

Title: ***Anxiety of difference: Explorations of belonging or (N)either here (N)or the other***

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ABSTRACT

As a young Iranian-born artist living in the UK, my research investigates the possibilities of bridging through elements taken from the cultural and ethical dichotomies that exist between the Muslim-dominated Middle East and the secular West.

Despite having settled in the UK for 13 years, I do not regard my diasporic identity as a biproduct of my Islamic upbringing in the framework of British contemporary culture. Instead, I understand my identity as an ongoing site of tension between post-revolutionary Iranian Shiite tradition of Islam and contemporary Western principles.

This thesis is concerned with research methods that use contemporary principles of performance practice to examine the construction of my diasporic identity in relation to both spectator perception and my own past.

My practice examines, through performance art, singing, moving image and poetry, the possibilities of de-territorialising various Islamic disciplines, detaching them from their personal, religious and socio-political connotations in order to emphasise positive values they might offer. It investigates how these discourses can be integrated with the ethics and aesthetics of Western contemporary artmaking that I as a migrant have acquired by living in diaspora.

My methodologies of research postulates *Jihad as Ready-made*. This unique fusion is an assemblage of process-based, transgressive, playful and interactional methods of resistance that disrupts established relationships between the signifiers and signified. *Jihad as Ready-made* has provided me with an effective means to examine the cross-over between the domains of artmaking and my everyday life activities. Through various transgressive and playful strategies, my practice generates situations where my actions challenge a variety of power-relations that exist in the site of artistic performance.

Exploring *Jihad as Ready-made* expresses my existentially unfixed status as an uprooted individual who has agency to hover and create bridges between the dichotomies of the Muslim oriented Middle Eastern culture that is inherited in me and the acquired Western modernist/postmodernist culture that I can critically operate within. *Jihad as Ready-made* allows me to arrive at new understanding of Islamic diasporic identity and investigate the intersection between Islamic orthodox doctrines and post-colonial and transnational ethics.

By making these findings accessible to spectators from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, my research tackles the climate of paranoia and propaganda against Islamic identity that has dominated the West.

These endeavours have only been possible via my critical scrutiny of subject-matters and traumatic memories that signify my existential status as a Muslim devotee or an *Abd-Allah*.

Please note this thesis is not publicly accessible. Please contact sadeghaleahmad@gmail.com if you'd like a free digital copy.

KEYWORDS

Diaspora, Performance, Performance for camera, Jihad, Appropriation, Subversion, Ready-made, Jihad as Ready-made, Maddahi, Islamic doctrine, Middle East, Exile, Migration, Cultural displacement, Abandoned identity, Terrorism, Poetry, Cut-up, Trauma, Rhizome, Dichotomies, Integration, Uprootedness, Singing, Transgression, Islamic diasporic identity, War on terror, Spectatorship, Moving image, Post-colonialism, Decolonisation, Western contemporary art, In-betweenness, Action of resistance, Western Avant Garde, Charlie Hebdo, Modernism, Thermodynamics, Entropy, Composed chaos, Site of conflict, Je Suis Charlie, Us vs them, Power relations, Multiculturalism, Globalism, Dada, Hybridity, Islamic gender relations, Plane of immanence, Genius Loci, Architecture, Site of performance, Site specific, Embodied knowledge, Camera, Mirror, Politics of the gaze, Reflection, Mise-en-scène, Cathartic, Return to the site of trauma, Victim of history, Documentation, Postmodern, Orthodox, Abd-allah, Allah, Islamic identity, Practice-based research, Practice-lead research, Migrant, Voice, Colonisation of mind, Quran, Non-site, Islamic patriarchy, Islamic masculinity, Islamic femininity, Masculine gaze, Surveillance,

Michael Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Gilles Deleuze, Frantz Fanon, Achille Mbembe, Homi Bhabha, Verhagen, Cathy Caruth, Richard Kearney, Elizabeth Kendall, New Noveta, Simone Forti, Walid Raad, Nancy Holt, Shirin Neshat, Hans Bellmer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Richard Mosse, Carl Andre, Anni Ratti, Robert Smithson, Hedi Bucher, Arthur Jaffa, Rasheed Araeen, Wafaa Bilal, Akram Zaatari, Mona Hatoum, Pola Weiss, Mohsen Namjoo, Rumi, Barbara Kruger, Mehrane Atashi, Stuart Brisley,

LINKS TO ARTWORKS DISCUSSED IN THE THESIS

- *Party Balloons* (2015)
<https://vimeo.com/157608948>
- *The Only Poem I Know to Hold in Blenheim Palace* (2015)
<https://vimeo.com/158266774>
- *Party Balloons* (2016)
<https://vimeo.com/386999426>
- *Ceiling the Veiling* (2016)
<https://vimeo.com/387008551>
- <https://vimeo.com/387008612>

- *Feathers and Shrapnel* (2017)
<https://vimeo.com/241385441>
- *Omega Fragmented (The Soil Returns to Us) no.6* (2017)
<https://vimeo.com/242472871>
- *For-e-skin Contemplations* (2019)
<https://vimeo.com/387945008/1bda08e075>