THINKING, FEELING, AND CREATING WITH PHOTOGRAPHY: WIDENING THE LENS OF VISUAL RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

By

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ABSTRACT

THINKING, FEELING, AND CREATING WITH PHOTOGRAPHY: WIDENING THE LENS OF VISUAL RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

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This arts-based photographic research project consists of three written chapters and two creative works. The dissertation develops a focus on aesthetics, stories, and communities through photographic inquiry, which expands conceptualizations of visual research methodologies by interweaving the indexical/imaginary, art/data, and fact/fiction. Building on the works of artists, arts-based researchers, and interdisciplinary scholarship on visual research, the written chapters engage epistemological and ontological understandings of photography in educational research, close readings of Mahtab Hussain's photography examining the transnational histories and lives of the South Asian diaspora, and a study of methodology as a lifestyle choice. One creative component is The Passport Photo Project, which forms the basis for one of the artistic products (exhibition), traces the history of passport photos and reshapes understanding of these bureaucratic objects through collaborative art-making with immigrants and refugees. The second creative component is a photobook, Notes from the City, which offers photo-textual vignettes about migration, home, and belonging. Taken together, this dissertation demonstrates the multifarious possibilities for photography as theory, method, and artistic practice, while also attuning to the ethical questions that are yet to be addressed by educational researchers as we see drastic shifts in the role of the visual in our everyday lives.

In loving memory of Vidya Devi and Ramatulasamma.

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CHAPTER 1 Shifting the Frame: Theoretical and Methodological Explorations of Photography in Educational Research

In 2015, Teju Cole began reposting photos of the same place from other Instagram users. For example, in one series, you see multiple photos offering a birds-eye view of the Roman Forum (see Cole, 2018). In another series, we see the stairwell at the New Museum, New York. Cole's reposts serve as visual essays showing a common theme across people's photographs: "People don't merely go to the same places or take photographs of the same monuments and sites; they take photographs of the same monuments and sites in the same way" (Cole, 2018). Scrolling through Cole's Instagram feed made me think about photography in our contemporary world. At a moment when more people have access to cameras than ever before, why are we all making similar images? That question in itself warrants an article or two. The answers for Cole are rooted in, among a plethora of other factors, how the tourist space is structured through the use of sidewalks, gates, and looking points. This spatial structuring, according to Cole, influences the photographs we make of the location. The endless repetition of images on Instagram and the resultant grid of images compiled by Cole is a poetic meditation on the medium of photography and also offers insight into the human condition. And at the same time, Cole reminds us that a majority of the photographs made of a site are only from some limited points of view. But the possibilities for other points of view, at least in theory, are limitless.

When I tell peers and colleagues that I am interested in thinking about photography and educational research, I am often asked "Have you heard about photovoice? Do you use photovoice?" The first few times I was asked if I was doing photovoice, I offered a vague response that (hopefully) suggested I was trying to do something else with photography. When the questions became a regular occurrence, I became curious. The repetition of the question, from scholars in education and other fields, gave me pause and made me wonder why so many of

us are pursuing photography in educational research through the lens of photovoice. In the methodological landscape of educational research, we are so often manoeuvred towards photovoice (Evans-Agnew & Rosemberg, 2016; Shankar, 2016). Eventually, I realized that their questions equate photovoice with photography in educational research—to "see" in the world of educational research, seems to mean to "see" through photovoice. Yet, I recognize the power and potential of photovoice, it legitimizes the visual medium in a research space that is predominantly print-based. It offers the opportunity for research participants to become the narrators of their own lives by "entrust[ing] cameras to the hands of people to enable them to act as recorders, and potential catalysts for change, in their own communities" (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). But I am also curious to see what else photography can do in educational research and practice. What other possibilities exist for the medium of photography in educational research?

I came to this question because of my existing relationship with photography. I came to photography much before I came to educational research. I came to it as a young boy insisting to be behind the camera and standing awkwardly in front of it. I came to it through the writings of Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes and John Berger. And through the photographs of LaToya Ruby Frazier and Teju Cole and Sohrab Hura and Carrie Mae Weems. My relationship with photography is one that slides on the spectrum of enamor, curiosity, and disdain for the medium—being moved by its immense power, intrigued by the possibilities, while also feeling immobilized by its limitations.

I take inspiration from the grid of images created by Teju Cole and question our given understandings of photography and photographic practice. I travel across a landscape where educational research meets visual methodologies. And rather than constructing the same images

of this landscape, I travel to various corners and share snapshots that help us see this landscape anew, from various other vantage points. Taken together, the images I construct here offer alternative viewpoints that help us reconsider photography as a methodological approach, object of study, and medium of "reporting" in educational research. In so doing, I enter a conversation around photography and educational research that is at the interstices of fact/fiction, indexical/imaginary, art/data, etc. I ask: How has our understanding and use of photography, the camera, and the photographer been shaped by the field of educational research? How might arts-based research create space for a more expansive engagement with photography? What possibilities exist for reimagining the role of photography in educational research?

Figure 1 *Untitled. Photograph: Vivek Vellanki*

Ultimately, the goal of this dissertation is not to critique or dismiss any particular methodological approach but instead to trace intimate relationships among photography, art, qualitative methodologies, and arts-based educational research in order to offer possible new visions and directions for visual research. Therefore, I respond to the above-mentioned questions by looking at three key elements within visual research. The first is the ontology of photography, in particular how our understanding of photographs and cameras have shaped our approach to

visual research. Drawing on the work of Azoulay (2015), I indicate how the traditionally framed binary of the photographer-photographed (and subject-object) limits our understanding of photographic practices and our readings of photographs. Second, by building on the disruption of the photographer-photographed binary, I examine how current approaches to collaboration in visual research are largely limited to creating opportunities for participants to make photographs or to interpret/analyze them. Building on the works of Campt (2017) and Drake (2014), I discuss additional ways to collaborate using photography/images. And third, drawing on the works of Hồng-Ân Trương, Hương Ngô, and Keith Secola I examine how photographs can help us feel/think/theorize within the field of educational research by attuning us to the material and affective dimensions of photography.

Depth of Field: Photography and Educational Research

Historically, photography has played an important role as a research tool in the fields of sociology and anthropology. The development of the camera towards the end of the 19th century and its subsequent ubiquity in the early 20th century made it an important device within field work practices (Edwards, 2015; Pinney, 2012). The camera has primarily served as an instrument for recording information, a tool for data collection, identification, and categorization of people, cultures, and places. In the study of other cultures, the camera served as a device offering additional proof, a visual certainty to what was being described by the ethnographers. The initial obsession with the mimetic function of photographs artificially limited the role of photography to representation and data collection. Tracing this early history, Pinney (2012) asks if photography, "is to be understood as a transparent objectification of a photographer's intentions, a mere device for the capture of surface evidence?" (p. 56).

However, drawing on Edwards (2015), I take the position that the camera has never been merely a passive device; along with the photographer it is always enmeshed in power relations:

"photographs mark not only the photographer's standpoint but a point of view of those in front of the camera, even if that moment is asymmetrical. Subjects are never passive—they think, they experience" (p. 241). Over the past few decades, scholars across many disciplines have created methodological approaches that try to address the asymmetries of power between the researcher and the researched. These broader questions on methodology and the asymmetries of power between the researchers and the researched have also translated into visual research and the use of the camera within these contexts. The development of participatory methodologies such as photoeliciation and photovoice have transferred the instrument of data collection (the camera) or the object of study (the photograph) over to the participants (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wilson et al., 2007). By creating opportunities for community members to create their own photographs and/or to articulate their readings of photographs, participatory visual methodologies center the voices of research participants. These methodologies attend to some of the obvious asymmetries of power in visual research i.e. who wields the camera? Who reads/interprets the images? How do we understand the visual from the perspectives of the insiders? However, despite these significant shifts, questions remain about how these ideas are taken up by researchers (see Evans-Agnew & Rosemberg, 2016) and about the "(im)possibility of empowerment" (Higgins, 2016, p. 681). Even with these shifts towards participatory approaches, the possibilities for photography in educational research remain largely untapped (Tinkler, 2008).

Three key assumptions about photography and its use in the research process are evident to me in existing participatory approaches such as photovoice and photoelicitation. First, the process of photography is reduced to two elements—the making of images and the reading of images. While these are important aspects of photographic practice, we can also consider other elements of the photographic process such as viewing images, writing with images, curating

images, etc. I discuss some of these in greater detail in subsequent sections. Second, the process of coding and thematic analysis of images is a representational approach that is often used to offer an understanding of the image. The perspective of the photographer (research participant) or the researcher or both are mobilized to direct viewers on how to understand the image and to interpret its meaning. In other words, the work of the viewer is often done for them by offering a definitive reading of the image. Third, some researchers argue for the separation between the aesthetic and the mimetic. For example, discussing the ways participants can be oriented to photovoice research, Latz (2017) writes that participants "should also be reminded that the aesthetics of the photographs are much less important than the meanings assigned to them" (p. 76). These three aspects are not inherently problematic for they offer a particular understanding of and an engagement with photography. However, these assumptions flatten how photography is understood and how it could be used in educational research.

To be clear, any particular method is not the issue. Rather, it is, what Springgay and Truman (2018) call, the "logic of proceduralism" that has foreclosed an exploration of inventive and aesthetic possibilities for photography and photographic practice in educational research. Several researchers have taken approaches like photovoice and offered significant re-articulations (Luttrell, 2010; Shankar, 2016). However, I am interested in a different intellectual exercise. Rather than thinking about how photography can fit existing logics of representational qualitative research—collect, validate, codify, represent—I am interested in exploring the affordances of the photographic medium and its practice that go beyond what photovoice and other representational qualitative methods have offered, and engage it artistically, aesthetically, and conceptually. I do so by problematizing dominant approaches to photography in educational research. My goal is to "rupture taken-for-granted habits, tropes, and common assumptions"

about photography through a process of "thinking-making-doing" (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 208). I look for inspiration and flights of thought in literature, art, and research outside the field of education and engage with the work of scholars and artists who embody and practice thinking-making-doing.

In this dissertation, I approach photography primarily through the work of artists, rooted in an engagement with artistic practice rather than merely engaging with its manifestations in qualitative research. I am drawn to the work of artists who push us to question the purposes of photography itself and also ask us to reimagine its possibilities. As I think about all the works and the practices of the photographers who have influenced me, some of whom I mentioned earlier, the underlying thread for me is that they help me "break through the horizons of the ordinary, of the taken-for-granted, to visions of the possible, of 'what is not'" (Greene, 1977, p. 287).

Therefore, my goal is not to dismiss existing methodological approaches but rather to explore multiple possibilities for visual research. In the following section, I indicate the epistemological and ontological understandings that shape my own orientation towards photography. I situate this framing within the broader field of arts-based research, highlighting key features of this paradigm that help us develop an expansive vision for the role of photography, to imagine otherwise.

Frames of Reference

In exploring artistic and inventive possibilities for photography in educational research, I join scholars who have pushed our understanding of what does and does not constitute research. In particular, the works of arts-based and humanities researchers like Anzaldúa (2015), Campt (2017), Eisner (1995), Greene (2000), Kumar (2000), Sharpe (2017), Sousanis (2015), Springgay (2004), Ulmer (2016), amongst several others, have created room for a more expansive

understanding of research. A somewhat simplistic but useful feature distinguishing arts-based educational research from other forms of educational research is its use of "aesthetic qualities to illuminate and reveal educational situations and experiences" (Eisner cited in O'Donoghue, 2009, p. 352). Apart from the focus on aesthetics, I also see arts-based educational research as "an ethical relationship with curriculum, pedagogy, and educational research. It is a process and form of research that attends to human interactions and social interactions that produce knowledge and bodies" (Springgay, 2004, p. 14).

My affinity towards arts-based research is driven by the epistemological and ontological beliefs that undergird artistic practices. In particular, its focus on aesthetics and its consideration of the affective, material, and visual registers as important aspects across the various stages of the research process (creation, analysis, and sharing). While it is also important to note that arts-based research includes a number of different approaches, here, I outline a particular instantiation of arts-based research that is interested in "describing and interpreting the complexity of experience among researchers, artists, and educators" situated in communities of practice while centering "relational inquiry, relational aesthetics, and relational learning" (Irwin & Springgay, 2017). As I indicated earlier, I am not interested in viewing art *only* as a way to collect data that will then be coded and analyzed using traditional qualitative approaches. Instead, arts-based research "asserts a form of making that has traditionally been understood as expressive rather than analytically communicative (often, although not always, art making), as equivalent in value (though different in kind) to the knowledge-making practices of traditional academic disciplines" (Loveless, 2019, p. 29). This particular belief and approach to arts-based research has also helped me see the limitations of how photography has been used in some methodological approaches that I discussed earlier.

Second, arts-based research is also, in some instances, deeply invested in the work and work practices of artists. Their work and work practices provide compelling insights into the limits/affordances of the medium, emergent ideas, divergent practices, as well as theoretical and conceptual insight. In fact, O'Donoghue (2009) urges more arts-based researchers to engage with the works of artists, art-critics, philosophers of art, etc. and asks, "How might a close, critical, and deeply contextual analysis of the work and work practices of artists advance, develop, and enhance understandings, theories, and practices of arts-based research?" (p. 353). In the introduction, I used Teju Cole's work to raise some questions that I have been grappling with as an arts-based researcher who uses photography and I continue to draw on the work and work practices of artists throughout this dissertation to inform my own understandings and practices.

My focus on photography within educational research is guided by the above mentioned considerations. In the following sections, I discuss my epistemological and ontological orientations towards photography. As you will see, these are guided by a diverse range of theoretical, empirical, and artistic works. I draw on contemporary artists, art critics, cultural theorists, educational researchers, etc. to indicate how I think about and work with photography using arts-based research. I focus on three key ideas: the ontology of photography, collaboration and photography, and thinking/theorizing with photography.

The Ontology of Photography

Much of the discussion about photography within educational research has been guided by two considerations (Greene, Burke, & McKenna, 2018.; Higgins, 2014, 2016). The first relates to the issue of who wields the camera—who is the photographer and whose gaze is centered. This concern has resulted in the emergence of participatory methodologies wherein research participants make the photographs and photography is reduced to the agency of the photographer (Sutton-Brown, 2014). The second relates to the issue of the photograph and what

it shows or conveys, i.e. represents. This has resulted in a deliberation of issues of voice and agency in relation to photographs and questions about who plays a role in reading and assigning meanings to the images (Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006; Harper, 2002). Some scholars have attempted to address the reading of images as a problem that needs to be solved methodologically (e.g., Latz, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997). This has meant that participants who make the photographs should be asked what their photographs mean/convey. In other instances, people who have been photographed should be shown photographs to investigate how they read the images (Buckley, 2014). In both these methodological approaches, an attempt is made to reach a sovereign reading of the photograph, either from the perspective of the photographer or the photographed or both.

In one sense, a sovereign reading of an image is held together by an idea of who is behind and who is in front of the camera. However, Azoulay (2015) writes that photography "is made up of an infinite series of encounters" (p. 26). Instead of viewing the photograph as the sovereign frame of the photographer, we can consider the photograph and what it inscribes "as resulting from an encounter between several protagonists that might take on various forms" (p. 12). In essence, Azoulay is arguing that the sovereignty over the images that is usually ascribed to the photographer/photographed is something to question and investigate. "What is written in [photographs] is always excessive with regard to any sovereign representation that one side or another – be it the photographer, the photographed person or the person in charge of the 'arena' in which the photograph was taken – wishes to impose on it" (Azoulay, 2010, p. 10).

For several contemporary scholars and artists, this ambiguity and multiplicity of photographs make them a source of creation and investigation. Campt (2017), for one, debunks the idea that any image can be read in a singular manner. Using mugshots, family portraits, and

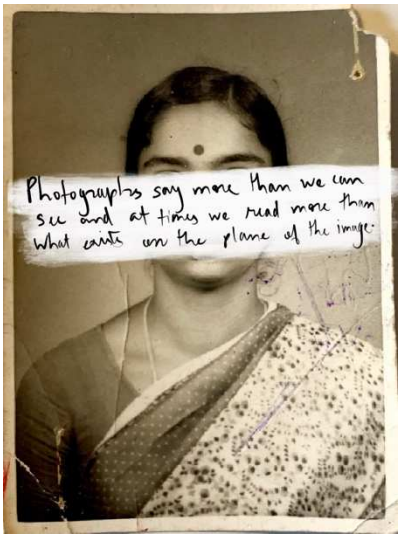
other images, Campt (2017) asks us to consider the "hum" that these images produce. Even in these images, some of which are created under conditions of dispossession and subjugation, she finds compelling narratives and reminds us that photographs are "neither wholly liberatory vehicles of agency, transcendence, or performativity nor unilateral instruments of objectification and abjection" (p. 59). Photographs, for Campt (2017) as well as other artists and scholars, are ambiguous and contain an excess which is not simply seen or read but also has to be heard, felt, and touched (Brown & Phu, 2014).

The ambiguity and excess in images that Azoulay (2015) discusses is something that has been flattened within some approaches to photography in educational research. Issues of power, voice, and agency are central to all photographic practices and have been acutely raised in the context of social science research (Edwards, 2015; Prins, 2010; Sontag, 2009). However, in my opinion, the transferring of the camera to research participants or asking them to read images does not necessarily resolve issues of power, voice, and agency. Rather, it offers a temporary closure to the meanings of photographs by transferring the responsibility of deciphering/coding/analyzing images onto research participants.

Another example might be helpful here. The passport photograph is a common identification document, a visual object that I return to repeatedly in my own artistic practice. Over the years, rules governing passport photographs have shifted. In these photographs, we can't smile or wear anything that covers the head. The distance between the face, the monotone backdrop, and the edge of the photograph has to be precise. One might consider the passport photograph to be a flat document. It is read by authority figures as a representation, as a means of identification, matching the likeness of the person in front to the person in the photograph. At the airport, at the bar, the person guarding the entrance always holds up my passport photo to my

face, trying to establish a similarity. This is a particular type of an encounter with the passport photograph. As I try to think of what else the passport photo does, I am reminded of my father's wallet. In it, he always has a passport photograph of my mother. A photograph that is probably several decades old at this point. He always looks at it longingly. In that same flat photograph, my father seems to find different affective intensities. For him, the photograph conjures memories, visions, and relationships to whom the image portrays. He is neither the photographer nor the photographed. I have never asked him if he was there when the photograph was made. It is possible that he was, but I guess that doesn't matter either.

Figure 2 *Untitled. Photograph: Vivek Vellanki*



Building on these considerations, I conceptualize photography as a series of encounters beyond the acts of photographing or an initial viewing of images. The possibilities of these encounters, as I indicated with the example above, are never simply determined by the photographer, the photograph, or the photographed. Instead, they are also subject to contexts, personalities, and the particular moments of encounter created in the process of engaging photography and photographs. To put it another way, "photography provides a productive interface—as site where haptic and optic coincide and where a confluence of feelings, not to

mention fields of inquiry, collide—for investigating the implications of the convergence of sensation and perception" (Brown & Phu, 2014, p. 21).

Within the context of educational research, exploring the possibilities of photography entails moving past the binary of the photographer or the photographed towards an engagement with the multiplicities photographs offer in our lives. This includes, but is not limited to, an exploration of the multifaceted role of photographs and photography in our everyday lives, attuning ourselves not only to the loud and extravagant but also to the quiet and quotidian (Campt, 2017). As I argued earlier, visual research within education has largely limited itself to focusing on who wields the camera and who reads/analyzes/codes images. However, there is room for us to engage in explorations of photography that engage the affective, the visual, the aural, the gestural, and the haptic. An engagement with these elements, as I have argued above, can attune us to aspects of photographic practice that are often overlooked within traditional research. For example, in describing her research with young children and their photographic practices, Templeton (2018) argues that it is important to attend to the varied resonances of images in the lives of young people. Templeton (2018) makes a shift by closely attending to the visual, sensory, gestural, and spatial in young children's photographs of New York City. She writes: "Until I looked at their photos, I had not considered the city a significant space for the young children in this study, yet one affordance of children's photography is that their pictures present new focal points and ways for adults to think about children's lives in ways we had not" (p. 13). Furthermore, Templeton (2018) reminds us that in order to be able to see, hear, think, and feel photographs on these varied registers we could try and move past our habitual, adult-ways of reading and interpreting images.

In order to attend to the affective intensities of images, beyond their indexical quality, we have to move past existing theoretical and methodological frameworks. "If we read images with the same literacy skills as we use to read words," Fendler (2017) writes, "we will not be able to see what images are and what they do" (p. 751). In this section, I have argued that the ideas of excess in images (Azoulay, 2015) and attending to the affective registers of photography (Campt, 2017) opens up a plethora of possibilities and "new analytics for thinking—and feeling—photography" (Brown & Phu, 2014, p.21) that has only recently begun to play a role in our engagement with the visual in educational research.

Collaboration and Photography

The shift towards participatory visual methodologies emerged against the backdrop of a critique of traditional qualitative research methodologies which were seen as being extractive, pushing an asymmetrical relationship between the researcher and the researched, and often reported findings only from the perspective of the researcher. Within this context, cultures (particularly of marginalized and colonized peoples) were described as 'primitive, savage, and underdeveloped.' Photographs played a key role in depicting these cultures and also in offering 'veracity' to the claims made by the researcher. However, despite its ubiquitous role in field work, photographs were usually absent from published monographs. Pinney (2012) drawing on the works of middle-20th century anthropologists argues that this absence might be because the "emotive power of the picture" was hard to control thereby potentially risking a fracture of the 'objective' purpose of the researcher (p. 61).

Several artists and theorists have pushed our understanding of collaboration within photographic practice. Drawing on the work of Susan Meisalas and Wendy Ewald, Azoulay (2016) argues that "collaboration is the photographic event's degree zero" involving several actors (p. 189). While we would often place the person behind the camera in a position of

authority, “the photographer cannot a priori claim a monopoly over knowledge, authorship, ownership, and rights” (p. 189). What does it mean that collaboration is the photographic event’s degree zero? Put simply, it is a limitation to assume that the photographer is the subject and the photographed is the object, with the direction of power simply flowing from the photographer to the photographed. Instead, photography is multiply agentive and actions emerge across various encounters and engagement with the process and images.

Over the past few decades, collaborative approaches have been seen as a solution to the extractive and predatory nature of social science research and have been positioned as positive. As I discussed earlier, the idea of collaboration within visual research has taken the form of engaging research participants along the lines of the photographer or the interpreter of photographs. The shift from yesteryears has been that the camera, initially wielded by the researcher, has been turned over to the participants with the hope that the resultant images would not reproduce the ethnographic gaze of the researcher. Thus, it is not only who the photographer is, but the very act of making an image from behind the camera that achieves heightened importance. This particular collaborative approach shifts the power wielded by the researcher by making the subsequent act of interpreting/analyzing images a ‘collaborative’ endeavor. However, despite this shift, the relationship(s) among the photograph, photographer, photographed, and spectator remain underexplored.

If we consider collaboration to be photography’s event zero, then how do we think about engaging in other forms of collaboration that move past the role of creating/analyzing images or the binary of the photographer-photographed? While we often see collaboration as a positive engagement, Azoulay (2016) reminds us, that there is an “unavoidable collaborative dimension of photographic practice, regardless of the photographer’s intention or success in engaging with

others in a just or hospitable manner" (p. 188). Collaboration is always already present in photography and is not necessarily reflective of a positive relationship (although it can be) between the various actors. Campt (2017), for example, uses ethnographic images of Black South African women from the late 19th century to illustrate that these images are not merely about dispossession and subjugation. To see these photographs as only resulting from the subjection of the women to the colonizers' gaze would be to ignore their quiet resistance and miss "the visible manifestations of psychic and physical *responses* (rather than submission) to colonization and the ethnographic gazes it initiated" (p. 51; emphasis in original). Instead, Campt (2017) sees these images as emerging from a collaboration, one that is most definitely hierarchical and unequal, that nonetheless visualizes a "tense grammar of colonization and black self-fashioning" (p. 50). Using her method of "listening to images," Campt (2017) suggests that "we think of self-fashioning in these images as complex articulations of self that resist easy categorization and refuse binary notions of agency versus subjection" (p. 59). The women's resistance is registered on the image in unheard frequencies. In order to access these unheard frequencies, we must also hear them to attend to the tensions between the photographed and the photographer that might not be apparent visually but can be brought out by drawing on other analytics.

For example, Azoulay, Meisalas and Ewald examined over hundred photography projects to chart out eight different clusters to illustrate the various ways in which photography can be collaborative. One of the clusters they examined is called "Coarchiving." In this cluster, they discuss collaborative projects in which, instead of a traditional museum or archivist, the "community performs its right to archive" (p. 197). The category is used to explore collaboration by examining the various relationships that are formed through photographic practice (across the

spectrum of production, storage, and circulation of photographs) and the ways in which people engage with it. Phu et al.'s, (2017) *The Family Camera Network* is an example of community archiving that has demonstrated ways to collaborate beyond the binary of photographer-photographed. By crowdsourcing photographs from families living in Canada, this project shows "how photos are produced and move and create meaning within a family" (p. 159). And at the same time, the process of archiving and community analysis, aided an exploration of family photographs in "multisensory ways" and "lays bare the influence of the nation-state in constructing ideas about family at the same time it illuminates the transnational dimensions of visual kinship" (p. 159). Through this project, the researchers were able to collaborate with community members to share compelling stories, visual and otherwise. This approach stands in contrast to existing collaborative practices like photovoice which seek to disrupt the power hierarchy between the photographer-photographed by shifting the camera away from the researcher to the researched. *The Family Camera Network*'s practice of collaborative archiving pushes forward "the ideas that photography is not a record but a site of action, and that revisiting its history is not sealing it off but opening it up for others to engage with its findings and pursue them further" (Azoulay, 2016, p. 198). A part of the collection has been made available online through the The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives and the Royal Ontario Museum. These imaginative approaches to collaboration attune us to the multiplicity of meanings, resonances, and feelings that reside in and move through photographs and photographic practices.

As a photographer, I am interested in thinking about ways of collaborating beyond asking research participants to become photographers. "Collaboration in photography cannot be limited to the question of how to engage others in the event of photography but must also ask how the

photographer herself engages with the act of photography" (Azoulay, 2016, p. 191). In the context of visual research, this can be paraphrased to ask how the researcher themselves engage with the act of photography. It is for this reason that the cluster of projects from Azoulay's (2016) typology that caught my attention most strongly is titled "The photographer seeks to reshape the traditional authorial position through the photographed person's collaboration." Azoulay (2016), Meisalas, and Ewald argue that the capturing of an image is "only one aspect of photography, which should be considered alongside other procedures such as sharing the camera, collecting photographs; sorting, sharing, showing, viewing, and archiving them; as well as writing on them and through them" (p. 195). This articulation reminds me of Carolyn Drake's (2014) book *Wild Pigeon.* For this project, Drake photographed the Uyghur community in China. She grappled with the ethical question of being an outsider who is photographing a community that is subject to hyper-surveillance and persecuted by the Chinese state. She wondered if her photographic perspective adequately represents the Uyghur experience and asks "what, if anything, did the pictures I was taking mean to the people in them?" She responded by inviting collaborators to manipulate the images she created through a process of writing, collage, and other forms of manipulation (see Drake, 2014). The result is a complex body of work that disrupts our traditional understandings of the roles played by the photographer and the photographed in the process of creating an image. As noted above, the relationships and interactions between the photographer and the photographed are usually hidden on the plane of the image. In the traditional framing, the photographed is mostly seen as being passive and subjected to the gaze of the photographer. The image is seen as a creation of the photographer and the credit is all theirs. How many remember the name of the woman sitting in Dorthea Lange's *The Migrant Mother?* However, in Drake's work we see a significant disruption to this

understanding. While we don't always learn the names of her collaborators (a deliberate choice she makes to protect their identities), she invites them to visualize the relationship between the photographer and photographed through a physical manipulation of the image. As a spectator, I am invited to view Drake's photographs through the traces and inscriptions created by her collaborators.

Drake's process of collaboration challenges traditional understandings of the role of the photographer and the photographed. The photographs are made by her, but her collaborators transform them in big and small ways. They hide some things, add words and phrases, cut out whole pieces of the image, or bring different images together to make something else. This particular practice of collaboration challenges dominant understandings of the role of the photographer and photographed. Most importantly, it visualizes collaboration as pushing the limits of the photographic medium.

Drawing on the work of artists and scholars, I have indicated above the possibilities for us to reimagine collaboration beyond the act of being a photographer in the community or inviting others to engage in the practice of being photographers. These 'new' collaborative practices push us to explore the ways we can, as artists/researchers/educators, invite collaborators to write with, think with, archive, and manipulate photographs. Ultimately, these imaginative collaborative practices, which often emerge from the work of artists, create opportunities for us to understand the multifarious roles photographs play in our lives and in reimagining the role of photography in educational research.

Thinking with Art/Photography

While in the earlier sections I focused on the process and analysis used in the context of photography within educational research, I now want to turn my attention towards the role of photography in offering conceptual/theoretical insight for educational praxis. I argue that in

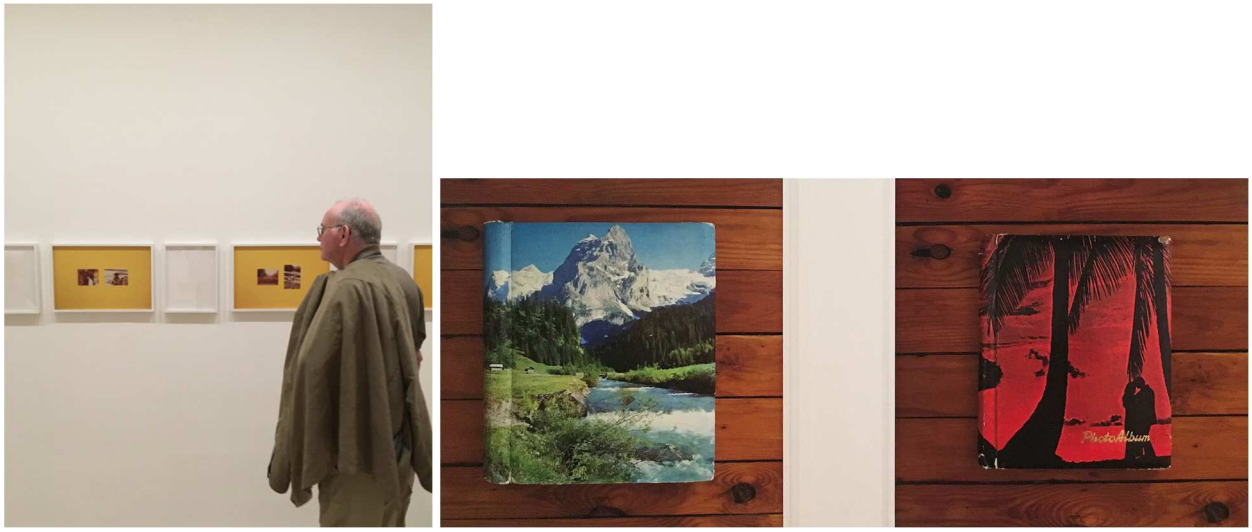
order to tap into the potentiality of photographs to help us think/feel/theorize, we have to move past the idea that photographs and photographic works are merely data that need theories and analysis applied to them. Despite the efforts to incorporate photographs as a way to move beyond print-based text as data, much of the analysis grates images into textual fragments—codes, themes, narratives—that are strung together to form print-based textual descriptions. The materiality and visuality of photographs is flattened into print-based text.

I remember the first time I saw Hồng-Ân Trương and Hương Ngô's *The Opposite of Looking is Not Invisibility and the Opposite of Yellow is not Gold* at MoMA, New York. In this work (Figure 7), the artists mined family albums to find vernacular photographs of their mothers, who had moved as refugees during the U.S. war in Vietnam. These images, which depict their everyday lives, are juxtaposed with transcripts from congressional hearings in the 1970s about Vietnamese refugees. While the photographs are printed on lush, velvety paper, and mounted on golden-yellow backgrounds the transcripts are laser engraved and exhibited behind a highly reflective glass. As a viewer, I quickly identified the images, but I had to look closely to read the court proceedings. I often only gleaned snippets.

Drawing on this work, as an example, I ask, how can we use art/photography to think? To theorize? To analyze? I see artistic/photographic practice as holding the potential to push theorizing and help us engage the contemporary world in multitudes. I think that the ability for art to do this repeatedly lies in its willingness to engage multiple senses, affect, reason, memory, and a plethora of ways in which all of us come to know, sense, and be in the world. On the contrary, much of qualitative/representational research has limited itself to rationality, reason, and words.

Hồng-Ân Trương and Hương Ngô's juxtaposition of the domestic (photographs) with the public (transcripts of congressional hearings) is not just a discursive move but a material one too. The laser engraved text creates a new relationship for the viewer. Together, they push the viewer to see how "the invisible histories of Asian American families and the broader national imperative in which war, the economy, and labor are bound up with each other" (Ngô & Trương, 2018). Long after I left the museum, I thought about their work and how they used their family photographs to theorize a relationship between the state and the refugee, between the personal and the political, and between women, domesticity, and nationalism. These elements exist alongside each other and collide with each other discursively as well as materially—the lives and desires of the women, their families, and communities sit alongside the rancid bureaucracy of the state.

Figure 3 *Hồng-Ân Trương and Hương Ngô's The Opposite of Looking is Not Invisibility and the Opposite of Yellow is not Gold at MoMa, New York. Photographs: Vivek Vellanki*



In trying to think, feel, and theorize with art/photography, I am interested in two elements. The first is to examine the ways artists are pushing our understanding of photography itself and articulating new ways to read, analyze, engage, and understand photographs (Brown &

Phu, 2014; Campt, 2012; Huang, 2019; Mani, 2010). Hồng-Ân Trương and Hương Ngô's work achieves this by taking the overdetermined genre of family photographs and repositioning them as quiet yet bold responses to the state's imagination and treatment of refugees. This visual, material, and affective treatment offers a new vantage point for viewers/educators to consider concepts/ideas that have been discussed within (educational) research (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017; Coe, 2010; De León, 2015).

Hồng-Ân Trương and Hương Ngô's photographic work engages several ideas at once and bridges the divides between the academic/non-academic by utilizing the affective, material, and visual registers of photography/art. It pushes past the dominant idea that "words are the only tool of thought" (Sousanis, 2015). The overreliance on print-based text within educational research "marginalizes, excludes, and negates alternative ways of being (ontology) and knowing (epistemology)" (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). The work of artists/photographers, like Hồng-Ân Trương and Hương Ngô, "offer new lenses through which to look out at and interpret the educative acts that keep human beings and their cultures alive" (Greene, 2000, p. 4). As educators and researchers, we could consider ways to engage these "other" ways of knowing and acknowledge "how *form* makes *worlds*" too (Loveless, 2019, p. 102; emphasis original). The question of form has particular import for researchers/artists who consider "the aesthetic, excessive dimensions of knowledge" and the ways in which this shift in the process and output of our research-creations can lead to the emergence of new pedagogical encounters (p. 39).

The field of arts-based research has consistently challenged the divide between art and research. For a long time, arts-based researchers have argued for the inclusion of artistic practice in the paradigm of research. Borrowing from Greene (1977), I explore what the artistic-aesthetic can do for curriculum as well. If art is not merely something that needs theory applied to it, then

how can we think of art as also offering a space to theorize, to grow and to un/learn? Tuck and Yang (2014) write, "using art to think/feel through theory—to decode power and uncode communities—trains our intuition" (p. 814). Artistic practice has a crucial role in shifting research practices away from its damage-centered orientation towards a desire-based engagement.

Keith Secola, an indigenous artist based in the U.S., created a series titled *Postcolonial Revenge*. This project includes family photographs that are screen printed onto "historical" publications and textbooks that condone the settler-colonial legacy and the ongoing erasure of indigenous cultures and lives. The photographs that make up Secola's works are from his family's archive, made between 1800 and 1950, and passed onto him by his mother. Secola's pieces are "a focused critique of text, images, and persuasion throughout history" (Metcalf, 2019). *Postcolonial Revenge* has deep resonances for the field of curriculum studies. In particular, the area of textbook studies which has been concerned with examining the gaps, silences, and erasures of particular peoples, histories, and cultures within school textbooks. Secola offers his own interpretation and conceptual analysis to these erasures. It is an interpretation and critique that is, both, deeply personal and political; conceptual and material. By superimposing his family photographs onto the covers of books, Secola is asking us to consider what these erasures mean for his family and community. More importantly, his work raises some pertinent questions—What do we miss out on when we study erasures/silences in textbooks only using the textual? How does this affective/material intervention shift our understanding of erasures/silences in textbooks and its impact on individuals/families/communities? How do we, as educators and researchers, shift away from a damage-centered approach towards a desire-based approach to researching textbooks? And

finally, building on that last question, how do we, through our research and teaching, center the lives, desires, and histories of the very communities that are affected?

These are some questions that came to my mind as I engaged with Secola's work. This list is not exhaustive. However, I hope the works of the artists above highlight how photographic (and other forms of artistic) practices can "offer modes of sensuous, aesthetic attunement, and work as a conduit to focus attention, elicit public discourse, and shape cultural imaginaries" (Loveless, 2019, p. 16). Photographs are not merely data that need theory applied to them, but they also offer us ways to think, question, feel, be, and to imagine otherwise.

What is Our Vision for the Future?

To insist that contemporary photographic practice — and I mean to include a majority of the international news coverage in newspapers like this one — is generally made (and published) for the greater good is to misconstrue history, because it leaves out the question of "Good for whom?"

– Teju Cole, *On Photography, New York Times*

The camera is a recent invention in human history, its presence in our lives is perhaps equivalent to the blink of an eye when measured against geological time. And yet, the profound impact of cameras and photographs on human (and more-than-human) life cannot be underestimated. In the preceding sections, I argued for us to reconsider and to reimagine the role of photography within educational research and practice. In doing so, I most often highlighted and shared examples of artists and works that use photography to provoke, question, and challenge the status-quo. However, if I was to say nothing of the ways in which photography has and continues to reinscribe regimes of power, domination, and dispossession then I would only be offering you a partial picture.

When I was first trained formally in using a camera, I was taught all the basics—aperture, shutter speed, ISO, etc. My instructor gave me assignments—still life, portraiture, street photography, etc. The camera made me see differently, it made me curious about life around me.

I was driven by an impulse to capture everything and everyone that seemed interesting to me. I was taught to be discreet, unobtrusive, and focused on the photograph I wanted to create. I would often walk up to people and photograph them, asking for their permission verbally, rarely explaining why I was photographing them. To be honest, I had no idea either. My friend Jasmine accompanied me during one of my sessions. She observed my practice and towards the end asked me, "Do you feel no hesitation, walking up to people and photographing them?" Her question, she insists to this day, was innocuous. However, it sent me down a spiral, making me wonder about my own photographic practices. Why was I making the pictures that I was making? What stories was I trying to tell? And what stories was I telling about the people I was photographing? I realized that my photography instructor had taught me how to use the camera but never really helped me consider how to use the camera ethically or responsibly.

We are at a moment in human history when more people have access to cameras than ever before. This has enabled us to democratize 'vision', allowing us to see perspectives, peoples, and places that were unseen before. And at the same time, it has made much more apparent the injustices we are surrounded by—photos and videos of police brutality, the murder of humans trying to migrate, and the toll of war. Cole (2019) makes a grim forecast: "Photography's future will be much like its past. It will largely continue to illustrate, without condemning, how the powerful dominate the less powerful" (para 17). As more and more educators and researchers draw on ideas of multimodality, arts-based research, and visual methodologies, to inform their scholarly work and teaching, the time to consider the ethics of image-making and its role in contemporary life is now.

We are currently experiencing rapid changes to the ways in which photographs are created, circulated, and curated. With the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its ubiquitous

use across web platforms, “the overwhelming majority of images are now made by machines for other machines, with humans rarely in the loop” (Paglen, 2019, p. 24). We are already noticing how these technologies permeate our everyday life—facial recognition, surveillance systems, and social-media algorithms. These technologies are now being mobilized at a large scale to monitor and control citizens. How do our research methodologies and teaching practices attend to this new reality? “Formal concepts contain epistemological assumptions, which in turn have ethical consequences” (Paglen, 2019, p. 27). Our theoretical concepts and methodological approaches could shift drastically and as we examine these new questions, technologies, and modes of interactions we cannot simply rely on siloed disciplinary traditions. Our attention towards the ongoing changes to our visual culture and practices will determine how the field is framed over the next few decades and more importantly, how photographs, images, and the visual intervene in our everyday life.

Throughout this chapter, I articulated some shifts that help reframe our understanding of photography and how it is used within educational research and practice. However, there are yet many more turns to be made. I hope this paper serves as an invitation for those of us who are interested in the visual to ask more questions, to critically engage our own practices and those of the scholars/artists who are interested in a similar task, and to reflect on the ways in which we invite our research participants and collaborators to engage with the visual. These are unchartered territories, and as Paglen (2019) reminds us “it is in inefficiency, experimentation, self-expression and often law-breaking that freedom and political self-representation can be found” (p. 27).

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CHAPTER 2 Imagining Home: Mahtab Hussain's Photography of Diaspora and Belonging

My cousins moved to the U.S. when I was eight years old. As a young boy growing up in Hyderabad, India, their photographs were conduits for me to imagine and to understand their lives in the U.S. My fascination with photographs and the layered meanings these objects hold for migrants has continued into my scholarship. Having migrated to the U.S. myself in 2015, I learned that the photographs that I saw as a young boy are fragments that could never fully convey the complexity of my cousins' everyday lives. At the same time, they offered me a visual entry-point into a world that was far different from my own. I remember the photograph of my cousin in Chuck E. Cheese, celebrating his birthday. My other cousin standing in front of a mound of snow in a pink coat. These photographs allowed my family to develop an understanding of their lives beyond what they could convey to us through words. The blue in the sky looked different, the snow felt foreign to our own tropical lives, yet the green of the grass appeared the same.

"Photographs bring together ontology and phenomenology" (Brown & Phu, 2014, p. 15). In the lives of the diaspora, photographs have served as a means of communicating the incommunicable, they offer a glimpse into the minutia of everyday life by capturing the material, the affective, and the bodily on the two dimensional plane of the image. However, as Lee (2018) reminds us, despite the central role of photography within the lives of the diaspora it has received little attention within the field of diaspora studies. Photography's complex role in the history of migration and colonialism make it a particularly interesting medium through which to explore diaspora consciousness (Banerjee, 2010). More importantly, beyond its broader role in these histories, the nature of the medium and its slippages between fact/fiction, memory/present, capture/loss make it particularly valuable in the context of diaspora studies.

"The framework of diaspora," Lukose (2007) reminds us, "has been so strikingly absent" from our investigations within educational research (p. 408). The burgeoning field of diaspora studies offers the opportunity to engage questions of home, belonging, and diasporic subjectivity beyond the binaries of assimilation/integration, home/away, here/there, foreigner/citizen. This scholarship pushes us to think beyond the nation-state as the unit of analysis within educational research (Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013). It also asks us to reconsider our understandings of the cultural, social, political, and educational processes undergirding the lives of the diaspora. The centering of the nation-state within educational institutions and research practices is, arguably, one of the causes for the on-going marginalization and alienation experienced by youth living in the diaspora (Abu El-Haj & Skilton, 2017). Bénéï (2005) along with other scholars show how various overt and covert practices within schools "manufacture" a citizenship which is deeply embedded in the modernist project of the nation-state. In recent years, scholars have shown us how some young people elide national boundaries (real and imagined) and use the arts to construct and inhabit imaginative geographies (El-Haj, 2009; Hamman & Zúñiga, 2011; Rios-Rojas, 2011).

While scholars engaging questions of diaspora, home, and belonging in the context of education have considered literature (Villenas, 2009), films (Maira, 2009), music (Gopinath, 1995), and other artistic media (Vellanki & Prince, 2018) as sources for insight, photography has largely been absent from these discussions. My focus on photography, as a specific artistic/documentary practice, is driven by my own personal interest in the medium, its role in the lives of the diaspora, and also because of its doubled "omission"[1] from the fields of diaspora studies (Mani, 2010) as well as education (Fendler, 2017).

[1] I want to be careful about how I articulate this perceived omission. It is important to acknowledge that in the past few decades there has been a growing interest in the relationship between diaspora and photography. A significant

This paper responds to this omission by considering the works of photographers dealing with questions of diaspora, home, and belonging in the context of South Asia. I do this by offering a close reading of the works and practices of Mahtab Hussain, a British-Kashmiri artist. I turn towards the diasporic photographer and examine the visual narratives constructed through an alternative vision of be/longing and migration. I explore Hussain's photographic practices because of my belief in the role of the arts in allowing us "to see more in our experience, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed" (Greene, 1995, p. 38). I examine Hussain's work by placing his photographs and practices in conversation with the work of scholars in the field of diaspora studies and educational research (Banerjee, 2010; Brah, 1996; Lukose, 2007; Trinh, 2011; Villenas, 2007). Through this engagement, "I am interested in what lingering in these works and work practices might offer" the fields of education and diaspora studies (O'Donoghue, 2009, p. 354).

What/Who is Diaspora?

The term diaspora has a long and contested history. The early use of the term focussed on the experiences of specific communities (Jewish, Armenian, Greek and African) facing exile and displacement. The meanings associated with this term have varied over the past few centuries with contemporary usage focussed broadly on "cultural productions and identity formations of migrant communities that have become important and salient for the larger political, economic, and cultural transformations that mark contemporary globalization" (Lukose, 2007, p. 409). This history, and the shifting nature of the term, has been traced and explored extensively (see Butler,

portion of the work has dealt with familial photographs (for e.g., Campt, 2012). Several other scholars have engaged with the subject of photography and diaspora through the lens of artistic practice (for e.g., Mani, 2010). The work of these scholars informs my own scholarship. However, in this paper I am engaging the overlapping omission of photography in the context of diaspora studies and educational research.

2001; Clifford, 1994; Hall, 1998). In this paper, I draw on Brah's (1996) conception of diaspora which moves beyond the categories of home, movement, and community. For Brah, diaspora is not simply a matter of an individual/group moving to another region and forming a "new" community that continues to be intimately tied to the "homes" they left. Instead, diaspora is "an interpretive frame referencing the economic, political, and cultural dimensions of these contemporary forms of migrancy" (p. 186). Brah's work brings together the conceptions of migration, home, community, be/longing, and explores their relationship to the categories of borders and the politics of location. With this shift, diaspora studies is not simply engaged in tracing movement across borders but also in the "imaginative worlds and cultural productions of migrants" (Lukose, 2007, p. 409). A reimagination of who/what diaspora is has enabled the disruption of a nationalist, assimilationist model of immigration, which in turn affects how it is possible to imagine schools, students, and the purposes of education. Diasporas articulate and re-articulate themselves through various cultural, social, and political practices that potentially escape the logics, structures, and boundaries of the nation-state.

While the social-sciences have seen a resurgent interest in diaspora studies over the last few decades, these themes have been explored for much longer via the arts—literature, films, music, performance, etc (Raiford, 2006). One could argue that diaspora(s) has always been involved in imaginative treatments of their own lives. These explorations, which are small and large, ordinary and extraordinary, have offered articulations of what it means to live here and there in order to create an elsewhere. For example, the letters written by diaspora(s) are personal articulations of the economic, cultural, and psychic process undergirding their lives. Familial photographs that travel across borders offer a visual rendition of lives, transporting an imagination and a materiality to other contexts, other homelands. As Villenas (2007) reminds us,

these practices "often remain elusive to an academic project which is always coming after to describe what is past tense to those who are creating these phenomena" (p. 424). Butler (2001) argues that "much of diaspora experience is unwritten: it is inscribed in the creative arts, material culture, and oral traditions" (p. 212). Therefore, more recently, scholars within the field of diaspora studies have begun to (re)articulate what it means to be diasporic by relying on the cultural and material artifacts produced by diaspora(s) and the imaginative explorations they offer (Appadurai, 1996; Campt, 2012; Cho, 2009; Gopinath, 1995).

Despite these imaginative explorations, the conditions of the nation-state, pursued through several state-sponsored institutions have forced diaspora(s) to choose between a here and there. As an educational scholar, I see schools as primary sites of building an imaginary of the nation-state (Anderson, 2006; Bajaj et al., 2016; Shirazi, 2018). Diasporic youth are often forced to leave their imaginations, curiosities, and cross-cultural affiliations at the doorstep (El-Haj, 2009). In the last few decades, educational scholars have considered, more seriously, the creative remixing that diasporic youth embark on, exploring the ways in which they construct imaginations of a here, there, and an elsewhere.

How does one attune and attend to these cultural, political, and social border-crossings within the context of educational research? The responses from educational scholars to this question have ranged from following the everyday lives of diasporic youth closely (Hamman & Zúñiga, 2011; Maira, 2002) to exploring how the arts can provide a foray into understanding the complexities of diasporic lives. For example, Villenas (2009) argues for the use of literature within the English classroom as a way of disrupting traditional understandings of the nation-state and the lives of the diaspora. El-Haj (2009) explores the role that films can play in developing ideas of a postnational citizenship. Alim and Pennycook (2007) examine the role of hip-hop in

developing glocal constructions of the real that elide the boundaries of the nation-state and engage the creative remixing that diasporic youth embark on. As Boym (2011) notes, the shifting nature of migration led theorists to draw on the work of artists, and the artists to rely on theorists in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of diaspora—"disappointed with their own disciplinary teleology, they emigrate into each other's territory" (p. 119). Nonetheless, despite the recent attention towards the role of the arts within the lives of the diaspora, photography has been repeatedly side-lined (Lee, 2018).

In arguing for an engagement with photography in the context of diaspora studies and education, I am not simply calling to add photography to a list of interchangeable arts that have been used to explore the questions outlined above. On the contrary, I make a case for photography as a unique artistic practice that has much to offer towards an understanding of the social, cultural, and political processes that undergird the lives of the diaspora. In recent years, scholars have attuned to, what Raiford (2006) calls, "a photographic 'practice of diaspora'" (p. 212). The role of photography in contemporary migration through its official/institutional uses (for e.g., passport photos) and deeply personal/communal uses (for e.g., familial photographs) make the medium particularly interesting in exploring ideas of home, borders, location, belonging, and memory (Banerjee, 2010; Campt, 2012). Furthermore, "photography's capacity to build or envision community across geographical location, its capacity to engage its viewers on both critical and expressive or emotional registers" make it pertinent in the context of diasporic lives (Raiford, 2006, p. 213). In recent years, both fine-art and documentary photographers living in the diaspora have taken up these questions within their practices and offered "a visual account of lives on the move; [documenting] social and cultural flux, identities in the making, a new kind of cosmopolitanism, and flexible citizenships" (Lee, 2018, p. 182). I

offer an articulation of what photography can do for the fields of diaspora studies and education through an examination of the works and work practices of Mahtab Hussain (2017), a contemporary artist, who offers creative imaginaries of diasporic lives that move beyond home/away, host/immigrant, here/there, citizen/migrant, etc.

Mahtab Hussain, the focal artist of this chapter, is a member of the Azad Kashmiri diaspora, working in varied contexts, using different styles, and embarking on travels across real and imaginary boundaries. I engaged with Hussain's photographs as a South Asian migrant who has lived in India, the U.K., and the U.S. I haven't visited Azad Kashmir yet and only understand it through the collective imagination of the broader publics which has been shaped by the media and political discourse. The region has a troubled history which became exacerbated around the time of the partition between India and Pakistan in 1947 (Kanjwal, 2017). Azad Kashmir is governed by Pakistan and shares borders with Jammu and Kashmir, which is currently under military occupation by India. Across these regions, there have been ongoing political struggles to end occupation and calls for sovereignty (Ali et al., 2019). While I assemble my understanding of Azad Kashmir through Hussain's artistic work, I also learn that this is a deeply personal project. Hussain is trying to preserve a semblance of life in this region, trying to imagine how his mother lived and loved here. And at the same time, trying to answer for himself, what might his life have looked like had his family not left the region? I am drawn to his work because of what it offers me, a South Asian migrant living in the U.S., and the broader questions/feelings/memories it evokes for me as a migrant/photographer/educator.

Hussain's work is a heady mix of artistic brilliance, memory, and nostalgia. However, I am wary of reading his work as an easy resolution of questions inhabited by the Azad Kashmiri diaspora. I read his work as offering a particular history of the Azad Kashmiri diaspora, a

creative imagination and fabrication. More importantly, Hussain's artistic process offered youth and elders in the community an opportunity to unlearn linear histories. In this way, Hussain's work addresses a significant gap in the educational experiences of diasporic youth—an opportunity to engage their histories and biographies beyond the dominant narratives of any singular nation-state. Bhattacharya (2019) reminds us that opportunities to explore these complex transnational histories are largely absent not only from K-12 schools but also within academia, at the level of theoretical, methodological, and conceptual engagements. His photographic practices created an educational experience for youth that offered a reinterpretation of diasporic history using the very materials (metal, clay, and water) that were significant to their migration and lives in Britain. Lukose (2007) reminds us that as educational scholars, an exclusive focus on schools and classrooms, ignores other "spaces for the articulations of diasporic cultural sensibilities" which are also "powerful aspects of immigrant student identity formation" (p. 415). His work creates "a complex encounter between diasporic longings and belongings, powerful processes of national racial formation, and state practices in ways that are producing new forms of cultural production and experiences between diaspora and nation" (p. 412). The pedagogic elements of Hussain's work are not merely in the work he creates but also in the processes that he embarks on. As educators, we can learn from the questions he asks and the kinds of opportunities he creates for community members to embark on similar imaginative journeys.

In each section, I offer a close reading of his photographic work refracted through the lens of theorists working in the area of educational diaspora studies. Using this artistic and theoretical grounding, I then offer my own subjective reading of his work. I tease out the relationships between his artistic work, the lives of South Asian diaspora, and broader arguments within the field of diaspora studies. I end the paper with reflections on what Hussain's work potentially

offers the field of educational studies. This work is also a tentative boundary-crossing, an attempt towards re-imagining what these fields might offer each other if we embarked on travels across disciplinary boundaries, real and imagined.

Mahtab Hussain's *Going Back Home to Where I Came From*

"The best I could do was to collect memories with my camera…The work grapples with what it is that I will never truly be able to own."

– Mahtab Hussain, *Going Back Home to Where I Came From*

Hussain's family moved from Azad Kashmir to Scotland during the late 20th century following the building of the Mangla Dam. Hussain was born in Glasgow, and lived also in London, and Birmingham as a child. He wouldn't visit Azad Kashmir till he was an adult. As a young person, artist, and photographer, Hussain remembers repeatedly being asked by White British people, "Why don't you go back to where you came from?" The multiple dimensions of diasporic life combine to construct a complex idea of "home." For a larger part of his adult life, Hussain wondered what it would mean to go back to his ancestral home, to visit the homelands that his family left behind, but where he himself had never visited. *Going Back Home to Where I Came From* is a manifestation of Hussain's desire to return home, to an imagined life in distant lands through the photographic lens as he travelled to Kashmir for the first time as an adult. The title of the book offers a twist to the xenophobic slur "Go back home to where you came from." In Hussain's work we see a visual rendition of the impossibility and absurdity of the racist insult: go back home to where you came from. Hussain travelled home, to Azad Kashmir, with his camera and walked away with photographs which are physical/digital remnants of home and yet continued to question where is home—is it here, there, or elsewhere?

Hussain's (2017) artistic work is concerned with "race, identity, politics, gender, hybridity, and cultural difference within the British Muslim community" (n.p.). *Going Back*

Home to Where I Came From is a collection of three different but related projects. *The Auspicious Journey* includes tintype photographs of British Kashmiri migrants created by Hussain during his residency on a boat in the Black Country. The process and experience lead to *Mitti ka Ghar*, an installation of a mud house in a gallery in the U.K. However, the bulk of *Going Back Home to Where I Came From* consists of photographs created by Hussain in 2016 when he travelled to Azad Kashmir. The first time I flipped through Hussain's book I noticed the absence of page numbers. I reached the end and only then realized that the title page was there. I read the book backwards. Perhaps, Hussain left out page numbers to offer us no readymade ways to read this book. The title is followed by Hussain's three-page essay which is written left-to-right, traditional English script, but the pages are organized as if the book is being read right-to-left. Even in the form of the book, Hussain combines the formal features of English and Urdu languages and bookmaking practices to offer a form that is neither wholly here nor there.

In Hussain's (2017) work I see a visual rendition of Brah's (1996) conception of diaspora space as a "genealogical analysis of the relationality within and between diasporic formations" (p. 241). Hussain's work explores this idea by examining the "contemporary conditions of transmigrancy of people, capital, commodities and culture. It addresses the realm where economic, cultural, and political effects of crossing/transgressing different 'borders' are experienced; where contemporary forms of transcultural identities are constituted; and where belongingness and otherness is appropriated and contested" (p. 242). Hussain traces the history of the Mangla dam and its impact on the lives of people living in the region, eventually leading to displacement and the "emergence" of a diaspora that has continued to be influenced by memories of and lives in various lands. His work illustrates the inextricable links between the project of the nation state, migration, displacement, home, transnationalism, and photography.

I combine Brah's (1996) conception of diaspora space with Banerjee's (2010) emphasis on photography as a unique medium through which to explore diasporic consciousness. Photography, Banerjee (2010) writes, offers an "unbridgeable abyss between the moment of recording and the moment of looking at the photograph, and the impossibility of returning to the originary moment captured in the photograph" (p. 455). This quality of the medium, she continues, "render[s] it a most appropriate trope through which to represent diaspora consciousness" (p. 455). In Hussain's work, we see a visual/material rendition of these concerns. He is, at once, articulating his own identity as a member of the Azad Kashmiri diaspora in Britain and developing an understanding of how this migration has impacted his ancestral homeland.

In the following section, I examine two important aspects of Hussain's work. The first aspect is Hussain's attempt to preserve memories of the homeland through his photographic work which focuses primarily on Azad Kashmir. The second deals with his visual-material tracing of diasporic histories, in particular, how his artistic work brings to light the broader socio-economic and cultural conditions that led to the formation of the diaspora community.

Photographing Home, Creating Home

In Kyoto,

hearing the cuckoo,

I long for Kyoto. – Bashō

Hussain's journey towards creating the photographs in *Going Back Home to Where I Came From* is long and interesting. Hussain created images in his ancestral home in Azad Kashmir, trying to connect with a land and a people that his family was pushed away from many decades ago. The images are of the everyday: a cow being readied for slaughter, a young boy who has stepped out of a pool of water, and corn kernels being dried in the sun. Hussain's

photographs effuse a longing in the quotidian quietness, making us see the home that he longs for. A home that he has known only second-hand, mostly through accounts from his family and friends. A home that he has known mostly through other people's memories.

The bulk of the photographs in *Going Back Home to Where I Came From* were created during Hussain's first visit to the region. The photographs and the book are an attempt to preserve diasporic memories of the homeland. This is a challenging project because what Hussain (2017) wishes to preserve doesn't exist any longer, it has been remade and transformed. He relied on memories, of those living in the diaspora, to construct this preserve. He wrote, "I wanted my work to encapsulate this profound feeling of having returned home" (n.p.). As a photographer, he funnelled these memories and his own experience of returning to the homeland through the camera. However, how does one preserve a home that one has only known through memory? How does one preserve and materialize memory? These are questions that diasporas across the world are concerned with.

For Hussain and several others like him, "migration is tied to an originary moment that they cannot access in memory" (Banerjee 2010, p. 446). However, they access this through shared and collective memories and imaginations passed on through conversations, stories, art, music, and literature. Hussain's photographs carry within them this subdued memory of a place known mostly through second-hand accounts. Remember the photographs my cousins sent to me? They helped me construct an imagination of the U.S. long before I visited this land. That imagination was partial and fragmentary, but the images became part of my memory. The photographs taught me to look for some things—the strip malls, the blue in the sky, peculiar mascots. Hussain's photographs remind me of a carefully curated visual preservation of a place. As I read his work, I feel that the photographs are constructed by someone who knows the place

well, even if only through second-hand accounts. Hussain seemed to have known what to look for and he looked in the crinkles of everyday life and not simply the extravagant.

Hussain returned to Azad Kashmir in order to answer questions for himself and to seek out a homeland that he had known, until then, through distance and memory. To write diaspora is to write mourning, Vijay Mishra remarks. What does it mean to photograph diaspora? Hussain offered his own personal answer to this question. In *Going Back Home to Where I Came From* he traces a relationship between his family, borders, transnational flows, and a politics of location. He does this with tenderness and care. He does it with a curiosity that is deeply personal and political. "Every form of memory—the individual memory of personal experiences, cultural memory or trans-generational 'postmemory'—depends on re-articulations and re-enactments. Its contents are necessarily modified and invented as they are remembered" (Baronian et al., 2007, p. 12). In many ways, Hussain's attempt to trace this relationship is tied to various aspects of his own journey and biography. It is tied to the stories his mom told him. It is tied to the community in which he grew up and it is also tied to the persistent othering he experienced as a young man in the U.K., being told to "go back to where you come from."

Hussain's photographs trace these desires—to see, to be seen, to know, to be known, to be a member of the community, to preserve what he never knew in flesh and dirt. "The best I could do was to collect memories with my camera…The work grapples with what it is that I will never truly be able to own" (Hussain, 2017, n.p.). On a two-page spread we see corn kernels being dried on a patterned sheet. On the right is a young person holding a corn cob and seemingly breaking the kernels. On another spread, we see a photograph on the left with two ladders resting against a mud wall. On the right are two young boys, standing awkwardly in front of the camera. One of them is clutching some bills and the other holding, what appears to be,

something edible (see https://www.mahtabhussain.com/work/going-back-home-to-where-i-came-from/). "It is the local nature of these other explorations that is significant—these explorations are mining rich seams of information, finding stories that for too long have been either sedimented in the archive or stored amongst papers and albums held in family attics and suitcases, stories which incrementally reshape our picture of the past" (Grosvenor, 2007, p. 616). Hussain's photographs reach for a visual/material preservation/creation of a diasporic home.

Hussain (2017) wrote, "I seized the chance to wander around the cornfields [my mother] would have run through, retracing some of the paths she would have taken, even sitting on the same well she once described to me" (n.p.). Hussain connected with his homeland through the memories and stories shared by others. However, in the statement accompanying the photographs, he made a bold and melancholic confession that the imagination of going home remains just that, an impossible imagination: "I knew I would never be able to claim a part of Kashmir for myself, it would never be my home; a familiar feeling of loss, disorientation and emotional fragmentation was re-released, the same feeling I'd felt for years growing up in England. I was a lost boy, living among lost generations, who are not able to call any place home." Hussain, through his photographic and installation work, created a home.

Kumar (2000) reminds us of more complexities in the idea of home. Kumar wrote that the phrase "There's no place like home" is actually filled with ambiguity, especially if we pause to consider its loaded nature. At one end is the idea that "there can be no other place like home" but at the same time, it can also mean that "the idea of home is a delusion, it never existed in its safely pure form." In Hussain's work, we see a visual manifestation of the ambiguity of home. "Photography is at the nerve center of our paradoxical memorial impulses: we need it there for how it helps us frame our losses, but we can also sense it crowding in on ongoing experience,

imposing closure on what should still be open" (Cole, 2016, p. 200). Hussain is inside the work and also outside of it. He is constructing a home for himself and others in the diaspora. And at the same time, he seems to have recognized that here too, he is a visitor.

What Hussain offers is a preserve that allows diaspora(s), Azad Kashmiris and otherwise, to access questions, longings, and memories of home, no matter where they come from. Hussain offers a visual preserve that is deeply personal, that is constructed out of imagination, images, and mud. An archive that crosses borders with ease and yet remains uneasy in any one location. I see his work as "visualizing" Brah's conception of diaspora space and teasing out the relationships between those who travel and those who stay back. The importance of Hussain's work lies in its ability to create home in a layered manner, taking us through the visual and back into the material, and eventually to the impossibility of finding home for the diasporic subject. It invites us to contend with the cultural, political, economic, and psychic processes that undergird diasporic lives without offering an easy resolution. In fact, Hussain's work offers new visions, directions, and questions for us to consider. Ultimately, it is a gift to diasporic youth, who will, according to Hussain (2017), "offer a more fluid understanding of what is meant by 'home'" (n.p.).

Re-creating Mangla Dam: A Visual-Material Tracing of Diasporic Histories and Memories

The origins of *Going Back Home to Where I Came From* can be traced to Hussain's related project, *The Auspicious Journey*. In 2015 he travelled in a boat through the canal system in Birmingham, U.K as part of the Ikon Gallery's artist residency. Tracing connections to his homeland in Azad Kashmir, Hussain welcomed South Asian migrants onboard and asked them to make model clay houses replicating the homes they left behind in their ancestral lands in Azad Kashmir. To put his own unique spin on this endeavour, Hussain photographed the individuals who created model mud houses using the tin type process. Hussain's description of the model

mud houses and the five tintype portraits at the beginning of *Going Back Home to Where I Came From* deal with loss and memory experienced by the Azad Kashmiri diaspora. "Memories, in diaspora, may be place-based, but they are not necessarily place-bound" (Fortier, 2010, p. 184). Hussain's work is about finding and (re)creating home in other contexts while simultaneously tracing the histories of homes that have been left behind. What follows is my reading of how Hussain's photographs and installation work recreate diasporic histories, offering a more complicated retelling of why and how they ended up "here", in the U.K. A history that is not simply about travels westward but a complex tracing of histories that tie the here to there and an elsewhere.

In one photograph, titled Mangla Dam, I see the simultaneity of presence and absence visualized. Hussain photographed a religious structure standing in shallow water. I am not sure how long the structure has remained submerged in the water—a few hours, days, weeks, or years. Regardless, the proximity of this structure to the water is evident. It appears old and dilapidated with loose bricks strewn around it. On one side, the walls are broken down. Peering through the reflection, I see the remnants of a larger structure, perhaps this was a bigger complex now subsumed by the water. In the background, I mostly see the blue of the water and the sky. On the horizon are concrete buildings in what appears to be a town. The submerged structure lingers in the water, aware of the challenges to its own existence ushered by the dam even as other buildings emerge in the distance. This image, which was often a centerpiece in his gallery showings, conveys the history of the region by depicting what is present and absent, what is gained and lost.

How does Hussain preserve that which has already been eroded? How does Hussain deal in memory with this sense of loss? How does Hussain make visible the transnational flows and

their impact on the lives of the people living in his homeland? In *Mitti ka Ghar,* Hussain decided to recreate a life-sized mud house in a gallery in Britain, an attempt to upend the loss felt by photographs. It is about learning what the process of constructing an old thing in a new place teaches us—which is that the thing no longer remains the same but becomes anew. This yearning for home and for upending loss is not a feeling that Hussain deals with exclusively. As Banerjee reminds us, the diasporic photographer's "efforts are constantly undermined by the fact that representing a moment photographically takes the form of a haunting: photographs ironically heighten loss by resuscitating memory" (Banerjee 2010, p. 446). He is, through his photographic and installation work, bringing into view the "historically contingent genealogies" of the Azad Kashmiri diaspora in the U.K. (Brah, 1996, p. 196).

The construction of Mangla dam on the Jhelum river, a project initiated jointly by the Indian and Pakistani Governments in the 1960s and funded by various international organizations, led "to the submersion of over 280 towns and villages and the displacement of 110,000 people" living in the region (n.p.). The dam, constructed after the end of the colonial-rule in the region, was a modernist project that was partly driven by political and economic interests of Western countries. As Brah (1996) reminds us, "contemporary forms of transnational migrancy of capital, commodities, peoples, and cultures is the very condition of both the persistence and erosion of the nation state" (p. 243). Ultimately, Hussain's work attempts to trace these histories by using the very materials that have impacted the lives of the diaspora and those who stayed back. Through the model mud houses and tin type photographs, Hussain implored the Azad Kashmiri diaspora to tell their stories of home, loss, belonging. Together, they (re)made these stories from mud, from metal, from water, and from memory. In the book, I only see two images of the mud house being constructed in the gallery. The rest of the images are from

Hussain's travels to Mirpur as he researched the mud houses and learned more about the lives and histories of the people who stayed back. The history of the region is visualized through presence and absence. I don't see any images of the mud houses Hussain talks about. There are two images from Azad Kashmir that come close to what Hussain describes and later reconstructs in the gallery. However, these images also show the still surviving mud houses against a backdrop of multi-storeyed concrete houses. The mud house becomes a symbol for the diaspora and the transnational flows affecting their lives. The dam reshaped the river, the region, and led to the displacement and subsequent migration of people.

While Hussain chose to tell the story from the perspective of the diaspora living in the U.K., he learned that to tell the stories of home, loss, and memory also entails an understanding of the related effects on those who stayed back/never left. Hussain found that remittances from abroad have led to the development of concrete buildings in place of the mud houses, a recurrent theme across his photographs. The dam becomes a thread with which Hussain stitches together a genealogy of the Kashmiri diaspora that transgresses national boundaries. Together, the tin type photographs and the model mud houses tell the history of the Mangla dam using visual, affective, and material registers. Hussain's work gently pushes us to consider the connected threads of diasporic history and to reckon with globalization and diaspora being two sides of the same coin. Using these materials (water and clay) that were so central to the displacement of his people in other contexts, Hussain harkens to a time elsewhere, where similar materials sustained life differently.

Mitti ka Ghar, Hussain's installation, is a bold statement about how the lives of diaspora are impacted by factors that span national boundaries. To create home in a space as foreign and as alienating as an art gallery is an act of preservation, a quiet resistance. Hussain was able to

imaginatively recreate the transnational trajectory of this particular diaspora and illustrate "what the search for origins signifies in [their] history" (Brah, 1996, p. 197). *Mitti ka Ghar* is about using photography to create a home, in its form and materiality, that lingers in the imaginations of those who have migrated to the U.K. and also those who have stayed back. And for both sets of people, the mud house no longer exists in its pure form, it has been remade through transnational flows of money, people, and ideas. "It is a story about being at home, and the erosion thereof" (Uekotter, 2017). Hussain's work is a reminder that to understand the lives of diaspora entails a journeying across borders, real and imagined. It entails tracing not simply the roots of a diasporic community but also the routes that led them elsewhere (Gilroy, 2000, p. 190). It is about tracing a history that is faint, eroded, and "questions linear conceptions of history, continuity and progress" (Fortier, 2010, p. 184). It is about attending to the imaginative ways in which diasporas create/preserve/remake something that can be called home.

Reimagining Boundaries: Curriculum, Diasporas, and Photography

How do we see Hussain's work as curriculum? How can we conceive of his work as a resource for youth, teachers, and teacher educators to engage, understand, and imagine the lives of diaspora beyond the boundaries of the nation-state? How can the questions that Hussain asked of himself and his community be questions that we are willing to ask as educators? How can we create opportunities for students to ask these questions, engage in creative imagination, and an exploration of histories, cultures, and politics that traverse national boundaries? In many ways, this chapter is my attempt at offering one possible way of engaging Hussain's work in order to address some of these questions.

Going Back Home to Where I Came From can be traced to Hussain's experiences as a migrant in Britain. Repeatedly being told to "go back home to where you came from", Hussain realized that the statement actually undergirds other questions—who are you? Where have you

come from? Why are you here? Where do you really belong? Diaspora(s) are often forced to answer these questions of identity and belonging. These questions assume that a person's racial and ethnic identities make them 'identifiable' outsiders to a region. Often these questions are asked in personal and everyday contexts but at other times can also emerge from social and political institutions. For example, schools try and impose a "unitary national memory" that treats the nation-state as the unit of analysis (Huyssen, 2003, p. 23). The category of the nation-state as a primary mode of identification forces diasporic youth to choose between a here, a there, and an elsewhere (Abu El-Haj, 2007). Several educational scholars have theorized the impact of this racism and xenophobia on the lives of migrant students (Abu El-Haj, 2007; Bajaj et al., 2016; Collet, 2007). These "everyday ruptures" force migrant youth to confirm a singular national identity, often questioning their allegiances to the nation-state of their residence (Hamman & Zúñiga, 2011). Hussain's experiences echo this research and reflect an ongoing social, cultural, and political conflict with 'British nationals' who view him and others as 'perpetual outsiders' to the nation-state (Sue et al., 2007). However, what makes Hussain's work unique and interesting is his use of photography and installation in responding to these questions as a way to move beyond the textual and to draw on visual, material, and affective registers.

Hussain, through his photographic work, set out to answer the questions undergirding the statement "go back to where you came from". The contested nature of the experiences of the South Asian diaspora in Britain have been widely documented by several scholars (Brah, 2012; Hall, 2012). Hussain's work "allows for the interrogation rather than the assumption of the nation-state, and attention to youths' and parents' hybrid cultural practices that rupture geographies and generations" (Villenas, 2007, p. 419). In preserving and creating home through the visual, Hussain is also attending to the questions that animate Brah's (1996) work on

diaspora: “who travels…when, how and under what circumstances? What socio-economic, political and cultural conditions mark the trajectories of these journeys? What regimes of power inscribe the formation of a specific diaspora?” (p. 182; emphasis in original). By connecting the Azad Kashmiri diaspora in Britain to the construction of the Mangla dam, Hussain’s work “interrogate[s] two nations now instead of one” (Villenas, 2007, p. 421). He is able to construct, what Lukose (2007) calls, “imaginative geographies of homeland often as a counter to national imaginative geographies” (p. 412). Hussain’s photographic and installation work offer an imaginative creation that counter the impositions, of nation-states and schools, on diasporas to assimilate into a singular narrative of home/nation-state.

In “creating patterns of attachment across time and space” through his photographic and installation work, Hussain offers “threads of continuity” across nation-states and generations (Baronian et al., 2007, p. 12). Seen through this lens, Hussain’s work can be conceptualized as *currere*, the infinitive plural of curriculum, “which seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one’s understanding of his or her life (and vice versa) and how both are imbricated in society, politics and culture” (Pinar, 2012, p. 36). Through his artistic practice, Hussain is performing a pedagogical exercise that is at once autobiographical and political, thereby offering “an intensified engagement with daily life, not an ironic separation from it” (p. 37). His work quietly challenges the dominant curriculum within schools that often emphasize a singular national identity and force migrant youth to assimilate. He offers an imagination of diasporic lives that are situated across locality, geography, and nation-states. Hussain interrupts the dominant discourse around migration and diaspora which “often involves a linear understanding of migration as a one-way flow from third world to the first world” (Villenas, 2009, p. 133). And in unlearning the dominant tropes and relearning the transnational histories of

the Azad Kashmiri diaspora, he created photographs and installation work that challenge several binaries—here/there, citizen/migrant, first world/third world—and that interrogates the complex histories of migration that are deeply connected to globalization, economies, labor, and cultural productions occurring in spaces between and across nations. In uncovering the histories of his own family and community, Hussain offers the Kashmiri diaspora "a sense of themselves within history, a sense of hemispheric belonging" (Villenas, 2009, p. 135).

Through *Mitti ka Ghar*, Hussain extends this engagement with the broader community. In the book, he describes how volunteers, several of whom were youth, were involved in the construction of the mud house in the gallery. Through this process, Hussain is able to engage the concept of diaspora space, relying on "a multi-axial performative notion of power" (p. 242). The mud house in the gallery in Britain is ultimately starting a conversation between the Azad Kashmiri diaspora and other communities in Britain. Hussain was able to visualize how the presence of the Kashmiri diaspora in the U.K. is tied to economic, social, and, political effects that cannot be pinned to a single nation-state or organization. In making these axes of influences and (dis)location visible, Hussain sanctions a different response to the questions often asked of the Azad Kashmiri diaspora—why are you here? And at the same time, he is imploring other communities to reckon with these questions beyond the dominant discourses that are circulated within schools, popular culture, and media.

Ultimately, Hussain's photographic work offers a curriculum: a rewriting, a creation, an imagination, and preservation of diasporic histories that is woven together with threads of continuity and discontinuity. The photographs in *Going Back Home to Where I Came From* offer a retelling of the story of the Azad Kashmiri diaspora and it is told from multiple axes—the homeland, those who moved, and the ways in which this migration impacted the lives of those

who stayed back. In weaving these axes together in his retelling, Hussain is offering past, present, and future generations a preservation, imagination, and recreation of their histories that resists any single unitary narrative.

Hussain's photographic work performs currere visually. He offers us an aestheticized narrative of personal history, a particular retelling of diasporic history which challenges given understandings of diaspora and the nation-state. Viewed such, the deeply personal and political nature of his work becomes apparent. Mani (2010), discussing Gauri Gill's work who engages in similar questions, reminds us "postcolonial interventions in photographic practice reveal alternate narratives of nationhood, and yet our frameworks of seeing are still constrained by geographically bound notions of 'national culture'" (p. 143). Hussain's work offers a retelling of diasporic history. There are many, many other retellings, big and small. As educators, how do we attune and attend to these retellings that offer us 'visions' beyond grandiose nationalistic narratives?

As a scholar of education, I am interested in engaging in various kinds of boundary-crossing, including global diaspora and transdisciplinarity. Lukose (2007) articulates the importance of adopting diasporic frameworks within education because it "simultaneously argues against perspectives that assume a national, assimilationist model of immigrant incorporation while highlighting phenomena like music, literature, and film that may escape the logic of national assimilation" (Lukose, 2007, p. 410). To this list, I add photography and have illustrated the productive tensions that Hussain's work offers in understanding, feeling, and imagining diasporic lives. Ultimately, Hussain's artistic work invites us to rethink our notions of home, belonging, and diaspora; to imagine otherwise.

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CHAPTER 3 Methodology as a Lifestyle Choice: Aesthetics, Community, and Stories

My first foray into asking questions pertinent to educational research started while I was an elementary educator. As a first-year elementary teacher in a working-class neighborhood in Pune, India, I was expected to use materials developed by the U.S.-based organization Reading A-Z. My students and I read stories of blueberry pies and John running up and down a hill. The context was remarkably different. Neither I nor my students, had ever seen/eaten a blueberry. In that moment, I asked myself why we were using curricular materials so removed from our everyday lives. How did those curriculum materials about blueberries get into my Pune elementary school? These early questions sent me down the path of exploring transnational networks of educational reform. I wanted to understand why certain policies and practices became mobile across geographical, social, and cultural contexts. Who/what makes these practices and reform ideas mobile? In attempting to address these fledgling questions, I turned towards social network analysis as a methodological approach. I read the work of several scholars who were already engaged in similar work (Ball, 2016; Dunn, 2013; Nambissan & Ball, 2010). I started with the belief that if *I* were able to uncover and show the networks of individuals/organizations/nation-states that are exerting this influence then eventually classroom practices might shift (see Vellanki, 2015). This led me towards pursuing a doctoral degree in the U.S., with the aim of conducting research in the country which I saw as exerting an influence on educational policies and practices within India.

As a second-year doctoral student, I went into my guidance committee meeting with a research agenda focused on examining transnational networks of influence. I had an idea for the sites I would engage with, the methodological approaches I would use, and the kinds of courses I would taking during my doctoral studies to make this research possible. However, during that

meeting, Lynn Fendler made a crucial intervention that would result in seismic shifts in my understanding of educational research as well as my own research trajectory. She said, "Vivek, a lot of people will say that you should pick your research method based on the questions you are asking." And as she said that, every research method class that I had been in and the various books on qualitative research methodology came flashing back to me. She was right, I had heard and read a variation of that line several times before. She followed up with, "I think that is one way to do it, but not the only way." I was confused about where she was going with this. "Methodology can also be a lifestyle choice, ask yourself: what do you want to do for six-eight hours a day, five days a week?" Her comment was brief and immensely powerful. Her articulation, I realize in hindsight, was the clearest criticism of most things I had been taught in school as well as throughout my research training.

Lynn's comment stayed with me, for days, weeks, months, and years following that meeting. I don't think I fully understood what she meant. However, her comments resonated with me and with the rest of the committee, which agreed with her observation. Alyssa Dunn chimed in and said, "I agree with Lynn. You are very interested in this topic but also your eyes light up in a different way when you talk about photographs, home, migration, popular culture, and other things." I was surprised that they noticed this and even more surprised that they were asking me to explore these interests, pushing me to move closer towards them.

Lynn's comment is a larger indictment of the educational system as well as research practices within the field. In this chapter, I explore what Lynn's comment offers the field of educational research. I do this by closely reading scholars who have pushed the boundaries of qualitative research by questioning the epistemological, ontological, and ideological assumptions undergirding research practices. By drawing on work in the fields of post-qualitative research,

arts-based practices, and humanities-oriented research, I make a case for flights of imagination when it comes to methodological approaches within the field. I argue that these pluralities of practices offer educators and researchers new avenues, imaginations, and knowledges that push us towards dreaming and building socially just futures. I will articulate some of my own considerations, curiosities, desires, and approaches that helped me realize methodology as a lifestyle choice. However, I remain cautious in offering this as an "alternative" that will be proceduralized. In illustrating the deeply subjective nature of this approach/work, I will use examples from my scholarly work to share what methodology as a lifestyle choice means to me. I do this by elaborating the methodological framework shaping my current work, which I call ASC: Aesthetics, Stories, and Communities. Finally, I offer some thoughts for the broader field of educational research.

What is Methodology?

There are several reasons as to why Lynn's comment had such a profound impact on me. It is partly due to my own desires and affinities towards artistic practices such as photography, video, theater, performance, etc. I came to these artistic practices much before I came to educational research and I continued to engage in them long after I learned more about educational research. Over the last few years, I have been involved with developing arts-based programs for teachers, a social justice and theater program for youth, a podcast focused on educational research. Despite these engagements, I saw the work of a researcher as being somewhat different. In hindsight, I worked from the assumption that the task of the researcher was to uncover a particular 'truth' with the hope that once this 'truth' is out in the world, things, people, practices, and policies will change. It is with this conviction that I set out to do the work on transnational educational reform. However, I realized that this approach, while being important and necessary, forecloses the possibility for other considerations. It mostly leaves out

desire, joy, curiosity, pleasure, imagination, refusal, creation as integral aspects of lived experience and as considerations that can also drive research.

This realization took me back to my earlier years as a student of life sciences. I remembered reading somewhere in my biology textbook, perhaps no more than one or two lines, about Barbara McClintock's decision to study corn which eventually led her to the discovery of transposons and a Nobel prize. I remember reading that the reason she decided to study corn was because she was drawn to these plants, these organisms fascinated her and she felt for them deeply (Keller, 2003). However, this aspect of her researcher identity and interests were tucked away amidst the more clinical descriptions of jumping genes and her experiments. McClintock is no exception. There are several other scientists who have similar stories that are usually absent from textbooks of science and reserved rather for their biographies, letters, and other personal communication. A historical legacy built on the separation between the subjective researcher and the object of research (Harding, 2016).

The first time I engaged in social network analysis, I was able to map the relationships between various organizations and individuals, which operated seemingly under the guise of political/ideological neutrality i.e. reformers without an agenda. The research was interesting, I was following the money, ideas, policies, and in the process learned a lot about the transnational landscape of educational reform. And through this research, I was able to demonstrate how John and the blueberry pies ended up in our classroom, not through chance, but through specific ideologies, policies, and practices being set in motion by powerful organizations and institutions. However, I remember feeling a sense of emotional dread as I did this research. In part, because of the realization that the elite pretending to change the world are continuing to perpetuate the status quo, an idea that Giridharadas (2018) captures with great insight in his book *Winners take*

all. It felt like I was uncovering a fragment of a network that has been studied for much longer by other scholars (Au & Ferrare, 2015; Ball, 2012; Nambissan & Ball, 2010; Peck & Theodore, 2010; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Subramanian, 2018). I felt that my work was an advertisement for power—laying out the networks that exist, exposing them but I wasn't sure what else it was doing.

I don't intend to discredit this line of work, especially the work of scholars and writers who have dedicated their lives to helping us understand and question these networks of reform. Its importance is undeniable. In fact, several individuals emailed me about the article I wrote, a testament to its small impact. However, the intervention from Lynn and my guidance committee made me ask myself different questions about the imperatives and purposes for doing research. Tuck and Yang (2014) remind us that "Research may not be the intervention that is needed. This axiom challenges the latent theory of change that research— more academic knowing—will somehow innately contribute to the improvement of tribes, communities, youth, schools, etc" (p. 813). In many ways, I was driven by this latent theory of change. I was working from the assumption that my research would uncover the networks of influence and would lead to the improvement of communities, curricular shifts, and potential institutional changes.

I learned that this was not the case, especially if we consider all the ways researchers have already helped us attend to the various gaps, challenges, and opportunities in reimagining schooling. Once again, this is not to say that this kind of research doesn't have *any* impact at all. But instead, to ask ourselves what else can research be/do? And here too, I recognize that this question has been addressed in many different ways by scholars, activists, community organizers, artists, etc. Within the world of educational research, scholars have attended to this question much more actively over the last few decades. In particular, feminist, queer, indigenous,

and scholars of color have historically pushed the academy to consider various knowledge systems, research imperatives, and ethical relationships with the communities we work in and with (Anzaldúa, 2015; Lather, 2016; Paris & Winn, 2014; Patel, 2016; Smith, 2012; Tuck, 2009). My own work emerges from and is shaped by these understandings, imperatives, and imaginations.

In my own experience, these works, questions, and imaginations, are typically side-lined within most university courses, conferences, and publications that are deemed "important" within the field. My own scholarly trajectory has been shaped by this disciplining. And yet, when I look back, I recognize that even within these spaces, scholars often acknowledged the ambiguities and uncertainties around qualitative research methodologies. For example, Peshkin (1988) makes a confession, "However, what choice of methodology comes down to for many of us, I suspect, is personal taste: the sense of adventure which I like in research is present for me under the circumstances of the ethnographic approach" (p. 36). Such a justification for methodology, one that is rooted in deeply subjective and affective reasons and not justified through quasi-scientific arguments are scattered throughout research articles. However, these confessions are often nestled amongst other claims and lost within "the epistemological quarrel over the conditions of scientificity" (Dosse, 1999, p. 352). Leavy et al., (2014) argue qualitative research has a deeply contested history and has constantly strived to establish itself as scientific and rigorous in relation to the standards and practices of quantitative research. This is one of the reasons for the development of, what Weaver and Snaza (2017) call, Methodocentrism, which is a "philosophy and politics that attempts to stave off the risk of inquiry by justifying, in advance of any engagement with the world, the 'validity' of the researcher's study" (p. 1049).

The contestations around the validity, rigor, and applicability of research are still ongoing. Since the 1970s, qualitative researchers have offered more reflective and critical explorations of methodology, specifically exploring the ontological and epistemological roots of these approaches. However, despite these shifts most graduate training is seen as a means of "disciplining perception and inculcating particular ways of making meaning in relation to a multiplicity of possibilities, most of which must ultimately be rejected" (Weaver & Snaza, 2017, p. 1058). In this paper, I explore this multiplicity of possibilities, and turn towards that which has been rejected or, perhaps more accurately, ignored by the academy. Because, the academy only came later, always. The work of being, imagining, knowing, creating outside this settler-colonial endeavour has been long held together by individuals and communities across the world. Often, far too often, the academy has discredited, damaged, mined the lives and knowledges of various communities. In exploring this multiplicity of possibilities, I am not offering anything "new" but rather attuning to ways of being, knowing, and creating that have been sustained for a long time. In her book *In the Wake*, Christina Sharpe makes the argument that Black scholars are being asked to work using methods that discredit their own knowledges—"the methods most readily available to us sometimes, oftentimes, force us into positions that run counter to what we know" (p. 12). In response, Sharpe asks us to "become undisciplined" (p. 13). This undisciplining is not merely a call to untether ourselves from disciplinary affiliations. It is a plea to unlearn the "logic of proceduralism" (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 205) and to engage in "a mode of defamiliarization that ruptures taken-for-granted habits, tropes, and common assumptions about how methods perform" (p. 208).

Talking about disciplinary training in relation to methodology, Brinkmann (2014) writes, "We have curricula of 'data collection' and coding, but what about learning to stumble?" (p.

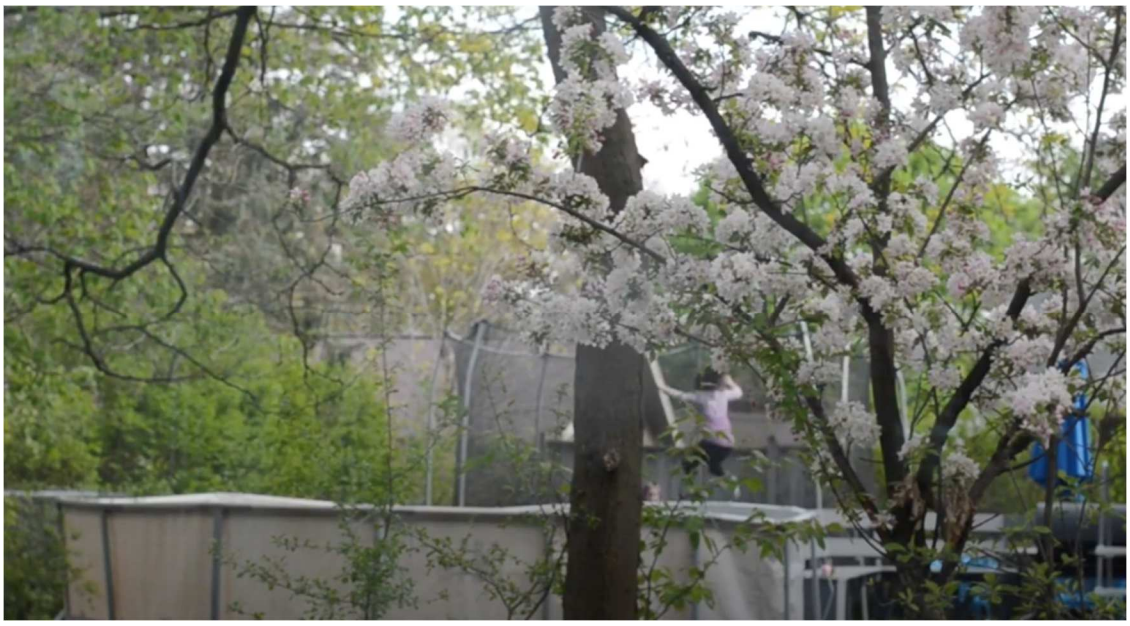
724). Taking up these calls, I decided to re-turn to photography, to pursue my own desire, disdain, and curiosity for the medium. However, rather than simply turning to scholarly work within this tradition, I turned to the work of artists, writers, and photographers like Teju Cole, Sohrah Hura, Gloria Anzaldúa, Carolyn Drake, Carrie Mae Weems, Amitava Kumar, Christina Sharpe, and others. These initial explorations led me to question the methodological monopoly of photovoice within educational research. In particular, the overreliance on photovoice as a way to do visual research. "I think we need more wonder in qualitative research, and especially in our engagements with data, as a counterpart to the exercise of reason through interpretation, classification, and representation" (MacLure, 2013, p. 228). I followed the practices of a young photographer, Urja Davesar, to imagine ways of engaging photography and the practices of youth beyond the realm of photovoice and its attendant practices of coding, themes, and textual analysis (see Vellanki, under review). Subsequently, I continued exploring my curiosity with photographs using the objects of passport photos, which I will describe in greater detail in later sections. These experiences helped me think about and articulate some aspects of methodology as a lifestyle choice.

Methodology as a Lifestyle Choice: Some Considerations

The idea of methodology as a lifestyle choice asks us to unhinge ourselves from disciplinary justifications for research methods. For example, considerations like validity, reliability, replicability, and rigor may not be sufficient nor are they the only yardsticks for the work we do. Since Lynn used that phrase in my guidance committee meeting, I repeatedly asked her to write a paper about this. I told her that we needed to hear more. To which, she often responded with "I don't know what else there is to say, everything I have to say I have already said about that—methodology is a lifestyle choice." In 2017, Lynn and I made a short film about this idea, I followed her across spaces, asked her questions, and probed her to say more about

methodology as a lifestyle choice. We shared an early draft of this movie at ICQI and since then we have shared this work in several graduate classes. And here I am, writing the paper that I asked Lynn to write. I am writing the paper that she refused to write. I am trying to make a case for methodology as a lifestyle choice, I am courting its death at the hands of the academy.

Figure 4 *Screenshot from Methodology as a Lifestyle Choice. Image courtesy: Vivek Vellanki and Lynn Fendler*



What else is there to say? I hesitate to offer a definition, an operationalization, or conceptualization of methodology as a lifestyle choice. It seems counter-intuitive. And yet, there is something else to be said. The idea of methodology as a lifestyle choice is a vast terrain, and what I offer below is not so much a definition as a partial map of this landscape, a snapshot of the features of this landscape that I have stumbled across. And as Dennis Wood (2013) reminds us, maps are not objective either, they are arguments. If I made a right turn there instead of a left, the map would have looked different.

My own stumblings and navigations across this terrain have led me to interesting places. I have found, along the way, various landmarks, features, and lookouts. A reminder that this is not an unexplored terrain, this is not a terrain to be discovered or colonized. Instead, there are paths that people have created for me/us, that lead us to interesting places, and faint hints of tracks that also invite us to seek out and create other paths. And some paths that are not created for me, that I will admire, respect and learn about and from but never venture out there on my own. Here, I want to offer thxree aspects that I found on this journey so far and that have informed my travels in these spaces.

The first is intimately tied to what happened and was said in my guidance committee meeting. I was pushed to follow and pursue my own affinities, curiosities, and desires, at a time when I didn't have the language to acknowledge and articulate them. However, my committee members noticed these small movements, in the way I write, talk, move, while discussing/doing certain things versus other things. My graduate training, and more generally schooling, pushed me to separate the mind from the body. Often times, the body was seen merely as a tool to transport the mind. Often, the body had to be tamed in relation to the mind. The idea of methodology as a lifestyle choice propels us to consider the relationship between the body and the mind. It challenges the "dominant model of education" (and I would add research), that according to Andreotti (2016), "aims to expand the mind at the expense of the body, and that attempts to tame or repress forces deemed unreasonable such as the aesthetic, the erotic, the more-than-human, the divine and the hilarious" (p. 83). Even though we have tried to create these separations, between the mind and the body, across various institutions and within the broader publics, our everyday lives do not follow these separations. In fact, turning towards these desires and curiosities as a source of knowledge, understanding, and creation is an argument and

practice that feminist, indigenous, and scholars of color have embodied for a long, long time (Bhattacharya, 2019; hooks, 2013; King, 2005).

That brings me to my second point, the separation between knowledge production and knowledge practices, which the academy has perpetuated for far too long. Most often, for any particular thing/action to be considered as knowledge, it has to be written about, theorized or researched. In my own experience, this has entailed a separation between that which I will research and that which I will do; that which has the academy's sanction and that which does not. I often think about my grandmother's knowledge practices, especially her passion and love for making pickles. Growing up, I never saw this as an important knowledge practice. Schooling had taught me that the only valuable knowledge was that which was sanctioned and approved by institutions and then filtered through textbooks. I loved pickles, I would eat them with nearly every meal and my grandmother would make them based on the season and the availability of fruits and vegetables. However, I never saw the process of picklemaking as being complex, important, or something valuable for me to learn.

Methodology as a lifestyle choice seeks to blur the distinctions between the idea of knowledge production and practice by identifying that practice (what we do for eight hours a day) is not separate from knowledge production but often at the heart of it. In this process, we are also compelled to think about the relationship between the body and the mind, the material and the affective, the aesthetic and the banal. I also learned that if the academy touched or found certain knowledge practices, it would remake them in its own garb, consume it, and regurgitate a scholarly version that would be made more palpable to schooled understandings. Anzaldúa writes of this: "The essence of colonization: rip off a culture, then regurgitate its white version to the 'natives'" (p.48). Here, a word of caution is necessary. As we explore the idea of

methodology as a lifestyle choice and the potential blurring of the false separation between knowledge production and knowledge practices, we are offering up more for the settler-colonial academy to claim and consume. It is important for us to keep asking ourselves questions: "Who gets to know? Who gets known? Where is knowledge kept, and kept legitimated? What knowledge is desirable? Who profits? Who loses/ pays/gives something away? Who is coerced, empowered, appointed to give away knowledge?" (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 812). These questions are not merely about justifying our research to IRB offices, grant organizations, faculty committees using preexisting justifications. Instead, they ask us to consider the long-term impact of our work in the lives of communities and individuals. And once again, remind us to ask: is research the intervention needed here? I don't wish to write/read a research article about picklemaking but I do wish that I had spent more time learning from my grandmother's practice. I wish schooling had taught me to acknowledge, appreciate, and engage various forms of knowledge practices.

And finally, the idea that we ask ourselves what we want to be *doing* for eight hours a day, five or six days a week can seem like a trite question that has been repeated in self-help books and other spaces. However, if we pause to consider the loaded nature of the question, it offers a lot for us to think about as researchers and educators. The question reorients our focus as researchers, away from the singular idea of knowledge production towards relationality. By asking us to think about what we are *doing* in the process of research, we open up a whole set of questions that, in my opinion, are particularly important but seldom asked with seriousness. Once again, to answer this question honestly we cannot rely on existing frameworks that help us think about the *doing of research*—data collection, analysis, and writing. If the questions at the heart of my research endeavors are not simply: what do I want to study? What do I write about? Where

is there a gap in literature? But also: how do I want to live? How do I want to be in relation with my community? How do I want to spend my waking minutes? What kind a world do we want to imagine and build? it might lead us to ask different questions of ourselves and of others and it might radically reshape our research practices.

Perhaps methodology as a lifestyle choice is also asking (some of) us to slow down, to reject the neoliberal university that is propelling us to work like machines (Shahjahan, 2015). Often, the pursuit for more grants, more publications, more research projects is a source of potential harm to the communities we live and work with and also to ourselves (Berg & Seeber, 2016). Methodology as a lifestyle choice rejects the given notions of the settler-colonial academy which "exhorts us to arrive at an answer to a research question that can be marketed as efficiently as possible" (p. 60). Instead, it asks us to linger, to be tentative, and to draw on an ethics that are not preordained by disciplinary frameworks but emerging from our subjectivities and an ethics of relationality, an ethics in the making.

What I have outlined above is a snapshot, a scene of the landscape from where I stand, looking back and beyond. And as I continue to move, I imagine that the landscape will change and as will the ways I see, feel, and understand the terrain and all the life that inhabits this place. Below, I describe in greater detail my own journey over the past few years.

The Passport Photo Project

In 2018, I decided to follow my curiosities with photographs/photography and combined it with my interests in migration, borders, and education. Through an ongoing and emergent understanding, I engaged with the work of artists, photographers, and writers to help me feel, think, and theorize. I paid more attention to the affective and bodily resonances of this work, what Stewart (2007) calls, "a something both animated and inhabitable" (p. 1). This exploration, The Passport Photo Project, is something that developed through stumblings, without a singular

well-defined path, a linear trajectory. Therefore, what I offer here is an assemblage of The Passport Photo Project constructed in hindsight. An assemblage that is fragmentary, imagined, and inconclusive.

Passport Photos

In 2015 as I applied for a U.S. visa, I was required to have a passport photo made. I decided to shave my beard for that photograph. No one really asked me to, but I did anyway. I did this because of the stories I had heard from friends, families, and strangers. That moment has lingered with me for the past few years. And at the same time, I have always been drawn to passport photographs. After completing my undergraduate studies, getting ready to bid goodbyes to my friends I asked them to share their passport photos with me. These photos have travelled with me over the past few years. I don't know what I was drawn to in these photographs—seemingly flat and emotionless. However, I saw in them an excess that cannot be articulated in language. An excess that has to, according to Campt (2017), be heard and not simply seen.

The passport photo is a recent invention, a little over 120-years old. The history of this object is a history that is at the interstices of photography, evidence, surveillance, and migration (Torpey, 2000). Passport photos are objects that are mired in legacies of racism, colonialism, and imperialism (Pegler-Gordon, 2006). This technology, developed by Alphonse Bertillon, was used as a way to identify criminals during the late 19th century in Paris, France. It was quickly adopted by governments all over the world. However, its full force would be seen in the early 20th century as governments used passport photos to regulate and restrict the movement of migrants. The passport and the passport photo became the cornerstone of a complex machinery controlling the movement of humans (Salter, 2003).

The history of passport photos is a history of migration. I lived this history before I learned about it. In the lives of migrants, passport photos are objects not merely of control and

surveillance but also of hopes and desires. Campt (2017) explores this contradiction, this doubled-ness of passport photographs (and perhaps all photographs), by listening to the affective intensities of these objects and what they reveal about the lives of migrants.

Another example might be helpful here. One might consider the passport photograph to be a flat document. It is read by authority figures as a representation, as a means of identification, matching the likeness of the person in front to the person in the photograph. At the airport and at the bar, the person guarding the entrance always holds up my passport photo to my face, trying to establish a similarity. This is a particular type of an encounter with the passport photograph. As I try to think of what else the passport photo does, I am reminded of my father's wallet. In it, he always has a passport photograph of my mother. A photograph that is probably several decades old at this point. He always looks at it longingly. In that same flat photograph, my father seems to find different affective intensities. For him, the photograph conjures different memories, visions, and relationships to who is in the image. He is neither the photographer nor the photographed.

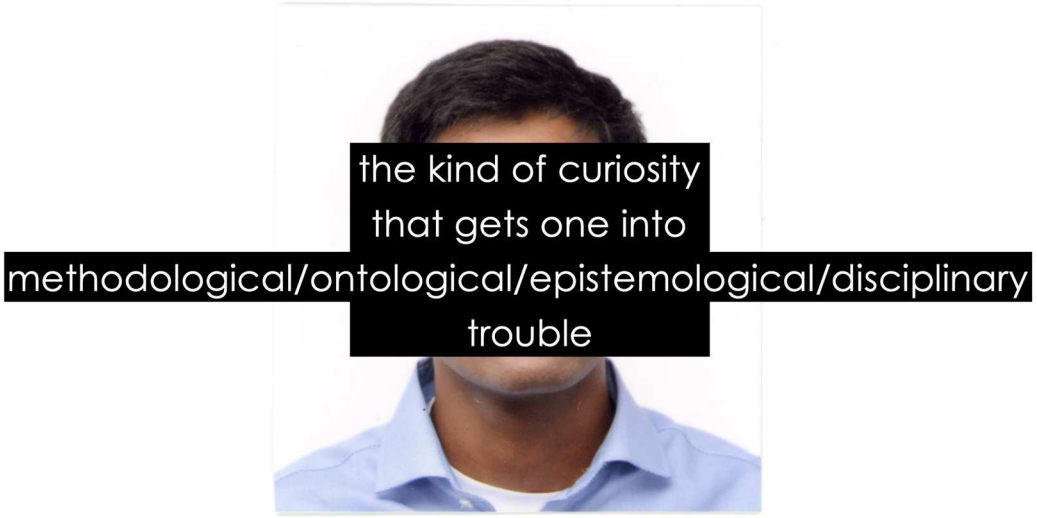
Despite this doubled-ness, Cho reminds us that passport photos "call to mind the burden of identification photos to speak, to announce and respond *to the question posed but not asked regarding the truth of one's identity*…to declare prima facie that one is who one claims to be" (Cho, 2009, p. 278). Passport photos circulate and linger within the economy of racialized, gendered, and marginalized lives. They serve primarily as objects to allay suspicion, to raise questions, to identify the questionable. Following the U.S. Government's immigration ban in 2017, the artist Sobia Ahmad developed "Small Identities" as a response to the xenophobic and islamophobic policies in the U.S. She collected passport photos from Muslim immigrants in the Richmond area and placed them on arabesque tiles. She learned soon that participants were

hesitant to submit their photos for fear of persecution. And for every participant who did not want to share their passport photo, she included a blank tile. How can one claim an identity on a two-inch square? How can one claim an identity if you are told not to smile, not to wear a hijab, not to show your teeth, to leave the walls bare, to conform?

The Process

In fall 2018, I followed my resonance with and curiosities about passport photographs. I followed it with "the kind of curiosity that gets one into methodological/ontological/epistemological/disciplinary trouble" (Loveless, 2019, p. 23). I was interested in seeing what would happen if we quietly challenged the civil contract of the passport photograph, to call into question its very purpose and to create something else out of it. In this pursuit, I was driven by Kumar's (2000) question: "[W]hen dealing with the varied, and often invisible, complexities of immigrant lives, how might we struggle against the poor economy of the photographs taken by the state or the racist, dominant media?" (p. 41-42). I wanted to shift the encounter that immigrants and refugees often have with their passport photographs—identification, surveillance, and suspicion—through its official use.

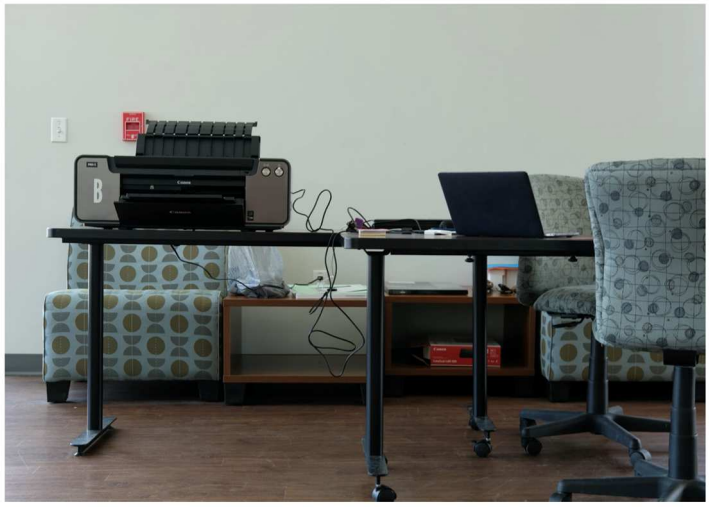
Figure 5 *Untitled. Photograph: Vivek Vellanki*



Drawing on the ideas of arts-based research as a process of "thinking-making-doing," I decided to create an engagement with passport photos that shifts its official purpose and also makes visible the resonances, contradictions, and desires that immigrants and refugees experience with this everyday object. I started by working with a small group of immigrants and asked them to share their passport photos with me. I scanned these images and reprinted the photographs at a much larger size—13X19 inches, leaving a 2-inch border on all sides of the image. I returned these resized images along with some basic art supplies—acrylic paints, sharpies, archival glue sticks, old magazines. I invited my collaborators to transform the photographs in any way that they wanted to. My prompt to them was: "What do you want the world to know about you?" As I expanded the project to a wider group of collaborators, I became aware of the challenges in asking migrants to share their passport photos with a stranger during times of heightened socio-political persecutions of migrants and refugees. Thinking about Sobia Ahmed's work, I experimented with my process to allow for more people to participate. Instead of asking collaborators to share their passport photos with me before the art-making sessions, I brought a printer and scanner with me to the site, allowing individuals to bring their passport

photos instead of leaving it with me for the scanning and printing process. A few months in, the artist Qais Assali pointed out that my process was also reframing the bureaucracy. In printing and scanning on site, I was recreating and potentially recasting the experience of getting a passport photo made, applying for a visa, or engaging in any of the several other aspects of the public office.

Figure 6 *Scanning and Printing set up during one of the Passport Photo Project sessions. Photograph: Vivek Vellanki*



Over a period of nine months, I conducted several sessions across the cities of East Lansing, Michigan and Fort Wayne, Indiana. I invited people through social media and email listservs. I had no age/nationality restrictions. Any person who identified as an immigrant/refugee could bring their passport photo and participate. I conducted sessions in high schools, public libraries, cafes, and people's basements. I provided some light refreshments and together, we created art while being in community and engaging in multigenerational conversations. Between September 2018 and May 2019, I collaborated with 50 migrants and refugees. I decided not to interview any of my collaborators or to ask them what the images "mean," what they intended to convey. Instead of thinking on behalf of the images, offering,

what Loveless (2019) calls, “perspectival certainty” (p. 46) I wanted to think and feel with the art created by collaborators. This influenced my process of analysis which I describe next.

The Analysis: Aesthetics, Stories, Community

I embarked on a material, affective treatment of the work that is not about epistemic certainty but about relationality. If methodology is a lifestyle choice then how do these choices factor along the spectrum of data collection, analysis, and publishing? I knew that I did not want to analyze the images using the process of coding or other qualitative approaches. Instead, I wanted to think about ways of sharing this work that engaged the materiality of the art work created by my collaborators. I decided to curate an exhibition as a way to share the pieces created by my collaborators to the broader public. Driven initially by curiosity, I now decided to shift towards a careful curation. Loveless (2019) reminds us that the three words, careful, curate, curious, share the same root: to care. Warning, desire, and considered choice became crucial elements in the process of curation. The exhibition, titled *Do You Have Anything to Declare?* opened at the MSU Union Gallery in October 2019.

I want to briefly discuss three elements that became important in the process of creation and curation through, what I call, the ASC framework – Aesthetics, Stories, Community. I was able to articulate ASC as a framework after completing the project and the exhibition, a framework that was preordained but one that became visible only in hindsight and one that still remains incomplete, partial, and only explains a portion of the work. However, and as I will describe below, I was attendant to and practicing various elements of this framework throughout the process. ASC doesn’t encompass/explain everything I did. However, it offers a way for me to think, feel, theorize, and practice the idea of methodology as a lifestyle choice. Below, I describe how these three elements became crucial aspects guiding various steps of the process from ideation to creation to curation.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics are a central part of arts-based research. Within this space, Springgay (2004) writes, "The artworks are not objects, which need theory applied to them, nor are they illustrations of language. *They are ways of knowing and being in their own right*" (p. 15). I approached the project with a keen awareness of and attention to the role of aesthetics in offering a possible reengagement with passport photos which at once reveals its bureaucratic purposes and also brings to light the deeply personal and subjective relationships migrants have to these objects.

In creating the work. Interested in reframing our experiences/stories around passport photos, I decided to resize them to 13X19 inches, making them much larger than their usual size. To see them in this size, I hoped, would create a different encounter with the image. My decision for this sizing also reflects the poster size that is commonly seen associated with messaging in airports, public offices, and other bureaucratic spaces. I provided my collaborators with acrylic paint, scissors, and magazines for collage. The magazines that I procured were quintessentially "U.S." magazines – New Yorker, National Geographic, Good Living, etc. These magazines portray, at once, an idea of the U.S. to the rest of the world and also circulate ideas about the rest of the world within the U.S. (Lutz & Collins, 1993). While the resized image was 13X19 inches, my collaborators decided the size for their final product. I encouraged them to transform their passport photos in any way that they chose. I saw some of my collaborators cut the photographs, resize them, stitch them to make other orientations/formats. For example, one of my collaborators, Vanessa, decided to cut her resized passport photo and glued it together to recreate the landscape orientation reflected in the first page of a passport. Across the pieces that my collaborators created I was stuck by the variations in sizes, styles, and aesthetic choices. No two

pieces look similar and this was something that neither I and nor my collaborators had anticipated.

In sharing the work. The aesthetics of the exhibition were shaped by the aesthetics emerging through the process of creating the work. I decided to bring out the contradiction between the bureaucracy/official role of passport photos and the lives of migrants through the overall aesthetics of the exhibition. Here, I will focus on two elements. First, instead of displaying the work on walls as is common with traditional gallery displays, I decided to use poster stands. My choice of poster stands—which are often used to share official information with travellers—was shaped by my own experience in airports, immigration offices, etc. This aesthetic decision was also inspired by Christian Boltanski's work, in which he uses stands to shed light on the lives of people who were persecuted during the Holocaust. My use of the stands is an aesthetic treatment of the discord between the bureaucratic/dehumanizing treatment of migrants—signified by the stand—and at the same time the all too human interventions that each participant makes with their passport photos. The stands serve as a depiction of people standing in line—in airports, visa offices, at borders, in government offices etc and the cold, dehumanizing gaze of the bureaucracy.

Figure 7 *Fabricating the stands to be used in the exhibition. Photograph: Vivek Vellanki*

Furthermore, I organized the work in the gallery to convey the choices described above. I structured the gallery space to replicate an airport line, creating narrow points of passage where only one or two visitors could pass through at a time. These spatial arrangements often forced visitors to wait in line, observe the person in front of them, to look around the space, or to engage others also standing in line. I also added frequently asked questions about passport photos posted on the U.S. Governmental websites onto the walls of the gallery. These aesthetic considerations, along with others, become central to my understanding and engagement with the works created by my collaborators. Through the use of these aesthetic elements, I sought to bring out the contradictions between the state's perceptions and policies towards immigrants and their layered lives and experiences.

Figure 8 *Installation view of Do you have anything to declare? Photograph: Charles Benoit*

Stories

Ultimately, The Passport Photo Project is about stories, our stories of migration. In Thomas King's (2005) critically acclaimed book *The truth about stories*, he writes "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (p. 153). What are the stories we tell about passport photos? What stories do our photos reveal and hide? Returning to Azoulay's (2015) idea of excess in photographs, I invited my collaborators to seek out a "different ethic. Tell a different story" with regards to their passport photos (King, 2005, p. 164). Pushing King's idea, Loveless (2019) argues that stories are not simply about hearing or seeing, they are also about touch. In the passport photo project, my collaborators embark on telling stories that are material-semiotic entanglements—the cutting, pasting, and remixing of passport photos.

These entanglements also invite viewers to participate/interact with the pieces at various levels—to be playful, to be tentative, to be with the stories that my collaborators are sharing. For example, one of my collaborators, Wanfei, decided to use sticky notes on top of her passport photo. These sticky notes had short phrases written on them. I assume that these phrases convey parts of her identity and life: "Chinese low-class, rational, friendly" etc. Visitors would often

physically move these sticky notes, peeling each layer to read what is written and eventually end up seeing Wanfei's transformed photo. Wanfei's creation is an example of a layered story that is told using different registers—the affective, the material, and the visual. I assume that each viewer walked away with a different experience while interacting with her piece.

Figure 9 *Wanfei's Passport Photo. Courtesy: Wanfei and Vivek Vellanki*

Furthermore, the individual pieces placed together in the exhibition also tell a collective story, a story that runs against and alongside other small and big stories we are told and tell each other about migration, migrants, and passport photos. I am interested in knowing what these stories do to/for me, my collaborators, and those who view our work. Perhaps they do nothing. And perhaps they do something. In both instances, it is difficult to pinpoint what it is they do. My goal is not to identify these shifts. Instead, I am interested in creating room for us to tell more stories—some that will contradict, some that will affirm, some that will question, some that will challenge, and some that will do things that cannot be named.

Community

My understandings of community are shaped by Pablo Helguera's (2011) work on Socially Engaged Art practices (SEA). While all art invites social interaction, SEA, according to

Helguera, centers participation in the very fabrication of the work. Participation is not nominal or directed as is the case with most activities within museums. For example, asking people to fill out a note-card, tweeting about an exhibition, taking a selfie in front of a particular artwork, etc. My engagement with the migrant community in the Greater Lansing area took the form of "creative participation," wherein I provided the broad parameters of the art-work and let my collaborators create their individual pieces.

In creating the work. Throughout this process, I paid attention to several aspects of community. First, I focussed on creating space for exchange and dialogue with my collaborators i.e. I often started any art-making session with some community-building activities, provided light refreshments, played music that was curated by my collaborators, and created a space for dialogue and conversation. I saw this as particularly important because spaces for migrant communities to be in conversation often don't exist within the broader publics. This was an opportunity to dialogue and to share in each other's experiences. I conducted sessions in schools, public libraries, cafes, universities, and in people's homes (Image 5).

In each instance, it was a multi-generational group, coming together to create work. Here, my goal was not to make myself disappear. Instead, I used my own curiosity about passport photos as a way to engage my collaborators in similar departures, asking them to consider their own curiosities, stories, and lives about passport photos. This project is a collective construction of knowledge about the migrant experience, refracted through the object of the passport photo, bringing into question the historic role of passport photos as well as the contemporary discourses around migrant lives.

Figure 10 *One of the Passport Photo Project sessions held in a collaborators basement. Photograph: Vivek Vellanki*

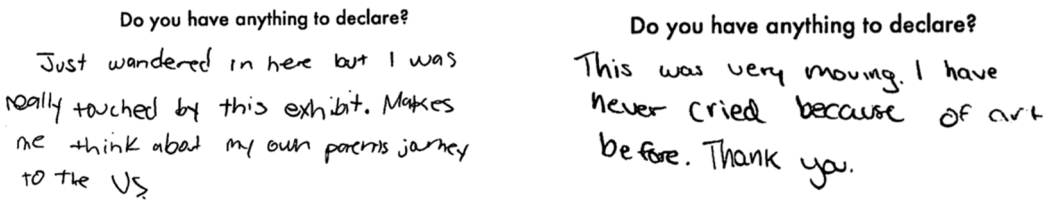
In sharing the work. The aesthetics of the exhibition, as I discussed earlier, were determined by our collective stories and experiences of migration. As I prepared to share this work with the broader community, I focussed on two important questions—what experience do we want community members to have? How do we want them to experience the work? These questions were a huge factor in how the exhibition was curated and structured.

The recreation of the line within the gallery became an important aspect of viewing the exhibition. During tours with classes and community groups, people were often held up where I had deliberately created bottlenecks. The narrow spaces forced viewers to wait for the people ahead of them to move. Sometimes the wait was short and in other instances it was much longer. The experience was akin to waiting in an immigration line. In the process of waiting, one couldn't do much else but look around, see the surroundings, engage with other pieces, or the people around them.

I also created space for directed participation with the visitors. I included a notecard at the end of the exhibit where I invited visitors to contemplate the question "Do you have anything to declare?" The exhibition also created a conversation within the broader community around

issues of migration through news articles, conversations spurred by visitors, students visiting the exhibition as part of their course, and other engagements.

Figure 11 *Select Responses from Visitors to the Exhibition*



Implications for the Field and Future Research

I am writing this at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this moment, our lifestyles have been radically altered by the pandemic. Life as we know it has been interrupted and at the same time, it has made bare the fundamental problems with the society we have collectively built. And now, I do nearly the same thing all day, every day. What does methodology as a lifestyle choice mean under these circumstances? I want to make it abundantly clear that methodology as a lifestyle choice is not an argument for an anything-goes approach to research. On the contrary, it brings to light ethical, moral, affective, biographical, and material concerns to the research process. I might be drawn to passport photos but is that a good enough reason for me to research them? Why am I drawn to these objects? What is my own relationship to these objects and the social spheres that are constructed around them? What does this research process entail, for me as a researcher and for anybody I ask to participate? Is research really the intervention needed here?

These are some initial questions that come to mind. The history of the social sciences, unfortunately, highlights how researchers have often followed their own desires and pursuit for knowledge at the cost of the lives and lifeworld's of communities: "Social science hunts for new

objects of study, and its favored reaping grounds are Native, urban, poor, and Othered communities" (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 813). The academy is built on ideas of invasion and mining of communities, species, land, artifacts, etc (Smith, 2012). We/they justified our deeply dehumanizing and settler-colonial practices using the language of science, determinacy, objectivity, and knowledge. If I see methodology as a lifestyle choice, then refusal is an integral part of that process for me. Especially, in thinking about how "Indigenous and Native researchers, researchers of color, and/or queer researchers in academe are frequently pressured to mine their families, communities, and personal stories to become recast as academic data" (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 813). In following our desires and curiosities, we might end up doing more harm to ourselves, to others, and to various communities. How do we un/learn what is not to be touched or seen or heard? How do we un/learn to question our desires and curiosities? And perhaps, most importantly, are there other ways to quell our desires and curiosities beyond the act of doing research?

Unfortunately, there is no prescribed, linear way to answer these questions. To answer these questions with honesty, courage, and vulnerability, to the best of our abilities, requires an unmooring from disciplinary traditions. We have to give up already existing disciplinary frameworks, that at this point, offer a formulaic response to ethical questions. For example, in recent years, positionality statements have turned from aspects that challenged the objectivist gaze of the academy to short-paragraphs that are an afterthought, consumed by the very academy it sought to challenge. It has turned into a listicle, a justification for doing XYZ work because I am ABC. I am guilty of this myself.

The idea of methodology as a lifestyle choice invites us to be tentative, uncertain, and to acknowledge the limits of our knowing. And at the same time, it propels us to turn inward, to ask

ourselves questions about why we are drawn to do the work that we are doing. In detaching ourselves from disciplinary traditions, we are propelled to leave given frameworks for justifying research—gaps in literature, problem statements, vulnerable populations, understudied groups, etc. These frameworks, often times, also come with preestablished rationales for doing research (Patel, 2014). Tuck and Yang's (2014) work asks us to challenge these rationales and to also ask other questions, of ourselves and of the institutions within which we operate and do this work.

In my current scholarly and artistic work, I turned to art, literature, and music, as an impetus for theoretical, methodological, and ethical questions. My fascination with photography initially led me to photovoice but following my own desires and curiosities led me to the works of artists like Carrie Mae Weems, Pushpamala, Teju Cole, Sohrab Hura, Carolyn Drake, Secola, and others. Here too, I found no readymade justifications, I often found more questions. And these questions propelled me to carve out and create a practice, which definitely builds on the works of some of the authors and artists I note above, but is also markedly connected to my life experiences, desires, and curiosities. I am able to name this as the ASC Framework, a naming that happened only in hindsight, a naming that came after the thinking-making-doing, and not before it.

I imagine that methodology as a lifestyle choice will mean different things for all of us, and it should, that is the point. It is less of a methodology traditionally understood as a quasi-scientific justification and more a way of life, of being, of relationality, of ethics, of justice. It is an uncoupling from the techno-scientific justifications that have led us here in the first place, the foundation on which the settler-colonial practices of the academy are built (Patel, 2014). And yet, methodology as a lifestyle choice is not a promised land. Perhaps, at its best, it is an inner angle, a small movement which has the possibility of opening up other avenues, ways of being,

thinking and doing. I'd like to end here, not with my own assertion, but with the explication of the metaphor of an inner angle, by Tuck and Yang (2018):

"For readers who have ever held a young one on their laps or on a hip, consider the weight of the baby, how the weight and pressure grows more intense with passing time. Then, consider the physical sensation of moving that young one to the other hip, or off the lap, or to another knee. New vantage points, new movements, new somatic possibilities are made through that small shift. This is the simple idea at the center of the metaphor of an inner angle" (p. 3).

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CHAPTER 4 Do You Have Anything to Declare?

Do you have anything to declare? is an exhibition based on *The Passport Photo Project*, an arts-based exploration of the experiences, desires, and imaginations of immigrants, international students, and refugees living in the mid-western U.S. Through this work and the exhibition, I highlight the complex subjectivities embodied by immigrants and refugees. *The Passport Photo Project* challenges contemporary visual narratives of migration by collaborating with immigrants and refugees to transform passport photos from objects of state bureaucracy into portraits that are seeping with desires, anxieties, explorations, and play. In October 2019, I held a solo-exhibition, *Do you have anything to declare?* at the MSU Union Gallery. All photographs in this chapter are courtesy Charles Benoit, unless indicated otherwise.

Figure 12 *Front and Back of the Invite for the Exhibition, Do you have anything to declare? Design: Lindsey Hendges*

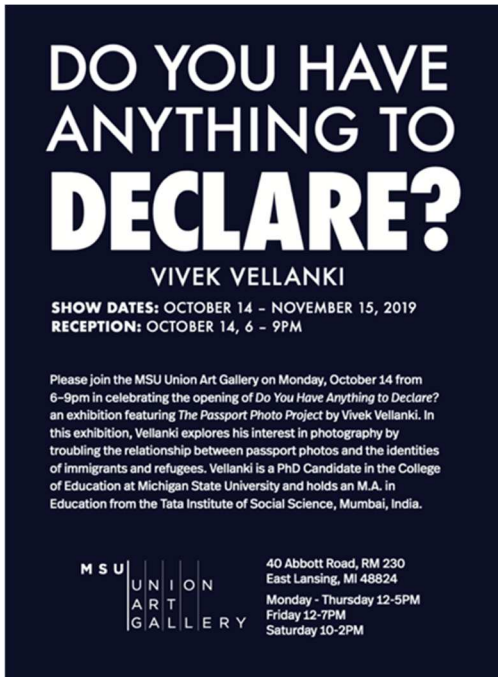


Figure 13 View of the Exhibition from Outside the Gallery

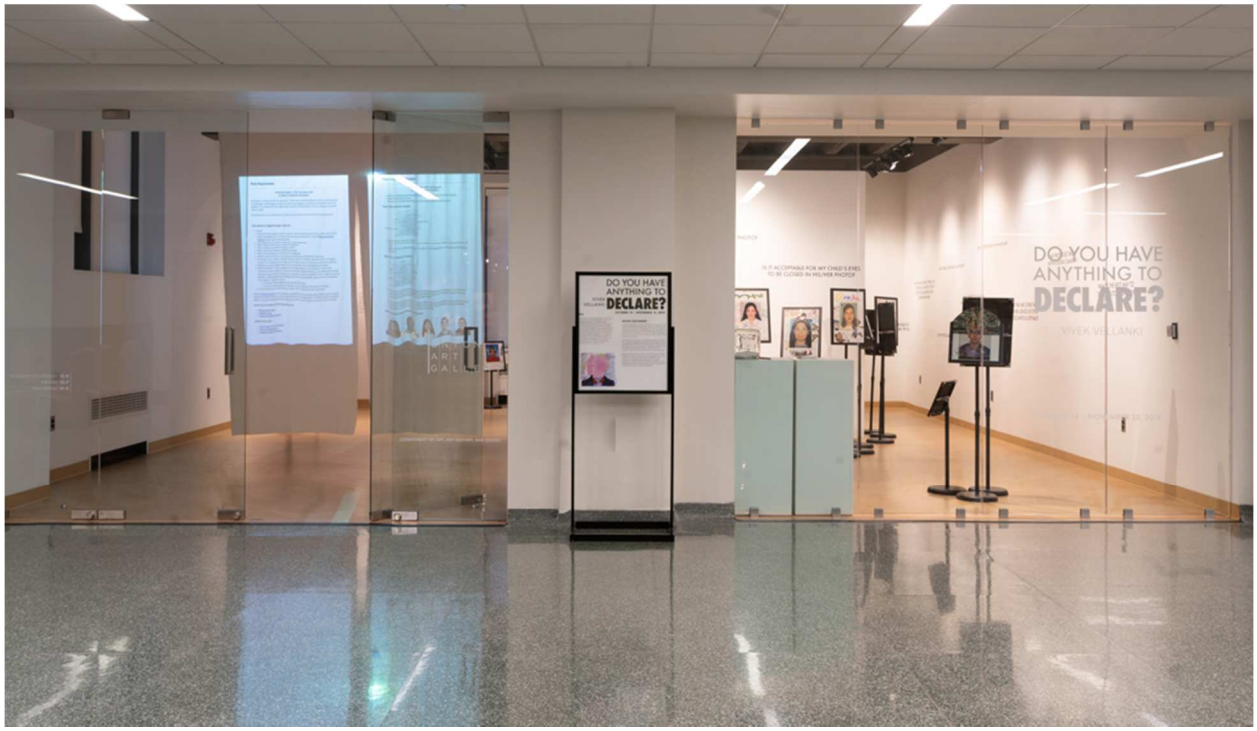


Figure 14 *Artist Statement for the Exhibition (left) and Installation View (right)*

ARTIST STATEMENT

The history of passport photos is a history of migration. These photos are objects of bureaucracy–
a physical manifestation of the state's practice of identifying and controlling migrants through the restriction of movement, gestures, and attire. On our journeys to other lands, it is one of the first times we are told not to smile, not to look suspicious, to fall in line, to shave, to conform, to shrink.

The Passport Photo Project is a collaborative project in which I ask immigrants, refugees, and international students to share their passport photos with me. Starting with resized copies, I ask them to draw, write, collage, or otherwise transform their own photos in any way they desire. I offer one guiding question: "What do you want the world to know about you?"

Between 2018 and 2019, *The Passport Photo Project* brought together 50 people from various cultures, generations, and nationalities. Sitting in homes, cafés, classrooms, and libraries, my collaborators transformed the cold and bureaucratic passport photos into portraits; objects of their making that are seeping with desires, anxieties, explorations, and play. These are our stories of migration.

Figure 15 *Drape with Projections Forming the Entrance to the Exhibition*

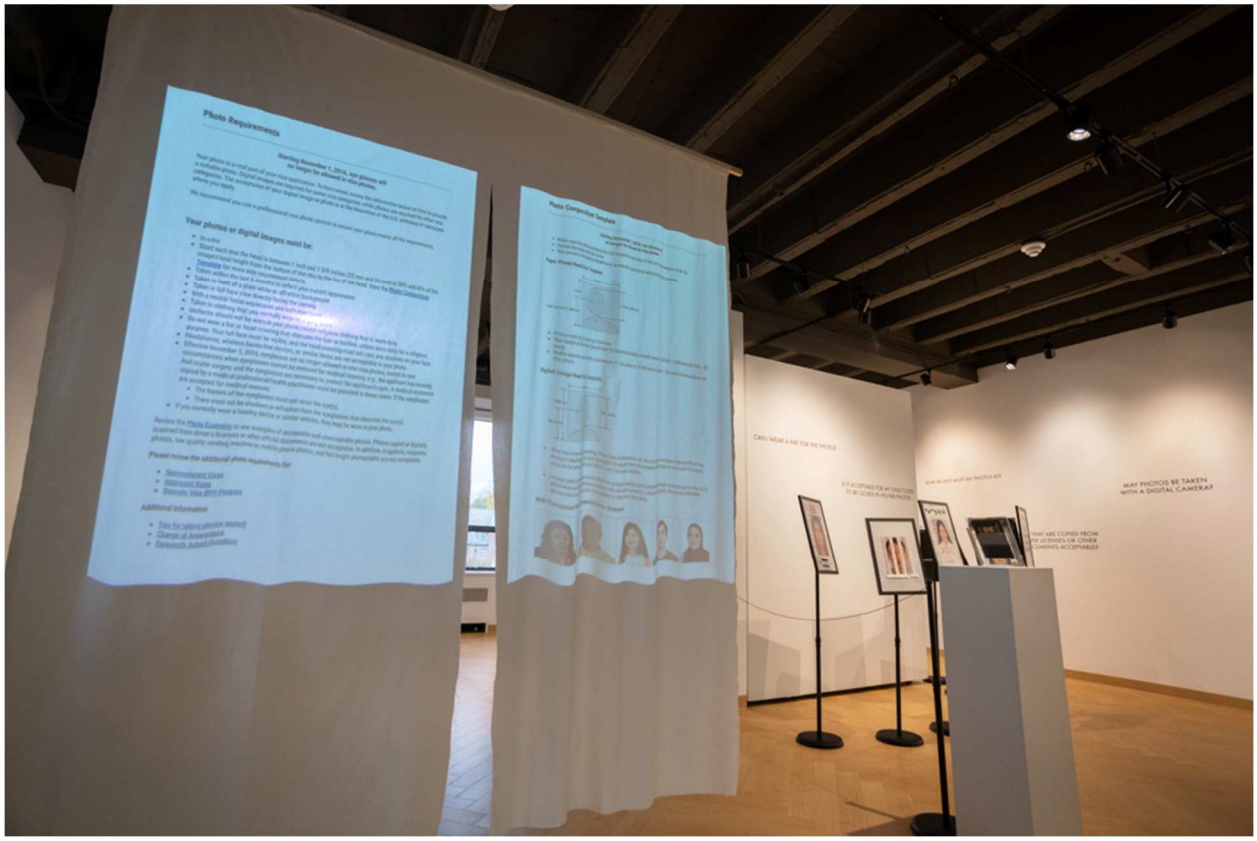


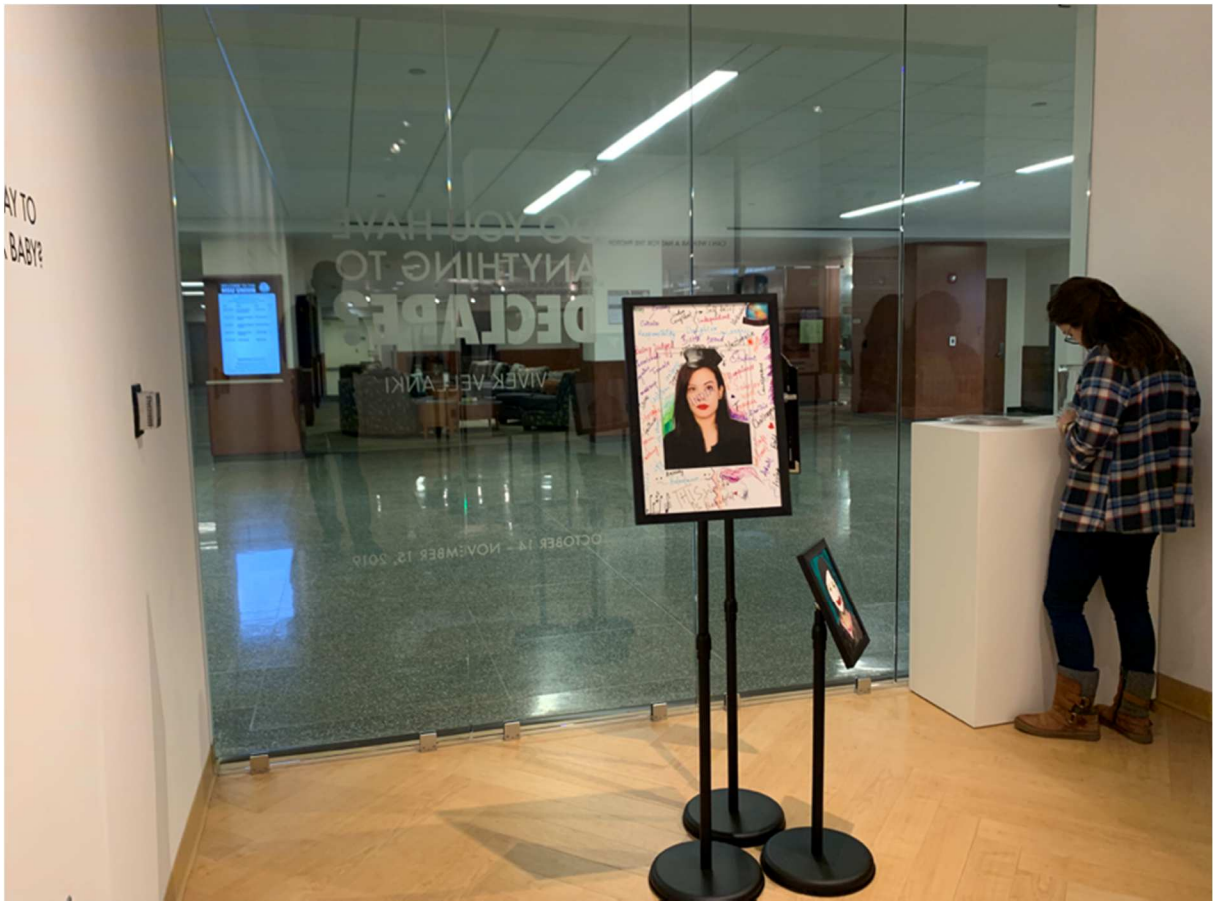
Figure 16 *Installation View of Do you have anything to declare?*

Figure 17 *Installation View of Do you have anything to declare?*

Figure 18 *Installation View of Do you have anything to declare?*

Figure 19 *Visitors Interacting With the Artworks. Photograph: Vivek Vellanki*

Figure 20 *Visitors Filling out Notecards at the Exhibition. Photograph: Vivek Vellanki*



CHAPTER 5 Notes From the City

The final chapter is constructed as a photobook titled, *Notes from the City*. Please access the supplemental materials section to view the photobook.