

University of the Sunshine Coast

Jo Loth and Ginna Brock

Life narratives and *The Centre*: a call for action

Abstract:

This paper explores the creative development of *The Centre*, an emerging play that reimagines Ancient Greek tragic characters as modern-day asylum seekers detained in an offshore detention centre. The construction of the play blends fictional character constructs of the Ancient Greek characters with information from reports on contemporary asylum seekers. While life narratives normally focus on the lived experience of one person, reimagined through a creative framework, *The Centre* uses multiple accounts of asylum seekers sourced from the public domain. *The Centre* is an attempt to work creatively at the borders of fiction and documentary theatre to highlight a contemporary issue through the self-conscious reframing of classical stories.

This project has been supported by Playlab Australia and The Sunshine Coast Council Regional Arts Development Fund with feedback provided from dramaturges Peter Matheson and David Fenton. The play had an initial creative development with The Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble.

Biographical notes:

Dr Jo Loth is a writer, director, actor, cabaret performer, educator and academic. Jo is the Discipline Leader in Theatre and Performance at The University of the Sunshine Coast. Her research focuses on actor training and the reimagination of canonical texts.

Dr Ginna Brock is a Lecturer in English and Creative Writing at the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC). Her PhD dissertation examined the extant Greek tragedies and proposed a radical philosophical reading of the plays: 'to be is to belong' (Brock 2014: 5). As a member of USC's Arts Research in Creative Humanities (ARCH) research cluster, Ginna collaborates on both creative and critical research.

Keywords:

Creative writing – life narratives – theatre for social change – Ancient Greek tragedy – bricolage – practice-led research

Introduction

The Centre is an attempt to work creatively at the borders of fiction and documentary theatre to highlight a contemporary issue through the self-conscious reframing of classical stories. Life narrative has the capability of fusing fact and fiction, arousing an empathetic response from the audience. Martha Nussbaum posits: ‘impartial respect for human dignity will fail to engage real human beings unless they are made capable of entering imaginatively into the lives of distant others and to have emotions related to that participation’ (1995: xvi). Our play focuses on the lived experience of the detained refugee in order to engage audiences with experiences that have been silenced and removed. This article expounds our writing process and ethical concerns in exploring these stories of people in a vulnerable position.

Contextualisation

Social issue

The construction of *The Centre* began with a pressing social issue – the inhumane incarceration of legitimate refugees. Since 2001, the Australian government has detained over 2000 people in off-shore processing centres on Nauru and Manus Island. In 2016, Amnesty International’s senior researcher, Anna Neistat, visited Nauru. She reported that the Australian Government had ‘designed a system of deliberate abuse’ to deter people seeking safety who arrive by boat (Amnesty International 2016). In March 2017, The Queensland Government called for a senate inquiry, titled *The serious allegations of abuse, self-harm and neglect of asylum seekers in relation to the Nauru Regional Processing Centre, and any like allegations in relation to the Manus Regional Processing Centre* (Parliament of Australia 2017).

On 10 November 2017, The United Nations stated their concerns over the conditions in Manus Island and Nauru Centres in a Human Rights Committee report:

inadequate mental health services, serious safety concerns and instances of assault, sexual abuse, self harm and suspicious deaths; and about reports that harsh conditions compelled some asylum seekers to return to their country of origin despite the risks they face there (2017: 7).

The report recommended: ‘The state party should ... end its offshore transfer arrangements and cease any further transfers of refugees or asylum seekers to Nauru, Papua New Guinea or any other “regional processing country”’ (7). We believe that the Australian Government’s establishment and maintenance of off-shore processing centers has created a system of human rights abuses resulting in an ongoing tragedy of Ancient Greek proportions. For the purposes of this play, we have focused on reported incidents from September 2015 through to May 2017.

Tragic form

The choice to represent the current mistreatment of asylum seekers through the Ancient Greek tragic form stemmed from an investigation into the philosophy underpinning Ancient Greek tragedy. Traditionally in tragedies, the protagonist experiences a tragic slippage – where fortune continues to fall (Aristotle, in Heath 1996: 21). In the case of *The Centre*, we have used the concept of a tragic circumstance – an element that is outside of the protagonist’s control and an entity that imposes its will upon the characters. In this case, the detention centre works as an oppressive character. This is used to downplay the usual notion of a ‘tragic flaw’, which puts the onus of responsibility on the characters, and instead exposes the political underpinnings that have exacerbated today’s tragedy. Beyond the form itself, a parallel exists in tragedy’s exposure of political turmoil. The earliest tragedies emerged during an unstable transition between disparate worldviews and the condition of a changing social ideology (Dreher 1986: 29). As recent events suggest, political leanings in democratic countries continue to shift dramatically between progressive and conservative viewpoints. The Ancient Greek tragedians were able to speak to these ever-widening ideological positions by focusing on a key, and unifying, symbol – the hearth.

The importance of connectivity is evident in the deification of the physical hearth into the goddess, Hestia (Spaeth 2013: 231). The conflation of material object and divine being combines the physical protection of the hearth with the transcendent concept of belonging, suggesting the ontological idea that ‘to be is to belong’ (Brock 2014: 5). In this way, the underlying message of Ancient Greek tragedy is that homelessness is the most tragic condition – the condition that most evokes the Aristotelian idea of ‘pity and fear’. Aristotle defines both pity and fear as ‘a pain’ that erupts from either ‘an apparent destruction’ or a ‘mental picture of destruction’, causing the individual to sense their own potential devastation (2010: 69, 77). Aristotle’s definition of tragedy suggests that individuals can only perceive their own fallibility through the suffering of another. Segal argues that the spectators of tragedy experience a ‘heightened awareness of community, continuity and universality’ where the compassion for the tragic protagonist ... extends beyond the stage (1993: 26-27).

Simone Weil suggests that ‘to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul’ (2002: 43), and the creation of the hearth, along with its deification, exposes this psychological need to belong. This notion of being ‘rooted’ creates a form of dwelling and distinguishes between ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’. The concept of ‘dwelling’ does not solely encompass the physical structure or dwelling place. Rather, it is a form of ‘grounding the self’, of being positioned ‘within’ and, thus, supported. Bachelard’s phenomenological investigation in *The Poetics of Space*, analyses the ‘house’ as both a ‘real’ and an ‘imagined’ space that provides insight into the human psyche:

In the life of man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being’s first world (1994: 7).

In this regard, the ‘unhoused’ individual is a ‘dispersed being’. The connotation of ‘dispersed’ generates notions of separation and alienation, where the scattered

individual is no longer ‘whole’. Therefore, to be separated from the hestia is equivalent to dismemberment; to be without *philia*, without chthonic roots is to be without the fullness of being.

Tragedy is, therefore, a form of revelation: a revelation of connectivity, where the self is subsumed into a shared experience. In this way, *The Centre* uses the tragic form to condemn the treatment of legitimate refugees in detention centres, referring to this type of detention as a form of institutional homelessness. Through this play, we are aiming to address the ‘dehumanization [sic] of asylum seekers’ and their mediated construction as ‘figure[s] of hate’ (Whitlock 2014: 85) The temporal uncertainty, the congested living condition, the dehumanisation, the separation from familial members is the ultimate denial of a human being’s need to belong.

Methodology

The Centre was crafted through a combination of practice-led and bricolage methodologies. Gray defines practice-led research as research that is carried out through practice and is based on the needs of the practice and the practitioner (1996: 3). Haseman supports Gray’s definition and comments:

This is a radical and bold innovation, for it not only affirms the primacy of practice in the research process, but it proclaims that the techniques and tools used by the practitioner can stand as research methods in their own right (2007: 151).

Following Gray’s and Haseman’s definitions, this research project is based on our needs and processes as playwrights, and uses the creative process of writing as the central focus of the research. Furthermore, within this study, the artistic process and product has been used as a distinctive form of knowledge. Scrivener argues that ‘art research performs an equally important but complementary function to that of the knowledge acquisition research domains’ (2002: 1). The concept of the art itself being the knowledge of the study is supported by Stock, who states ‘embodied practice engenders ways of knowing, and there is a knowledge claim in its own right with a rigorous epistemology, methods and evaluation processes’ (2007: 343). The project utilises the methods and evaluation processes of practice-led research to create its own form of knowledge.

Practice-led research also provides a path to direct our research, thereby informing the research-led practice which contributed to the creative artefact. Smith and Dean extol the merit of combining practice-led and research-led methods for creative crafting (2009: 8). In order to gather data for the construction of our characters, we used the research method of bricolage. The bricolage approach involves combining characters, storylines, and specific quotes from Ancient Greek tragedy with information from news-reports and official government documents, fusing fact and fiction. We are aware that news reports are often ‘framed’ as Entman describes, where ‘frames entail selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution’ (2003: 422). We have specifically chosen reports that focus on the lived experience of asylum seekers over the politicised issues of refugees.

As writers, using Yardley's terms, we have been 'weaving stories' and 'assembling montages' (2008). In this process, researchers 'construct and convey meaning according to a narrative ethic, an approach to research that is neither naively humanistic nor romantically impulsive – nor, by any means, easy to achieve' (Yardley 2008). The 'narrative ethic' of our play has developed in a way that creates characters out of a range of composite sources. We integrated multiple online stories in order to de-identify specific individuals and to be sensitive to the vulnerability and trauma of the stories being shared. Our approach explores multiple expressions of trauma and resilience, combined in composite characters. Denzin and Lincoln state the 'qualitative researcher who uses montage is like a quilt maker or jazz improviser. The quilter stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together. This process creates and brings psychological and emotional unity to an interpretative experience' (2008: 6). Our hope in using this montage approach is to create psychological and emotional unity, in order to raise a heightened awareness of Australia's current response to asylum seekers. Denzin and Lincoln continue: 'works that use montage simultaneously create and enact moral meaning. They move from the personal to the political, the local to the historical and the cultural. These are dialogical texts' (6). The choice to present these montage stories in a theatrical form is to embody these life narratives. We aim to make our story personal, political and epic.

Ethical concerns

As playwrights, we are acutely aware that we have written a play that shares events experienced by individuals who do not get the chance to 'speak for themselves'. The reframing and remediation of news articles and materials within our play raises numerous ethical concerns. In her discussion of the representation of asylum seeker stories, Whitlock exposes problems regarding 'an aesthetic grounded in compassion and sympathy' (2014: 88). She cautions that there are 'concerns about the self-interestedness of benevolence, pity, and compassion, the ethics of spectatorship regarding pain' (88). We have attempted to address these issues through self-conscious theatricalisation and using the character of Cassandra as witness.

We define our use of bricolage as a form of 'documentary theatre', specifically theatre that is 'created from a specific body of archived material ... [including] ... documents, hearings, records, video, film, photographs' (Martin 2006: 9). Martin states that this form of theatre can 'both foreground and problematize the nonfictional' (2006: 10) in its mix of fact and fiction. Rokem draws attention to the central tension of theatre that is based on historical events, stating:

the notion of performing history inevitably confronts the tensions between... narrative principles of selection, on the one hand, and the seemingly chaotic and sometimes unimaginable dimensions of ... historical events and their catastrophic characteristics, on the other ... These tensions between the historical past as a chaotic and frequently unmediated reality and the performance have to be confronted on the stage when performing history (2000: 10).

In his discussion of documentary theatre, Bottoms advocates a 'self-conscious' approach to performance creation, where attention is drawn to the construction methods

in the play (2006: 61). Bottoms specifically praises Kaufman's *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* stating that this play foregrounds the sources of all of the performance material within the performance and is 'highly self-conscious about its own status as a collage of appropriated historical texts' (2006: 61).

In crafting our play, we have used the heightened conceit that contemporary asylum seekers' stories are conflated with characters from Ancient Greek tragedies. Specifically, the characters: Cassandra, Medea, Iolaus, Hyllus and Polly from Euripides' *The Heracleidae*, *The Trojan Women* and *Medea*, and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. The choice to focus on these plays stems from their emphasis on a least one exiled character. *The Heracleidae* focuses on the struggles of Heracles' children in their search for sanctuary. The play exposes the frustrations and exhaustions of being continually rejected and dismissed. The choice to include Cassandra's story from *The Trojan Women* and *The Agamemnon* reveals the notion of the 'trophy' wife – women who were 'claimed' by the victorious soldiers – forcibly removed from their homeland and enslaved into the service of the victor. The most controversial inclusion is that of the character of Medea. *Medea* is also a story of an abandoned women, a foreigner on a foreign shore. Medea cannot return to her fatherland, she is wanted for murder, and is being exiled from Corinth. She can be read as a character without home, who searches for sanctuary, before committing heinous crimes. The conflation of these fictional characters draws attention to the aesthetic dimension and heightens the constructed nature of the performance.

We have also considered the ethical concerns of our project in relation to concepts of witnessing as informed by Etchells (1999), Schaefer (2003), Wake (2008) and Rokem (2000, 2002). Etchells believes that the role of contemporary theatre is to produce witnesses rather than spectators so that an audience is 'unable to stop thinking, talking and reporting on what [they've] seen' (1999: 18). Wake discusses the concept of witnessing in relation to the renaming of documentary theatre as the 'theatre of witness', in which 'the figure of the performing witness is typically a character... that testifies to a personal, social and/or historical trauma' (2008: 188). Wake goes further to suggest that this act consequently positions the characters, actors, spectators and critics involved with a piece of such theatre as 'performing witnesses' (188). Freddie Rokem states that characters as witnesses in a performance add 'a dimension of theatricality on the basis of which the spectator begins to interpret the performance' (2002: 168). For Rokem, this device provides a 'filter' through which 'the 'truth' about the past can be examined and critiqued' (2000: 203). Or, in other words, by viewing a witness onstage and observing the way that this witness watches other stories in the performance, the audience develops a heightened awareness of their own act of witnessing. The action of *The Centre* begins with the character Cassandra envisioning the arrival of new detainees and the play is then presented as Cassandra's prophecy. The final scene of the play returns to the moment of Cassandra's original vision, at which point all characters turn to the audience to ask 'How many more atrocities must come to this house?' (*The Centre*, Scene 19). The action of our play is thus seen from Cassandra's point of view, and she is positioned as a 'prophetic witness' to the events of the play. The final question, a direct address to the audience, demands that the audience examine and critique the situation that has been presented. In these ways, the conflation of life

narratives with Ancient Greek characters and the establishment of Cassandra as a ‘witness’ self-consciously draws attention to ways we have reframed and remediated events.

Creative crafting

The Centre has been inspired by Euripides’ *The Heracleidae*, *The Trojan Women* and *Medea*, and Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*. The play focuses on five asylum seekers – Cassandra, Medea, Iolaus, Hyllus and Polly – who are being detained at an offshore processing centre. This section will focus on our use of the bricolage process to construct the character of Cassandra and her journey within the play. Cassandra is a character who appears in both Euripides’ *The Trojan Women* and Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*. As part of the legend of the Trojan War, Cassandra’s backstory includes: being raped by an enemy soldier; being taken to a foreign land as a war trophy and concubine; having a gift of prophecy, but being cursed with no one believing her prophecies; and being murdered at the hands of her Captor’s wife.

We chose Cassandra as a representative of women who have been taken away from their homeland and forced to be sex slaves. In many cases these women find a way to escape from a life of sex slavery and become asylum seekers. In our version of Cassandra’s story, we decided to have her escape before she is taken to Agamemnon’s house. Cassandra then believes that by coming to the centre she has escaped her tragic fate and had come to the centre with the hope of a better life. In *The Trojan Women* and *Agamemnon*, Cassandra’s prophecy is both a gift and curse: her gift is her ability to see her own future, and her curse is that no one believes her. Within our play, Cassandra has visions of the future that no one can recognise as prophetic; she is considered damaged, yet has the most insight of any of the characters. In contemporary life, ‘visions’ and ‘hallucinations’ are pathologised and seen as a mental health disorder. In our research of the Queensland Senate submission we read about a young woman on Nauru who had reported been abused and was suffering from severe mental health issues. The report noted:

The AMA Secretariat received photographs depicting her self-harm and was advised that [she] was suicidal. [She] had been in detention for over three years and is, from accounts received from several advocates in direct contact, mentally and emotionally unwell, and with no support whatsoever. She was reportedly abused verbally, physically and sexually while on Nauru, with no action taken by the Nauru authorities. There is additional evidence of an internal injury/problem causing excruciating pain. [She] had been provided with Quetiapine, Lorazepam and Mirtazapine, with severe side effects.

The AMA contacted the Department on several occasions expressing concern about [her] mental and physical health and, reporting the information received that she may be suicidal and at heightened risk. The AMA is not satisfied with the information from the Department, which includes findings such as:

Whilst [she] did state that she continues to hear voices, these are much less than previously and the voices did not contain any derogatory or command hallucinations.

[The doctor] increased her anti-psychotic medication to 20mg at night and recommended another review in 1 month.

At the time of writing this submission, the AMA has no further information about this asylum seeker, whether she continues to self-harm or if her hallucinations and ‘voices’ indicates more severe mental illness requiring specialist psychiatric care (Tatz 2016: 6).

This submission portrays a woman suffering from severe trauma who has been highly medicated causing her to hear ‘voices’ and see ‘hallucinations’. We found this to be a haunting echo of the way the original Cassandra’s prophetic visions were viewed as ‘madness’ by those around her. In our play, Medea is shown to ridicule and taunt Cassandra for her ‘mad ravings’. In Scene 3, Cassandra foresees that the centre will become an ‘Open Centre’, but this vision is mocked by Medea:

CASSANDRA: Today it begins. We’re free but not free. Newly our lives conjoined in one fate as we beat on like waves against an angry shore.

MEDEA: (*mockingly*) Oh yes, yes, you can see an angry shore. All I see is endless gravel (*The Centre*, Scene 3).

Later, when Iolaus and the children enter the tent, Medea comments:

MEDEA: Don’t pay her any attention. She’s been medicated since she arrived, it brings on hallucinations. Can’t make much sense out of the things she says (*The Centre*, Scene 7).

In October 2015, around the time when we started to write this play, stories of the rape of asylum seekers on Nauru were prominent in the news. The detention centre on Nauru had been declared an ‘Open Centre’, and detainees were free to leave and return to the centre (Hurst 2015). This ‘freedom’ however resulted in numerous assaults on the detainees by Nauruan locals. Three such stories involve: a 26-year-old Somali woman who stated in her recorded call to the police that she was raped by two Nauruan men; a 23 year old Somali woman who was raped and subsequently became pregnant; and an Iranian asylum seeker who was sent to a Brisbane hospital for injuries after she had been raped (Cooper 2015a, Allard 2015).

In Scene 7 of our play, detainees are informed that the centre has become an ‘Open Centre’ and Iolaus decides to go to explore the Island with the children. At this point, Cassandra has a vision and foresees that Polly will be raped on the island, and decides to take Polly’s place, refusing to let another girl be defined by the sexual violence of predatory men. In scene 8, Iolaus and the children come across Cassandra after she has been attacked. In this scene, Cassandra goes into a trauma-induced trance:

CASSANDRA *enters. Her dress is torn and she is bruised and bloodied.*

POLLY: *Cassie! Cassie!*

IOLAUS: Stay put. (*IOLAUS goes to CASSANDRA*).

CASSANDRA: **The axe. My fate. Oh God, why have you forsaken me?**

IOLAUS: Are you all right? (*Comforting her*) You are safe now.

CASSANDRA: **I am ridden by God’s curse still. ...**

POLLY: What happened to her?

IOLAUS: She’s has been...wronged... dear one. She has taken herself to another place.

POLLY goes to embrace CASSANDRA, but CASSANDRA does not see her and POLLY retreats.

The lines in bold above are quotes taken from Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (line 1080) and Euripides' *The Trojan Women* (line 365), at the point at which Cassandra foresees her fate. In our play, this scene is the beginning of Cassandra's tragic journey at the detention centre, paralleling the tragic journeys of real life asylum seekers on Nauru. According to a news report in October 2015, the Nauruan police stated that there was not enough evidence to prove that the 26-year-old Somali woman had been raped:

the government of Nauru has issued a press release stating that a full investigation has been conducted into the alleged rape. It said the inquiries by police at the scene found no evidence of the victim's clothes being ripped or shredded, and no visible cuts or abrasions (Cooper 2015b).

Also in October 2015, a 23-year-old Somali refugee, who claimed that she was raped and impregnated on Nauru, was flown to Australia for an abortion, but was subsequently returned to Nauru without having the termination (Allard 2015). In our play, sometime after Cassandra's attack, she is taken away. Medea reads the news report of the incident on her (smuggled) mobile phone:

MEDEA: It said the inquiries by police at the scene found no evidence of the victim's clothes being ripped or shredded, and no visible cuts or abrasions.

Police also said they were unable to locate the 'cave' into which the woman said she was dragged during the attack, and that a medical examination was conducted after the incident, but evidence of the rape could not be found.

The police say they have now recommended that the case be closed due to 'insufficient evidence'.

Insufficient evidence? Let's see them try to explain the baby away.

IOLAUS: At least they are taking care of her now. She even has a lawyer fighting for her rights (*The Centre*, Scene 11).

In this way, we combined incidents from the Queensland Senate Report and news articles to explore the situations faced by young women in detention centres. As we continued to develop the play, we received dramaturgical feedback encouraging us to establish backgrounds and countries of origin for each of the characters. For Cassandra in particular, it was important that we establish where this character had come from and her reason for escaping. In our research, we came across the story of 21-year-old Nadia Murad Basee Taha, an Iraqi Yezidi woman, captured by ISIS and forced to be a sex slave (Alter 2015). Nadia managed to escape and flee to safety, and now lives in the USA. In Iraq, the Yezidi population has been targeted by ISIS because they do not practice Islam. In 2014, over 5,000 Yezidis were abducted and at least 3,400 are still in captivity. Most captives are women and thousands more have been slaughtered (Alter 2015). Nadia's tragic story is related by journalist Charlotte Alter as follows:

The fighters separated the men from the women, and put Nadia and some other women on the second floor of the building ... [Then they murdered all the men including] ... Nadia's brothers and stepbrothers. When they retook the area from ISIS, Kurdish forces also uncovered a mass grave of about 80 elderly women who had presumably been

executed because they were too old and undesirable to be sold into slavery ... Those who remained, the women like Nadia who were considered young and attractive, were taken to the occupied Iraqi city of Mosul, where they stayed for three days before they were 'distributed' among the fighters to be enslaved ... Every morning in Mosul, the women would be required to wash. Then, Nadia says, they would be taken to the Shari'ah court, where they would be photographed. The photographs would be posted on a wall in the court, along with the phone number of whichever militant or commander currently owned each woman, so that fighters could swap women among themselves (Alter 2015).

From this research, we reimagined the character of Cassandra as a young Yezidi girl, whose family was murdered at the hands of the enemy, while the younger females of her village were divided as sex toys for the soldiers. We integrated this story into a poetic monologue delivered by Cassandra in Scene 8, after she has been raped and is in a trauma-induced trance. At this point she realises that she escaped repeated sexual assault in her home land, only to experience the same fate on the island:

CASSANDRA: They met us in the streets
 And took us away.
 First my father, struck down on our front steps
 Then my brothers and step-brothers slaughtered
 Finally my mother – her silver hair stained red
 They saw the men as too much of a threat
 And they viewed older women as no longer of value
 But we, we teenage girls were distributed amongst the soldiers
 Our images posted on the wall of the court
 Each man took his pick
 The names were noted and the choices made
My torn adornments, my skin defiled
My futile escape (*The Centre*, Scene 8).

The final two lines of this speech (in bold above) are taken from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (lines 453-54). Due to the heightened trauma and suffering experienced by asylum seekers in detention centres, we needed the play to also expose the resilience and humanity of those being detained.

Asylum seekers in detention show a high level of resilience. The detainees are in an extremely traumatic situation, yet they keep searching for a way forward. *They Cannot Take the Sky* (Green and Dao 2017) is a publication that shares firsthand accounts of asylum seekers' experiences. This book details the resilience and resourcefulness of asylum seekers, and the strategies they use to keep hope, and themselves, alive. For example, Behouz, a Manus Island detainee, relates that when doing a protest on top of a tree he listened to Mozart and Beethoven, and 'wrote a poem about the birds and the beautiful sky, because on top of that tree I could see the ocean' (19). Hani, previously a detainee on Christmas Island, shared that, for her, cleaning became a source of calm and consolation: 'We used to do cleaning. I love cleaning. In the night-time, I would be awake all night cleaning the compound. I just thought, *I wanna keep my Australia clean*' (35). Imran, currently detained on Manus Island, finds solace in writing and relates that

writing, going to the gym and studying English grammar are activities that he integrates into his routine to stay positive, although he does state that these activities work to differing degrees of success (263).

Inspired by these stories of resilience, we incorporated scenes into the play, without text, to show activities used by asylum seekers to maintain their sense of hope and purpose. These scenes also aim to communicate the extended passages of time experienced in detention centres. In one scene, Cassandra paints on a sheet, using earth mixed with water, and in another scene, the two children play a game of checkers using bottle caps and a checker board drawn in the earth. In a third scene, Iolaus feeds the birds, while Hyllus does physical exercise. These scenes show daily routines helping detainees find a way through the situation and, in some cases, show them finding a way towards peace and calm.

Conclusion

Life narratives from the public domain informed the construction and crafting of *The Centre* by providing the social awareness impetus, the political controversy, and the recorded accounts of lived experiences. Acknowledging the global crisis and universal suffering of refugees, the choice to parallel this contemporary event with the ancient tragic tradition underscores the enormity of the suffering and attempts to manipulate the genre from one of determined destruction to a more hopeful solution. Through the cyclical process of practice-led research leading to research-led practice, the story unfolded from an idea of similarities between Ancient Greek tragedy and contemporary asylum seekers, to a more substantiated body of work that drew from both the ancient stories and reports of contemporary survival. The use of bricolage to merge the pieces of information discovered during the research process with the ancient Greek sources creates a text that exposes the depths of humankind's inhumanity to humankind, and questions the necessity of this preventable suffering.

Works cited

- Aeschylus 1953 'Agamemnon' R Lattimore (trans) in D Grene and R Lattimore (eds) *Aeschylus I* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 35–90
- Allard, Tom 2015 'Refugee rape victim says Immigration Minister Peter Dutton is telling lies about abortion' *Sydney Morning Herald* 19 October, at <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/refugee-rape-victim-says-immigration-minister-peter-dutton-is-telling-lies-about-abortion-20151018-gkc21y.html> (accessed 24 October 2017).
- Alter, Charlotte 2015 'A Yezidi woman who escaped ISIS slavery tells her story' *TIME magazine* 21 December, at <http://time.com/4152127/isis-yezidi-woman-slavery-united-nations> (accessed 4 February 2017).
- Amnesty International 2016 'Report 2 August 2016', *Amnesty International* 2 August, at <https://www.amnesty.org.au/australian-governments-secretive-system-of-deliberate-abuse-on-nauru> (accessed 5 June 2017).
- Amnesty International 2017 'Report 9 November 2017' *Amnesty International* 9 November, at https://www.amnesty.org.au/manus_actions (accessed 12 November 2017).

- Amnesty International Australia 2017 *Amnesty International Official Website*, at <https://www.amnesty.org.au/act-now/end-secret-abuse-offshore> (accessed 5 June 2017).
- Aristotle 2010 in WR Roberts (trans) and WD Ross (ed) *Rhetoric* Oxford: Oxford UP
- Bachelard, Gaston 1994 *The poetics of space* Boston: Beacon Press
- Bottoms, Stephen 2006 'Putting the document into documentary: an unwelcome corrective?' *TDR: The Drama Review*, 50 (3), 56-68
- Brock, Ginna 2014 *Greek tragedy and the poetics of the hearth* Doctoral thesis, Maroochydore: U of the Sunshine Coast
- Brock, Ginna and Jo Loth 2018 'The Centre: a search for belonging' *New Writing* 15 (2), 200–23
- Cooper, Hayden 2015a 'Raped on Nauru: video captures moment Somali refugee pleads for help from police after alleged sexual assault' *ABC news* 28 September, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-28/two-refugees-allegedly-raped-on-nauru/6809956> (accessed 24 October 2017).
- Cooper, Hayden 2015b 'Nauru police say not enough evidence to prove Somali woman was raped on the island' *ABC News* 16 October, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-10-12/not-enough-evidence-to-prove-rape,-nauru-police-say/6846814> (accessed 24 October 2017).
- Denzin, Norman K and Yvonna S Lincoln 2008 *The landscape of qualitative research* 3rd ed, Los Angeles: Sage
- Dreher, Diane 1986 *Domination and defiance: Fathers and daughters in Shakespeare* Lexington: UP of Kentucky
- Entman, Robert M 1993 'Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm' *Journal of Communication* 43 (4): 51-8
- Etchells, Tim 1999 *Certain fragments, contemporary performance and forced entertainment* Routledge: London
- Euripides 1958 'Hecuba' trans W Arrowsmith in D Grene and R Lattimore (eds) *Euripides III* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 9-68
- Gray, Carole 1996 *Inquiry through practice: Developing appropriate research strategies* Helsinki: UIAH
- Green, Michael and Andre Dao (eds) 2017 *They cannot take the sky: Stories from detention* Sydney: Allen and Unwin
- Haseman, Brad 2007 'Rupture and recognition: identifying the performance research paradigm' in Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (eds) *Practice as research: Approaches to creative arts enquiry* London: IB Tauris, 147-58
- Heath, Malcolm 1987 *The poetics of Greek tragedy* Stanford: Stanford UP
- Hurst, Daniel 2015 'Nauru centre opening has "dramatic effect" on detention challenge, court told' *The Guardian* 7 October, at <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/oct/07/nauru-open-centres-asylum-seeker-fighting-offshore-detention-high-court> (accessed 15 October 2015).
- Martin, Carol 2006 'Bodies of evidence' *TDR: The Drama Review* 50 (3), 8–15
- Nussbaum, Martha 1995 *Poetic justice: The literary imagination and public life* Boston: Beacon
- Parliament of Australia 2017 'Serious allegations of abuse, self-harm and neglect of asylum seekers in relation to the Nauru Regional Processing Centre, and any like allegations in relation to the Manus Regional Processing Centre' 30 March, at https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/NauruandManusRPCs/Submissions (accessed 6 August 2017).
- Rokem, Freddie 2000 *Performing history: Theatrical representations of the past in contemporary theatre* Iowa City: U of Iowa P
- Rokem, Freddie 2002 'Witnessing Woyzeck: theatricality and the empowerment of the spectator' *SubStance* 31 (2/3), 167–83

- Schaefer, Karine 2003 'The spectator as witness? *Binlids* as case study' *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 23 (1), 5–20
- Scrivener, Stephen 2002 'The art object does not embody a form of knowledge', at http://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/783/1/WPIAAD_vol2_scrivener.pdf (accessed 23 October 2017).
- Segal, Charles 1993 *Euripides and the poetics of sorrow: Art, gender, and commemoration in Alcestis, Hippolytus, and Hecuba* Durham: Duke UP
- Smith, Hazel and Roger T Dean (eds) 2014 *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts* Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP
- Spaeth, Barbette Stanley 2013 *The Cambridge companion to Mediterranean religion* Cambridge: Cambridge UP
- Stock, Cheryl 2007 'Accented body and beyond: a model for practice-led research with multiple theory/practice outcomes' *Proceedings: Re-thinking practice and theory: International symposium of Dance research, Centre International de la Danse, CORD*, Paris: Society of Dance History Scholars, 343–52
- Tatz, S 2016 Australian Medical Association Submission to the *Senate legal and constitutional affairs committee on serious allegations of abuse, self-harm and neglect of asylum seekers at Nauru and Manus regional processing centres*– D16/5097, submission # 1, 28 September, 5–6
- United Nations 2017 'Human rights committee 121st session, 16 October–10 November 2017, Agenda Item 5', at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/580025f66b8f5b2dabbe4291/t/5a04a67fec212d19b0559311/1510254213175/INT_CCPR_COC_AUS_29445_E.pdf (accessed 12 November 2017)
- Wake, Caroline 2008 'Through the (in)visible witness in *Through the wire*' *Research in Drama Education* 13 (2), 187–92
- Whitlock, Gillian 2014 'Protection' in Meg Jensen and Margaretta Jolly (eds) *We shall bear witness: Life narratives and human rights* Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 80–99
- Weil, Simone 2002 *The need for roots: Prelude to a declaration of duties towards mankind* London: Routledge
- Yardley, Ainslie 2008 'Piecing together – a methodological bricolage' *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 9 (2), at <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/416/902#g11> (accessed 20 October 2017).