
methodology which has
me to make sense of the
process and the outcome
+ Stakeholders.

Wallpaper #120
Wild Thing



"A material mix of
prints, textures and colours,
the modern tribal trend
makes everything groovy"

Image 50. Wallpaper, Workbook



Image 51. Somali Sewing Group 2



Image 52. Somali Sewing Group 3



Image 53. Somali Sewing Group 4



SUNO spring/summer 09

Image 54. Suno Illustration, Workbook



Image 55. Fatama Embroidering



Image 56. Somali Music Vidio



Image 57. Fatama Embroidering 2



Image 58. Fatama Embroidering 3



Image 59. Sweater Concept



Image 60. Fatama's Bag Making



Image 61. Emabet Dying 2



Image 62. Tree Shirt



Image 63. Sweater Dying

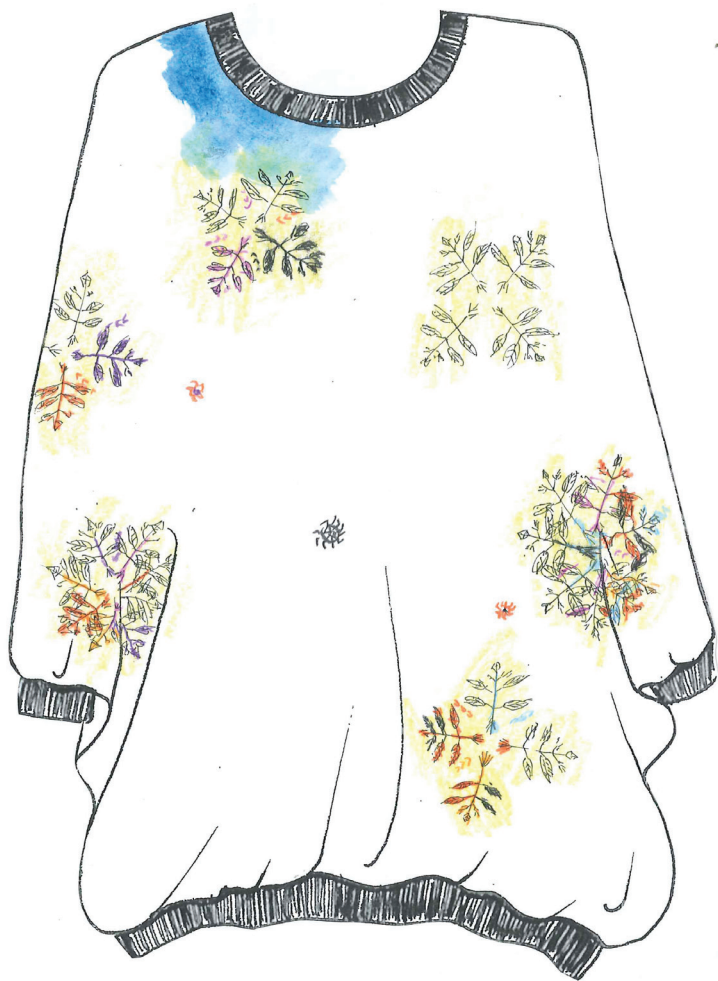


Image 64. Sweater Illustration



Image 65. Emabet Dying 3



Image 66. Emabet Dying 4



Image 67. Emabet Dying 5



Image 68. Sweater Illustration 2



Image 69. Sweater Concept 2



Image 70. Somali Music Vidio 2



Image 71. Somali Music Vidio 3



Image 72. Kosir Sewing



Image 73, Kosir Sewing 2



Image 74. Sweatshirt

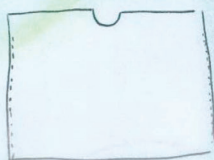


Image 75. Sweater Analysis, Workbook

1.



Embroid Print

Fabric + Photography
TDL Printing

2.



Embroid Print + Fatima Embroidery

3.



Embroid Print + Fatima Embroidery +
Embroid Dye

4.



Embroid Print + Fatima Embroidery +
Embroid Dye + TDL Print of Islamic
Pattern / Text

5.



Embroid Print + Fatima Embroidery +
Embroid Dye + TDL Print + some else
embroider into new print

6. Constructed by Kosa.

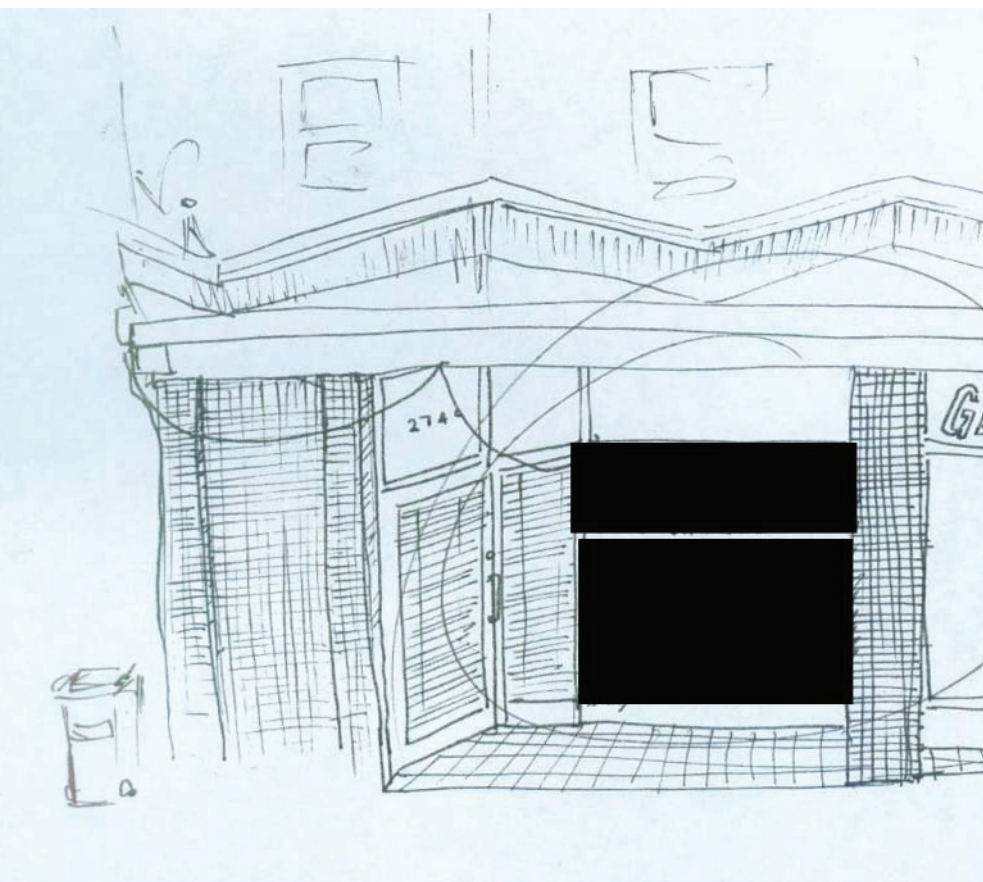


Image 77. Window Planning, Workbook



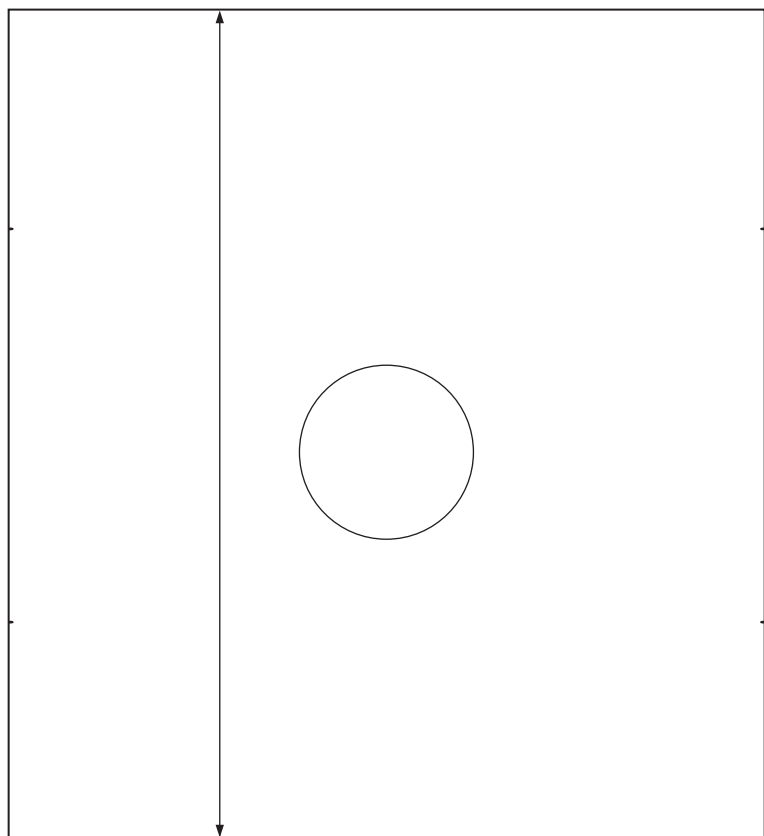
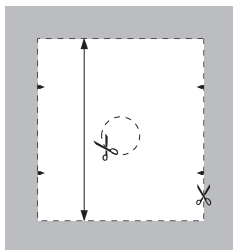
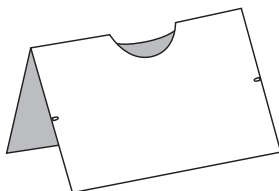


Image 82. Pattern

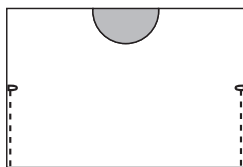
1.



2.



3.



T.

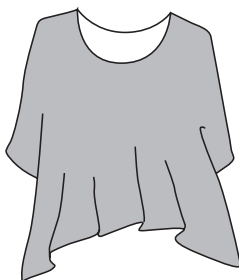


Image 83. Directions



Image 84. Emabet in T



Image 85. Emabet in T 2



Image 86. Emabet in T 3



Image 87. Emabet in T 4



Image 88. Emabet in T 5



Image 89. Emabet in T 6



Image 90. Emabet in T 7



Image 91. Fatama Embroidery 4

PART 2:

METHODOLOGY:

As a practitioner, with a focus on collaboration, Participatory Action Research (PAR) is my core methodology. “From a design perspective, PAR is similar to Participatory Design in that the researcher/designer engages the community, or users, in the process, while still preserving the role of initiator, evaluator and in the end designer” (Von Busch, 2008, p.248).³² As with action research, PAR applies a cyclic process of designing, working and analysis, but also emphasizes the importance of the active, collaborative input from the participants with the intention that these participants will directly benefit from the research. I draw on feminist research techniques encouraging women to share their skills, stories and perspectives gathering qualitative data. This practice is non-hierarchical with the intention of building relationships, aligning with my exploration of displacing the authority of the designer. Feminist research, “legitimizes women’s voices as sources of knowledge... the process of research is as important as its outcomes” (Emmison, & Smith, 2000, p.10).³³ In applying the social research genre Ethnography, as I observe from within my research process, I view from a position of participation (Participatory Ethnography); “The method is... well suited to carry out research with vulnerable people in cross-cultural arenas...It helps to discover human needs. And therefore, it helps to find ways of meeting these needs” (Liamputtong, 2007, p.120).³⁴

32 Von Busch, O. (2008). *Fashion-able, Hactivism and Engaged Fashion Design*. Gotenburg: Art Monitor.

33 Emmison, M. & Smith, P. (2000). *Researching the Visual*. London: SAGE Publications.

34 Liamputtong, P. (2007). *Researching the Vulnerable: A Guide to Sensitive Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications.

PILOT STUDY FINDINGS:

An example of working in tandem with the refugee women within my practice based research is the development of a sweatshirt, involving:

1. An image drawn by Emabet, an Ethiopian.
2. The use of this imagery to create a t-shirt print, printed by the Textile Design Lab (TDL).
3. This print then had embroidery applied by Fatama who is Somali. I supplied her with thread in colours that I had chosen but she dismissed these as “ugly” and I encouraged her to use colours she saw as fit.
4. The garment was then dyed by Emabet. I supplied her with a batik kit in an effort to gauge how familiar she was with such a process but, she has poor eyesight and was unable to clearly see the wax on the white sweat-shirting. I hope to find a refugee with specific dying skills. Perhaps though, this is more likely to be a male.
5. I then developed another print including block letter text derived from the phonetics of Fatama trying to pronounce her street name for me. On eventually deciphering the street name, I found her watching a Somali music video with large block letter type rolling up the screen. This informed the typeface I used for the print which was again printed by the TDL. The print also included map imagery, blending in and out of the dyed fabric and referencing the journey of these women.
6. This new print (specifically the text) was embellished with embroidery by Kosir, a Pakastani, who also constructed the sweatshirt. The actual shape of the garment was directly derived from the method of construction the women often use; simply

folding a piece of fabric in half, leaving room for the neckline and armholes, they create a draped garment.

Outcomes Analysis:

On analysis of the sweatshirt, the level of individual input would necessitate a high price point. This is also desirable on a philosophical level; the work of these women should be valued and price is an indicator of worth. An improvement of the fabric quality was necessary. I had originally chosen a polyester/cotton blend, intending to incorporate pleating (this technique was of interest as I had been surprised by the pleats in the clothing of some of the refugee women, having assumed it was a western aesthetic). Considering fabrics such as silk de chine, I eventually chose a fine cotton t-shirting to retain the reference to t-shirts and sweat-shirts and the resulting contrast of my process with that of sweatshop's. If moving into production with these garments I would use a fair trade, organic t-shirting fabric sourced from Indian company Rajlakshmi Cotton Mills.

This shift from sweat-shirting to t-shirting evolved simultaneously with the development of the garment into a t-shirt format, applying the same method of construction, simply altering the dimensions of the original square of fabric. This transition shifted the garments into pieces which would, when incorporated within a window display in November, correspond with the summer season.³⁵ Applying a similar process to that described above, a series of t-shirts have been created, one garment retained from each step because, as the sweatshirt developed, I could envisage it functioning at any point of the process.

Pilot Study Visualisation:

Rather than exhibit the resulting t-shirt series in a gallery, I have chosen to use a window display format in Geoff's Emporium, Dominion Road, Auckland, making evident the skills our migrants bring. Gallery spaces can be elitist, with only a small number of the population entering them (very rarely our refugee community). We have a tendency to approach work in this environment with an assumption that it is art. I am not implying that my work is without conceptual depth, but that I am happy for it to be read on a number of levels including (and importantly) on face value as someone rushes past it on the street.

35 I have been influenced by Clemens en August's international tours with each of their collections, selling garments in the season in which they would be worn, both removing the retail margin and creating exclusivity (the collection is in each city for three days only).

Although few of the women I have spent time with around this project wear a full burka, almost all are Muslim, covering their heads accordingly. This modesty is as foreign to me as the belief systems that accompany it. Perhaps as a result of publicity around Muslim woman's rights, the burka now functions as a recognizable symbol of the world's fastest growing religion. Subtlety referencing this garment, the interior of my display will only be visible through the small gap at eye level of the blacked out window. Positioned in Geoff's Emporium, the area has a consistent flow of foot traffic. Dominion Road lends itself to inclusivity; those frequenting it of varied cultural and socio economic positions. My intention is that the ambiguity of the space will generate curiosity in those passing by; the window will be approached, the interior containing the garments and the projection of a film making the invisible processes visible, viewed by the community as a whole.



Image 92. T Diagram

This first layer of the t-shirt is a print developed from a drawing by Emabet. Emabet is Ethiopian. She is unsure of her age but appears to be in her early fifties. She fled Ethiopia almost twenty years ago. After living in a refugee camp in Kenya for nine years she came to New Zealand in 2000 as a refugee. Whenever she illustrates, Emabet narrates with the relationship between the images and Ethiopia. This is always done in a nostalgic manner with no negative references. The tree image in this print is as Emabet puts it, an Ethiopian tree and is “very good”.

This tree print was embroidered into by Kosir, a Pakistani woman. She showed me one of the techniques that her mother had taught her as a young woman in Pakistan and we worked on the t-shirts together. In some photographs I have taken she appears troubled, a result of the recent increase in violence in Pakistan, particularly in the area she is from and where much of her family remains.

The fabric was dip dyed by Emabet. Building up layers of colors, the final result was predominantly green. Green is a colour considered by Emabet to have significant value as it is one of the three that makes up the Ethiopian flag (green, yellow, red) and meaning life.

At this point I added a layer to the collective garment development. This contribution is in the form of a digital print including an Islamic pattern layered over Emabet's tree imagery and a map print. The Islamic pattern (based on an image appropriated with permission from the Pepin Press Image Archive) references the profound impact working with these, predominantly muslim women has had on me. Derived from the belief that pictorial representations of man become idols, Islamic imagery is instead geometric and often has a kaleidoscopic quality. The initial tree print, repeated in a circular pattern was the first allusion to such an effect. Consequentially, the later layers and repetition of pattern took on a similar form, especially in the larger scale maps, pivoting from the centre of the square of fabric (the neckline).

The concept of wearing map imagery, especially in the context of garments developed with refugee's can become political. Maps reference colonisation. Neither the human body nor continents are politically neutral. On an aesthetic level, Emabet's use of green lent itself to the depiction of land. Mapping imagery was also appropriate in reference to the journey the women have been on. Personally, I have discovered so much of the world on my doorstep as a result of this project. I have found myself in situations where I am the only New Zealand born Kiwi at an event,

but, I am never made to feel unwelcome. Instead, I have been honored by the openness of these communities.

This print was embellished by Amina, a Somali woman. She has much better English than most refugees having gone to a British school in Somalia, then completing her Masters in Education. She now teaches in an Auckland school and has been a helpful contributor to this project as we can communicate with ease. No images have been taken of Amina as she has recently undergone chemotherapy.

The garments were cut and constructed by women in the Somali Sewing Group such as Luul, a Somali woman, Kosia and Salwa, an Iraqi. In spending time in this group, watching the women like Kosir construct garments using the embroidery and measurements of her hands as guides, it becomes evident why our numerous steps from the pattern development to garment construction seems superfluous.

Selwa was particularly interested in the print development commenting that she had never sewn fabric like that with Emabet's tree print and in her limited English, she enthusiastically explained that the Islamic patterns were like those that decorated the buildings from her home, especially in the "very beautiful" stained glass windows. The use of such imagery in these garments greatly pleased her.

These t-shirts are derived from the initial sweatshirt development-a hybrid form between sweaters and their inevitable sweetshop association and the form often utilized in the construction of garments by these women. A scooped neckline along with the drape of the garment and light weight of the fabric shifts the t-shirts from sportswear to street-wear, more elegant garments to be cared for. The white ribbed neckline although less noticeable in the white garments, becomes more prominent in the t-shirts that have been dyed, a reminder of the contrast between the relational, design and production process I have endeavored to develop and the human rights abuse that so often occurs in sweetshop environments.

So, is it possible to create a social entrepreneurial process of working within fashion while maintaining my design aesthetic? I have, from the beginning of this project, sought to explore my role as the designer, recognizing not only my reoccurring interest hybridization, but also my appreciation of the unexpected, the areas of my work in which I have relinquished control. This was evident in my final undergraduate collection. Over-dyeing my reconstructed clothing, the fabrics in a piece would shrink to varying dimensions distorting the garment in

often unforeseen manners. Similarly, the “Social Fabric” process is beyond my total control and this is where its potential lies. Although I have defined the parameters of the collaborative work that has developed, even this, the form of garments, was directly informed by a method the women use. I have been profoundly influenced by the refugees I interact with; constantly inspired by the way they choose to dress, especially their interpretations and combinations of western clothing. The “Social Fabric” process has been designed to create room for the unexpected; each new development decision being made on the basis of what has gone before. This is especially evident in the sweat-shirt where each step produced an unforeseen result. The t-shirt series is based on the sweater process, creating a t-shirt at each step as a means of visually demonstrating the method and considering the potential to build ranges in this organic manner.

Seeking primarily to meet the employment needs of refugee women has resulted in a broadening of my aesthetic as it is informed by the skills they have brought. Heavily reliant on craft, I hope to shift current assumptions of such products from being novel, fair trade objects to a fashion context. Such an approach is evident in Italian fashion group, Max Mara’s work alongside the International Trade Centre and resulting employment of African Artisans. The beauty of such social enterprise is the resulting multifaceted benefits. In a sense, democratizing the design process in “Social Fabric;” acknowledging that the women have the capacity to contribute on a design level; will I hope result in a sense of communal ownership. Employing previously jobless refugees, offering them more than just hand outs, begins to become beneficial for society as a whole, moving them from positions reliant on welfare to contributors to our economy. The potential for working in a social entrepreneurial manner in fashion not only offers new aesthetic possibilities (in fashion’s continual striving for the new, surely significant changes to our focus will generate fresh possibilities) but questions our social responsibility. If for no other reason than our reliance on a healthy economy, social implications should be paramount. Surely it is appropriate for fashion to lead in more ways than dress.

To a degree, the outcomes of this Masters project was shaped by the rigidity of the process of gaining ethics approval leading to restricted time in the experimentation and finalization of garments. Despite the main body of my work being the documentation, analysis, and justification of the process of employing and working collaboratively with refugee women in a fashion context, Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH) were unwilling to give me permission to pay the women for their contribution. In contrast to my feminist research

considerations, AUTECH required that I request the approval of the husbands of the women involved. I also only received approval in September 2009 as Ramadan started following much re-wording of the submission for the committee. Most of the women involved are Muslims; their celebration of this Holy month left us with little time to complete work. However, as frustrating and time consuming as I found gaining approval from AUTECH, it proved useful in the sense that it illustrated potential negative perceptions of my work with refugees. As I consider the translation of this project into a business, what authority do I have to utilize the crafts of these women? What occurs regarding intellectual property rights as we work collaboratively? Do significant relationships deem contracts as being unnecessary; if not, who do they protect and how? What is the most transparent and fair method of payment?

Social Entrepreneurship, a phrase first used in the late 1990s (Johnson, 2000)³⁶ is, due to its relative newness, a generalization. Personally though, it has in a sense come to represent tension. Juxtaposing 'social' and 'entrepreneur', the term describes a business generating financial resources primarily in the pursuit of social value creation. Here my fascination with hybridization again manifests itself. Hockert describes such ventures as "straddling the boundary between the for-profit business world and social mission-driven public and nonprofit organizations" (Hockerts, 2006, p.g.7).³⁷ So, I seek to engage fashion industry practices to create and sustain social value through generating dignified employment for refugee women. I am interested in Paul Romer's³⁸ concept of ideas being one of the few commodities by which the more we share them the more we receive. It is my hope that "Social Fabric" will become both a means of retaining the craft skills brought from the country of origin by these women, and a forum in which they can be shared and taught to those who, as a result of fleeing conflict, do not have the knowledge of these techniques that in many cases have been an intrinsic aspect of the everyday outworking of their cultures. Engaging the triple bottom line,³⁹ the

36 Johnson, S. (2000). *Literature review on social entrepreneurship*. University of Alberta: Canadian Centre for Social Entrepreneurship.

37 Hockerts, K. (2006). *Entrepreneurial opportunity in social purpose ventures*. Retrieved March 10, 2009 from <http://web.cbs.dk/centres/cvr/>

38 *Tedtalks: Paul Romer's radical idea: Charter cities*. (2009). [online presentation] Retrieved August 20, 2009 from http://www.ted.com/speakers/paul_romer.html Paul Romer is a Stanford University economist seeking to address the big problems of our century like poverty. Believing that "a crisis is a terrible thing to waste" (New York Times, July 31, 2009), Romer is impacting current economic thinking and policy making; proposing cities be created where people can choose to live under new and better rules for themselves and the environment.

39 The term Triple Bottom Line (people, profit, planet) was first applied in 1994

worth of this project on being translated into a venture will be measured not only financially, but also environmentally and socially, particularly as I seek to further emphasize values like locally made.

New Zealand is a nation made up of the descendents of migrants. We are predicted by 2021 to have 25% of our population born elsewhere: “one of the highest proportions of foreign work forces in the OECD” (OEA Employment Symposium Acting for Change, 2007).⁴⁰ Seeking to structure jobs specifically for our migrant communities, especially those who have had the misfortune of enduring the events that have resulted in their refugee status, seems not only legitimate but necessary. As stated by international economist, Philippe Legrain; “Given the current economic climate, there has never been a more relevant time to highlight New Zealand’s wealth of ethnic diversity in the workplace.”⁴¹

How then can other designers and refugee agencies adopt a similar design and production process? I’m not advocating for carbon copies, however the description above is not a complex one. The refugee women have varied cultural backgrounds which is an asset. They struggle to find employment on their relocation to New Zealand, a need. Many bring with them both craft skills and a willingness to learn also an asset. Despite a willingness to contribute, again many don’t know where to start and can become isolated, a need. Freeset is an example of the recognition, and meeting of such needs. Training and employing women with no construction skills, some not even understanding how to use scissors, Freeset utilises a business model that conventionally considered makes no sense but, measured against the triple bottom line, the economic, environmental and especially social outcomes are more than sufficient promotion for the adoption of social entrepreneurial practice. It is this accounting for the triple bottom line which is paramount and will surely result in sustained, holistic and constructive change however applied.

by John Elkington who, in 2008, was named among the ‘1000 Most Influential People’ in London’s *Evening Standard*. The Triple Bottom Line method expands the means of measuring the success of a business, no longer based just on economic success but also in human and ecological capital advocating a commitment to corporate social responsibility.

40 OEA *Employment Symposium Acting For Change*. (2007). [online text]. Retrieved August 18, 2009 from http://www.ethnicaffairs.govt.nz/oeawebsite.nsf/wpg_URL/Whats-Happening-Previous-Ethnic-Affairs-Events-OEA-Employment-Symposium-Acting-For-Change-18-June-2007?OpenDocument

41 *The economic benefits of diversity*. (2009). [online text]. Retrieved August 18 2009, from: http://www.ethnicaffairs.govt.nz/oeawebsite.nsf/wpg_URL/Whats-Happening-Previous-Ethnic-Affairs-Events-The-economic-benefits-of-diversity-

CONCLUSION:

Faced with manipulative globalization, how can one not react? I don't want to respond with complacent or compliant work. Art-making is profoundly emotional, an expression of hope, a proposal for alternative living. It's a life project; it's a commitment with yourself as well as society. (Orta & Bourriaud, et al., 2003, p.13).⁴²

This Masters project is the starting point for my navigation of a potential route for operating in the fashion industry in a social entrepreneurial manner. Obviously the true test of the validity of such an approach will come as I seek to activate it within the market place but, the results from, and reactions to, this research have grown a conviction in me that this can and will work. When questioned what the greatest commandment was, Jesus simply stated love God and your neighbour (Holy Bible, Matthew 22:37-40).⁴³ On recently moving to the Auckland suburb of Three Kings, these refugee women have very literally become my neighbours. However, the ever-decreasing size of the world as a result of globalization leaves us with little justification not to empathetically view all of humanity as such. The potential for operating within a framework that involves both my design sensibility and my heart is an opportunity too good not to pursue with fervour. So, watch this space.

42 Bourriaud, N., Damianovic, M. & Pinto, R. (2003). *Lucy Orta*. New York: Phaidon Press.

43 *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*. (2004). Illinois: Tyndal House Publishing.

FUTURE RESEARCH:

Moving forward...

My project is effectively unfinished, being completed only on its successful transition into a functioning, self supporting social enterprise, utilising collective intelligence to create garments and generate significant employment.

Like Suno, I seek to produce clothes that are coveted initially on an aesthetic level, the story of their creation adding value. It is this story though that will drive the marketing as I endeavor to further the creation of a framework in which the relationship between the maker and the consumer can begin to be restored. The potential for additional garments to be developed in a similar manner, but applicable to lower and higher ends of the market will be investigated through the shifting of variables in the process revealing potential prototypes. Guerrilla marketing techniques will be utilized. I will continue to create window displays, temporary and on street fronts. I hope these will convey a sense of immediacy and relationship to contemporary culture, in a similar way to graffiti. My intention is that interest will be generated, the stories of the garments told, and pieces purchased funding another season.

Aesthetically, beauty can hardly be defined. I do however agree with Bourriaud's

conclusion that beauty is a continuous quest for simplicity (2002).⁴⁴ On a recent visit to Tonga I was struck by the minimalism of their lifestyle. Admittedly, this sense of simplicity could partially be the result of their comparative poverty to the average New Zealander. In many ways though, their values and pace of life are preferable. Their homes, far removed from our stark and sterile take on minimalism, instead evoke warmth; the little that they own highly decorated against a backdrop of vivid color. It is this aesthetic that I seek to embody; it also has added relevance as many refugees live in a similar manner. How this aesthetic is worked out however in a consumer driven fashion context is a tension I am yet to resolve. The collection of t-shirts included in this body of work, derived from the layers of the final garment, eked out so the consumer can purchase a piece developed anywhere between the initial t-shirt with a print developed from Emabet's drawing to the fully embellished, densely layered final piece, is one approach. Here, simplicity is embodied in a number of ways, including the original square shape of the garment which ensures very little waste of fabric.

Due to restrictions placed on me as I endeavored to gain ethics approval, I was not able to spend time with the women discussing the nature of their backgrounds. However, to more fully analyse each individual's input, and the resulting creative dialogue between east and west as I work collaboratively with these women, a greater understanding of the history of the contributors is essential. I have sought to begin to construct not only clothing but also community; the garments that develop in this environment functioning as a means of conversation, a medium on which to autobiographically communicate the stories; both past and future of these refugee women now living in New Zealand. The nature of working in such an environment with people who have certainly experienced trauma, is that this would be a place in which they would feel comfortable to grieve. In all honesty, this is an intimidating prospect. I feel ill qualified. However it is a reality that I, and anyone else working with refugees, must be aware of, if for no other reason than to better understand reactions and interactions.

Ultimately, I envisage that the "Social Fabric" method will be scaled up, functioning not only with refugees relocated in New Zealand but also in refugee camps in places such as Kenya, offering those who remain there for an indefinite period of time both occupation and finance. "It's time to stop pretending that the aid-based development model currently in place will generate sustained economic growth in

44 Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational Aesthetics*. Les presses du reel

the world's poorest countries. It will not" (Moyo, 2009, p.g.144).⁴⁵ In contrast, I will employ microfinance frameworks⁴⁶ empowering the vulnerable to, despite their present situation, provide for themselves and their families with dignity.

"It is not enough to aid the victims of injustice without challenging the structures which keep injustice in train"(Valley, 1990, p.g. 228).⁴⁷

45 Moyo, D. (2009). *Dead Aid*. London: Penguin Books

46 In 2006 Muhammed Yunus was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in recognition for establishing Microfinance. A model duplicated by many globally, Microfinance recognises the only collateral many of the world's poor have; the honour of their word and their accountability to their village. Making small loans, the Microfinance model has enabled countless people to start self sufficient enterprises.

47 Valley, P. (1990). *Bad Samaritans*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

INTERVIEWS:

Amina 1/11/09

Kareen: Where are you from?

Amina: Somalia, the North.

K: What is the current situation in Somalia?

A: It's lawless. It is! I think it is worse. There is always killing, fighting... mmm, there is killing, there is fighting.

K: How long have you been in New Zealand?

A: Since 2001

K: What jobs have you had here?

A: I work for Home Tutors for 2001, 2002, 2003, yeah, mid 2003. Then I went to Mount Roskill Grammar.

K: How do you feel about your contribution to the T-shirts?

A: Laughs. I don't know, you tell me. I did a piece of art to the t-shirts-otherwise it would just be a print but where you do embroidery it makes more beautiful, yeah.

K: Where did you learn to embroider as you do?

A: Ha, from my mum, at home, when I was little and then in school of course. But, I learnt all first at home-even stitching because my mum had a machine. I remember the first time, there was a lot of pride.

K: Do any of the embellishments have any cultural references for you? The Islamic pattern?

A: Islamic images, yeah, in some of the homes, the mosques. It's an element of the culture.

K: Are many of the refugee women that you know here in New Zealand are employed?

A: No, no, no.

K: Would they benefit from employment collectively constructing garments?

A: Ah yes. Yeah, they get the know how, they are trained, it a rally good idea.

K: What are the greatest needs of the refugee community?

A: Um, career development or career ah, guiding them for their career, teaching them some skills. We don't expect them to go to university-a lady with nine children could take short courses, mainly in craft, maybe food industry. Much could be done, we don't know where to find job.

K: Is there any further comment you would like to make regarding this project?

A: I hope the project to be successful, it would be fantastic, fantastic to have a place where the women can embroider. Good luck.

Fadumo 1/11/09

Kareen: Where are you from?

Fadumo: Somalia

K: What is your job title and role?

F: Chair person of the New Zealand Somali Women

K: How long have you worked with refugees in New Zealand?

F: Ten years.

K: What are the greatest needs of refugee women in New Zealand?

F: Ah, many things. Firstly to learn the English language, you know, to integrate New Zealand culture, the language, the system.

K: What is your opinion about the way New Zealand looks after our refugees?

F: Provide many things, many facilities, they build the best building, you know.

K: Do you think employing refugee women to construct clothing would benefit them?

F: Yeah.

K: Do you know other women who would be interested in taking part in such a venture?

F: Yeah, I know many women.

Emabet, translated by Yehuala 2/11/09

Kareen: Where are you from?

Emabet: Ethiopia-Northen, Capital city.

K: What is the current situation in Ethiopia?

Yehuala: Job not much. War situation somewhat reduced, there is no hunger, overpopulation, -securing life is somewhat difficult but the country is green. But, demand and supply do not meet, there is more than eighty two million people, it won't be bigger than New Zealand.

K: Have you ever had a job here?

E: No.

K: Would you like to be employed to help create clothing?

E: Yes, I am happy if it is within my capacity.

K: Do you like these T-shirts?

E: So nice, it's wide and I like it, so nice, something stylish.

K: What do these drawings mean to you?

E: It means, tree means, it has different advantage-you can make home or anything... I love it.

K: Is the colour green symbolic?

E: Green is like something heavy, green thing is life.

K: What do you like most about living in New Zealand?

E: I don't have any problems here, the government supports me.

Y: For me I am happy living here. I came from good job but, if I am sick there is no government support. I was worried about my children.

K: What could be done to further help refugees here?

Y: Education. Can't mix with New Zealand people.

After the interview Yehuala also expressed her regard for this project and her belief in it's potential to truly assist refugee women.

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