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art media politics

FUSE

SPECIAL ISSUE:
War?

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Initial Impact... an immediate response by Shani Mootoo
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Tariq Ali speaks at OISE at University of Toronto, September 2001.
Photo: Hassan Bozai. Courtesy: Canadian Asian News, Toronto.

Cover: Tariq Ali addresses marchers at Toronto Mobilisation for Global Justice March for Peace held 29 September 2001. Photo: Lucas Mulder

editorial

Last summer, before the events of September 11, Francis Coppola's famous film about the Vietnam war, *Apocalypse Now*, was re-released. Despite its confused and often offensive politics, the film has a quality that is rare among American war pictures. This is not simply because it is a war film played as a horror movie. It is that what we fear throughout the film is not so much what will happen to the central characters, but what terrible things they might do and become.

Watching the towers of the World Trade Centre collapse created a similar kind of experience for many of us on the left. We were not only horrified by what was occurring, but also deeply anxious about what the US might do in response. The immediate comparisons to Pearl Harbour sent a chill down the spines of many people who remembered the dark side of North America's reaction to that attack.

As a friend said, "This is only going to make the Americans more American." He meant more self-obsessed, more self-righteous, more xenophobic, more likely to use violence in efforts to dominate the world stage — not more interested in understanding the effects of their foreign policy upon the rest of the world. This is a struggle of good versus evil, George W. keeps telling us. We are either with 'em or against 'em. Sorry George, but FUSE has other stories to tell.

As news reports and personal anecdotes began to come in about harassment and attacks on anyone remotely — and often mistakenly — perceived to be connected with Islam, many of us were troubled, but not terribly surprised. We know how near the surface racism and ethnocentrism lie, and how easily an event such as this can expose what our country's official multiculturalism attempts to paper over. The

response of our political leaders seemed reassuring at first. "We are fighting terrorism," they insisted, "not Islam." (And then there was Ralph Klein, who immediately implied an equivalency between the September 11 terrorists and the anti-globalization protesters who might descend upon his province.)

We weren't re-assured for long. Beyond the political double-talk, the response has been repressive legislation that withdraws many individual rights and opportunities for access to information in exchange for dubious security benefits. The response has been war against Afghanistan and who knows how many other "rogue states." The response has been lots of money for the nice people in the intelligence "community." The response has been obvious — but never officially acknowledged — racial/ethnic profiling at airports and borders. The list goes on...

At FUSE we have long been suspicious of clear-cut battles between good and evil, especially when they involve our southern neighbour. We know that life is inevitably more complex and political than that. In this issue you will have the opportunity to explore September 11 and its aftermath from perspectives that often remain marginal to the mainstream media. In some cases our writers respond on a very personal level, documenting the immediate impact of the events and political fallout of September 11. We need to hear these stories because they help us to understand what is at stake in very concrete terms. At the same time these personal accounts play out against much broader political critiques of media representation and access, stereotyping, institutional response and histories of political and artistic protest going right back to the Vietnam era. What better antidote to CNN?

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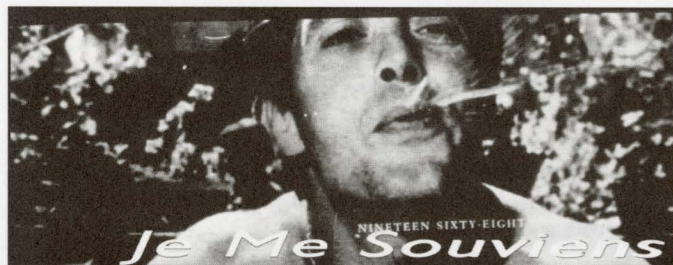
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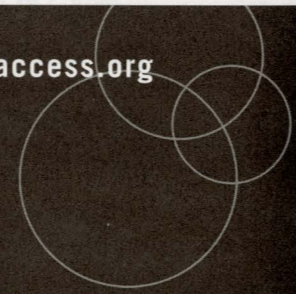
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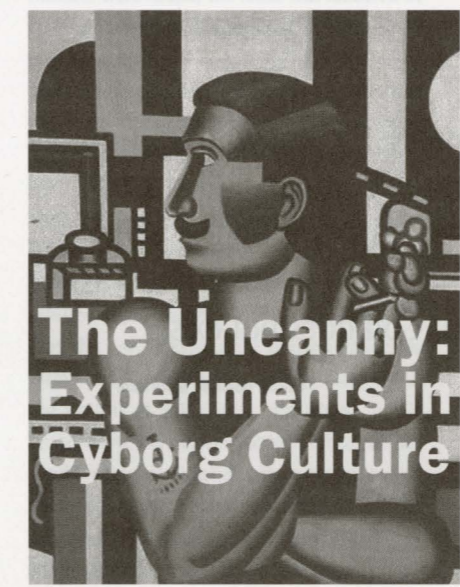
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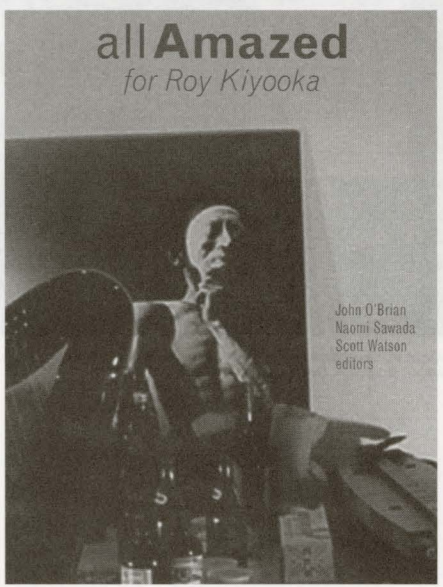
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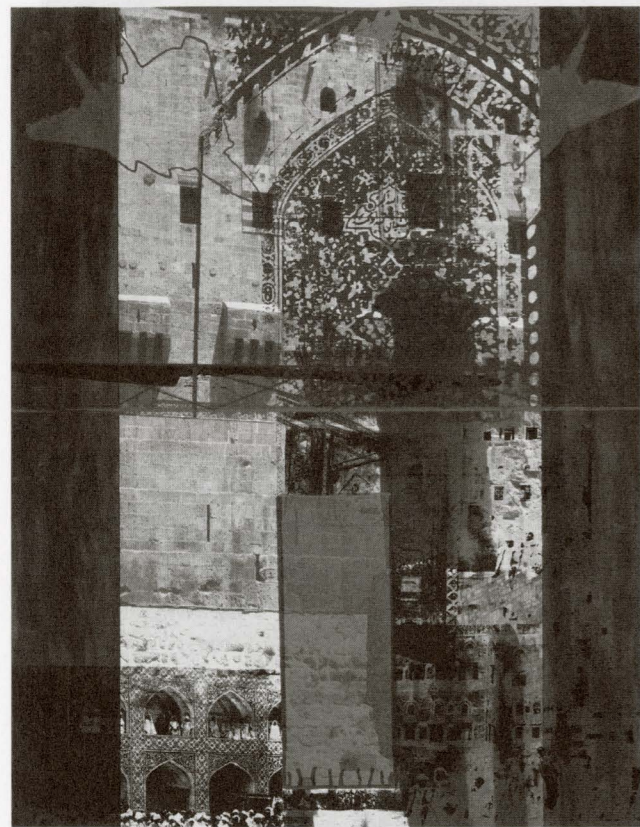
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"Yes, my name is Ibrahim and I am an atheist!"



Detail of... and at night we leave our dreams on window sill, memory of a place, Farouk Kaspaules, 2000, wall installation: mixed media on paper. Courtesy: Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Confessing Asrar: Art, Answerability and the Death of the Author

by Awad Ibrahim

"I am a theist," means "I know that God exists." "I am an atheist" means, "I do not know that God exists." Appending the Greek prefix "a" could in no way be constructed as meaning, I know that God does not exist.

— Chester Dolan in "Blind Faith"

Confessions, those processes by which the subject is incited to produce or state some kind of truth about herself, are always juicy. They are juicy for two reasons. First, because of their capability to have effects on the subject herself and second because, like an unexpected scene in a horror movie, they fasten our heart beatings and make our eyes bug out. To confess is to say the unexpected, to utter *asrar* — the plural of the arabic word *sir* — with the vowel pronounced like [sit]. *Asrar's* meaning literally sits on the fence between telling secrets and confessing. As I see them, the former is those furtive affairs that are accessed by no one but the self, whereas the latter has almost legal ramifications. Yes, my name is Ibrahim, I am an atheist and this is a short essay of *asrar*.

I. Imagining an Ibrahim: The idea of an Ibrahim being an atheist seems to surprise and trouble the imaginary of a number of people, both Muslims and Christians — the two groups that concern me here. Two incidents will highlight my point. The first is a letter I received from the Islamic Council of University Professors (ICUP) inviting me to attend a dinner hosted by the ICUP in October 2001 in Ottawa. I did not know where my address and phone number were found; the letter was followed by three phone calls. I wondered, subsequently, why I was invited to the ICUP dinner in the first place. I knew no one in the council and I had not heard of it hitherto. My surprise came as no surprise, and it simply had to do with my name.

The second incident happened three days after the horror of September 11. While I was at home, a pastor — with whom I work in a refugee organization — called. She explained that she was organizing a religious panel to offer condolences to and show solidarity with the victims of 9/11. Each, she added, would recite from his/her respective scripture. She would represent Christians, there was a "Jewish professor" and I would "represent Muslims," she explained. At this point, I did not know how or what "Muslims" would think of me representing them since to represent, for me, was to speak in their name and place. So I declined the invitation for I could not bear the responsibility of speaking in the name of "Muslims" while my

very Islamic faith is doubtful.

These two incidents invoke something larger than a trivial letter and simple phone calls. Powerfully, they are telling me how my name is *already* "read," "marked," "positioned" and "imagined." It is imagined and read in ways that can only be performative acts of history. Here, Ibrahim *is*, and *is* is already known. That is, given my name, the pastor and the ICUP assumed their knowledge of me (almost with certainty). It is a reading that has little to do with my current being, with me. For the here and now reveal something radically different. They point to a Black man, Arabic speaker, born into a Muslim family but truly living the contradiction of the postmodern. And when it comes to my *sir* of being an atheist, I know that that is neither meant to highlight something new nor to indicate an exception. In fact, this is a common description of the left — mostly Marxists — in the Arab world. And it is a secret or a *sir* only because it is unknown outside the Arab world.

II. This first confession is of particular significance when it comes to art production in the Arab world, and by this I am talking about a world that is as diverse as the people living in it, including Christians, Jews, atheists, animists and Muslims. Here, *art is the left and in the left is where art is produced*. Literally, most if not all art production in the Arab world is either produced in, within or by the left or directly influenced by it. The left in the Arab world is an umbrella of which democrats, liberals, nationalists, Marxists-Leninists are central *dispositifs*, apparatus. One encompassing and driving ideological desire that guides their world and their word is secularism: the separation of the state and religion. A visit to <http://www.secularism.org/skeptics/secularism.htm> reveals the historical and contemporary background of this debate. Here a number of books and thinkers are discussed: Nasr H. Abu Zeid, Abdurrahman Badawi's *From the History of Atheism in Islam*, Ismail Adham's *Why am I an Atheist?*, Hussein Mroueh and of course Ibn Warraq's controversial *Why I am not a Muslim*, among many others. But the left in the Arab and Islamic world in particular can still not confess to secularism in public, since the latter has the con-

notation of atheism, which is considered a conversion: a strictly forbidden act in Islam. Confessing to it therefore, on the one hand, endangers the lives of those who confess, since their *fatwa* could be capital punishment. Yet, throwing off the yoke, a number of authors and members of the general public have declared their secularism and atheism openly. The poet Amal Dangal, for instance, in a verse that is recited by almost every secularist, not to say atheist, went as far as to say: "Glory to the Satan, beloved of the winds, who said nay in the face of the one who said yea, and lived in eternal pain ever after" (Mutasim Agra'a translation). And confessing to it, on the other hand, centralizes art as a *dispositif* through which this confession is made, as a site where most avow their ideological beliefs. They do so in and through astute and indistinct art forms and representations: poetry, painting, sculpting, and so on.

And I come to your site — my hope
Throned by angst, and heart divided by grief
I come to you, to be mesmerized
Having my guitar, I come to tell you
His story when he gave his life to your path
And drew your picture on his voice
And said: either you — or I would die!

In my very crude and literal translation of a small section of "The City of Your Eyes" by Abd el Gadir El Ketayabi, the city is the Sudan, the whole country, and her "Eyes" are where the vision of hope is built. El Ketayabi is specifically talking about a secular state where he does not fear holding her hand and walking along the Nile in a full moon night. Always in the Sudan, Mohamed Ahmed as a name, for example, when used in poetry, came to symbolize not only the working class but also all other marginalized individuals. Similarly, Fatima came to signify the powerfully courageous feminine and feminist(s).

The work is tremendously engaging within these symbolic markets, which use highly symbolic signifiers. And it is hardly talked about either within Arabic-speaking countries or elsewhere. The use of symbolism is conspicuously linked to the contextual nature of political practice in the Arab world where turmoil and coups d'état are common place. Here, for one reason

or another, the first people to be captured and detained whenever and wherever there is a coup d'état are the members of the left.

This, I would submit, is by and large the same group that exhibited its work at the Museum of Civilization in Hull. If one is to expect a dialogue between "Canadians" and Arabic-speaking countries, these are our ready allies. (One would have to note, however, that these artists are not "over there" in another land, they are here in Canada having the same rights afforded to all Canadians.) Hence, it was disheartening to see that exhibit shut down, even for a while, and this brings me to my third *sir*: answerability.

III. A piece of art is a piece that is yet to be summated, to be finished and co-authored. No piece is full in and for itself. It needs a reader, a viewer, and it is this reader who will co-author the piece in the process of reading. Mikhail M. Bakhtin calls this "dialogism" in his "Art and Answerability," from which I am extracting all of my subsequent quotations. Dialogism is understood as the *effort of understanding*, as "the active reception of speech of the other," and Bakhtin sees art as a form of speech. The adjective is all-important here: "active reception" means that an art piece has to be worked on, dialogued with, translated, negotiated and co-authored. If this is so, as most literary and art critics would emphatically argue, how do we signify it when the "reader" refuses not only to co-author, but to look at the piece of art at all? Here, I would contend, a regime of non-answerability is created. But to understand non-answerability, one would need to signify answerability first.

For Bakhtin, the latter is a construct focused on ethical response, a fundamental foundation of dialogic relations such as reader-text or viewer-art. Put otherwise, we act in response to others and our experience. This means that, "I" need an "Other" to respond to, but my response is uniquely and temporally mine. This, by definition, intensifies the ethicality of response. As he put it, and he is worth quoting at length,

I have to answer with my life for what I have experienced and understood in art,

so that everything I have experienced and understood would not remain ineffectual in my life. But answerability entails guilt, or liability to blame. It is not mutual answerability that art and life must assume, but also mutual liability to blame.... The individual must become answerable through and through: all of his constituent moments must not only fit next to each other in the temporal sequence of his life, but must also interpenetrate each other in the unity of guilt and answerability.

Here, the "poet must remember that it is his poetry which bears the guilt for the vulgar prose of life, whereas the man of everyday life ought to know that the fruitlessness of art is due to his willingness to be unexacting and to the unseriousness of the concerns in his life." This is because art cannot afford to be too high-flown, too self-confident. For if this is the case, then art is in no way bound to answer for life. And it is this that I referred to as the regime of non-answerability. As Bakhtin aptly contended, "it is certainly easier to create without answering for life, and easier to live without any consideration of art. [For him,] Art and life are not one, but they must become united in myself — in the unity of my answerability."

If these arguments were to be juxtaposed against the closure of the Arab-Canadian art exhibit, then obviously we as "readers" of art were forbidden to read and answer to the art itself. Instead, it was decided that, at least for a while, we were incapable of answerability, of reading and of co-authoring. The temporal closure of the exhibit had no justification other than those who were exhibiting hold the name "Ibrahim." And as I said, Ibrahim is, and is already known. To the contrary, I think "Ibrahim" needs to be re-imagined, and this can only happen when we "answer" to his art production not to what his name invokes in our imperial imaginary.

At a time when our very civil liberties are under siege, art becomes not only necessary but vital in our everyday dialogues, in envisioning the unenvisioned, in building the unbuilt. We need to

remind ourselves of this not only in the Arab world, but also in Canada. I am certain that, when Bakhtin wrote his "Art and Answerability," he was not thinking of Canada at the dawn of the twenty-first century. He was most likely thinking about the One State, *The Matrix*. This is not to analogize Canada to the One State, but to praise our struggle as general public against the practice of the One State: shutting down a significant exhibit at a very difficult time, a time when ethics of answerability is more than ever urgent. What I have witnessed on the ground in Ottawa was assuring, nonetheless. Although the head of the One State might bulge once in a while, fortunately, our popular democracy is still alive.

Following Nietzsche, Michel Foucault proposed that the author indeed dies in the process of reading. That is, the moment I read a text, that text is temporarily mine, although the author still has his or her signature on it. The author can be compared to the artist here, and text to art. If this is so, then the Foucauldian "death of the author" certainly requires "answerability." Ibrahim does not need to be thrown out the window and left to die in the cold, he needs to be answered to, dialogued and co-authored with. The exhibit did not need to be shut down, in lieu it required answerability. Dare we all, finally, let the "author" — whatever his or her name — work through the mess of life: our answerability then is not to the author's name, but to his or her "text." Dare we love and dream to be; and to be answered to and not unimaginatively imagined, since ...

Love's procession is moving;
Beauty is waving her banner;
Youth is sounding the trumpet of joy;
Disturb not my contrition, my blamer.
Let me walk, for the path is rich
With roses and mint, and the air
Is scented with cleanliness.

—Kahlil Gibran

Awad Ibrahim is an assistant professor at the School of Education, Bishop's University. He teaches in the areas of critical thinking, cultural studies, and the sociology of race and ethnicity. He is working on a book dealing with the processes of becoming and their impacts on subject formation (abirahim@ubishops.ca).

Initial impact ...

an immediate response

by Shani Mootoo

The following essay was written in Edmonton on September 12, and aired in part on CBC Radio on September 14. It was an immediate response to the events unfolding in the United States of America.

With every passing hour after this essay was written, new information, new understandings and bigger confusions came to light. My own analyses and sentiments evolved in leaps and bounds several times in a day. When I realized that what I had been listening to on the radio was not a play but was reality, my first thought was not that the terrorists were from outside the US but that they were American citizens of the Waco or Unibomber mindset. I am a practicing Buddhist, and yet I

shocked myself with decidedly anti-Buddhist sentiments: that capital punishment was not punishment enough for the perpetrators of such a horrific crime made all the more dreadful for its masterful planning and execution, but that in this case the death penalty would do, and I wished it on them all. This thought lasted, thankfully, not half a day. Then, as the days wore on and more information was aired, I began to fear the forms and range of retaliation that would be meted out on the countries from which the terrorists came, or in which they lived. I immediately saw too, and feared that we—around the world—were headed directly for a new era of generalized curtailment of civil liberties for all people, and a very frightening and specific curtailment for citizens,

immigrants, visitors of colour and any people who dared to differ or publicly dissent. The events and the responses herald for me an outcome tantamount to a total derailment of much of the long, hard work done to good effect in the past, which had set the legitimate causes of minority groups visibly on the table.

I did not tamper with the original essay as I set it down on September 12, because I feel that it is a valid response to and record for that specific time.

Yesterday morning just after awakening, I got down on the rug for the usual morning romp with my two dogs. Remembering that I had to make a phone call before eight AM, I jumped up, flipped on the radio, filled the kettle with water and ground coffee beans. While coffee brewed I made my call. On the radio in the background was what I assumed was a replay of the bombing of one of New York's World Trade Center towers. An anniversary, I presumed. To my surprise, when I finished my fifteen-minute conversation the same program was on. I fixed breakfast and attended to feeding the dogs. In and out of one ear floated the sound effects of that old bombing—or so I thought—of emergency vehicles wailing, of people's horrified exclamations and their screaming. Somewhere in the background, as I mentally mapped out my day, I caught commentary regarding a second plane that had crashed into another of the towers. I realized then that the program was not about the old bombing, and thought that it must have been a radio play. Clearly, in the play's first act, one plane had already crashed, and now a second. Before sitting to eat I walked toward the radio, intending to change to a music station; I did not care to listen first thing in the morning to a doomsday-type radio play. But a moment before I could switch it off, the announcement came that the Pentagon too had just that minute been hit by a plane. I instinctively hurried to the TV and turned to CNN. To my horror I saw the fateful words "Breaking News" and realized the reality of what I had been hearing but not listening to. I immediately burst into uncontrollable tears, not willing to believe this could be happening, and happening to one of the cities [New York] in which I had once lived and continue to love so well. And then my body

began to tremble as if with ague: all too soon I had "seen" the fate of the world's future.

In times of incredible crises my usual impulse is to try to create order out of chaos via one form of art making or another. But before the events in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington on Tuesday, I had never witnessed—and I dare say experienced, albeit from a distance—anything as horrendous. After pacing back and forth wondering what I could do to be of use right then, realizing that there was little really, I felt *totally* useless as a writer of fiction and poetry, and as a visual artist. Apparently sports people and entertainers too have in general had similar feelings of paralysis, wondering in this initial shock about the place of art and entertainment.

Of course, as Picasso's eloquent painting *Guernica* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* show—in time, after the mourning and some synthesis—one *will* eventually be able to write, paint, sing, whack a baseball, in rage, in protest and commentary, and one and all will triumph again. We will again turn our passions, anger and resolve with the lathes of our talent into works of art that will create value beyond the works themselves.

But for now I remain in too much shock: art making at this moment almost seems insulting. Never before today have I so acutely felt the limits of language. In fiction one can take one's time to get rhythm, syntax, pacing, tension, intent—the nuts and bolts of good storytelling—as right as one wants. One can work to turn an idea, an image, a feeling from mere outpouring of expression into art. Now? I can barely think. I mostly feel. Descriptors are lacking. Tenses are confusing; past, present and future are colliding in a terrifying uncertainty. I have been profoundly aware that I am witnessing the precise moments when life as we had (or is that "have"?), known it, assumptions and freedoms that we have, or rather had, taken for granted, even here on this side of the border, are in flux and will now be forever altered. The deeper understanding will take a greater time, before the words will form, so if this seems disjointed, even incoherent, I suppose I might be forgiven for it reflects the state of the time right now.

Initial
an immediate

by Shani Mootoo

column

For the past two days I have remained glued to the television; it is the source of information I so desperately need in order to feel some modicum of control. I knew the instant I saw it that this violence for which there is no adequate descriptor was much more than an attack on the United States of America; to paraphrase Article 5 of NATO's Washington Treaty, "An attack on one human being is an attack on all." I, like the citizens of Canada, share the distress of Americans right now, but also, as a human being I take this attack utterly personally. I am not a politician, diplomat, soldier or medical worker. I can only resolve in my small sphere of life to toil diligently toward accomplishing a neighbourhood where true peace, good will and respect for human life — regardless of another's color or creed — will prevail. One person, one neighbourhood at a time is all most of us can do, but it is, in fact, a great, great deal.

I have trained myself, as someone interested in popular culture, to stand back and look skeptically and critically at all media presentations. While I have had little energy to be critical of the news regarding the hijackings and the resulting devastation, I couldn't help but notice a sudden overnight maturity in our cultures. Allow me to mention one observation. Not too long ago the word "Muslim" would inevitably be accompanied by another spoken or implied word: terrorist. And the word terrorist would conjure up Muslim, Islam, Arab, Moslem, and terrorist — all interchangeable. I was struck by the rather quick and constant cautioning of many US senators and other politicians, and of news anchors that we *not* do this. Over and over we are being reminded by them, if not told, that just as the IRA's violent sector is a tiny group within the Christian world, so this suspected band of incomprehensibly violent people who happen to be Moslems is only a fraction of the greater Muslim world.

Tuesday morning [September 11] a Muslim friend phoned deeply saddened by that morning's occurrences and worried for himself and all other Muslims. "It is a bad day to be Muslim," he said. He continued by saying that, as much as these acts should never have happened, he sure hoped for the sake of Moslems

everywhere that they had been perpetrated by some group of white supremacists.

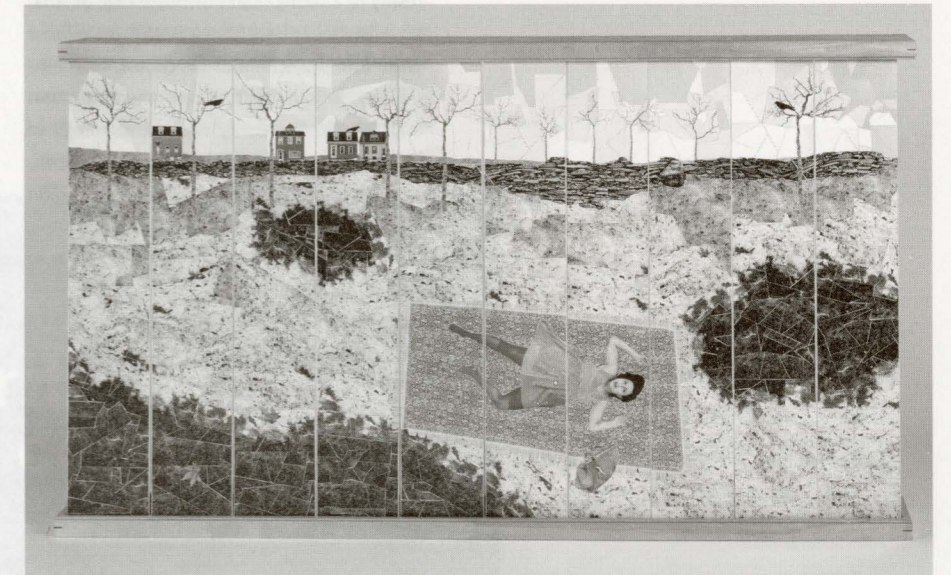
That night, not wanting to leave the TV set, I ordered a pizza for delivery. It arrived almost one-and-a-half-hours later because apparently everyone else in the neighborhood had the same idea. The delivery man was Muslim, and he was quite aware of his sudden visibility. Very sheepishly he asked if anything new was unfolding. I told him the FBI had some pretty solid leads: they had identified the hijackers. He said, "Are they..." but couldn't finish his sentence. I said, "Yes, they are Muslims." He covered his face with his hands and said, "Oh God, no!" Then he said, "I hope they find every one of them."

I am an Irish-born Canadian of Indian-Trinidadian decent. Hindu by birth, Buddhist by choice. I am brown-skinned. To the uninitiated I may appear to be of the same background as the alleged terrorists. It is difficult to know if the slight I experienced this morning from one terse shopkeeper was directed at me specifically. I am still wondering if I unwittingly committed some indiscretion in his shop, or if I am merely made guilty in the abstract by racial coloring. And then again, who knows? Perhaps the shopkeeper was just having a bad day. The aftermath is already greater than the precipitant. I am aware that by dint of my appearance my turn to be harassed or even actually hurt by some ignorant fellow Canadian may well come. I must, as a matter of course, be aware of this from now on. I know, too, that if or when my turn comes I will not shout, "Wait! You have the wrong person..." Rather, in the event of irresponsible trigger-happy retaliation, here or abroad, government driven or otherwise, I will put on the *hejab*, the Muslim woman's scarf, in solidarity with every Moslem and Middle Easterner who abhors any act of terror and celebrates the dignity of human life, and I will encourage all Canadian women, regardless of race or religion, to do the same.

Shani Mootoo is the writer in residence at the University of Alberta for 2001-2002. She is working on her second novel to be released by McClelland and Stewart in the fall.

21st Ramadhan, 1422 – 8th December, 2001

by Nuzhat Abbas



Lebanon-Canada, via Bahrain, Camille Zakharia, 1998, installation: photo-collage and gouache on paper, mounted on triangular wooden columns. Courtesy: Canadian Museum of Civilization.

At a certain point I lost track of you.
They make a desolation and call it peace.
When you left, even the stones were buried:
The defenceless would have no weapons.

"Farewell," Agha Shahid Ali

Tonight is a night of anniversaries.

Tonight is said to be one of the possible nights of Laylat-ul-Qadr, that night of glory, fifteen centuries ago, when the Holy Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Two nights ago, over a decade ago, fourteen women lay dead, murdered by the misogynist rage of a desperate young man called Marc Lepine. One night ago, sixty years ago, the Japanese bombed a naval base called Pearl Harbour in the US. On a night like tonight, all those years ago, a few powerful Americans began to imagine the obscene beauty of a mushroom cloud rising over Hiroshima and Nagasaki to avenge the deaths of over two thousand American soldiers. Tonight, eighty-eight nights have passed since two airplanes crashed into the World Trade Center towers, damaged the Pentagon and killed, by some estimates, around 4,000 people. And tonight, sixty-two nights have blazed with the flares of bombs falling over Afghanistan in the name of those

deaths. Tonight, I have received no names and no numbers to record the ones who receive such terrifying gifts from the sky amidst the grieving valleys of Kabul and Kandahar.

Tonight is the night to remember the gestures that open a conversation. An angel comes to a man in a cave and recites: *Iqra! Read*. And the man repeats after him: *Read in the name of your Lord who created humans from a clot of blood....* The Qur'an enters his tongue and he descends from the cave and repeats. Over the years, other men transcribe these recitations. Later, Umar, one of his followers, will codify and canonize the text. Some will contest this fixing of holy words, but soon, it will become the standard and those who follow it will forget its fluid origins, its passing from tongue to tongue, and the time it took for these words to become a Book. Centuries later, barely literate Pashto-speaking boys will stumble over the Arabic of the text in the Saudi-funded madrasahs of Pakistan and descend as soldiers into the valleys of Afghanistan to found a culture in the name of this Book. Tonight is the night words fell from the sky into the ears of a yearning man. Let us remember the yearning, the gift of words.

column

Tonight is a night to remember gestures that open a conversation. And to figure the response. Fourteen dead bodies in Montreal testify to a young man's inchoate rage at what he believes has been stolen from him. Refused entry into the school of his choice, he roams the city, furious, drifting into unemployment and misery. Modernity and the privilege of being in Canada should, he believes, have entitled him to more. He blames women. He believes they have trespassed into territories that do not belong to them. He does not know the women he kills, they are simply symbols, substitutes for the powers he dare not attack.

Across the ocean, there are more unhappy men like him. In countries like Egypt, Pakistan and Algeria, young men prowl the city streets in discontent, beneficiaries of improved educational opportunities but barred from jobs by massive unemployment and entrenched class prejudices. The decolonizing nationalisms of the 1960s and 1970s have failed them. The engines of globalizing capitalism have left them stranded in their yearning, and their fragile masculinities begin to fracture in such spaces. Thousands of them drift into the welcoming brotherhood of political Islamic groups. Their sisters, new to the cities, studying in schools and universities, put on the modern veil to negotiate the strangeness of cities, all the while needing to assure their families and villages of their unspoiled chastity.

Political Islam, in all its reassuring garments, its promise of unbroken history, becomes shelter and provides a seemingly authentic voice with which to chastise the new brown colonialists who have made no room for more at the table. Whatever might take away this fragile dream of resurgent Islam will be greeted with obsessive hysteria. In Egypt, scarcely legitimate fatwas farcically declare divorces for the noted feminist Nawaal Saadawi and other 'apostates.' More frighteningly, the Egyptian State continues its contradictory policy of imprisoning and torturing Islamist radicals while placating popular Islamists by echoing their demands. Thus, dozens of men accused of homosexuality are exhibited in courtroom cages while local human rights groups fall silent out of fear of similar

accusations of immorality. Writers, in particular, become the Islamists' favoured targets. Iran's fatwa on Salman Rushdie is soon followed by the persecution of Taslima Nasreen in Bangladesh. Even US 'liberated' Kuwait has no qualms about enforcing such laws, charging feminist authors Alia Shueib and Leila el-Othmani with blasphemy and obscenity. Meanwhile hundreds of writers and journalists continue to be killed in places as disparate as Algeria and Iran. This is just the surface. Pakistan, with its long history of militarization, gratefully receives millions of US dollars in the early 1980s to fight the threat of Soviet communism with the carefully harnessed zeal of Islamic fundamentalism. The leaders of both nations shake hands to seal the deal and carefully look away as laws are enacted to suppress women, and as starving refugee boys are forced into Saudi-funded madrasahs to produce the Taliban.

Everywhere, anxiety is gnawing for what modernity has failed to deliver. Across the table, the rich grow easy with each other, imagine borders collapsing, find commonality with English, Coca-Cola and MTV. But outside the lights of their cosmopolitan parties, the discontented gather in the ruins of destroyed homes, congregate in mosques, churches and temples. Some find answers in the lost certainties of indigenous religions and the invention of new traditions. Others take to the hills in places like Chiapas and refuse the temptations of simple victories.

In Canada, the beginning of the new millennium arrives with the multiplying murders of women within the privacy of their homes and families. There is news of escalating suicides in native communities and the uncomprehending faces of young glue-sniffing teenagers stare back at the nation which destroyed them in order to flourish. In a small Ontario town, contaminated water kills fragile children. On the streets of the world, young people greet the millennium with a refusal to let the promise of a borderless world erase the existence of such impermeable borders, persistently rewritten with secret and visible violences.

This is a night of remembrance. The bodies gather. It becomes difficult to write.

The bodies of the dead accumulate, become statistics. What are their names? Who will remember their faces? Who will mourn them for forty days and forty nights? In the US, the talk shows still feature American survivors and the families of the dead. In the days following the attacks, newspapers carried a running strip of faces and names to personalize the uncountable dead. All over New York City, posters stared from walls with the faces of the missing and the

terror falling from a sky now grown foreign to its people. The trade embargo has killed millions of children by the simple gesture of denying the sick medicines that might heal them. Collateral damage? Madeleine Albright has shrugged her shoulders. All the dead children are made to wear the mask of their putative father Saddam. This is how an entire country is given over to its leader. This is how the patriarchal family of the nation is reinscribed by the

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Nazis technology of murder. But there are other, simpler ways to "purify" the world for those who would like to rule over it. Tonight, eighteen days lead us to Christmas and the orgy of consumption that it entails for the wealthy Christians in the world. Tonight is the twenty-first night of the Ramadhan fasts that teach Muslims to empathize with the hungry and the poor. But each day's fast is punctuated with the feasting of the night. Real starvation, like real yearning, is of a different kind. Unfed, it leads to myriad forms of death.

There are many ways to kill a people. In Iraq, bombs have rained since 1990. Eleven years of

your hands. No terrifying glance into the faces of the dying.

It is simple, this gesture of lowering your eyes to focus on a screen. Every day, hundreds of poor Americans, undocumented workers and those without proper addresses are turned away from US hospitals to die in silence and obscurity. Every day, we in democratic North America walk over the sleeping bodies of the homeless on our way to earn our pay cheques. Every day, we gratefully purchase goods at cheap prices produced in places which treat factories like labour camps. Every day, we murmur pious platitudes about the suffering of native com-

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The bodies of the dead accumulate, become statistics. What are their names? Who will remember their faces? Who will mourn them for forty days and forty nights? In the us, the talk shows still feature American survivors and the families of the dead. In the days following the attacks, newspapers carried a running strip of faces and names to personalize the uncountable dead. All over New York City, posters stared from walls with the faces of the missing and the dead. But in Afghanistan, the dead have no names and no faces. Instead, one face, the strangely gentle face of a Yemeni man from Saudi Arabia has become America's strategic sign for an entire country. In pursuit of this face, wanted dead or alive, bombs have fallen from the sky for sixty-two nights and murdered thousands who bear no resemblance to the desired one. Today, pamphlets fall from the sky offering \$25 million for a body to match that face. A whole country has been bombed to annihilate the terror written over that face.

The dead in Afghanistan are not even allowed to become statistics. They are invisible, given over to their rulers by the obscenity of such words as "collateral damage." Worse, the dead are disappeared. Given over to the unmarked mass graves of those the world can choose not to mourn. On the horizon, a number given by UN Aid agencies hovers as a terrible warning. This winter, seven million may die for lack of food and shelter.

There are many ways to kill a people. Since 1945, the world has been obsessed with the Nazi's technology of murder. But there are other, simpler ways to "purify" the world for those who would like to rule over it. Tonight, eighteen days lead us to Christmas and the orgy of consumption that it entails for the wealthy Christians in the world. Tonight is the twenty-first night of the Ramadhan fasts that teach Muslims to empathize with the hungry and the poor. But each day's fast is punctuated with the feasting of the night. Real starvation, like real yearning, is of a different kind. Unfed, it leads to myriad forms of death.

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There are many ways to kill a people. The old battlefields of war are shrinking. Now cities are targeted from the air and the bodies of citizens evaporated in the phallic rush of hitting an on-screen target. On "Oprah," a woman serving on USS Carl Vinson smiles at the camera and says: "September 11 solidified the desire to serve my country and go kick some butt." She navigates the planes that drop the bombs. But flying above a place, staring at a computerized screen, can leave you unscathed, utterly ignorant of the devastation you have wreaked. No blood on your hands. No terrifying glance into the faces of the dying.

It is simple, this gesture of lowering your eyes to focus on a screen. Every day, hundreds of poor Americans, undocumented workers and those without proper addresses are turned away from US hospitals to die in silence and obscurity. Every day, we in democratic North America walk over the sleeping bodies of the homeless on our way to earn our pay cheques. Every day, we gratefully purchase goods at cheap prices produced in places which treat factories like labour camps. Every day, we murmur pious platitudes about the suffering of native com-



Detail of *A Place for Rose*, Bernice Lutfie Sorge (in collaboration with Julien Sorge, Geoffrey and Gloria Sorge), 2000-01, mural work with sound: intaglio and silkscreen printing on vellum, California redwood frame, recorded narration audio. Courtesy: Canadian Museum of Civilization.

munities, the rash of young suicides, the suffering swallowed in alcohol. President Bush informs us that he is out to protect "our way of life." This is what it means to live our way of life. It is impossible to live it unless you conscientiously practice a peculiar form of myopia and blur your vision at the borders.

In Palestine today, one needs to go through checkpoints to go from one Palestinian town to another. The border guards have become masters of the techniques of delay and intimidation. Hundreds of stories circulate about women forced to give birth in the taxis taking them to hospital, of the sick dying as they wait in the long line-ups at checkpoints. These are the simple deaths that do not bring out international cameras and outraged reporters. Strangely, not so long ago, the Prophets of globalization were speaking of open borders and dissolving states. Today, guns patrol Canada's border with the US, and thousands of people are being arrested for lack of proper papers.

A curious effect of September 11 has been the clarity with which the unspoken assumptions of the powerful are now manifest. Meanwhile, the bodies of the dispossessed drift over oceans in the fetid containers of ships, suffocate in the trunks of cars, get caged in the detention camps of Australia and the secret jails of the US and Canada. These bodies flee, escaping terror, poverty, the kinds of fears unimaginable to the scornful officials at the border gates. *Prove your identity, they ask. Give me a reason for your arrival here.* At the same time, over there, men and women in expensive suits are signing multi-million dollar deals, pipelines are being planned, resources are being extracted and factories are churning out goods labelled for the West. These men and women travel differently. For them, borders are porous, mobility is swift and the world grows more and more into a habitat for their tastes and their desires. Some would say there is a terrible hubris involved in making the world to become a mirror for your longing. The refugee whose motion is arrested at the border is allowed no mirror. The border guard stares down at a piece of paper and continu-

ally repeats: *Who are you? I do not believe you. Prove to me the truthfulness of your name.*

Reaching the border is in itself an achievement, despite the humiliations imposed by the guardians of frontiers. As millions of Afghans disperse into the valleys to escape the US bombing and the Taliban's retaliations, stories come to be told of how entire villages contribute to the safe passage of one sick man, and how highway bandits steal his money leaving the sick man and his friends destitute and in debt as they arrive to face the obstacles of the border. In Toronto, young Asian women can speak of similar debts incurred to the men who smuggled them into Canada, who now use their bodies to earn back their freedom. In Afghanistan, twenty years of war has meant unspeakable stories of parents selling their young daughters to the men who would smuggle their families across borders for a price. Such families need to forget their daughters to survive their escape. Who will remember these daughters?

In the name of the daughters, Mulla Omar took power. The story goes that two young girls were kidnapped and raped by members of the Northern Alliance then in power. Mulla Omar and his men rescued the girls and massacred their rapists. It was to keep women safe, it is said, that the Taliban, on gaining power, enforced the Burqa and the enclosure of women within the family house. The borders of inside and outside had to be zealously patrolled in the name of security, in the name of property. Women who transgressed this boundary, not surprisingly, threatened the security of the state and struck terror in the hearts of the fundamentalists. They needed to be punished, detained, controlled before they contaminated the hardwon purity of the Emirate.

In Canada, Bill C-36 works in much the same way. Except this time, the subjects of such obsessive surveillance are those who look Arab, who bear Muslim names, those whose citizenship might be suspect. Like women under patriarchy who need to uphold the values of male supremacy because of their dependence on men, dark-skinned immigrants in Canada have

had to vow the purity of their faith in Canada and pledge loudly to become fundamentalist Canadians in order to escape being branded treasonous. The ones who have spoken out, Sunera Thobani among them, have immediately been marked as "poisonous," ungrateful, the not-quite-Canadians they have always been suspected of being.

These are strange times to be among those who are accused of being not-quite-Canadian and not-quite-Muslim. It is a strange time to want to weep for the daughters but not speak in their name. In the US, images of women in Kabul pulling up their burqa to show their faces and men shaving their beards, are used to symbolize the "civilizing" force of the US's "liberating" war on the Afghan people. Here, the burnings of mosques and temples, and ongoing attacks on people perceived to be Muslim has driven the Muslim community to organize a united front and to participate politically to protect their rights. It is strange, in this climate, to want to criticize one's own people. It feels unseemly. The way anti-war voices may seem unseemly to Canadian patriots. It opens one to accusations of betrayal, of being among those who are too "Westernized," who have crossed over to the other side. If I speak critically of the Iranian government's intention to execute a noted filmmaker, I am asked to keep quiet. *This is not the time.* If I talk about the injustice of Shari'a laws on evidence and inheritance, I am reminded of the separate spheres of men and women. Worse, if I dare argue for the right of women to the erotic powers of their bodies, I am accused of obscenity and depravity and declared an apostate, to be denounced within the community of Muslims.

Not long ago, I wrote an article critical of the drive in Muslim communities to build private Islamic schools in Ontario. Ingrained sexism and rising homophobia are at the heart of such separatist desires, I argued. But the Canadian education system's ingrained racism and Eurocentric curriculum are equally at fault in creating such alienation and fear among Muslim immigrants. The Canadian state continues to fail its minorities. The West's desire to see the world in its own image found its first

expression in the colonial enterprise. People in Canada and the rest of the world have borne witness to these violent experiments in territorial expansion, nation-building and the containment, if not annihilation, of other cultures.

If Islamism in the Middle East and elsewhere can be read as a response to such disregard for other peoples and cultures, it is not surprising that it has found ground here in Canada to counter the racist discourses of the state. Like other nationalisms, including Chicano, Black, Quebecois or Native nationalisms, Islamism wants to claim women as the sign of their realized identities. Errant women, women who cross borders, contaminated women, all remain troublesome. At each border point, we are asked to produce proof of our identities, marks of our allegiances, evidence of our purity.

In the refugee camps that populate the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan, women weave rugs to make a living. After the Soviet invasion, the patterns changed. One rug shows helicopters invading the sky over an inverted map of Afghanistan. A bomb with a hammer and sickle falls over it while tanks and jet planes hover to the side. On the rug's border is the repeated imagery of "Aqrab" the scorpion, symbol of darkness, and the broken rays of the sun rising, promising life. These days I read reports of how infected wool is making these weavers sick. As in many parts of the world, children are forced to weave on account of their small and nimble fingers. The rug continues to tell its story despite the suffering of its maker. Who knows what images will emerge now as the US closes its chapter on Afghanistan and prepares to wage war on Iraq now. Winter is still coming over the mountains. People are starting to flee their new masters and the refugee camps can barely hold all those in need of food or shelter.

The poet Rumi, born in what is now Afghanistan, wrote:

Silence, for the mirror is rusting over;
when I blew upon it, it protested against me.

Nuzhat Abbas is a writer currently based in Toronto. She teaches literature at Ryerson University.

All In A Day, Oct 13th, 2001

Early morning:

The wind roars
Truly in the Prairies
So it did this autumn morning;

Little dogs got only half their walk.

Midmorning:

At the framing shop Gamal helped chose a frame
for an etching I executed twenty years ago
of my grandmother and me.

We drove to Zenari's, browsed through the Globe and Mail, ate quiche and had tea.

Mid day:

The cold, a windy walk,
Wearing neither hat, nor scarf
Three blocks east, one block north
We clutched the collars of our coats

The Prairie wind roared from Zenari's on 101st, to City Hall.

A crowd already assembled
a good size, someone marveled, for Edmonton
Newspaper photographers, TV cameramen
lined up placard holders for the perfect shot
A reporter from Global planted his microphone
at the face of a peace-begging woman:

If not bombing then *just what should they be doing?* he asked.

150 strong,
a good crowd
for Edmonton.
To the marshal beat
The single drummer
No more war
No more hate
Whistles, a flute, shuffled feet
We marched along Japer and declared
Who decides? We decide!
People must decide their fate

Patrons in shops turned out to see
Out of Nato. Out of Norad.
No more war
No more hate
Car horns cheered us on
People must decide their fate
Against the roaring autumn wind
banners twisted and turned
and then came down
Justice Not Revenge
Who decides? We decide!
Out of Nato. Out of Norad.
Voices hoarse, we clutched our collars against the roaring wind
No more war
No more hate
People must decide their fate
Heel spurs rammed against skin
The autumn Prairie wind bored tunnels through our ears
But we would bear it all when we remembered why:

No more war.
No more hate.

Mid Afternoon:

At the Legislature the Prairie wind longed
to gobble his voice so Gamal whispered into the microphone:
Last night I awoke, I awoke at three am
Last night I awoke at three am and listened in the dark

I listened and I heard. I heard bombs falling
Last night I listened in the dark, and heard the people screaming
Last night I listened and I heard, bombs falling, people screaming and running

We must learn to listen, he whispered,
beyond the white noise of the tv beyond the silent rainy images of that little box
We must learn to listen
and we *will* hear

A man from Iran shouted into the microphone
Because the wind tried, the wind tries to sweep his voice away
I was born in Iran I was born a Moslem and I hate Islam,
I hate Islam I hate Christianity I hate Judaism I hate Capitalism I hate all religion
Religion and capitalism are the left hand and right hand of oppression
I was born in Iran but I am not Iranian not Moslem I live in Canada but am not Canadian I do not like borders
I hate borders
Borders, borders and religion and capitalism are the pillars of racism

Gamal and I
took the LRT back to the car
via Holt Renfrew
where I bought a scarf and a faux fox
fur-lined hat.
In the rearview mirror I saw it
looked remarkably a lot
like those worn by men in Afghanistan

Evening:

Simone, passing this way, decided to drop in
She gave me a massage
and a reflexology treatment
She wrapped a shawl
of microwave-heated flaxseeds
around my shoulders

Night time:

Turning the lights off, I lay still in my bed, eyes open to the dark.

I listened.
I listened.

I listened.
And I heard.

I heard the bombs fall.
I heard someone screaming.

I am hearing bombs falling and people screaming.

Shani Mootoo

of Arabs, Museums and Civilizations

by Rawi Hage

A few years ago, the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull decided to organize an exhibition reflecting the current state of Arab-Canadian art in Canada. Aida Kaouk, a Syrian born PhD in sociology was given a budget to locate, choose and recruit artwork and artists for the show. The hunt started in 1996 and was completed in 1999.

I was one of the chosen artists. My work was accepted and later on I was commissioned to photograph thirteen of the twenty-six participating artists. I flew across Canada to meet them. The curator of the exhibition, Aida, a short bouncy lady whose smile comes suddenly and whose laugh hovers for some time after a joke has been delivered, is a careful, intelligent and calm woman. She appears to make no decision in haste; her nature reflects the nature of the museum; careful, polite and never hasty.



Québec, la cinquième saison (Quebec City, the Fifth Season), Joseph Moukhtar, 1996, oil on canvas. Courtesy: Canadian Museum of Civilization.

What was Aida looking for in an artist's work, you ask me? She wanted to know the artist as a person, an experience, a migrant, a messenger, a storyteller and a comedian. Far from the post-modern, jargon-filled elitism of the contemporary art scene, Aida was looking for the authentic, the humble, the sentimental.

Ask me, I know all about it. I traveled from British Columbia to Halifax and met thirteen of these artists. I entered their homes, drank their water and their wine and tasted their food. I met Aladdin, an antique restorer and collector, who drew me calligraphy of my name as a gift before I left. I met Joseph Moukhtar, whose son is a policeman and whose basement has a corner filled with paint and canvases. Joseph is a Syrian-born man of Armenian origin in his sixties who draws scenes that look to be somewhere between Aleppo and Paris. I met Hadjira, whose family surrounded me at a large gathering where I was offered Algerian Berber food. I met Adel, whose long life of exile and wandering is similar to mine, and Jamilie Hassan who offered me coffee and sweets while we talked about our voyages. I can go on...

What is the commonality between all these artists who come from different cultural and religious backgrounds from within the Arab world? If you ask me, it is those little folkloric objects from the east that you find hanging somewhere over the stove or in the living room of every Arab artist's home. Stories, yes. Stories of leaving and traveling and leaving again. Stories of east and west, hospitality and food.

On September 11 "the world changed," at least in the eyes of the west. The exhibition, which was

to open on October 18, was abruptly postponed. This time in uncharacteristic haste, without consulting the artists, the decision to postpone the exhibition was taken. The explanation for this decision was (or so is the official position) that after September 11 the exhibition has to be put in "context," which, of course, includes an explanation about the Arab world, maps, literature...

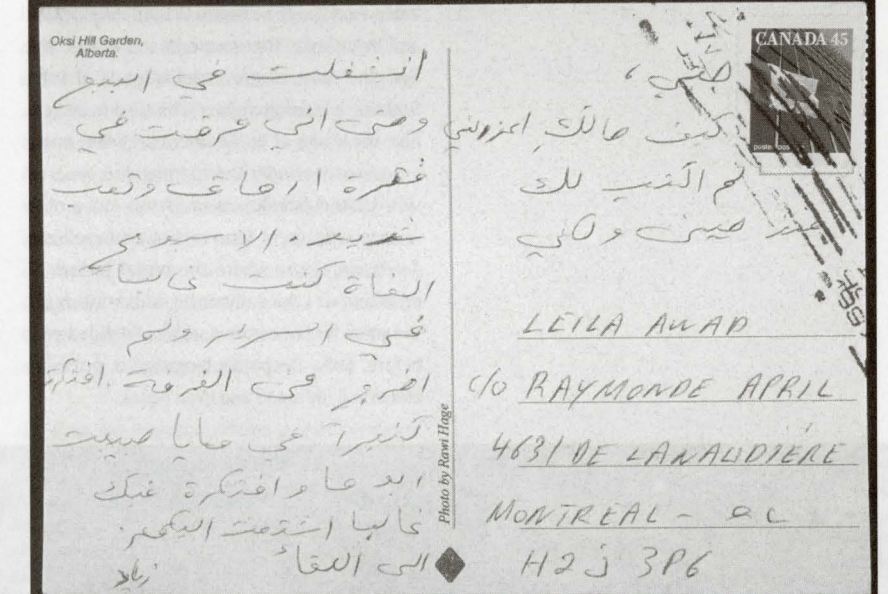
I called Jayce Salloum, another participating artist and he proposed that we write a letter to the press. I made the first draft that same night. I sent it to Jayce and to Laura Marks (a writer and art critic), some adjustments were made, and we posted the letter on e-groups. Julian Samuel posted it on the post-colonial list and Cathy Busby posted it on the art list e-flux.

The news took off. It seemed as if everyone on those lists wrote to the museum. There was a tidal wave of protests and letters. The museum was overwhelmed.

Later the news media caught on. The NDP took the issue under its wing; I believe it was the MP Svend Robinson who raised the issue to Alexa McDonough, the party leader. Then it was discussed on the floor of Parliament and the Prime Minister of Canada agreed with the leader of the opposition party and asked that the show be reinstalled on the original date. Applause. I was told everyone stood up in the House of Commons and cheered in solidarity. My mother, who was watching through the kitchen door while cutting onion for her tabbouli, was in tears.

A flood of journalists caught my name and called me from all over. I was interviewed by French, English and Arabic newspapers. TV crews and eager reporters, inquisitive writers, detectives and neighbors all wanted me to talk. I gave many interviews, was led into narrow hallways in large broadcasting corporations and was offered coffee while cameras pointed at me and wires dangled from my ear.

I never once saw myself on TV. I do not own one. I never saw the faces that interviewed me; all was done by videoconference or over the phone. I was always conscious not to frown when I spoke (something we Middle Easterners are



Detail of Care of Raymonde, Rawi Hage, 1997, gelatin silver prints, paperboard, ink, postage stamps. Courtesy: Canadian Museum of Civilization.

known for, which is always misinterpreted in the west as sign of aggression and anger). I tried to be as Victorian as I could; I kept reminding myself: straight face, straight face. Still, the next day, the French lady next door told me that I looked angry; Jayce called it passionate.

I was asked the same question with few variations. The media took our side, they all lined up with the Prime Minister's position. I used all the just words that I could think of: art as a dialogue, bridges between communities, racism, we are not all terrorists, reactionary decision, punitive measures, understanding, art, art and art, and loovee baby, it is all about love.

Toward the end of the interviews though, the tone of the questions changed. Now the media were actually interested in knowing about my work. Is it political, controversial, the voices from the little microphone sponge in my ear kept repeating. Once I described my work, they lost interest; they were looking for the forbidden, the dangerous work, the political, the incorrect, the offensive, the hate speech, the one-sided, et cetera.

Finally they found what they were looking for.

Video work on the Khiyam Prison, Palestinians and Yugoslavia. These were Jayce's videos. The first and most controversial video is of Soha Bechara, a freedom fighter who tried to assassinate the leader of the Southern Lebanese Army, a proxy army under the funding and supervision of the Israeli. *Uncut* is the story of a woman who spent ten years in an Israeli-run detention centre where the brutal torture of prisoners was the daily norm. I had translated the video for Jayce from Arabic to English a year before. Soha Bechara's language is political, emotional, intimate and even poetic.

The second video relates stories told by older Palestinian men and woman of their experiences in exile and under the occupation. The third video, photographed in Eastern Europe, is a series of interviews steeped in postmodern aesthetics and postcolonial language.

Arab and Islamic organizations caught onto what was at issue and raised their voices. In my opinion, though, the credit should be given to the art community first and foremost.

On October 18, I walked from the hotel across from the museum to the exhibition opening. Looking down, I saw a vast crowd of more than 3,000 people. The seats were full, all facing a stage with a few chairs and a circle of sand, promising some exotic, mysterious performance act from the east.

The lineup at the bar was the largest I have ever seen at any Arabic event. I was dying for a drink, red wine in a transparent glass please. I paid for it and counted my change, wondering if I would have enough to buy food the next day, the hotel breakfast was not included



Everything and nothing (from the ongoing project untitled), Jayce Salloum, 2001, video installation. Courtesy: Canadian Museum of Civilization.

(apparently the museum is counting their pennies now as well).

A few of the artists sat down in the first row, I stayed with Jayce and Laura in the back watching the event from an angle. Aida gave her speech and then the museum president, Mr. Rabinovitch, who I believe was instrumental in the decision to postpone the show, gave a non-apologetic, detached speech, with not one inch of a step toward reconciliation with the community. A large part of his speech was about his own experience as an immigrant. With a glass of red wine in my hand turning empty, I could not help but feel that my unique immigrant/exile experience was being emptied, made banal.

Then Sheila Copps, the minister of culture, gave her speech to the Arabic community, alternating the Arabic *salaam* with a Hebrew *shalom*. Maybe she too had waited at the bar and paid five dollars for a drink. Who knows, maybe it was just one more incidence of the "balanced" coverage that is the norm in our society. No surprise, protest or objection came from the audience. We Arabs know all about that; anything that has to be said about our experience has to be automatically balanced by an apologetic *shalom* or by a two-minute CNN expert. Or maybe it was a desperate act to compensate for Jayce's dissent. Who knows?

Now a dancer was fretting her Middle Eastern body in the middle of the sand circle. I was hoping for an Inca priest to appear and perform some human sacrifice ritual. We all need a scapegoat now more than ever.

I was on my second glass of red wine and I was now willing to offer myself for my community's sins.

Okay, so the show is on. People line up, pass through the exhibition, meet the paintings and the painters, the ceramics, the photos and the videographers.

Okay, there is some disappointment in the faces of the audience. Questions like, "where are the tents?", "where is that rhythmic dangerous music that we are so used to hearing?", "why is

it so cold in here?" and "which way is the desert?" abound.

Okay, so I am exaggerating. All people were looking for was the bathroom. I am frantically looking for Mr. Rabinovitch, to congratulate him on his sincere speech, but he is nowhere to be seen. He must be mad at me and especially at Jayce, or maybe he is simply lining up again at the bar. Laura is looking for him too, she wants to sit on his lap.

More sets of cameras are pointed at me. I am being asked if I am upset and about how I feel now. Tippy, I say. "Can you explain your work for us?" It is about displacement, non-belonging, migration and exile... okay, so you guys have heard that before. Everyone is an immigrant here, even the president of this large museum. Why am I whining and being melodramatic about my nomad life? Look, if two Rabinovitch immigrant brothers can become successful — one is the president of the largest museum in Canada, and the other is the president of CBC — so can I, no? I better shut up now.

Later on, the museum offered us a buffet down in the cafeteria, Mr. Rabinovitch was still nowhere to be found.

Buffet, all you can eat. Excellent! One less meal to worry about for a starving artist. The red wine is free. All you can drink. Excellent! An artist party is brewing. Over dinner, I hear that Soha Bechara is married and is finishing her studies in international law at the Sorbonne.

Later that evening, I strolled along the Ottawa River. Eclectic visions and enigmatic voices told me that that Sheila Copps was on some airplane somewhere above the prairies preparing to deliver a speech to the Ukrainian community. The speech, I was told by that soft nasal voice, was to be ended with a Russian salute. Balance, it is all about balance. On my way back, I slipped on the edge of the river but did not fall in.

Rawi Hage is a visual artist and a writer. His visual work has been exhibited in Canada, Paris, New York, Columbia and the Middle-East. His writing has appeared in many literary journals and reviews.



Tariq Ali addresses marchers at Toronto Mobilisation for Global Justice March for Peace held 29 September 2001. Photo: Lucas Mulder

The Wars:

Tariq Ali on building anti-war movements, debating the “civilization mongers” and narrating the history of Islam

Interview by Cynthia Wright



Tariq Ali, born in 1943 in Lahore and long resident in London, is an internationally known writer, editor (with *New Left Review* and Verso Books) and filmmaker. He first rose to prominence — and was banned from several countries — for his work in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. His account of this period, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties*, is a classic. He has written and edited over a dozen books on politics, including the important collection, *Masters of the Universe? NATO's Balkan Crusade* (Verso, 2000), and published five novels. His first, *Redemption*, is an uproarious satire of political, sexual and gender trouble on the Trotskyist left. More recently, he has published three novels of an “Islam Quintet.” Ali has co-written a number of plays with Howard Brenton and produced numerous TV and film scripts, including Derek Jarman’s *Wittgenstein*.

Since September 11, Ali’s incisive commentaries on the crisis (see <http://www.zmag.org>) and sharp public interventions in Europe and North America have been vital for framing debate and building anti-war communities. His account of his arrest in Germany (and release

shortly after) zipped through e-mail networks all over the world. In demand because he is a brilliant, funny and knowledgeable speaker, Ali appeared in Toronto in September and was invited back in November. I interviewed him on his second visit, two days after his speech at an anti-war event in the city’s Convocation Hall, and the day after his debate with conservative American journalist Charles Krauthammer on CBC’s *counterSpin*.

Cynthia Wright: I wanted to start with your reflections on building anti-war movements, past and present, with 1971. That year you did a tour of Canada on an anti-Vietnam war platform. I have been interviewing one of your old comrades, Phil Courneyeur, and he mentioned that he had done this tour with you. The weather was a disaster and you were on either side of some kind of a faction fight that we didn’t get into the details of...[laughing]

Tariq Ali: I came from a tradition of the European new left and, in Europe, sections of the new left had come together with European Trotskyists, which were very different from the North American variety. The people I was very close to were Ernest Mandel in Belgium, Alain Krivine and Daniel Bensaid in France, and it was just a totally joyous experience in the late '60s and '70s. The first time I encountered the North American left, I’d met some of their leaders at meetings in Europe, and they always seemed slightly weird to me.

When I came to Canada it was my first North American tour because I was banned from the States. I had only visited the States once, in 1969, after a special State Department waiver and that was three days in Minneapolis, which didn’t give me a real picture. The real shock to me was to discover these — some of them were very nice — but totally ossified people. There was no meeting of minds,

interview



Tariq Ali addresses marchers at Toronto Mobilisation for Global Justice March for Peace held 29 September 2001. Photo: Lucas Mulder

by and large. There were already divisions between the European and the North American movements. So I think they were very careful I didn't establish contact with independent leftists on this tour. I was constantly accompanied by someone or other. There was an air controller strike when I was in Winnipeg, so we had to travel through the Rockies to get to Vancouver. The journey actually was fairly stunning, a real treat. I've never forgotten that journey.

There were lots of good people I met on that tour and I got to know Canada and the Canadian left somewhat, albeit in slightly awkward circumstances. The meetings, now that I look back, were mainly on a mixture of topics. Some were on Vietnam, some were on the civil war in Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh. There were groups of nutty Maoists who defended the Pakistani military because Chairman Mao was defending the military in Pakistan. They would come and try and disrupt the odd meeting. But that was the atmosphere at the time. And if I remember correctly, they were so nervous, the Canadian fossils, that I was going to establish contact with a group of dissidents in their organization who were based in the Maritimes. But they couldn't refuse the trip. Then the weather was so bad that no planes were landing, so they were just thrilled that this contact hadn't been established [laughing]. But it was established through letter writing. So that was my first visit to Canada and it was in the winter and it was very cold and the snow was everywhere, so I got a shock on every level.

CW: I ask about anti-Vietnam war organizing because, at the public meeting at Convocation Hall, you commented that the Western imaginary is always refighting the Second World War. This also arose very clearly in your televised debate with Charles Krauthammer who basically wanted to argue that your position against the war on Afghanistan represents appeasement and who

wanted to re-debate every decision taken by the US during the Second World War. The cliché is that the left rebuilds anti-war movements based on the experience, or the imagined experience, of Vietnam. To what extent do you think that's true? Is it useful given the types of wars we're dealing with now?

TA: I agree very much with the way you're posing the question because I encounter this all over Europe now when I speak. My generation — I don't — constantly harks back to that as a seminal experience of the most amazing anti-war movement ever. Which it was, especially in the sense that that movement played a very big part in the United States. I still tell people who say "Well, look, you know, they may be terrorists, but they hit the Pentagon and that was great." I say "Hang on. It may have given you a temporary moment of joy, but ask yourself this. Which would frighten the generals in the Pentagon more: some crazies hurling a bomb or crashing a plane, or 50,000 people outside the Pentagon, half of them G.I.s wearing G.I. uniforms, on their crutches, wearing their medals from the Vietnam war and chanting "hey, hey, Ho Chi Minh, the N[ational] L[iberation] F[ront] is going to win?" That is what traumatized the American military and political establishment, that they had lost ideological control of a large chunk of their own population, including the army. That was absolutely decisive. So that anti-war movement was very special. What made it that was the fact that the left, the new left, liberals, halfway decent people all over the world really wanted, deep down, and some not so deep down, the Vietnamese to win. There was a side we were backing in that war.

That condition hasn't arisen again in that way. Since the collapse of Communism in 1989–90, we have a totally new situation in the world. We have a uni-power, the United States of America, which

controls power, which is very hegemonic and which more or less uses international institutions as it pleases to do what it pleases. Sometimes it encounters some resistance, sometimes not, from other powers. For me, and I talk for myself now, but also for others, it is impossible to support the people the United States is fighting against, to give them political credibility and support. Some people do it and I think that's wrong and weakens us, seriously. You can still oppose these wars without supporting the other side. But that already makes it very different from the Vietnam war. The analogy I give is the First World War. When social democracy caved in, an independent left was born precisely out of saying we don't support either side in this war. It is a war between people who are unsupportable. The left got spoiled, in reality, in the Vietnam war — there was a side we could support. Or the war in Nicaragua, we supported the Sandinistas against the Contras. Or the attempts to topple Castro, we supported him against the Cuban crazies based in Miami. But in these particular wars of intervention that the United States has embarked on, backed by the European countries, it's impossible for me to say that I want the Taliban to win. Because it's a regime that I've been opposing for so long, that suddenly because the Americans are bombing them, to say that that somehow transforms the character of this regime is unacceptable to me. This is what I was trying to explain to Krauthammer, who didn't bother to deny it. These are regimes of people created by the United States and backed by them. They then get out of control or don't do as the United States wants them to do and then they have to be toppled.

We've therefore got to get away from the Vietnam syndrome, if you like, in building the new anti-war movement. Most of the people coming on these demonstrations are also new. They're coming not because they remember Vietnam, not at all, they're coming because they don't like the way a big power is behaving to smaller

countries. Lots of young people who come out are kids I've seen at the anti-globalization demos or they're just new people who don't like it. So I think one has to be honest with them, and say, "look, sometimes there are no easy solutions. We live in a very complex world, but these are the reasons we're taking up this position."

CW: You have said that the opposition to the war in Afghanistan is greater than it was to both the Gulf War and to Kosovo. Why do you think that's the case?

TA: The Gulf War was essentially a very, very crude attempt by the US to assert its power in a region where the leader of a country they had put into power to destroy the left had gone out of control. The big question I asked myself at that time was: Saddam Hussein is a very cautious guy, why would he do something that he knows the United States would oppose, when all the time he's been in power, he's never done anything without the approval of the United States in advance? The answer to that is he genuinely believed he had their approval. If you look at the transcripts of the conversation between him and April Glaspie, who was the US Ambassador to Iraq, he told her that the Kuwaitis are provoking us and we will have to teach them a lesson. Her reply to that, and I'm giving a rough reply, because I don't have it in front of me, was "the United States understands and supports your position on Kuwait." Which that regime took as the green light to do what they did. They were wrong, and poor old April Glaspie has suffered ever since as a result, her career has just sort of nose-dived. But I think he thought that the United States would approve that, since they'd approved the war against Iran. Once he realized that the US was opposed to it, then he dug his heels in and developed his so-called anti-imperialist rhetoric, threatening Saudi Arabia, and became like many other people the United States had backed and



Marchers move through Queen's Park enroute to a rally outside of the US Embassy, Toronto Mobilisation for Global Justice March for Peace, 29 September 2001. Photo: Lucas Mulder

created, became unpleasant to them. Bush Senior, by that time, decided that this was quite a good way to go in and reassert US power. And I think there was a lot of opposition to it. I remember Tony Harrison, an English poet, writing a very, very powerful poem ["A Cold Coming"] about the image which was flashed on all the screens and in the papers of that burnt charred skeleton of a tank driver. That war was the last time I think the left was more or less united, but the level of popular mobilization wasn't so big.

The Kosovan war was very different. Lots of well-meaning people generally believed that the Albanians in Kosovo had had a hard deal from Milosevic, which was true. The number of liberals and people on the left I heard saying, "Well, you know, Tariq, this time they really are going to do something good, so we can't oppose it." It was a war that was going to do good and save the Kosovans. And then they were wrong in the sense that it was an unnecessary war, as the later documents revealed. Milosevic had been prepared to do a deal at Rambouillet. Madeleine Albright upped the stakes every single time. And what broke off negotiations was when she demanded for NATO troops the right to enter Yugoslavia at will. And he said "No, you can come to Kosovo, but you can't cross the border without our permission." It was a really well thought out provocation, and now it's commonly accepted that the Americans basically wanted that war to finish up the business in the Balkans that they thought was unfinished. As for helping people, they put into power in Kosovo a UN protectorate but the K[osovo] L[iberation] A[rmy], everyone acknowledges, are a bunch of pretty unruly and unpleasant people. The one Albanian leader, Ibrahim Rugova, who was a pacifist, and who would still probably win popular support, was sidelined and has been for some time. It's been incredibly unpleasant and two or three big documentaries on British television made that very clear.

In the case of Afghanistan, I think the gut reaction is it is a war of revenge. Krauthammer yesterday on *counterSpin* said it is. The American senior politicians would never admit to that, but that's what it is. And I think people all over the world perceive it as such. That's why the response to the war on Afghanistan has been much bigger than to Kosovo or to the Gulf. I've spoken at meetings in many parts of Europe and certainly a lot in Britain, and it's an entirely new generation of people coming out. Very, very noticeable. That September meeting here [in Toronto], there were large numbers of young kids from the ethnic communities and Muslim kids and non-Muslim kids and young men and young women, wanting to know.

CW: Can you talk more about Britain, the nature of the anti-war movement there? Any anti-war movement arises in a particular pre-given social and political context. Do you want to say a couple of things first about the state of play before September 11?

TA: We've had a Labour government in power; this is its second term. In the first term, it did absolutely nothing that was different from the Tories. Or what it did was actually worse. In both tuition fees on students — making it more difficult for working-class kids to want to apply to universities — and also on the cultural level, totally commercializing everything, obsessed with pleasing the corporate sector, in fact re-branding the Labour Party as New Labour, as the party that is corporate-friendly, hostile to trade unionism, a total break with its past. Howard Brenton and I wrote a play, *Ugly Rumours*, which was a savage satire on New Labour and it had very good audiences and the critics hated it. Even the liberal critics hated it because they felt it was too soon. "These guys aren't giving Blair a chance." Now, six, seven years later, lots of people say, "God, there's so many echoes of that play you wrote in what's been

happening, and why was it attacked so?" In the second term, the big, big decline in the vote indicated that people were just completely fed up. Even the people who voted did so out of traditional habits and loyalties, not expecting very much. Blair personally, while he's popular with a certain section of the population, lots of Labour Party people and Labour supporters and Labour Members of Parliament absolutely loathe him. It's fear, hatred and loathing, all combined, so they can't do anything about it. That makes them even more filled with bitterness. On the level of politics, though, there's no other party. There's the far left groups, there's the anti-globalization movement, but there's nothing that can attract lots of people, mainstream social democrats or left social democrats. This was the overall situation in which September 11 took place.

Blair's utterly crazed hawkishness did even take some of his own supporters by surprise. They've had right-wing leaders before, but he's the first leader the Labour Party's had who actually loathes his own party. And he feels he's won them the election so he rides roughshod over them. Blair is even tougher than Bush and his acolytes in the press think, "God, isn't Tony really giving the world leadership, much, much, more so than Bush." The anti-war movement, one reason it's been quite strong in Britain, is because it's a way of showing how alienated they are from the current regime in Britain and how completely obscene it has been in some of the things it's been doing. Labour has now fought four wars, not a single resignation. It's a sign of how degenerate the party has become at the top, it'll accept everything and anything the United States decides on, it will back it loyally. If you ask a Labour minister "Is there any conceivable situation in which you would oppose the United States?" they can't reply. And you've got to understand that in Britain and in Europe today, in every single European cabinet, between one-third and half the members of these cabinets

were all members of the left, and far left and new left in the sixties and seventies.

CW: Aren't there three or four Labour MPs who have dissented in public pieces in the *Guardian*?

TA: Yeah, there are about ten Labour MPs, or less, maybe nine. But that's not very much when we remember the role the left used to play at the parliamentary level. And these people are quite isolated in Parliament.

CW: Who is joining the anti-war movement in Britain? Is it largely a lot of young people coming out of the anti-globalization movement?

TA: I think one shouldn't totally idealize the British anti-war movement. It's larger than anything in North America, it's not as large as the Italian one. It is mainly young people, school kids, university students, third-generation immigrants from Muslim communities. I remember kids from the Muslim communities whose parents and grandparents had warned them against me, coming to my meetings and afterward saying, "We agree with you, but you know, is it true that you're not a believer?" So I said, "No, I'm not a believer." And they said "Why aren't you a believer?" So it's good that the discussion is open. Lots of them wouldn't have spoken with someone like me before. And that's one reason I've decided to write this book I'm working on. It's a non-fiction book called *Clash of Fundamentalisms*, which Verso will publish in April. Just to negotiate with this new layer. Some won't agree with it, but even if they read part of it...

So these are the people who are coming out and forming what we call the British anti-war movement. We'll see how many people

come out on Sunday, whether they think the war's over or not. I'm not sure whether we'll get what we were expecting when it was just the bombing going on and the cities hadn't fallen.²

CW: Turning to some of the debates that have arisen in the anti-war movement here, you heard [professor and activist] Shahrzad Mojab speak very militantly on women and gender. The left anti-war movement has not addressed this at all, that was her argument. And how you combat racism and anti-Muslim sentiment. The liberal left all over North America has responded with "Understanding Islam" sessions. This has produced a very interesting proliferation of discourses about Islam and Muslim identities, but also debate and frustration from some women who have felt, for example when approached by the media, that they have to occupy the category of "Muslim woman." Space to make secular, progressive, democratic arguments hasn't been there.

TA: The nineties onward march of identity politics to the exclusion of almost everything else took place in various stages. Its last stage was that identities within multiculturalism came to be identified with different religious groupings. This meant that liberals, in particular, became totally uncritical of religion because they saw religion essentially as a question of identity for many immigrants in Europe or North America. So religion became the great untouchable. And I think we're paying the price for that. It's not just Islam, it's Hinduism, Judaism, Christian fundamentalism.

CW: There's a complete lack of serious discussion about Bush's Christian fundamentalism.

TA: Yeah. Now they're [liberals] feeling quite embarrassed. Because there are parts of Islam or Islamic fundamentalism that

they had not taken into account. Lots of the people they'd been cuddling up to in most of these countries, or some of them, are pretty hard-line people who used multiculturalism to establish bases, to get money from cities, etc. In speeches I've made in Britain, I've been very, very sharply critical of the Taliban. Like the Saudi regime today, it has an appalling position on the condition of women, on any dissent inside Islam. It's a very minority view even within Islam, but one has to attack it very strongly. As for this obsession to learn more about Islam, that can be a good thing. If it takes people out of their culture to just see what another culture is, what the history of the religion is, what its formation is, it's not a bad thing to do. Provided it's done with a critical spirit, and also to see how close Islam is, for instance, to Judaism.

CW: How has the British movement dealt with the immense amount of anti-Muslim racism in the media and elsewhere? Here's the problem we have here: some of the critique of women under the Taliban has been developed by a certain strand of liberal feminism that is on a rescue mission. It's been very hard for people who do serious work on women and Islam to get any space in a context in which mass-circulation women's magazines are taking a Hilary Clinton standpoint.

Then you have sections of the press saying Islam is the enemy and fundamentally is barbaric — the "clash of civilizations" thesis.³ You have the "clash within" discourse I call it because — after they got hammered for writing a lot of trash about who has the superior civilization — journalists who know absolutely nothing about Islam, who had hitherto spent their lives writing about the Liberal Party of Canada, are now writing columns about "Islam has to decide between its two poles of this and that." Like the stuff Rushdie's writing in the *Guardian*.⁴ Then you have attacks on peo-

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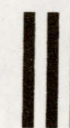
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ple, and burnings of mosques. How have people in Britain sorted out how to deal seriously with racist attacks and deal with them in ways that go beyond Islam 101 or discourses of tolerance?

TA: There are a lot of civil rights and anti-racist movements monitoring the situation very closely. An Edinburgh mosque was attacked by some idiots who threw a fire bomb and we all came to its defence like you would when anyone else is attacked, a synagogue, a mosque, you go and show solidarity. What is a problem is whether to make Islamophobia like racism, an offence. I'm not in favour of that. I really feel that a critique of religion has to be permitted, whether it's the Jewish, Christian or Muslim religion. Existing laws are perfectly adequate to defend whomever's been victimized. I don't think you need an additional law, which some Muslims have been arguing for. Some of the tabloids have been publishing grotesque stuff. This is where the liberals like Rushdie and the civilization-mongers, as I call them, get into a terrible twist. You can't talk about Islam as being monolithic in any way. These societies are very diverse and rich. Islamic fundamentalism is, in the bulk of the Muslim world, a tiny minority. The reason why fundamentalists have acquired so much prominence is because of the collapse of secular openings and the collapse of the left.

So you don't deal with it by saying "This is Islam." Because Islamic societies have experienced exactly the same trends and pressures as any other country throughout the twentieth century. The largest communist party in the world, outside the communist countries, was in Indonesia, a Muslim country. It was massacred by the generals who killed over a million people in 1965. The largest communist party in the Arab world was in Iraq, a party which Saddam Hussein systematically destroyed. I just get very annoyed when people talk about clashes of civilizations and Islam.

The last thing Rushdie did, a few weeks ago, was an interview he gave to some French magazine whose name I've forgotten, I think it's a mass cultural magazine, where he posed for the cover draped in the stars and stripes.

CW: Get away.

TA: I'm not joking. Let's not talk about him, it's not a useful subject. I'm too angry.

CW: I have to say something about him and we'll get off the topic. I read his *Guardian* piece alongside one in the same issue written by an Egyptian-American woman. It covered some of the same territory but she stressed what had happened in Egypt that led to the attack both on fundamentalists and also on the democratic openings. It was very different from his piece, which was totally abstract.

TA: Ahdaf Soueif [friend of TA] who's a novelist who wrote that piece knows Egypt very well, knows how various sections of the population are trying to resist Islamism.⁵ And the key thing is she's trying to explain something and she's very opposed to the war. Rushdie's for the war. That also determines how they write and what they write.

CW: Let's talk then about your novels and projects. I understand you recently did a theatre piece about Iraq.

TA: A group of New Yorkers took the decision — this is long before September 11 — to do an evening [19 November 2001] of plays called "Imagine: Iraq."⁶ They asked me, Harold Pinter, Trevor Griffith, Tony Kushner and Naomi Wallace to write ten-minute pieces. It's very difficult to do a ten-minute piece, as much as to do

a full-length play. I did a piece about Iraq, which I think they were at first a bit surprised by. I think they like it a lot, but it wasn't the take they were expecting from me. [It features] two women. A doctor who works in a surgery in Iraq and is just you know, in a total state, because of what she's witnessed, the deaths and she just can't do much about it, but she carries on. The other woman comes to see her and they're lovers. It's about two women who love each other and are lesbians in Baghdad City. The fact that they're lesbians is neither here nor there. It's totally natural for them. And you're not even meant to think about it, but I know you will, and that's fine, because that's the point I'm making. This is what life is like, for everyone. It's called *Tigris and Euphrates*. They're doing the first big public rehearsed reading and then they're going to travel with it and are prepared to take it to whoever invites them. It'll be a very riveting two hours, from what they were telling me.

CW: Do you want to talk about how and why you wrote the "Islam Quintet"?

TA: The first one [award-winning *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*], set in Spain, begins in Andalusia. The second one, *The Book of Saladin*, about the Crusades. And then Turkey, the Ottoman Empire. The fourth one is the twentieth century and, curiously enough, one of the characters was going to be an Islamic fundamentalist, but this has now become too banal. Not that this is the central character, but you can't ignore it, so I have to think of another way of doing that now. I thought I'd end it, and then one day I was reading some book and it suddenly hit me that even though I have to finish the twentieth century one this year...

CW: It really does range over the whole twentieth century?

TA: Absolutely. And seen through the eyes of a Muslim painter. The fifth one will be about something which is not talked about at all, which is the tenth century, in Sicily. Very few people know that for 200 years there were 150 mosques in Palermo. Arabs played a very big role in the formation of that culture and one of the greatest geographers of early Europe, ash-Sharif al-Idrissi, was a Sicilian Arab who first mapped Europe. I was reading a piece where this right-wing xenophobic Italian politician — Umberto Bossi from the Northern League, who's with the Berlusconi gang — referred to the Sicilians as Arabs. And then he then went on to say that Garibaldi didn't unite Italy, he divided Africa. So that gave me the idea of doing a novel set in Sicily in the tenth century. When I've finished that, the Islamic quintet will be complete, mapped out, and then I'll move on. But it's been a big, big project of my life now...

CW: Why did you want to do it? It's an immense amount of historical research for a start. How did you manage that? In one of the prefaces you note the lack of historical sources for imagining the women characters.

TA: Well, funnily enough, it grew out of the Gulf War. I heard some idiot on BBC television saying that the Arabs were a people without a culture; I just said, "This is too much and has got to be replied to." I then asked myself a question: why is it that of all the big universal religions, Islam is the only one that hasn't undergone a reformation? To answer that, you have to go to Spain. The interest was not religious, it was historical and it was to correct misapprehensions and ignorance. And I felt that if Islam had not been brutally exterminated from Europe, and ghettoized...

CW: The whole memory expelled from Europe.

TA: The whole memory expelled, it may well have undergone a reformation. How could it when it was constantly crushed from the fourteenth century onward by a consistent attempt by the Catholic Church? I began thinking and I did something I had never done before, which is reading [many] books on Islamic history. By hard-line Muslims, by liberal Muslims, by Orientalists, everyone, just to get the picture. I read for a year. Then I spent about six months in Spain. Thinking, travelling, smelling the soil, watching the sunsets, going to Cordoba to see the church constructed in the heart of the old mosque, imagining what life must have been like. At that time I was also doing documentaries for Channel 4, and one was on Islam in Spain, so we had an excuse to go around interviewing people. We were talking to poor peasants and farmers. And they suddenly started — they were so thrilled to talk about it — talking if it was all yesterday, and this wonderful woman said, "yes, it was there," pointing with her finger, "that's where they left." It was just eerie. And the guys said that all the best things that happened here were brought by them, the irrigation systems, the agriculture and this country's never been the same again. Quite amazing.

Then I reread Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and if you read it knowing that the key task is to look for echoes there, it's filled with echoes. Absolutely saturated. *Shadows* took a year and a half to set up and another nine months to write. That was the longest I'd taken. And likewise then on *The Book of Saladin*. It's a subject that has been written about a lot. I read all these biographies of Saladin [1137–93], pro-, anti-, I read Walter Scott to get the fiction read [*The Talisman*, 1825]. And then when you read Saladin had thirty-six sons and God knows how many, fifty-two or sixty children and you begin to ask, who are the women who produced his children? Where are they? They're nowhere present. That was a big challenge, to reconstruct their lives. And so at the heart of *The Book of Saladin*...

CW: ...is a kind of lesbian-feminist novel.

TA: That's what I've been told. There's a love affair between these two women. I was in Istanbul when the book came out there, and the Islamists in Turkey are quite mild and moderate and they're not at all aggressive. It's a packed meeting of the Istanbul book fair and one of the Islamists raised his hand and said "We like your books, but could you explain one thing?" I said, "Yes." "In *The Book of Saladin* you waste a lot of time describing..." I said, "The love affair between two women." He said "Yes, that's what I was coming to." I said, "Yes." He said "How do you know these things existed?" So I said, "Look, this is fiction, okay. This is not historical fact. The women are made up, their names are made up, they're fictional women," and I explained why. I said, "You try and think if you were writing a book, and you had two hundred women, at least, if not more, confined to their quarters, not in a bad way, I mean, they had lots of privileges, but basically they lived together in this large palace. And they were all dependent on one guy to supposedly pleasure them." And by this time, the women were just trying to control themselves.

CW: [laughs]

TA: I said, "One guy can't satisfy them all, so some of them had relationships with each other, others used eunuchs, it's just normal." He sat down, he didn't quarrel about it. No argument at all. But the key thing when you're writing historical novels is to make sure that the history that's in there is right. People get very irritated if you get the history wrong, so I'm very careful that the historical facts are as right as I can get them.

CW: When you were thinking through this quintet, you were, I

think, trying to explore themes beyond the “contributions of Islam” approach. That approach is important on one level, but it doesn’t get at the constitution of Europe, how Europe was created partly through the expelling of the memory of Islam. Those histories have to be understood together. The linked histories of Jews and Muslims is also I think something you were trying to get at.

TA: It is absolutely that which I’m trying to get at and I’m also trying, in these novels, to show the fundamentalists that they don’t know the history of their own religion. In Spain for instance, I don’t know if this is in the novel, but certainly all its echoes are there, Muslim women played quite an important role on different levels. Poetry, the arts, intervening. Some of the very funny erotic poetry is written by an upper-class Andalusian woman, Princess Wallada [bint al-Mustakfi. d. 1091/2]. She publicly mocks her lover who’s deserted her. It’s just an incredibly funny, universal attack that anyone could make on losing a lover. It’s jealous, but it’s vicious as well. Very sharp and vicious. You know, referring to his abilities to perform. She used to go and recite on the streets and distribute the poems. And the interesting thing about Spain is that because Islam, Judaism and Christianity were in such closeness to each other, they had to argue with each other all the time. These arguments produced a synthesis, certainly for the Jews and the Muslims and probably also for the Christians because there’s lots of very liberal-minded Christian scholars who also picked up a lot. That’s what was very exciting about that society and that also created a great deal of scepticism and doubt within the Islamic intellectuals of the period, which is reflected in that book [*Shadows*]. One of them, and this I found out subsequently, when I was reading for another book, Ibn Rushd, who is known [in the West] as Averroës [c. 1126–98]. . . .

CW: I’ve seen the feature film about him, *Destiny* [1997], yeah.

TA: By [Egyptian director] Youssef Chahine. He was the first, probably the first male thinker to raise the question of women. Just full stop. He raised it in Islam, he raised it by posing the question in the twelfth century, saying what can we say about a religion and a society which denies 50 percent of the population the right to participate in the running of the state, and I’m referring to women. And a society and a religion which does this will disintegrate. It will not flourish. When you read this you say, “This is certainly what happened watching the twentieth century.” What it shows is that that religion, curiously enough, did reach a peak of its intellectual achievements in that period, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth centuries, and then it went into a slow decline. In *The Stone Woman*, it’s the decline I’m mapping. It’s about a family whose own disintegration mirrors the disintegration of the last great Islamic empire and the last chance they had to modernize Islam was through the Ottomans.

And the family’s divided. The women, or some of the women, want modernity, some of the guys want modernity, the others constantly dream of the past, which is a side of Islam, or Islamic thought, that gets on my nerves. “Oooh, look what we achieved blah, blah, blah, blah.” Which is fine provided you’re doing it accurately and historically, but you also have to discuss why the decline happened. That they never do. It was, of course, an incredible offensive by Christianity and the Church and a military offensive, but the question is also, why were these societies not able to resist that? One reason they weren’t able to resist is that, even in those times, there was a current within Islam that . . . I mean the incredible city near Cordoba, which was called the Madinat al-Zahra — incredibly advanced city — was destroyed by Muslims. It wasn’t destroyed by

Canvas of War

Christians. They couldn’t bear it because they said “Why are we painting, why are we painting images, why are we doing this?” So there’s always been this struggle within Islam between a formal fundamentalism and another current that is trying to move forward. It’s been there right from the, I would say from the eighth, ninth centuries onward. And in a different way it’s still there. These are some of the things that I explore in these novels and the aim is to establish a dialogue with the fundamentalists on the one hand and the Orientalists on the other. Just to say, “Look guys, it’s much richer and much more diverse than you think.”

CW: Something that is so disheartening in the current context is to see how strong a lot of these discourses are, how strong this “clash of civilizations” stuff is, and how much we’re haunted by particular imagined histories. You could see it in Charles Krauthammer’s account last night about what’s really at stake here. He didn’t really want to deal with the stuff you were raising about Palestine, Iraq or Saudi Arabia, for example. No, it’s, “Look you guys, get over it, you lost a few centuries ago.” So the historical memory and its interpretation is really critical. It’s not just some scholarly or literary exercise; it’s a really profound political difficulty we have about how to dislodge the power of these discourses. It means telling more complex stories, which people don’t want to take the space to hear.

TA: I know, but the question we have to ask is why have we reached this phase in our existence, why something that was barely discussed for the bulk of the twentieth century has become so pronounced again? All over the Muslim world, very few people were discussing any of this [fundamentalism] because there were radical nationalist currents, communist currents, the intellectuals were experimenting with all sorts of ideas in poetry and literature. No

one was interested [in fundamentalism]. This is the result of defeat. Not the defeat of Islam 500 years ago, but the defeat of Enlightenment ideas, the defeat of Marxism, the total collapse of the Soviet Union, the feeling that there’s no alternative, there’s no hope. So all the questions that were not of interest in the twentieth century have come up again. It’s a regression. And one’s got to deal with the regression. My instincts told me at the time of the Gulf War that you’ve got to come up with a few things, precisely to stop the kids from becoming total fundamentalists.

CW: The book of essays, *Mullahs and Heretics*, is related to this project, I think.

TA: The title now is going to be *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Jihads, Crusades and Modernity*. A lot of the same material is going to be in that but in a post — September 11 situation. It is going to be a discussion of Islam as well, but I have changed it a bit and it should be out in April. Side by side with the “Islam Quintet,” I’ve been working on another set of novels, “The Fall of Communism” trilogy. *Redemption* was the first, *Fear of Mirrors* the second.

CW: I’ve read *Redemption*, but not *Fear of Mirrors*.

TA: *Fear of Mirrors* you’ll like, actually. That’s an account of the fall of Communism and it’s a novel that spans the twentieth century. And the third, which I’ll only do after I’ve finished the Islam ones, is about renegades, people who’ve completely changed their ideas and . . .

CW: You mean who’ve moved sharply from left to right?

TA: Yeah. And trying to explore how that happens and how they

live with themselves. There are quite a few in Europe now actually. I think about it often. So those are my two big literary projects. And then Howard Brenton and I are thinking of doing a play on Palestine, a big epic play on Palestine. It's not going to be so historical, it's to explain the despair and the desperation. Then the one other project which is also on the back burner is that I'm writing a libretto for an opera called *Khomeini* for which Michael Nyman is composing the music. So we meet up and talk about it, but since September 11 I haven't had time to think about it at all.

CW: How the hell are you getting time to do anything post-September 11?

TA: It's very difficult while all this is going on. I know I'm going to just sit down and finish off this book [*The Clash of Fundamentalisms*] now so that it's finished by mid-December. But I'd started writing the fourth novel in the "Quintet" on September 2, and it was going really well and then this thing happened and, well, you just can't do anything on it. I will return to it at some stage. Once you get involved in the movement it does sort of completely take over your life, and because I know a lot about the regions there's a special pressure on me to go and speak everywhere. Sometimes even when you're too exhausted you do it, you don't want people to feel, "he's not coming here because we're not important."

CW: I think it's absolutely crucial the work you've been doing and certainly you've been very important in Toronto, the generations of people, sectors of the movement, communities, etc., that you've been able to bring together at these meetings has been for us very, very...

TA: Well, I'm glad.



Marchers rally outside the US Embassy during the Toronto Mobilisation for Global Justice March for Peace, 29 September 2001. Photo: Lucas Mulder

Acknowledgements: I want to thank Tariq Ali very much for generously agreeing to an interview in the midst of an extremely demanding schedule of public appearances and media engagements. I am also very grateful to Pedro Sanchez for arranging the interview and for providing much-appreciated support at a crucial moment. Debi Brock, Anjula Gogia, Mary-Jo Nadeau and Andie Noack all gave key technical and practical assistance. Varda Burstyn graciously allowed her home to be the interview site and was warm and welcoming.

Notes

- 1 For the transcript, see Phyllis Bennis and Michel Moushabeck, eds. *Beyond the Storm: A Gulf Crisis Reader*. (NY: Olive Branch/Interlink, 1991)
- 2 As it turned out, attendance — estimated as up to 100,000 — at the London anti-war rally that Sunday surpassed organizers' expectations. "Thousands join London anti-war rally," *Toronto Star*, 19 November 2001, p. A7
- 3 For a critique, see Edward Said, "The Uses of Culture." In *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After*. (Updated edition. New York: Vintage, 2001.)
- 4 Salman Rushdie, "Islam's battle with the Islamists." *Guardian Weekly*, November 8-14, 2001, p. 11
- 5 Ali is speaking of the author of the Booker-nominated novel, *The Map of Love*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1999.) I was referencing Mona Eltahawy, "Egypt's Voices of Reason still Gagged." *Guardian Weekly*, November 8-14, 2001, p. 29. The point still stands.
- 6 See www.artistsnetwork.org.
- 7 Robert Irwin, *Night and Horses and the Desert: The Penguin Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature*. (London: Penguin, 2000.)

Cynthia Wright, an activist and academic, teaches Women's Studies at the University of Toronto at Scarborough. She has a long-time interest in immigrant rights movements and is active in working for status for undocumented people in Canada.

Canvas of War

Art Gallery of Ontario
October 12, 2001—January 6, 2002

Review by Kirsty Robertson

In the final room of *Canvas of War* at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), visitors gather around Orville Fisher's 1946 *Battle for Carpiquet Airfield*, a painting of a destroyed, but still standing, aircraft hangar that bears an uncanny and eerie resemblance to New York's collapsed World Trade Center. This telescoping of space and time between present-day events and the First and Second World Wars is an unintended but significant component of this particular display of the Canadian War Museum's art collection. Both the original exhibition, which opened in February 2000 at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC), and that at the AGO occupy an uneasy position between competing narratives of conflict, peace and nation — narratives from the war years as well as those of today.

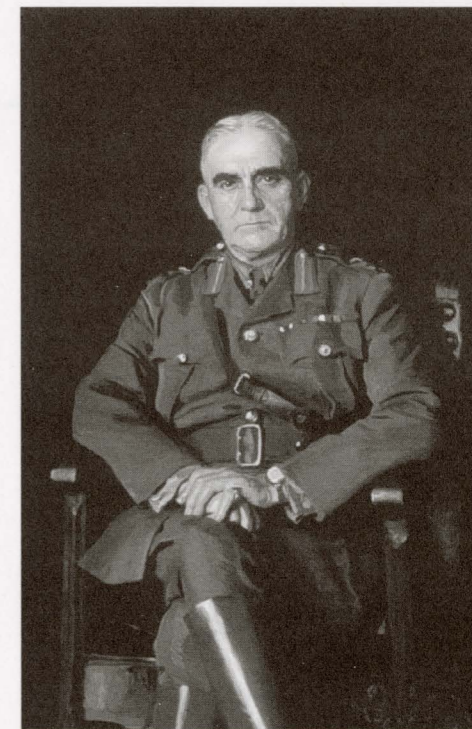
The exhibition consists of selected "masterpieces" from the Canadian War Museum's collection, amassed in the period beginning with the First World War up to and including UN peacekeeping missions in 1994. At the AGO, in the four rooms housing the chronologically and thematically organized canvasses, Canadian participation in war is writ large. The only canvas showing peacekeepers, William MacDonnell's *Sappers Clearing a Deadfall* of 1994, is located outside of the exhibition space. Within the exhibition space proper, the narrative takes us from portraits of politicians and generals leading the war, through the safety of Canada to the increasingly chaotic depictions of women working on the home front and soldiers fighting on the front lines. This exhibition is not a celebration of war. From Harrington Mann's 1918 portrait of a glaring and possibly demented Sam Hughes, minister of militia, to the final painting, Alex Colville's wrenching portrayal of dead concentration-camp victims, *Canvas of War* is a testimony of painted mud and death; enough to quell any glorified or jingoistic interpretations of war.

In spite of the exhibition's subject matter, and the added impact of recent events, *Canvas of War* at the AGO has, if anything, become a less portentous, lighter version of the original exhibition. In Hull, the exhibit opened amid the heightened patriotism of the quest for government funding for a new war museum and the hyper-nationalistic reports surrounding the return of The Unknown Soldier in May 2000. As public support was necessary in order to secure funding for the war museum, a subsidiary of the Museum of Civilization, the exhibition was constructed as a representation of the importance of the First and Second World Wars to all Canadians.

The CMC exhibition emphasized Canada's coming of age through the trauma of Ypres and Vimy Ridge, the formation of the Group of Seven in the wake of the war and the experience of several Group members as war artists and the importance of the war art collection to Canadian history. The exhibition's dark walls, sombre music and boutique lighting complemented a narrative path that guided viewers through the history of the struggle to build a strong nation. However, because the display only included canvasses from the War Museum's collection, which has a heavy emphasis on Anglo-Canadian interpretations of war, issues such as French-Canadian anger over conscription or Japanese internment camps were ignored, resulting in an omission of potentially controversial content.

Now, within the context of secured funding for a new war museum (funding was granted midway through the exhibition's run in Hull) the show at the AGO differs significantly from the original presentation. Stripped of the historical timeline of the CMC exhibit, and placed outside of the cause/effect relationship between war and Canadian nationality, the exhibition at the AGO

visual art



Lieutenant General Sir Sam Hughes, Harrington Mann, 1918, oil on canvas, 127.3 x 102.2 cm. Collection: Canadian War Museum

reviews



Bodies in a Grave, Belsen, Alex Colville, 1946, oil on canvas, 76.3 x 101.6 cm. Collection: Canadian War Museum. Courtesy: Canadian War Museum.

deals more effectively with the politics of history without descending into a political or historical account of war. The lack of a narrative of historical nation building, and of war artifacts and extensive labeling, and the inclusion of adjunct installations of war posters and paintings from other collections as well as oral remembrances create a more richly layered exhibition. Gone are the dark walls, the boutique lighting, the sombre classical music, the emphasis on Group of Seven members and the huge, romanticized canvasses that were the focal points of the original show. Instead, the mauve, sunshine-yellow, light-blue and green walls, together with the bright overhead lighting, cause the paintings to seemingly leap from the walls, and many of the details hidden in the dim lighting at the CMC spring to the foreground, leaving dead bodies and twisted machinery visible in agonizing detail.

The conscious inclusion in both exhibitions of some of the few canvasses in the collection showing the wartime contributions of women, First Nations and non-British-Canadians is less problematic at the AGO. At the CMC a monolithic definition of Canadian nationality effectively acted to subordinate the inclusivity suggested by the display of these canvasses. By contrast, in Toronto, the lack of emphasis on nation building works to highlight heterogeneity rather than subsuming it into a definition of Canadian nationality constructed as primarily male and Anglo-Canadian. Instead, by shuffling the canvasses out of essentialist groupings, the result is a narrative of the chaos of war and the distance created by conflict.

This distance existed, of course, between home front and front lines, but also between Canadians and between cultures. This idea is reiterated in the inclusion of the haunting watercolours of Japanese-Canadian artist Kazuo Nakamura that show his memories of the Tashme internment camp in the British Columbia interior. Significantly, these early works by the now-well-known member of the Painters Eleven were added to the exhibition by the AGO, not by the Canadian War Museum. It seems that the national war art collections continue to maintain a one-dimensional account of Canadian experiences during wartime.

This highlights the main problem with the Canadian War Museum collection: the context of its creation and the context of its display are not one and the same. The heady topics of nationalism, war, peace, death and history cannot be contained within the historical moment(s) represented in these canvasses, but are forced outward to react with the current contexts of their display. The AGO attempts to address this in the final room of their exhibition, called the Debriefing Room.

In this room, the Nakamura watercolours, together with late works by war artist Jack Nichols depicting his ongoing concern with war, and a seating area where visitors can listen to audio recordings of different accounts of war and conflict, chat with volunteer veterans, or fill out response cards, combine to add another layer to the exhibition. This layer, however, is the only part of the exhibition that suffers from a lack of labeling. The AGO was successful in pinpointing the problems of the earlier exhibition, but the collapsing of so many issues into such a small area left the final room a somewhat confused space. Who is being "debriefed," and for what purpose? A brief look at the comment cards shows that in spite of the brightly coloured walls, and the fact that the canvasses are not confined to essentialist groupings, visitors see the rotting bodies, their fighting ancestors, the gaping holes in their own history. The belief is instilled in us that somehow we must learn from these canvasses. The largely unvaried responses from visitors on the comment cards suggest that by the time viewers reach the Debriefing Room, the competing narratives of peace, war and nation overwhelm the diversification tactics of the final room. By including several other narratives only at the end of the exhibition, the AGO quite possibly did its inclusive display strategy a disservice.

As this exhibition tours across Canada and North America its display will change dramatically in each location to reflect the regional and cultural differences that come into play when examining the impact of the wars on Canadian history. As the collection tours toward its final resting place in a permanent display at the new Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, these chang-

ing contexts produce an opportunity for the curators of the final presentation to locate the canvasses within an active and constantly changing understanding of the wars—one that avoids single narrative interpretations of Canadian history. In the final analysis, what the inclusion of Nakamura's watercolours at the AGO demonstrates is that the Canadian War Museum's collection does not speak for all

Canadians, and that there are a myriad of voices waiting to be heard.

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Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future

by Hamid Dabashi
London: Verso Books, 2001

Review by Sarah Sharkey Pearce

book

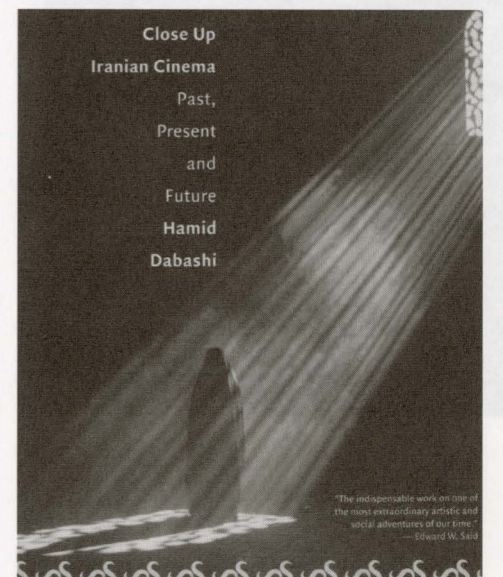
As Hamid Dabashi recalls an image from his childhood, the reader finds that Iran is alight... With small hands Dabashi builds a shoe-box film projector. As he fastens the light bulb too close to the celluloid strip he lights the film on fire. With his mother in the backyard and the door to the living room shut tight he tries to stifle the smoke:

We could no longer breathe in that room without opening the door and letting the world notice the hazard of our situation, nor could the world ignore the curious smoke that was already escaping the dark dungeon through our creative crack.

Hamid Dabashi has found in himself and has seen in the history of Iran and its people, the liberatory practice that is Iranian cinema. Dabashi writes his new book *Close Up Iranian Cinema: Past, Present and Future* with a personal sensitivity and cutting political insight that exposes the reader to the relationship between cultural production or art making in Iran and the personal/political liberation of the Iranian subject.

Throughout the book, Dabashi argues that Iranian cinema is the expression of a people confronting the colonially militated project of modernity, while, at the very same moment, rushing up against the Islamic revolution. He links the failure of modernity in Iran to two major conditions. The first is colonialism, as it disallowed the formation of a self-conscious national bourgeoisie, and the second is the dire consequences of Iran's disadvantageous economic placement in the productive logic of global capitalism. Dabashi notes that it is important to remember that along with the failure of modernity came "the moral collapse of any successful formation of individual subjectivity." As a result, Iranian cinema has functioned as "a record of that failure" and as "a wish list for its successes."

Close Up Iranian Cinema charts modern Iranian cinema as the manifestation of the Iranian people's attempt to define their location beyond the divisive binary of a colonially conditioned modernity and a clerically minded anti-modernity. It is in the insistent occupation of this space beyond that we begin to understand Iranian cinema as a site for revolution.



Detail of *Women Making Shells*, Mabel May, 1919, oil on canvas, 182.7 x 214.9 cm. Collection: Canadian War Museum. Courtesy: Canadian War Museum.



Amir Naderi's *The Runner*, 1985, was filmed near Ahvaz, where Hamid Dabashi grew up. In the lead character, Amiru, the director captures the essence of every young boy's dream of escaping an inevitable fate.



In *Through the Olive Trees*, 1994, Tahereh Ladania's prolonged silences and Kiarostami's long takes map out uncharted territories in human emotion.

Dabashi's knowledge of Iranian history is almost encyclopedic. He looks at the origins of Iranian cinema from the works of Kimiyai and Mehrjui, up through the works of established directors such as Kiarostami, Beyzai and Bani-Etemad to emerging filmmakers such as Samira Makhmalbaf and Bahman Ghobadi. The reader will be amazed by the phenomenal scope of Dabashi's thoughts, as he moves from broad social movements to particular social moments in order to construct a context for Iranian cinema. He makes clear in chapter one, for example, that as he examines the rise of Iranian film production in the context of modernity, he also wishes to educate the reader on the sociopolitical history of Iran. Each chapter is a dense web of social, political and cultural history that combines to form a thorough and critical guide to Iranian cinema.

Dabashi devotes individual chapters to address the contribution of specific filmmakers who have been participants in Iran's changing social and cultural identity and who have each constructed visions for the future. The filmmakers whose work Dabashi analyzes in detail include: Abbas Kiarostami, Bahram Beizai, Bahman Farmanara and Mohsen Makhmalbaf.

A particularly interesting chapter is chapter two entitled "The Making of an Iranian Filmmaker: Abbas Kiarostami." Kiarostami was producing work during the Islamic revolution of 1979. Dabashi asserts that the kind of redrafting of reality in which Kiarostami is engaged sketches out a mode of being that survives all the pains and promises of the revolution. According to Dabashi, Kiarostami's cinema "is the vision of

life on earth, certainty in the real, a celebration of the transitory, the festive embracing of being-toward-now."

Close Up Iranian Cinema: Past, Present and Future examines the sociopolitical situation in which the Iranian subject became a producer of Iranian cultural identity. From an incredibly personal perspective Dabashi describes the Iran of his youth and the conflict in cinematic representation faced by the Iranian people by both watching and making films between western imperialism and the Islamic revolution of 1979. Submerged in the texture of the space and time in which he writes, Dabashi presents an overwhelming amount of historical and political information through the lens of Iranian cinema. His understanding of the revolutionary potentiality of artistic expression is inspiring. "Iranian Cinema" he says, "has much to offer its immediate and distant audiences: it has emerged from the painful memories of a modernity denied, a future delayed to become the rising hope of a people restored to their dignity, the immediate aspirations of a nation dreamt for the world."

Dabashi manages to articulate the essence of the Iranian consciousness from the inception of Iran's exposure to the moving picture through to the dilemmas of present day. His text expressively draws a strong connection between the past and the present, in order to present a strong vision for the future.

Sarah Sharkey Pearce is a filmmaker and recent graduate of the York University Film and Video BFA programme. She facilitates and instructs youth video projects at Globalhood and occasionally writes an article.

Digital Dissent and States of Emergency: Patricia Zimmermann Speaks at the University of Toronto.

Review By Patricia Molloy

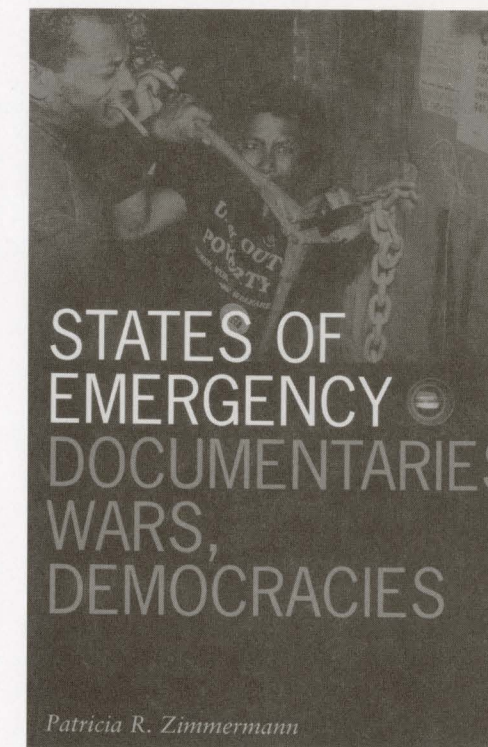
In response to the World Trade Center tragedy, the November 2001 issue of *Artnews* featured a cover story asking "How Can You Think of Making Art at a Time Like This — How Can You Not?" Likewise, on October 1, members of the New York arts community met to discuss possible avenues for a cultural intervention of social concern in light of the terrorist attacks and subsequent erasure of civil liberties and public debate. The result was "911 — The September 11 Project: Cultural Intervention in Civic Society." In the words of one of the project's founders, arts journalist and activist Robert Atkins (also founder of Visual AIDS), "many of us have become concerned about how to respond publicly, how to use our skills as artists and cultural workers." He adds that the pedagogical limits of a corporate and government-dominated media have resulted in "numbingly inconsequential coverage rather than desperately needed insight, analysis and debate." In other words, says Atkins, "we need to open up public space and reinvigorate discourse and debate."

A transcript of the inaugural meeting of the 9-11 Project and links to its activities can be found on the Rhizome.org website (<http://rhizome.org/911>). Rhizome.org, which describes itself as an online community space for new media art with the intention of fostering critical dialogue, is but one of the sites that promote digital-art responses to both the trauma and political implications of September 11.¹ But artists are not the only cultural workers whose dissenting voices have been threatened, if not silenced, in the rubble of the twin towers. Educators, at the secondary and post-secondary level, in the United States and beyond, are also keenly aware that they should "watch what

they say and watch what they do."² Speaking to a capacity crowd at the University of Toronto's Innis College in November, Patricia R. Zimmermann, professor of cinema and photography at Ithaca College in New York State, recounted how as an academic she has been told "to mourn, to grieve and to pray" in the wake of September 11. She received a memo on how to do grief counselling in her classes — but with no mention of content. It is indeed important to grieve, Zimmermann said, but also to *think*. The accelerated militarization of public space requires "contrapuntal polyphonies, fugues" to recover and "rewire" the vectors of cyberspace, or more specifically, cyberwar. As cultural workers, "we must speak not to each other, but to the world."

Zimmermann, author of *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Indiana, 1995), was originally invited by the Centre for Media and Culture in Education at OISE/UT to speak about her new book, *States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000). *States of Emergency* charts the emergence of new forms of independent documentary film and video in the 1990s as a response to the global changes of 1989 and the defunding of the arts in the United States. In light of the current international crisis, Zimmermann focused her talk on digital responses to September 11 and the war on Afghanistan.³ Furthering the argument begun in *States of Emergency* about the need to reclaim public space from a government/corporate-dominated media landscape wrought by transnationalization, and to rescue collective will from "post-Cold War inertia," Zimmermann set out to map "the before and afters" of

new media



Patricia R. Zimmermann



Jadranka Gigej gathering documentation of war crimes in a Bosnian refugee camp, August 1993, in a scene from *Calling the Ghosts*, 1996. Directed by Mandy Jacobson and Karmen Jelincic. Courtesy: Women Make Movies, New York, NY.

September 11 as a crisis of democracy. For democracy, she writes in *States of Emergency*, is no longer a given. Rather, it is an interrogation.

There is not one democracy, but multiple democracies; there is not one form of documentary, but multiple documentary practices. Coupling these new documentaries with a notion of democracies requires a new cartography, one that is almost three-dimensional — like a hologram — composed of mobile, endlessly morphing layers of nation, borders, spaces, technologies, access, identities, transnationals and pirates, where each layer is not parallel to any other, but all the layers are always in fact in relationships of varying impact and influence.⁴

At the outset of her multimedia presentation, Zimmermann dedicated the event to, among others, the 5,000 people from seventy-five countries who were killed on September 11⁵; the 100,000 now-unemployed US airline workers; the women of Afghanistan; elementary school kids (including her eight-year-old son) who refused to say the Oath of Allegiance in school; and US postal workers who were the last to be tested for anthrax poisoning. She also asserted that she wanted to speak for the 8 percent of Americans whose voices are being silenced; and that the 92 percent approval rating for George W. Bush and his actions is *not* a full unity, and moreover, is anti-democratic. Indeed, the current state of “democracy” in the US speaks of an emergent military-industrial, media and entertainment complex (MIME) that has come to replace the military-industrial complex of old. Where once military technology spilled over into Hollywood, with the digitization of Hollywood, the dynamic of the relationship has shifted. For example, in 1999 the US military gave \$45 million to the University of Southern California film school for research and development.⁶

The productions of transnational media companies are now tied to the US military (for example, weapons producer General Electric owns NBC) such that it is these companies that produce the narratives of “evil doers” that dominate the media landscape and govern public perception.

Given the complexity of these transnational networks, Zimmerman notes that it is no longer sufficient to speak merely of images or the role of the media as such. The media is neither separate from, nor controlled by, the state. She says, “the media and the state in fact produce each other, especially in wartime, which only serves to spotlight their interconnectedness.”⁷ In the age of infowar, therefore, images of war are never stable or fixed. Instead of images we must think of networks; instead of representations, circulation. Thus, all-too-easy notions of deconstructing the news, as Zimmermann sees it, “are passé.” What is needed is a “laser-guided intellectual analysis” through these digitized cybernetworks in order to rewire for the future. 9/11 (the term Zimmermann prefers to use to avoid the monumentalization of September 11) has created the largest amount of internet traffic in history. We must therefore imagine a “strategy of interruptions;” create new public spaces with public media. And one of the first examples of this that Zimmermann provided was a website featuring photos, taken by Pakistani journalists, of casualties in Afghanistan that are not being published by Reuters. Such sites are important not so much because they reveal “the truth” *per se* but inasmuch as they interrupt and disrupt the current sanitized mode of “warfare without bodies, without images.”

Audience members wanting and expecting a Chomskian type of analysis may have been disappointed (or frustrated) with Zimmermann’s talk. Some found it difficult to concentrate on the content of the talk given the simultaneous and rapid display of website menus and images projected onto the huge screen behind her. For others, it was precisely the content itself that was difficult to follow — and for some, to swallow. Virilian notions of vectors and a Derridian discourse of polyphony and fugues did little to win over those who desired a more concrete analysis of definitive truths or a foolproof plan of action. However, as the reality of warfare has shifted in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century from total war to nodal war, info/cyberwar and virtual war, so must the terms and language — the places and spaces — of the debate shift. The reality of warfare today is its virtuality. War has moved from the ground to

airspace, from weapons to computers, from analog to digital. As Zimmermann did well to point out, the war in Kosovo deployed 1,500 US bomber pilots — and 30,000 computer technicians. It is no longer enough, therefore, to simply uncover facts and truths and bring them to light. We must also reveal their vectors and interfaces. As Paul Virilio has argued, there is no war without representation. “The history of battle is primarily the history of radically changing fields of perception.”⁸ And in the past century, the battleground has shifted not just from the ground to air, but beyond the airspace of planes to the deterritorialized digital cybernetworks. Indeed, as Zimmermann also pointed out in her talk, US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld has called the current war “a new kind of war,” with the added implication that invading the enemy now means invading his cyberspace.

Nonetheless, this “new kind of war” has, in both official and popular discourse, been both likened to World War II (think of slogans like “America under attack,” “America’s loss of innocence”) and, as with the Gulf War, contrasted with Vietnam (no one will get the better of us this time). Thus, as Zimmermann put it, “this new war is both old and new.” Moreover, this summoning of past wars without their context, a history *without* history, amounts to a history without politics, and consequently signifies the annihilation of the political itself. As she has previously argued in reference to the ubiquitous comparisons of the 1999 war in Kosovo with World War II and the Holocaust, “the trauma implied by the digital is not in its elimination of the analog, but its amputation of history and historiography.” Metaphors and analogies to prior wars “ambush the new politics of the digital networks with simplistic nostalgia.” Images of the Kosovo war gleaned from CNN and the *New York Times* have been stripped of their histories, stories and politics. Stripped of their meaning, they are but “spectacles of empathy.”⁹

Public media — of the truly independent, the underground, non-corporate variety — need “to make new compositions” and create new archives, recover the political and “reconnect emotions to thought and action.” New public media must offer not singular visions or bina-

risms of good and evil, you’re “with us” or “against us;” but, as in the Baroque before the Classical period removed polyphony, “multilayered voices and arguments, clarity and hope.”¹⁰

Reclaiming digital networks as a space for critical discourse will not on its own topple the war machine of course. And, to be sure, not all of the sites that have sprung into being since September 11 are remotely critical in intent or design. Pro-Bush and anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments abound in the interstices of the digital. And this increases the urgency to interrupt, disrupt and reroute the traffic. We might not all have the means or know-how to create our own alternative spaces and networks (only 2 percent of the world’s population is wired),¹¹ but as artists, activists and educators who live in the world not always of our own making we can make pedagogical interventions by bringing the underground to the surface.

Notes

1. See for example, http://www.alternet.org/break_cycle.html, <http://www.a-virtual-memorial.org> and <http://www.creative-time.org>. For responses from the New York arts community, see <http://www.namac.org>.
2. The most notorious example is the allegations of “hate speech” following the University of British Columbia’s women’s studies professor Sunera Thobani’s address to a conference on violence against women in October, in which she openly criticized the bloody legacy of decades of U.S. foreign policy.
3. The talk was held on 8 November 2001, and co-sponsored by the Toronto Women’s Bookstore and the Cinema Studies Program at Innis College.
4. Patricia R. Zimmermann, *States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 23-24.
5. This figure has since been recalculated at approximately 3,000.
6. The grant was awarded to fund a research centre to develop and translate advanced military simulations into video games and game park rides. It would seem that in the post-Cold War era, games and special effects in the entertainment sector are now more sophisticated than military imaging systems. Thus the recent trend of the National Research Council has been to foster increased collaboration between the defense and entertainment industries. See Patricia R. Zimmermann, “Matrixes of War,” *Afterimage: Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism* special issue, *Media Art in the Balkans*. Vol. 28 No. 4 (January/February 2001), p. 30.
7. Zimmermann, *States of Emergency*, p. 56.
8. Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989), p. 7; quoted in Zimmermann, *States of Emergency*, p. 57.
9. Zimmermann, “Matrixes of War,” pp. 30-31.
10. See for example, <http://www.papertiger.org>, <http://www.indymedia.org>, <http://www.videoactivism.org>. A complete list of the sites used in Zimmermann’s talk is available at the Toronto Women’s Bookstore.
11. Nonetheless, in the world’s most impoverished and embattled nation, the underground Afghanistan feminist organization, RAWA, has had its own website since 1997. See <http://rawasongs.fancymarketing.net>.

Patricia Molloy has a PhD in Education from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto where she teaches cultural studies. She is the author of *From the Strategic Self to the Ethical Relation: Pedagogies of War and Peace* which is forthcoming from the University of Minnesota Press in 2003.

The Neutron Hazer and the Mystic Gulf: Remembering Remembrance Day

Performance by Johanna Householder with Carmen Householder-Pedari
8 July 2001, Dovercourt House, Toronto

performance art

Review by Robin C. Pacific



Several years ago, teaching at York University, I asked the students to observe a minute of silence on Remembrance Day. They went along with it, but seemed bemused, indifferent. Many thought World War II had something to do with the defeat of communism and the preservation of the "free world." "We had to defeat Stalin." "Hitler and Stalin were going to take over the world." "The war was about beating Castro." My father had served in the Second World War; theirs had evidently done their time in the Cold War. That's when I knew that henceforth I would have a Janus-like relationship to human time, looking backward to my parents' generation, and forward to the generation of these students.

The Neutron Hazer

Walking into the old ballroom on the second floor of Dovercourt House, on a hot July afternoon, Sunday, and it's filled with mist, smoke, fog, tinted now pink, now yellow as the sun filters through the red-gel-covered windows. The gelled windows made the light bulbs look green, an unexpected spectrum shift in the room. Mist at dawn over the trenches in France; a foggy day in a televised Flanders Field; a ghost story. On a video monitor in the entranceway, poppies, filmed in Johanna Householder's garden, blow.

The Red Clothes

Strewn over the very large floor, pieces of red clothing. Johanna and her thirteen-year-old daughter Carmen are wearing dresses made out of red clothes sewn together and trailing at odd

angles. Carmen tells me in our interview that at the beginning of the piece, the clothes were stacked in piles. She and her mother took chokecherry branches and poked the clothes around, "as if we were looking for something under the piles, things that could have been left by loved ones who had died. By wearing the red clothes, we were making them part of ourselves." From time to time, Carmen and Johanna pick up clothes from the floor, go over to a sewing machine, and sew them onto each other's costumes. Walt Disney's *Cinderella* is playing on a small old-fashioned TV set on a table. The movies Johanna watched as a child, she watched with her child, when Carmen was three and four. The little animals, *Cinderella*'s familiars, sew her dress.

The War Movies

On small monitors on each of six window sills are playing, silently: *The 49th Parallel*, *Sands of Iwojima*, *12 O'clock High*, *Back to Bataan*, *Guadalcanal Diary*, *Battleground*. On the counter at the bar, on another old TV, *Last Year at Marienbad*, the ur-memory film, cause of Johanna's "conversion to art" experience when she herself was thirteen and subject of and inspiration for a previous mother-and-daughter performance. In each of the war movies, the son of an officer or war hero is brought in and has to live up to the heroic father or father figure. Watching the movies, Householder became interested in how experience, mediated by popular culture, is transmitted from one generation to the next. And the next.

The Dialogue

Johanna and Carmen sit on two curved banquettes, red plush parentheses. On a small table, two walkmans and tapes containing the soundtrack from the scenes in the war movies when the older man convinces the younger to fight, or to match his heroic deeds. The two women are simultaneously listening to the dialogue (which we can't hear) and speaking it.

Second-wave feminism has perhaps had no greater influence in a single genre than that of performance art; indeed, Householder herself, through her work with *The Clichettes*, helped to define a movement and influence a generation (or two). Performance suited feminists because of its unreproducibility, its stubborn refusal or even inability to become part of the circulating capital of the patriarchy/art world; because it allowed the female artist to be both subject and object, to return the gaze; and simply because it gave women and women's issues voice and visibility. Something else is happening here, though. It is the speaking women who are giving voice to silenced men — men forgotten by my students on that November day. Johanna's father, like mine, served in the war. During the last years of his life, he suffered from diabetes, and much of the time either slept or was silent. As Johanna sat with him, with his silence, she imagined the cranial space of his memories. She became interested in how culture is passed on through fragments, an act of voyeurism and love.

The Knitting

Between these dialogue exchanges, and the sewing of the red clothes, mother and daughter sit and knit, one with red, the other with purple yarn. Carmen: "We were taking strands of knowledge and knitting it into something. It was special because we did it together and we both worked equally hard. We were knitting together to make this bouquet of knowledge, love and meaning. I liked doing that part of the piece. It was like when she taught me how to use the sewing machine, except better because it was something we did by hand."

The Mystic Gulf

In theatrical performance, there is an uncross-

able space between the spectator and the performer. Like one-point perspective "a visible and easily located point of view provides the spectator with a stable point upon which to turn on the machinery of projection, identification and...objectification." In *Remembrance Day*, tables and chairs are placed throughout the performance area. The viewpoint of the spectator is unfixed, ambiguous. Audience members stand against the wall, or sit somewhat self-consciously, unsure if they are using chairs meant for performers. The self-consciousness typifies performers, spectators and thirteen-year-olds. It's awkward, but useful. The real relationship between mother and daughter, played out in real time, during the performance, is unrehearsable, unreproducible, now subtext, now the drama to which *Remembrance Day* becomes subtext. According to Carmen, some of the red clothes were from *Buy the Pound*, some were their own. "I kept getting worried my mom would accidentally sew my clothes and through the whole piece I kept trying to tell her, 'Don't sew my clothes!'"

The Generations

Johanna Householder's performance art stitches a fine seam between Walt Disney and war, memory and hope, mother and daughter. Sitting with her beautifully eloquent dancer's spine erect, she links the ghosts of the last century to the presence of her daughter's future in this one. Johanna: "I'm exploring untheorized, undocumented kinaesthetic psycho-social territory." Carmen: "It's like a firework that goes off and you think it's the end and then another little one goes off, that's how performance makes me feel. There's always something there that isn't answered. It's like nothing else. I hope my daughter gets the privilege to do it with me some day."

Notes

1. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked, the Politics of Performance*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 163.

Robin C. Pacific is a Toronto artist, writer and activist. She recently launched *Babes in the Woods*, an art computer game for women, and gave away 800 copies in defiance of Mattel's trademark laws. She is a founder of *Art Starts Neighbourhood Storefront Cultural Centre* and currently chairs its board.

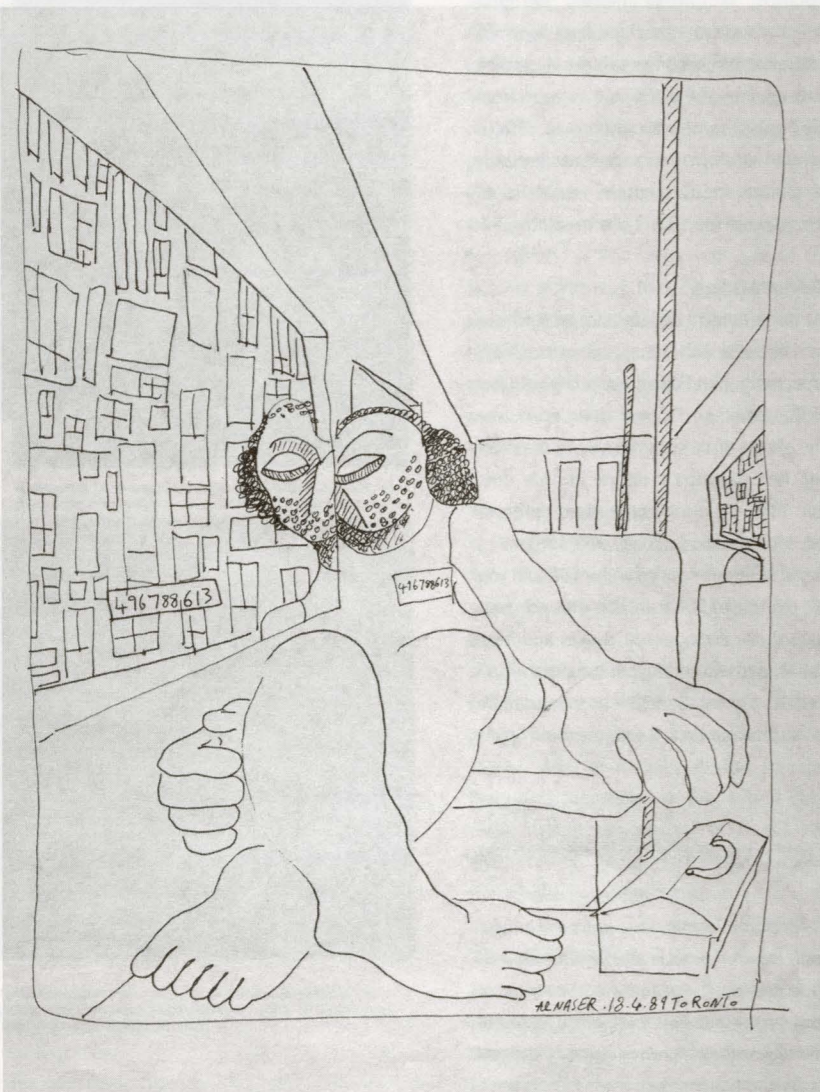


Above: *The Neutron Hazer and the Mystic Gulf: Remembering Remembrance Day*, Johanna Householder with Carmen Householder-Pedari, July 8, 2001, performance. Photo ©2001 Vera Frenkel. Courtesy: the artist.

Above: *The Neutron Hazer and the Mystic Gulf: Remembering Remembrance Day*, Johanna Householder with Carmen Householder-Pedari, July 8, 2001, performance. Photo ©2001 Vera Frenkel. Courtesy: the artist.

9/11: Diary of a Suspected Hijacker

By Gamal Abdel-Shehid



Drawing from *A Great Country Welcomes You*, Adel Alnaser, 1989, pencil on paper. Courtesy: Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Manhunt in Oblivion

I spent the manhunt in oblivion. In the middle of all the punditry, predictions and prognostications, I was in oblivion. Well, I guess I wasn't alone. Many of us spent the manhunt in that place. Oblivious rage. Oblivious despair. Fear. Rage.

I spent the manhunt ducking from the raging indifference of the racists. Oblivious to differences between Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, Arab, Farsi, Afghani, Christian, Jew. Oblivious to histories, cultures, politics. I got forced underground. Once again, I found myself in the middle of the fictional world of Richard Wright. That of the man who lived underground. September 11-style. Fugitive.

Once again, and all of a sudden, I was still immigrating. I had just arrived. Newly and still un-Canadian. My passage, which presumes arrival, was yet again rendered desperately incomplete. As if I hadn't even begun. I desperately searched the house for my passport and citizenship card. Found my passport but couldn't find my citizenship card. Now is *not* the time to apply for a new one, I told myself.

Oblivion took another form. I spent the week after September 11 without TV. Not even the good old CBC. Nothing. Still haven't seen the twin towers blow up or collapse. Haven't seen the remains of the Pentagon. In a way, it was just as well. Couldn't bear it. Nor could I bear to see pictures of my likenesses being flashed on the screen every two minutes with pundits and prognosticators detailing what "we" were up against. Couldn't bear to hear all of the Arabic names mispronounced, brutalized. Brought to heel under the order of news-y English.

My oblivion from TV meant that I didn't see pictures of blood on steps of mosques across North America. I am not sure these pictures made it to TV. Oblivion meant that I didn't see the pictures of terrified Muslim children trying and failing to make sense of the world as neo-fascists hurled rocks at their schools and school buses.

I didn't have to look. I could feel it. I could feel the anti-Arab and anti-Muslim terror every time I moved. Could hear it, see it. In the aftermath of September 11, it seemed as though every Muslim woman I saw was wearing a special pain. Losing weight and looking gaunt. Not knowing where to turn.¹

Note to Allan Rock

It's mid-summer. My father — although no one wants to admit it — is dying. As a result of a bypass operation, he worsens, and eventually dies, in the face of several complications. While this is hard enough to take, the onset of hallucinations is a particularly damaging blow. From his hospital bed, he drifts in and out of lucidity. He tells me to pass him the screw that fell to the floor, or to make sure to remove the boiling water from the stove.

In disbelief, I call a family friend, a heart specialist on the Canadian east coast. He is like a brother to my dad. They met in Alexandria in the 50s and have remained friends, on and off, ever since. I call my dad's friend because my "job" on the care team, among things, is to be in constant dialogue with this man, and to translate all of the technical medical information to my mother, who is too fragile and weary to handle all of the deciphering that medical knowledge in the West demands. All she wants is her husband back, and to get him out of the dreary hospital, where nothing seems to be going right.

After telling my "uncle" about the hallucinations, my uncle asks me for the list of medications being administered to my father. After I read him the list, he tells me not to worry. One of the drugs being administered to my father is an antibiotic, Cipro, in order to ward off the pneumonia that circulates endlessly in the hos-

pital. My uncle tells me Cipro has been known on several occasions to cause hallucinatory or delirious behaviour as a side-effect. He assures me that once he is off the Cipro, the hallucinations will go away.

The next time I hear about Cipro, it's mid-October. Amidst all the paranoia around the US-led re-colonization of Afghanistan, Cipro is all over the news as the antibiotic prescribed for anthrax exposure. Millions of people in North America are taking the drug. It is reported that some in the United States are crossing borders to Canada and Mexico in order to get supplies of the drug. The thought of this boggles of my mind. A nation of rabid anti-Arab and anti-Muslim fanatics are running to consume a drug that is almost certain to cause further delirium. Does this mean that more people will be calling 911 after they see white powder on their diaper table, in their sugar jars, and so on?

Meanwhile, Allan Rock, Canadian minister of health, hordes this hallucinogen, the knock-off version. Same side-effects. While speaking at an anti-war rally in Edmonton, I remind anti-war protesters that there is no antibiotic for war, no antibiotic for imperialist slaughter and racist murder.

America's new war

America's new war is a war on news. In this case, no news is *not* good news. It is the normal state in a culture that has replaced news with Hollywood. The United States self-presents as though it is a movie, and far too many people are scrambling to play the familiar parts. Good white guys, chasing after evil Arabs. Good white girls, lining up to do what the men tell them to. Except nobody is running to play the role of the bad Arab terrorist. Those roles will have to be conscripted. And Canadians have a major role to play here.

US newsmakers fall right in line. Now, they are not simply appearing as cameos in an endless stream of disaster movies. Here they assume starring roles. North American newslessness means that news anchors turn to Hollywood script writers and directors to tell "us" what is going to happen next. No surprise really, war as

9/11: Dia Suspected

movie is not a new thing in the West. The last major US-led war, what Chomsky called the "Persian Gulf Slaughter," was broadcast as though it were a movie. After a perilous beginning, the United States and the "allies" emerge to restore justice and freedom to a helpless people, from evil and wayward Arab masculinity.

The sense of life as Hollywood is enveloping. In the early 1990s, it even permitted conservative postmodern critics in the West like Baudrillard to claim that "the Gulf War did not take place." The Hollywood-ization of contemporary culture in the West, is, as a result, a horrifying aspect of post-colonial neo-colonialism, with a happy ending only for very few.

The spectralization of culture in the West is also one reason that in Canada, there is a constant attempt to write Canadians into the narrative. Over lunch one day, my friend asks me about the national obsession with finding a Canadian connection to the attacks of September 11. As far as she can tell, it must be about Canadians saying: Come on, aren't "we" good enough to be attacked? Come on!

My response is that, once again, it is our desire to be part of the Hollywood news script, I mean the script of the imperial United States. Except that this time, "we" don't offer up non-descript white folks who pass like white Americans, such as William Shatner, Michael J. Fox, Jason Priestley and Heather Locklear. This time, the desire to be like Hollywood involves a whole new series of people, who unlike the former, want nothing to do with it. It involves cultivating our own extras, and renaming them "security threats." The conscription begins. Canadian authorities traffic bodies labeled "terrorist" as their way of saying "we" can truly be Hollywood North. For the real-life version of *Under Siege*...

Out of Oblivion

The war on Arabs, Muslims and their likenesses continues. For me, hiding, though seductive, is no option. Survival depends upon battling oblivion. There is no safe place for the East in this country. Mostly, it exists to be brutalized. A friend, who teaches at a university in Canada,

tells me she is afraid to tell her students she is Arab. Muslim students in Edmonton complain about being thrust into the public eye as public enemies. My mother tells me that in the wake of post-9/11 reprisals, orders go out from the Coptic priests to all churches in southern Ontario to remove Arabic writing from the walls of the buildings. Lest they be mistaken for mosques.

Meantime, as Copts run from Arabic, politics and history become more Islamized. Few seem capable of speaking from secular positions. In the Western media, the microphone is a gun. In front of it, victims have three options: speak only as Muslims, decry terrorism and insist Islam is a religion of peace. No one else has to do this, and no other speech is allowed.

Reeling in the wake of 9/11, the Muslim Students Association at the University of Alberta mounts an effective counter-strategy against racist propaganda. Explaining and detailing Islam. But we cannot all do this. We cannot all speak as Muslims, wear *hijab* and grow beards. We cannot invent tradition. We cannot all translate.

Many of us are not Muslim. Many live pluralistic and secular lives. Strict adherence to Islamic "tradition" is resolutely Western. Tradition is the weapon of the anthropologist. So too is modernity. It, and the Coptic response, are forms of oblivion. After 9/11, Arabs, Muslims and their likenesses are irrevocably here. We must be brave, and build other languages of struggle. Remember the other wars. On First Nations. Black folks. Queers. The poor. There are other scripts, and we have roles to play.

I would like to acknowledge the support and encouragement of Cynthia Wright and Shani Mootoo in the writing of this piece.

Notes:

1. It is common knowledge that most of the reprisals by neo-fascists toward Muslims, or those who looked like them, were taken out on these presumed to be the weakest and most defenseless, young children and women.

Gamal Abdel-Shehid, member of the University of Alberta Coalition against War and Racism, is assistant professor in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta.



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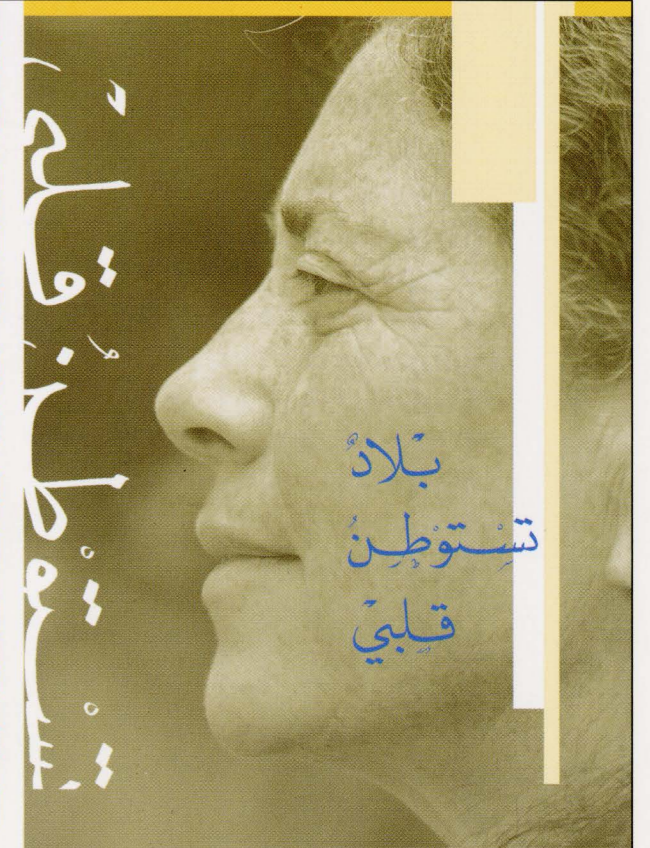
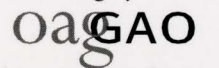
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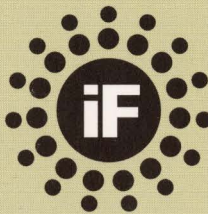
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