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*Off Leisurely Confrontations – A Dhol Reconnaissance*

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For this call, within the terrain of solidarity and interdisciplinarity, while being grounded in my ongoing PhD research, I propose a 'Leisurely Confrontation,' a dialogue in an archival encounter. In the archival collections at the Imperial War Museum, a page in the sketchbook of an anonymous WWI British officer in India carries a drawing of a day in Jeddah in 1917 where male Indian officers from the 28th P. I perform Kathak, a classical and traditional dance, while the British officers watch, casually leaning against the wall and smoking a pipe. This sketch embodies a complex world. It is as fragmented as my institutional, intergenerational, archival encounters, where everyday life, leisure and the ordinary are in charge of the political – I have engaged in a leisurely, confrontational and performative dialogue with this sketch, animated, embodied and enacted it within spaces of power or of the powerless in London. It has taken a multidisciplinary form of a video performance essay/film. The aim is to leisurely, effortlessly, Take up Space, in solidarity. Leisure, I believe sustains an incognito urgency, like the everyday, where things can dissolve yet persist to arrive when no one is watching.

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To give some context my PhD project introspects and enters with a personal and familial archive. A World War 2 scrapbook and photo album of a South Asian Indian Muslim soldier (my grandfather) traveling across continents to fight the imperial war as a soldier in King George's Own Central India Horse Regiment. Recently I wrote a mission statement for my ongoing PhD project: My contribution is in identifying the persevering, everyday, quotidian, slow burning of power that arrives into my skin from an imperial legacy of leftovers, a generational toil - the resistance, complacency and silent activism that is urgent to respond to, not in acts that are spectacular but by scrapping and extending quietly 'in, out and from' the methodology of the oppressor, I respond with leisure, humour and the everyday; it is a provocative, intimate and temporal excavation.

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### **Video Performance Essay**



Downloadable video link: <https://vimeo.com/1118566828/6286d3dbfb>

Duration: 14 minutes 3 seconds

### **Reflective Text**

It is high time; I need to dance to the rhythm of the Dhol. We need to dance to the rhythm of the Dhol. Near the Thames, on the Arabian, sailing across the Red Sea or on the Mediterranean... this could be a Dhol reconnaissance... it is a Dhol reconnaissance.

Gussie, as his friends in the imperial army called him, was posted as a reconnaissance officer in the last trail of his time in World War Two, as a Punjabi Musalman soldier in King George's Own Central India Horse Artillery regiment – I saw this in a dream maybe, my *nana*, maternal grandfather Raja Ghaziudin or Ghazi Hyder, aka Gussie Hyder, was smiling at me, and then he laughed a warm and thundering laugh when I told him that him and I had joined to form a new reconnaissance here in London.

This is a reconnaissance with a rhythm of the Dhol, in each beat ...we accompany each other with the scraps of his scrapbook, our scrapbook and our lives - be it Lahore or Rawalpindi, London, Basra, Cairo, or Salonika, inside and outside concrete, bricks, shelves and cannons, in spaces that should be rendered nameless so that they can let us be. He spoke English with a British accent and Punjabi Potohari - I speak English with a Pakistani accent and Urdu.

His scrapbook has a life of war in-between opera tickets, tarantella dance, evidence of aesthetic choices, such as Herbert Johnson hatters and Champion and Wilton saddlers, living along... with a postcard from his friend M.P Stott from camp Stalag VII-A, a prisoner of war in nazi Germany. Written in pencil that is fading, Stott started his postcard with "dear Ghazi sorry to... tell you how fed up I am here...". A suggestion and idea of a reconnaissance with the beats of the Dhol sounds bizarre and leisurely to R.G Hyder, but he held my hand and let us... just be, as that he knows, requires courage.

My flatmate caught me red-handed preparing for the reconnaissance of the bhangra beats, maybe people in the buildings across watched from the windows. Eyes, eyebrows, laugh lines, hands, fingers, nails, hair, ears, spine, the feet fly, arms wrap *innn* the spaces, argue with them, confront them, and release them... I feel free, the Dhol reconnaissance unearths, shakes, and breathes... the Dhol yells, screams, pleads, and watches, hushes, erupts, explodes and collapses... in silence... like me, it is sick and tired, and weary (or numb) of giving history lessons.

The Dhol reconnaissance is in memory that lives and continues with you and me, in the present and to the future... in every rhythm, matched or unmatched... the Dhol reconnaissance is anti-timeline, in and off, leisurely and in confrontation with history that wasn't mine and not yours, but was written and drawn... in pencil beneath pen or pen on top of pencil...

This sketch was probably a dream too; in my dream I found it here in London, in a nameless sketchbook that belongs to a British soldier who was stationed in India. He drew this while sailing across the Red Sea, as an officer in the Punjab regiment... pencil

beneath pen, pen covering up pencil, he drew the 28<sup>th</sup> Punjabis, an infantry regiment dancing to the Dhol, he inked the date and destination, Red Sea 1917, he wrote k-a-t-h-a-k, kathak dance, the 28<sup>th</sup> Punjabis danced in raging leisurely abandonment on the Dhol, dhum dhama dum dum...to *bhangra*...not *kathak*...

## Credits

A Film and performance

By

Sehr Jalil

Filming and sound-mix

By

Roberto Prestia

A special thanks to Mark Edmondson at the Goldsmiths multimedia lab for technical assistance/sound recording

Reference:

Sketch of the Punjab regiment sailing across Jeddah from an anonymous sketchbook of a British Soldier.

Imperial War Museum Research Rooms, WW1 collection.