

Alternative Dramaturgy for Jihad Against Violence: Oh ISIS Up Yours!

Alternative Dramaturgy for
*Jihad Against Violence: Oh
ISIS Up Yours!* by Fawzia Afzal-
Khan, Nesrin Alrefaai, and Katherine Mezur

Arab Stages,
Volume 1, Number 2 (Spring 2015) ©2015 by Martin E. Segal Theatre Ce
nter Publications

Morphing Jihad by Fawzia Afzal-Khan

The post-9/11 “War on Terror” has increasingly focused on Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan. In fact, both geographically and culturally, the border between the two nations is porous. Pakistan, as we know, became an important ally in the US-led War on Terror when the military dictator General Pervez Musharraf (then President) vowed to President George W. Bush that he would root out the Pakistani Taliban. This branch of the Taliban, as a result of US policies since the 1980s, had become the proverbial “chickens coming home to roost.” But despite efforts to eliminate it, the Pakistani Taliban (also now known as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, or the Pakistani Taliban Movement) continues to organize raids across the Pakistani North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) border into Afghanistan where they battle NATO troops fighting the Afghani Taliban. The Pakistani-US war against Afghani Taliban, going on since 9/11, is an increasingly hopeless struggle because many Afghanis sympathize with, if not actively support, the Taliban and remnants of Al-Qaeda, who are seen as nationalists or Afghan sympathizers fighting against US imperialist hegemony in the region. The Afghani Taliban are helped by some elements within the Pakistani army and the sympathetic Pakhtun population on the Pakistani side of the border.

Until the 1980s, when the United States supported the proxy war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union, Pakistan had been a relatively moderate Muslim state. The USSR was driven from Afghanistan by locally recruited and trained Islamist militants then called the Mujahedeen (freedom fighters) and now the Taliban (literally, “students”). This moniker is apt because the Taliban were trained in *madrassas*, Islamic schools across much of Pakistan. In the 1980s, the madrassas were funded by the Saudis with American support. Pakistani madrassas became a haven for foreign jihadists from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other Middle Eastern countries. These militants recruited many jihadists from the local impoverished and illiterate population of Pakistan’s northern tribal areas. After 9/11, these recruits learned that the War on Terror was a battle for the soul of Islam pitting the “true” believers against the immoral and power-hungry imperialist forces of the West, particularly the United States, aided and abetted by the corrupt neo-colonial and “un-Islamic” ruling elites of Pakistan.[\[1\]](#)

It is against this backdrop that many theatre and other cultural performances like mine try to make an effective argument about the anti-cultural, anti-performance, anti-art policies of the Pakistani state. The different iterations of my play, staged in New York City as *Jihad Against Violence*, with an earlier incarnation as *Sext of Saudade*, are both collaborations with other women in a multicultural yet neo-imperial space—the United States of America. *Jihad Against Violence* also has a performance history in Pakistan, having been performed by myself and two other local actresses in the second woman's role in the cities of Karachi and Islamabad; in the former, it was performed at an “alternative” performance and literary space called T2F in 2010, where audience members, mostly members of an older elite class, seemed quite horrified and/or puzzled by the play and left rather quickly after it ended. However, a young up-and-coming singer on the Pakistani cultural scene, Arieab Azhar, saw the performance and was so excited by what he referred to as its “newness” and air of “fresh boldness” that he arranged for me to be invited to perform it in his hometown of Islamabad. The underground performance space was quite literally the basement in the home of a young man freshly returned from having completed a degree in Theatre at the University of Washington and now working a day job as a computer analyst while putting on edgy performances by various musicians and actors in the basement of his parents' house in Islamabad since there are no public spaces where such work can be performed without censure or even at all! Here, the play and its performance was received with great acclaim and pleasure with a Q and A extending into the late hours of the night, the audience comprised of twenty- and thirty-somethings progressive artists and students living and working in the capital city.

A Pakistani immigrant to the USA, Ahmed Naumann, an engineer by profession living in Minneapolis with a passion for the theatre and for Pakistani music, saw the play and later read the earlier version of *Sext of Saudade*. He was so intrigued by both plays that he decided to try his hand at combining the two scripts, and thus resulted a third iteration of this innovative, collaborative theatrical experience, *Jihad Against Violence 2*.

Some scenes from this third version were excerpted and published in a special issue of the journal *South Asian Review* on Pakistani writing in English that I co-edited in 2012. During the inauguration of this special issue at the Pakistani Embassy in Washington DC that fall, my co-editor and I performed the excerpts, again to the audience's great amusement (composed mostly of tight-lipped diplomats!)—as they recognized the recent geopolitical references to Osama bin Laden, to the growing influence of jihadists, and to President Obama, in some new scenes that had been added into this third iteration of the play.

From there evolved the fourth and latest “meme” of this play, from which I performed some scenes in June 2014, with Katherine Mezur, a North American theatre scholar who also choreographed it, and with translation into Arabic by Syrian theatre scholar Nesrin Alrefaai. These excerpted scenes were performed at the tenth annual Tangiers Conference on Alternative Dramaturgies, where several viewers remarked that these reminded them of “happenings” as set into motion on the avant-garde theatre scene in NYC in 1959 by Allan Kaprow. Several theatre students of the University of Tetouan participated in the performance or “happening” as well, speaking lines from the Arabic translation.

This latest iteration, called *Jihad Against Violence: Oh ISIS Up Yours!* references geopolitical developments in the Iraq-Syria region, including the rise of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria)—thus connecting the history of Islamic radicalization in South Asia to similar and ever more dangerous developments in the Arab world and their connections to the politics of empire in the twenty-first century.

Below is a brief history of the development of the different iterations of the play, followed by commentary from Nesrin Alrefaai on her role and perceptions in this ongoing experiment, and a similar intervention from Katherine Mezur.

Iteration#1: *Sext of Saudade*

A play and performance by Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Annie Rachele Lanzillotto, at Dixon Place, NYC 2008

What kind of worship is this? What kind of paradox are these two dissenting women's voices weaving?

A new one-act performance piece by two bold artists—enacts an odd, cross-cultural journey across gender and sexual demarcations and religious spaces. Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Annie Lanzillotto are representative types who collide and come together in a collage which questions all pieties, and hierarchies of gendered, sexual, national, and class identities. How does a Pakistani Muslim American Wo/man find a language to connect her experiential realities with a working-class Butch Dyke from the Bronx, an unexpected encounter to help her re-enter a spiritual space she thought she had left behind by making a journey westward?

Mayhem, murder, true confessions, cross-dressing, song, dance, and video!

How does a white woman pass as an Arab man in the Khan el Khalili and Al Aqsa's masculine space of zikr? "It drove me crazy that women went in one door and men in another. I wanted to go in all the doors. I declared the Shahadah as a woman, but prayed with the men." One of Annie Lanzillotto's bizarre confessions.

"Bespawl me in my agnestis!" is Fawzia Afzal-Khan's equally odd response. "That's English for—cover me in saliva in that part of my back which I cannot scratch!" To whom is such a prayer addressed? A man, a woman, a god, a goddess? Or to you, the audience?? What are we to make of these madwomen's bespawled feistiness and ludicrous pathos, their willingness to lay bare their naked souls as they express their longing for some type of faith amidst their abidingly restless faithlessness of spirit?

Come and find out.

So reads the advertising material for the very first incarnation of this play, called *Sext of Saudade*. Saudade means longing in Portuguese, and I used the term Sext to refer to text messages that enact desire—becoming all the rage then, with all their potential for wreaking mayhem on people's personal-and political lives, as we witnessed many years later with the scandal/s surrounding the fall from grace of Congressman Anthony Weiner. I also wanted the word to connect the audience to the French Feminist post-structuralist use of "text" to encompass or signpost the writing body... or the body that writes, with all of its pulsations, its excretions, its "invective languages" as Nesrin Alrefaai names it, writing in the present moment, in the latest "meme" of the play, crossing and connecting new borders and bodies—those of the Pakistani and the Syrian Arab woman, now overlaying the "original" lesbian body of the Italian-American Annie in male drag. Is there an "originary" moment, ever? Can it be recaptured? Or are we always already there, the past impinging upon the present and vice versa, orality and the written word always in constant translation, the performative utterance... I can only say that back in the fall of 2008, both Annie Lanzillotto and I, the former a self-proclaimed urban "I-talian American dyke from the

Bronx,” sitting in the lawn of my far more “straight” upper-middle-class suburban home in Westchester County NY, decided we were intrigued enough by each others’ “otherness” to jump into an experimental performance piece that could probe, as honestly as possible, our differences but also our similarities, and all those mutual shades of longing in between whatever constitutes the “self” and the “other”. We wanted to shatter, and we wanted to (re)build.

Iterations# 2, 3 and 4: *Jihad Against Violence and Jihad Against Violence: Oh ISIS Up Yours!*

In publication notes for *Jihad Against Violence*, the second iteration of the play that started life as *Sext of Saudade*, I have described it as a poetic memory-play, meant to jolt the audience—and the players-- out of our complacency with violence in our lives. At once dramatically poignant, and at times hilarious, this play is written and performed by two leading Pakistani-American women writers, performers, and cultural activists (Bina Sharif, long a fixture on the off-off-Broadway scene in the Lower East Side, and myself—again separated by much more than the nation-state moment of origin that binds us). The play weaves together our memories and desires of the past and the present both from a personal and a political vantage point. It speaks to issues of Muslim womanhood in a patriarchal world, which may be similar to those of the "turd" world in relation to the "first" in our neo-imperial moment which knows no past nor present, only an unending continuum: shall we cry, or shall we laugh? Maybe both—and maybe, just maybe, we all might dare to have the audacity to hope for change; we can't go on, we must go on!

This second version of the script which I originally wrote with Annie—and which is the basic one (with additions from Ahmed Naumann’s collaborative version, as well as my own new material referencing the rise of ISIS), that Nesrin Alrefaai’s translation is based on—is quite differently inflected in terms of its style and also content. While still in the experimental, non-realistic mold, obviously this became a play which expressed the views and experiences of two Muslim Pakistani-American women, not one Pakistani-American and the other an Italian-American. Not only did the change of religio-ethnic identity influence concomitant changes in the play, but the fact that we are both very political-minded and highly engaged in Pakistan-US political analyses, meant that some of this aspect of our lives made it into *Jihad Against Violence*—as the title itself is meant to indicate. Further, the edgy playfulness of a hetero/lesbian erotic bond gave way to something that explored a different type of "difference." Indeed, the play took on more of a mournful, even elegiac tone toward issues of identity and (un)belonging, linking the personal to the political by way of linking gender and ethnicity to the politics of US imperialist hegemony in the world, particularly in its relationship to Pakistan, a crucial ally in the War Against Terror (unfolding and still ongoing since 2001). Class issues, instead of being instantiated through the different situational realities of the two female actors, became centralized through the class structure of US society itself; women’s oppression as manifested differently through the characters became a mirror for the oppressiveness of human life itself, as lived in a world of ever-increasing inequality. The Jihad—struggle—against this inequality is fundamentally a struggle against the violence that inequality breeds, but given the powerful structures that surround us, past, present, and future, this is easier said than done. Yet, the seemingly impossible must be attempted, the challenge always mounted even in the face of despair. And often, this challenge is against our own baser selves, our own inner dictators, sexists, classists, cheating, lying hearts. As a colleague who had described watching *Sext of Saudade* as a “Brechtian experience” put it: “*Jihad Against Violence* is far more Beckett-sian.”

In Morocco, we have a new iteration developing (a new “meme” if you will)—one that involves a written and dramaturgical collaboration/translation/border-crossing among myself, a Pakistani female scholar and

performer of theatre and music; Nesrin Alrefaai, an Arab Syrian female theatre scholar; and Katherine Mezur, a “white” American female scholar and practitioner of theatre choreography. Each of us is marked by different ages, different racial affiliations, different national states of un/belonging, and in one case, forced exile. More than ever, I must—we must—ask, whose story is this? It started out in large part based on my memoir, my life, as well as that of Annie Lanzillotto, with whom the experience of sharing a stage was so painful—“Brechtian” in laying bare the “family quarrel” beneath the surface—that for its next iteration I turned to a different experiment, with a fellow “national”, Bina Sharif, with whom I shared a history of growing up in Pakistan as well as moving to the USA. Our experience of political humiliation and anger at the neo-imperial moment we both inhabited, our varying degrees of complicity in it, sparked the “meme” of *Jihad Against Violence*. And then, a man jumps into the mix—Ahmed Naumann, another fellow Pakistani-American settled in the Midwest of the USA, who felt so inspired by reading *Sext of Saudade* and *Jihad Against Violence* that he sought permission to combine the two plays and his version became *Jihad Against Violence 2*. He changed—translated—the scene between two women titled, “Success is Thin and Violent” in *Jihad Against Violence* to a scene called “Success is Eastern...and Violent.” The setting of the scene changed too from Long Island to Pakistan... and the sparse dialogue was obviously now a reference to the Pakistani-American “dialogue”—with all of its mis-translations and opportunities—around Jihad and the War on Terror. For Ahmed, a man of Pakistani Muslim background, this additional symbolic register/layer of meaning made the play come alive in a slightly different way—deepening and extending an earlier scene about the Browns and the Blairs “coming to dinner.” Then along came Nesrin, a young Syrian theatre scholar I met some years ago at an IFTR conference in Portugal; we became fast friends almost immediately despite the gap on our respective ages and locations, and she decided she wanted to attempt an Arabic translation of the play, the version co-written by Bina and me. Nesrin’s translation, the Arabic “meme,” if you will, has now become *Jihad Against Violence: Oh ISIS up yours!*

I asked myself—what is she relating to in this story or stories? Why is she interested/invested in doing an Arabic translation of this evolving play-script? Are these different iterations the collective memories of each person who has become involved in what is now clearly a multi-ethnic-multi-border-crossing project? And what is Katherine Mezur doing in this constantly brewing, thickening mix? Is she just there to “choreograph,” to serve as female placeholder for the male “director” from the Imperium, colonizing us anew? Or is she inhabiting a new socius—a space from within the West to critique the nexus of power and—oddly (or perhaps not so oddly) enough—increasing powerlessness, possibly even marginalization, that she inhabits as a symbol of white womanhood from the imperial center? Are we negotiating possibilities via our virtual and in-person conversations and dialogue, possibilities that model the collective coalitional politics that is the need of the day in a rapidly-changing world? Are we searching for a dramaturgical model that respects the Other but one which can also show us how to negotiate border-crossings intelligently and respectfully? In a way this form that has evolved and is evolving dramaturgically speaking in this series of plays, is the most revolutionary form possible in our collectively, mutually-imbricated present moment, because it speaks to the need for crossing borders and building solidarities around our common experiences of war, dislocation, empire, and how gender and sexuality are impacted by continuing processes of colonial/imperial power. What solidarities must be found, what affiliations and alliances forged, and how can new dramaturgies like those we propose

provide part of the answers we are all so desperately seeking? What morphings must we now translate into and out of? These are the questions that lie at the heart of this shared project of alternative dramaturgy.

***Translating Jihad* By Nesrin Alrefaai**

Susan Bassnett describes translation as “a kind of journey [...] an activity that always involves motion, it is a passage from one language to another, and hence from one culture into another.”^[2] This in part describes the reasons for and the process behind the translation of the play. I wanted to build an actual bridge in cross-cultural cross-border theatre(s). *Jihad Against Violence* transcends national boundaries and has a transnational, and even cross-cultural reach. The translation of the play into Arabic carries the story through different time, cultures, places, and languages. In addition, the cross-cultural collaboration between playwright and translator highlights conditions of production, thematic conflicts, and issues considered taboo in the Arab world. This extends from ideas on women, gender, and sexuality, which have connections to other parts of the Muslim world such as Pakistan.

Issues of women’s experiences, religion, gender, and politics are often translated from Arabic into English; translating this play from English into Arabic highlights that taboos, gender issues, and post-colonial struggle cross cultures and languages. In addition, the project highlights translation as a vehicle of cross-cultural communication and that it can show shared experiences and collective memories shaped by conservative cultures. That the play is drawn from an incident described in its writer’s memoir, *Lahore With Love*,^[3] means it plays at once with memory, experience, and performance; exploring the boundaries between personal stories and public performance. What the play—and in particular the work in translation—asks us to think about, is whose story is being told? Is it of a woman in Pakistan, as in its English version, or is it of a woman in the Arab world?

The choice to translate the play *Jihad Against Violence* by Fawzia Afzal-Khan was driven by several factors. The first was the translation process; taking on the project allowed me to scrutinize and engage with the play’s language. The peculiarity of “language use” in *Jihad Against Violence*—its layered allegories, and its staccato dialogue—requires a translator to take on an in-depth analysis of its language. My study of the text traced elements of Theatre of the Absurd, and demanded that I dive into its Brechtian nature. The playwright manipulates language to achieve a particular and poignant effect. Afzal-Khan uses language that reflects the attitude of the characters, layering meaning so that at the same time the phrases build toward the larger theme of the play, and indeed the playwright’s ideology.

This full-length translation dedicated to the study of Afzal-Khan’s *Jihad Against Violence* also fills a clear gap in studies of contemporary playwrights. Afzal-Khan’s play has spurred some provocative discussions around language and the global politics of identity, as well as around, the feminist re-defining of the canon. The translation frame helps assess the acclaimed multilingual work as deeply interconnected, globally as well as to dense layers of refraction in both the human and artistic range.

Sandra Bermann writes in *Nation, Language and the Ethics of Translation*:

In attempts to translate, we become more aware of linguistic and cultural differences, of the historical ‘haunting’, and of experiential responsibilities that make our languages what they are and that

directly affect our attitudes toward the world. "Highlighting the difficult alterity within language that makes any transparent or "literal" translation "impossible." [4]

There are some particular "issues" or what Duff calls "problems" in the translation process: the problem of ambiguity that originate from structural and lexical mismatches between languages, and multiword units like idioms and collocations. According to Duff, when translating there are cultural translation problems, linguistic translation problems, and text-specific translation problems. [5]

While a broader context of the linguistic use of taboo, bad or banned language examines the issues of "anthropological questions about the nature and source of the power of bad language; socio-linguistic issues of politeness and decorum; theoretical linguistic issues such as the causes of language change; sociological issues of class, generation, and gender; and language planning issues about the control and censorship of language by governments, religious authorities, legal systems, language academies, teachers, and others," [6] the play accentuates these challenges, as the heavy use of invectives are its most salient linguistic feature. Bad language or "swearing" can be defined as a type of language whose expression "can be used to express strong emotions and attitudes." [7] When translating swear words into Arabic, however, this can be a problematic approach. It is essential to keep true to the original text and more importantly to the use of invective language used by the main character. This is not only to show her strong emotions but also to rebel against a conservative society that frowns upon swearing in general, and women swearing in particular. Usefully, the Arabic language has the equivalent social norms. However; the gap between orality and literacy seems to make translating these invectives a mission almost impossible.



While the character uses specific language to face tradition, culture, and gender issues that must be adjusted, she still uses strong language that is not as offensive as the original English for example:

Screw the director... I want to eat and drink and drown in the feasts of fornication and suck the milk from the full teats of adultery I want to sit at the table of the straightest of laces and thence to the table spread with fruits of all types I want to feel their juices running down my chinny chin chin so with a huff and a puff I can blow all their narrow houses down.[8]

????? ??? ??????.. .???? ?? ?????? ??? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?? ??
????????? ?? ?????? ??? ?? ?????? ?????? ??? ?????? ?? ?? ?? ?????? ?????? ? ?? ??????
?????????? . ?????? ?????? ? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?? ?????? ? ?????? ? ?????? ?????? ? ??????
?????? ?? ?????? ?????? ?????????? ?????? ?? ?????? ?? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????
??? ?????? ?????? ?? ?????? ?????????? ?????? ?? ?????? ?????????? ?????? ?????? ?? ?????? ?
????? ? ?????? ?? ?????? ?????? ?????????? ?????? ?????? ?? ?????? ? ?????? ? ?????? ?? ?????? ?? ??

A second example is how the play’s dialogue is punctuated and the issue of silence is brought in as indicated in through the use of ellipses, dots, or commas.

It can be argued that the specific use of punctuation develops a background of rhythm creation in the play and brings up the crucial issue of timing. For example:

Pretty red shoes...fuck-me shoes...all girls need a pair...gun...hmmm... prayer rug...of course...I am a Muslim you know...red dress—yeah I’m wearing it.[9]

????? ?????? ??????...????????? ??? ??????.. ?? ?????????? ?????????? ??? ??????.... ??????... ??????
?????? ?????? ?????????? ??? ?????? ?????? ??????... ??? ?????? ?????? ??? ?????????? ?? ??????

Even though this method of punctuation serves a particular purpose in English, when translating to Arabic, the Arabic syntactic structure is very different, which requires re-negotiating not only the meaning of the words but also the effect that the punctuation has, and how that can be translated into Arabic.

Translation and its correlative transformation comes to define the playwright’s dramaturgy, providing a persuasive case study of ongoing cross-cultural social praxis, an invitation to interdisciplinary study and a medium for dialogic engagements with history, performance praxis and each other.[10]

Repetition is especially important in scene five since, as Johnstone has noted, "The role of repetition in creating interpersonal engagement in conversation and in signaling how speakers are to understand their interlocutors’ words." [11] Repetition in this play is used not only in an absurdist, Beckett-like sense, but also as a strategy to interweave tenses, past with present and present with "now" to create a background rhythm that contributes to the musicality and theme of the play which indeed created a challenge when translated to Arabic to keep this musicality flowing.

WOMAN #2: I thought it was resolved

WOMAN #1: What was?

WOMAN #2: The Past

WOMAN #1: And the Present?

WOMAN #2: Present too

WOMAN #1: You wish...

WOMAN #1: It's unending

WOMAN #2: What?

WOMAN #1: The Past

WOMAN #2: And the present?

WOMAN #1: Present too..." (65)[\[12\]](#)

“????? 2: ???? ?? ?????? ?? ??????

????? 1: ?? ???? ??????

????? 2: ??????

????? 1: ? ??????????

????? 2: ?????? ??????

????? 1: ??????...?? ? ? ? ? ?

????? 2: ? ? ? ? ?

????? 1: ??????

????? 2: ? ??????????

????? 1: ?????? ??????

***Dancing Jihad* by Katherine Mezur**

The aim of this project is to frame the argument for an alternative dramaturgy of "gesture-out-of-translation," which can provoke, complicate, and illuminate transnational, translated, and multilingual

performance through stylized physical practices. Stylized physical practices are part of a choreographic thinking process, which is the basis for this alternative dramaturgy of performance: a kind of corporeal architecture of dynamic relationships: bodies to texts, bodies to sounds, bodies to objects, objects to text images, space to time, and time to space, which are always in motion. Choreographic thinking, which has been written about extensively, but recently by Susan Foster, William Forsythe, and Erin Manning, who all include different mobile architectures or what Manning calls "thought in movement, activated not solely in the body, but across the machinery itself—in the folds of the evolving architecture."[\[13\]](#)

Backstory

This is above all a practice-as-research project-in-process. While I have planned types of gesture sequences for each section, these are in outline and subject to shifts according to the performers' ideas and needs. These are not based on the subject matter or the characters, but in response to the play's different sections and their different kinds of dialogue and/or monologue. I will test these gesture ideas with the chorus members and the two actors, Afzal-Khan and Alrefaai, and adapt these to work best for the performers. I have been in Morocco and met women students who attended conference presentations and performances. We talked about women's involvement in Moroccan theatre and how at one point women performers were restricted to radio drama: a woman could be a voice but not an image. Like Alrefaai's translation, the performance dramaturgy here is a highly charged negotiation and struggle among different political and cultural corporeal/visible restrictions and priorities, which will impact the whole play. Perhaps I need to consider other alternatives: Will the movement chorus become shadows or will they move only with their backs to the audience? What ways could they be seen but not visible? These are the questions prompted by working transnationally, and where bodies can signal codes unknown to me. I asked to join Afzal-Khan and Alrefaai in their collaboration to do a bi-lingual staged reading in Arabic and English of Afzal-Khan's play *Jihad Against Violence*, because I wanted to experiment with this kind of performance dramaturgy where languages and gesture might trigger alternative meanings and more questions about violence and female bodies in and out of performance. I also think this project could grow and deepen with an embodied gestural dramaturgy created with Afzal-Khan, Alrefaai, and the Moroccan women chorus: What will they bring to the project in terms of how gesture breaks off from bodies and multiplies meanings? Or how a movement chorus could be a reflection, a response, or a threat that frames and haunts the multiple shifting voices and the mixing of sounds and images from such vivid languages? How will the moving bodies charge and change the meaning of the texts?

Rustom Bharucha writes, on his own dramaturgical practice,

... Intracultural theatre practice, therefore, can be regarded as the outcome of those intersections in differentiated imaginaries... what remains enigmatic is not the multiple lives of a text, but the unknown lives that are concealed within it. ...these other lives have their own languages, which embody more than one history and more than one culture.[\[14\]](#)

This experiment in dramaturgy of gesture, may intersect with these other imaginaries, and demonstrate, in the Brechtian sense, a productive cacophony of embodiments out-of-translation.

By "gesture" I mean still postures, isolated movements of the limbs, locomotive movement through space, and small adjustments (winking, smiling, shoulders shrugging). All of these gesture types are deeply shaped by cultural prescriptions within the context of the play and the different performances by the

author, Fawzia Afzal-Khan and translator Nesrin Alrefaai. "OUT of translation" means that I will be using gestural dramaturgy, or a kind of choreographic thinking within the parameters of the texts to oppose, provoke, subvert, and sometimes confuse or hide the text's meaning or enunciation to demonstrate the politics of gesture from the outside. I am coming from the outside; my movement work is built on an American tradition of modern and contemporary performance art and dance. My exception to Fawzia's challenge concerning "what am I doing as a white American woman" with Syrian and Pakistani women playwrights, translators, creators, and performers? First, I have lived and studied theatre and dance forms in Indonesia, India, and in Japan (for longer than a decade), and I have devoted most of my scholarship to studying "other" cultures with the consciousness of being the outsider other, which I borrow from Trinh T. Min-ha's many lectures and writings. I have also failed many times, and learned to recognize my own orientalisms and assumptions of understanding and essentializing. My positioning here in the project of *Jihad Against Violence* is one of moving interdisciplinary interloper.

May Joseph suggests in her book, *Nomadic Identities*:

Viewed through a transnational lens, the condition of hybridity compels a critical reevaluation of the binarisms around race and the West/non-West. While the rhetoric of binarisms shapes the international economy of labor...the living reality of contemporary hybridity concretizes and inflects ideas of oppression and domination. [\[15\]](#)

This kind of alternative dramaturgy of gesture can be used in performance devising and in analysis and critique for raising questions concerning the bodies, characters, and circumstances of the play, which become "assumed" and "assimilated" in the text translation. Movement makes bodies pop out of the sometimes oppressive drama of texts. Text translation is very difficult. But in the case of physical "language" somehow there is an assumption of a universal body or at least a set female repertoire of coded gender acts, no matter what the culture, age, ability, or status of that female body. Contrary to this, stylized dramaturgy of gesture, based on choreography of time, space, and energy patterns, which may be repeated, expanded, and re-cycled, can be a device for keeping differences in the performance text clearly visible and unresolved. Seeing and perceiving differences through movement can shock the viewer out of a kind of complacency of perception. Reframing performance through strategies of a dramaturgy of gesture, particularly drawing on basic physical skills, magnifies the disturbing differences of corporeal gender politics and social norms, which the text-in-translation can mask. With this alternative dramaturgy, the corporeal acts spin (out) sensations that deliberately mix-up and press on the translations' equivalencies and differences. What this produces is a text/performance OUT of translation: a performance that stumbles and shakes up our attention to the ongoing, in-flux, non-hierarchical narrative of inquiry for both performers and spectators. More than anything else, dramaturgy of gesture coupled with choreographic thinking charges the performance with multi-dimensional images, energy, and unknowns.

At the heart of this process is the practice-as-research mode of stylization techniques. I note here that stereotype and flash points from popular iconography are all part of stylization but the work of the artist here is to move the gestural vocabulary beyond that but in tension with it. For example, if one of the performers waves goodbye with her arm extended, she can also make it very small, pulling the arm in and only barely waving the hand. What happens? The wave may lose or abstract the meaning of departure and if repeated in a pattern, it may even become partially emptied out, as it becomes ornamental in its form and time/space displacement. On the other hand a culturally saturated gesture may very well keep its

meaning throughout the stylization process. "Othering" can mean to separate or distance something uncomfortable or painful. This chorus, which will be developed with the young women, will craft that distancing with their gesture pattern or other the events in the dialogues. I will use daily patterns of movement that may be stylized and codified and then amplified and diminished through cycles of repetition. These repeated sequences or patterns of movement become abstract and even create their own resistance in their cyclic performance. In a similar way the movements that the speakers will evolve may interfere with their text performance but also distance their voices and their bodies from the actions of the text.

In the following section I will suggest how the dramaturgy of gesture in several kinds of sequences: a solo/monologue, duet/dialogue, and group chorus may illustrate how the bodies that are moving with an adapted and hybridized vocabulary of gesture can intensify and even provoke multiple meanings in the bodies of the performers and spectators. This multiplying of meanings is not done irresponsibly, but rather, carefully out-of-translation, which allows these other bodies their own spin on translation.

Three stylization techniques

The following is an outline of possible gesture types and styles. Improvisation is central to developing these possible ideas with the actors and chorus. We will create signature gesture phrases (see below) for everyone and from these we may generate enough material for the whole scene, and these movements will keep evolving over time. Each one of these will be considered within the frame of a scene from the text, but they may cross over into other scenes and join up in unexpected ways.

1. The two actors will develop a short personal gesture sequence, which they will try small and large, and with different rhythms and music styles. They will repeat and shape this sequence through the play. This sequence will become a signature phrase, an identifying "mark" which the performer can use at any time during the performance. They develop this phrase with three elements, a gesture that could mask emotion, a gesture that changes their direction or moves them through space, a gesture that has memories and images attached to it. When the three are practiced and repeated, the signature gesture phrase may become abstract or change completely from the original. It is only important that no matter which character they take on in different parts of the script, this signature phrase remains the same. This contributes a Beckett-like disturbance in the identification with any one character or type. The signature phrase can be used in many ways and even taught to the chorus as another iteration: identity is not only mobile, but transformative and exchangeable.
2. In this second stylization process the actors may find a different set of gestures, which may arise from the scene and its characters or dialogue. The inspiration might come from the form of the scene: for example the rapid fire, "one word dialogue" scenes have a quick punctuated momentum, as if words ricocheted into the air. We might find still held postures will harness this dialogue, making its brutal delivery even more concentrated and hard-hitting. The actors may gesture while remaining in one spot, with small directional changes to the postures, or one character/voices may pace around the still figure of the other. Perhaps the use of constraint in movement might amplify the text. Here abstraction in gesture, which is pulled away from the meaning of the dialogue, can create an ironic physical critique of the text. Repetition of gestures with changes of timing or dynamics between languages/lines will also create more choices of meanings. Gesture like music can transform atmosphere: even creating a lyrical mode in contrast

to the bombastic text.

3. Chorus movements will be derived from daily activities, which may be easily abstracted, repeated, amplified, and broken up with walking, turning, or running. Small gestures may be based on personal movements such as folding one's hands, shrugging one's shoulders, brushing off one's clothing, tilting the head, waving goodbye, and other personal/group related postures and patterns from daily movement routines. The chorus members may also have one object each, such as an extra scarf, which they can manipulate with these gestural patterns. The chorus will learn each other's movements and create their own repeatable phrase of gestures that could be performed in a parade formation or behind and around the two main performers.
4. The chorus will also create a unison movement vocabulary, which might be derived from a mixture of urban popular culture or traditional sources. For example, some chorus movement could be based on Syrian and Egyptian chants and marches created during Arab Spring or other demonstrations or events. Another source for these unison chorus movements might be from their own community practices.

All the above stylization techniques can be manipulated through time, space, and energy patterns related to the scenes. These stylization patterns may be adapted to match specific scenes, giving them a rich somatic sense of the embedded histories deployed in the play. Examples of movement choruses may be found in many of the works of Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, Kisaragi Koharu's NOISE company, dumb type, the Wooster Group, and other performance groups where text and gesture combine and separate in surprising and ironic ways.

For this work of performance dramaturgy, it is important to remember that bodies are never neutral and choreography simultaneously exposes and erases. That is, nothing is neutral about anybody or any action. Our marked bodies can expose, through the simplest of gestures, the embedded ideologies of particular cultural, national, and/or religious/spiritual regulatory systems. Performing our corporeal knowledge through gestures out-of-translation can possibly produce an alternative dramaturgy that is porous and reflexive and implicates the performers, spectators, and producers in its intentional turbulence and uncertainty. Perhaps our multiple translations can move us beyond fixed identities and stagnant patterns of behavior, towards, what one of the voices cries:

...to the table spread with fruits of all types I want to feel their juices running down my chinny chin chin...

????? ??? ?????? ?????? ??? ?????? ?????????? ????? ?? ????? ?????????? ?????? ?????? ??? ??????

And another replies:

WOMAN #1: It's unending

??? ?? ??????

Dance!

?????

***Fawzia Afzal-Khan** is professor of English, director of the Women and Gender Studies Program at Montclair State University, and a University Distinguished Scholar. She has published extensively on postcolonial feminism, Muslim women, performance, and politics, with a particular focus on Pakistan. She is author of Cultural Imperialism: Genre and Ideology in the Indo-English Novel (Penn State Press 1993), A Critical Stage: The Role of Secular Alternative Theatre in Pakistan (Seagull Press, 2005), co-editor of (The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies (Duke University Press, 2000), and editor of Shattering the Stereotypes: Muslim Women Speak Out (Interlink Books 2005). Her memoir, Lahore with Love: Growing Up With Girlfriends Pakistani Style was published by Syracuse University Press in 2010. Afzal-Khan is a trained vocalist in North Indian Classical music, a published playwright in the pages of TDR (The Drama Review), a poet, and has worked as actor and singer for Ajoka Theatre Troupe of Pakistan, as well as with the experimental theatre collective Compagnie Faim de Siècle of which she was one of the founding members. She serves as contributing editor to TDR (The Drama Review) and is founding chair of the South Asian Feminist Caucus of NWSA (The National Women's Studies Association of North America), where she also serves as a member of the Governing Council. She is currently working as creative director, scholar, and producer on a documentary film about Pakistani female singers for which she won a development grant from the National Endowment of the Humanities in 2011. She has won a Fulbright award to continue research on her book on Pakistani Female Singers as well as to help Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, set up their Women and Gender Studies Program.*

***Dr. Nesrin Alrefaai** is currently a postdoctoral fellow at SOAS, University of London where she is researching and teaching. She obtained her BA (Hons) in Theatre Studies from Damascus University, Syria and her MA in Drama and Theatre Education and PhD in Theatre Studies at Warwick University, United Kingdom. Dr. Alrefaai is member of IFTR (The International Federation for Theatre Research) and a founding member of the Arabic Theatre Working Group. Dr. Alrefaai also, co-edited Kalamoon, a university-based magazine. She is now translating the work of the Syrian playwright Sa'dallah Wannous into English.*

[1] Fawzia Afzal-Khan, "Performative Interventions in the Body Politic of Pakistan," *TDR: The Drama Review* 54, no. 2 (T206) (Summer, 2010): 19.

[2] Susan Bassnett, "Translating Terror," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2005): 393–403.

[3] Fawzia Afzal-Khan, *Lahore With Love: Growing Up With Girlfriends Pakistani-Style* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010).

[4] Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood, eds., *Nation, Language and the Ethics of Translation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[5] Alan Duff, *Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[6] Kingsley Bolton and Christopher Hutton, "Bad and Banned Language: Triad Secret Societies, the Censorship of the Cantonese Vernacular and Colonial Language Policy in Hong Kong," *Language in Society* 24, no. 2 (1995): 159–186.

[7] Lars-Gunnar Anderson and Peter Trudgill, *Bad Language* (London: Penguin Books, 1992).

[8] Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Bina Sharif, "Jihad Against Violence: A One-Act Play," *TDR: The Drama Review* 54, no. 2 (T206) (Summer, 2010): 60–69

[9] *Ibid.*, 61.

[10] May Roth and Sara Freeman, eds., *International Dramaturgy: Translation & Transformations in the Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 25.

[11] Barbra Johnstone, *Repetition in Discourse Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1994), xii.

[12] *Ibid.*, 65.

[13] Erin Manning, *Always More than One* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 104.

[14] Rustom Bharucha, *The Politics of Cultural Practice* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 107.

[15] May Joseph, *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 144.



Arab Stages

Volume 1, Number 2 (Spring 2015)

©2015 by Martin E. Segal Theatre Center Publications

Founders: Marvin Carlson and Frank Hentschker

Editor-in-Chief: Marvin Carlson

Editorial and Advisory Board: Fawzia Afzal-Khan, Dina Amin, Khalid Amine, Hazem Azmy, Dalia Basiouny, Katherine Donovan, Masud Hamdan, Sameh Hanna, Rolf C. Hemke, Katherine Hennessey, Areeg Ibrahim, Jamil Khoury, Dominika Laster, Margaret Litvin, Rebekah Maggor, Safi Mahfouz, Robert Myers, Michael Malek Naijar, Hala Nassar, George Potter, Juan Recondo, Nada Saab, Asaad Al-Saleh, Torange Yeghiazarian, Edward Ziter.

Managing Editor: Joy Arab

Table of Content

Essays

- *Science Fiction in the Arab World: Tawfiq al-Hakim's Voyage to Tomorrow (Rihlatun ilal-ghad)* by Rani Bhargav
- *Tawfik al-Hakim and the Social Responsibility of the Artist* by Majeed Mohammed Midhin
- *Jun?n: Poetics in the Discourse of Protest and Love* by Rafika Zahrouni
- *Ritual and Myth in Dalia Basiouny's Magic of Borolos* by Amal Aly Mazhar
- *Staging the Self: Autobiography in the Theatre of Sa`dallah Wannous* by Ali Souleman
- *The Arab Theatre Festival* by Jaouad Radouan
- *France's Théâtre d'al-Assifa: An Arab-based Alternative Theatre Model* by Magdi Youssef
- *A Dramatic Anticipation of the Arab Spring and a Dramatic Reflection Upon It* by Eiman Tounsi
- *Rania Khalil's Flag Piece* by Dalia Basiouny and Marvin Carlson
- *Silk Road Solos: A Three-Thread Performative Stitch* by Jamil Houry

Short Plays

- Excerpts from *Jihad Against Violence: Oh ISIS Up Yours!* by Fawzia Afzal-Khan
- *Alternative Dramaturgy for Jihad Against Violence: Oh ISIS Up Yours!* By Fawzia Afzal-Khan, Nesrin Alrefaai, Katherine Mezur
- ReOrient Theatre Festival 2015:
 - Bitterenders* by Hannah Khalil
 - Lost Kingdom* by Hassan Abdulrazzak
 - Picking Up The Scent* by Yussef El Guindi
 - The House* by Tala Manassah & Mona Mansour

Reviews

- *Edward Ziter's Political Performance in Syria - A Book Review* by Safi Mahmoud Mahfouz
- *The Gap Between Generations: The Revolt of the Young: Essays by Tawif al-Hakim-* A Book Review by Michael Malek Najjar

Announcements

- *Malumat: Resources for Research, Writing/Publishing, Teaching, & Performing Arts* compiled by Kate C. Wilson

www.arabstages.org

arabstages@gc.cuny.edu

Martin E. Segal Theatre Center

Frank Hentschker, Executive Director

Marvin Carlson, Director of Publications

Global Posts

building CUNY Communities since 2009

<http://tags.common.gc.cuny.edu>

Rebecca Sheahan, Managing Director