

Fitrah: A Spiritual Journey

by

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the notion of preserving self-identity using personal experience as a Muslim immigrant with cultural concerns of maintaining the practice of Islamic prayer rituals in a secular environment. It explores how the use of art practices in conjunction with digital technology can create a work that presents a deeper understanding of a Muslim immigrant's need for a space to practice their prayer rituals. It discusses works by Edward Said, Stuart Hall and Frantz Fanon that are tied to acts of resistance and inequalities in various global settings. My project uses autoethnography and practice-led research that provide me with the appropriate methodological framework to create an installation that conceptualizes the experience of an Islamic prayer. *Fitrah* is a digital interactive installation which uses Islamic artifacts, light and audio to express my spiritual journey and preserve my Islamic prayer rituals in shared spaces.

Keywords: Self-Identity, Rituals, Prayer, Multi-faith Spaces, Islam, Diversity, Autoethnography, Practice Led Research, Islamic Art, Digital Technology, Religion, Digital Interactive Installation, Orientalism.

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Dedication

For Allah..

And to all those who are struggling to “belong” and “identify” themselves somewhere
new.

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Introduction

According to Sumo Rao Professional Corporation (2010), a Canadian immigration Law Firm based in Toronto, “Canada has one of the most positive immigration policies in the world” since it provides one of the best places to live by offering free education, medical services, dual citizenship, welfare benefits, old age and unemployment insurance amongst other advantages. Immigration has been considered a shaping factor in Canada’s society and culture and its policies are ignited by the desire of expansion and development. Research gathered by the Pew Research Center in 2015 states that Muslims make up around 23 percent of the world’s population and this percentage is increasing rapidly, thus making Islam the second largest growing religion in the world. Muslims have migrated to different parts of the world and have managed to establish their own communities in foreign lands. An increase in Muslim migration has allowed Muslims to contribute a great deal to global diversity and one of the places where many Muslims have migrated to is Canada.

The immigration of Muslims to Canada dates back to before 1896 and since Canada adopted a Multiculturalism Policy in 1971, the number of Muslim immigrants has accelerated, making the country a home for a rapidly growing Islamic community. The largest Muslim community is situated in the Greater Toronto Area, comprised of Muslims who immigrated to Canada in the late 19th and 20th century, recent immigrants, children who are born to Muslim woman, and converts to Islam. Despite this large and growing Islamic community, Muslims in Canada have struggled with issues such as preserving their religious identity and adapting to their new community. The Muslim community’s current state has been greatly affected by issues of Islamophobia and Islam being linked to terrorist acts such as the infamous 9/11 attacks on the US. In recent years it has become more difficult for Muslim immigrants to overlook, overcome

and adapt to a Western secular environment which views Muslims as enemies and outcasts. This viewpoint can sometimes lead to tragic events such as the Quebec mosque shootings in 2017. In an online article published in CBC news (2017), the Quebec City Police Chief, Robert Pigeon, reported that hate crimes targeted towards Muslims have doubled between 2016 and 2017.

For this introduction, I will delve into the following: personal background, thesis title, research questions, objectives, research purpose, and finally the thesis outline.

Personal Background

Coming from a Muslim background, both country and religion, I find myself in a difficult position, as do my fellow Muslim immigrants. After moving from Saudi Arabia to my new home, Toronto, I recognized the hardships Muslims experience in a foreign environment. I find myself torn between two cultures, the one that I left and the one I have come to inhabit. I have come to discover my role as an artist in defining my identity as a Muslim immigrant woman.

In the interview *What Happened, Miss Simone?* (2015) done with the famous singer Nina Simone, I have found her words stimulating and powerful. Below is an excerpt:

An artist's duty, as far as I'm concerned, is to reflect the times. I think that is true of painters, sculptors, poets, musicians. As far as I'm concerned, it's their choice, but I choose to reflect the times and situations in which I find myself. That, to me, is my duty. And at this crucial time in our lives, when everything is so desperate, when everyday is a matter of survival, I don't think you can help but be involved. Young people, black and white, know this. That's why they're so involved in politics. We will shape and mold this country or it will not be molded and shaped at all anymore. So I don't think you have a choice. How can you be an artist and not reflect the times? That to me is the definition of an artist.

Like Nina Simone, the artist, I find it my duty to reflect and understand "the times and situations in which I find myself." However, it is hard for me to situate myself in an environment where I do not know how the people living in it may or may not accept who I am or my identity. This identity involves the practice of my religious beliefs freely, both privately in my home and in

public places. This thesis examines cultural tensions within diasporic communities and uses art practices and digital technology as a method of representing the Islamic ritual of prayer. In this thesis, I aim to describe my personal experience of difficult situations of assimilation by focusing on religion and identity. I base my work on a self-study journey that examines my own position as an artist that is situated somewhere between being a Muslim immigrant and an unwilling orientalist.

Thesis Title and Research Questions

My thesis title *Fitrah: A Spiritual Journey*, entails an Arabic word that has no literal equivalence in the English language. However, *Fitrah* can be defined as a spiritual instinct that Muslims are born with. It is believed to be natural faith of the Islamic religion. This spiritual instinct that I believe I possess from the time of birth is a fundamental basis for how I identify myself as an individual. The term *Fitrah* is the initial shaping factor of my Muslim identity. It is a sacred instinct that serves as the starting point of my investigation of the challenges I face in maintaining the practice of my religion in a secular environment.

The central research question I attempt to analyze and answer through this project is as follows: “How can the use of digital technology in conjunction with Islamic art provide a safe space for immigrant Muslims in Canada to practice prayer?”

Detailed Research Questions and Objectives

There are two main aims in my thesis which are vital to answering this research question: 1) to use autoethnography as a method of self-study for my research to allow me to position my thesis as an analysis of my personal circumstance, “as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act” (Adam & Holman Jones, 2008); 2) to appropriately analyze the data collected to construct and produce an appropriate art piece that accompanies and visualizes the act of Islamic

prayer, known as *salah*. Digital technology and Islamic artifacts are the main components of this production.

The following research objectives flow from my core research questions: to address my social responsibility of reflecting the crucial situations in which I find myself as a Muslim immigrant in Canada; to use my personal experience to raise awareness on the significance of practicing my prayer rituals in shared spaces; to preserve Islamic cultural rituals within the Islamic immigrant communities in Canada, promoting their well-being and helping them cope with adapting to their new secular environment; to create a safe space for the Islamic cultural ritual of practicing prayer in public and academic institutions; and to explore the Islamic ritual of *salah* and integrate its movements and concepts with my thesis and production project.

Research Purpose

Islamic religious rituals help nourish my well-being by allowing me to embrace the spirituality I am accustomed to back home. The Islamic ritual that I focus on in this thesis is the practice of prayer that is known as *salah*. It is one of the most important daily acts of spirituality I grew up performing five times a day. It is a significant holy act that a Muslim is required to perform at specific times of the day. Performing this holy act five times a day conveys its importance in my life as a Muslim. It plays a major role in my self-identity and my daily life. Since a devotional practice such as *salah* is performed five times a day, a place, in terms of both space and time, needs to be easily accessible for Muslims to be able to perform it. In Islamic states, it is very easy for a Muslim to access a space, wherever they are situated, to perform their prayers. Whether at school or work or a mall, all social institutions offer a room for prayer. One can pray wherever they are just by taking a corner in the room and offering their prayers. Also, in

every neighborhood, there are mosques that are accessible at any time of the day. It is impossible to replicate the situation of living in an Islamic state when one lives in Canada.

Thesis Outline

In the second chapter of this thesis, “Context Review”, I examine the key contexts for this project. The first section addresses the socio-cultural context examining diversity within immigrant communities, my own experience of struggling to preserve my religious identity, and the significance of multi-faith spaces. This section also investigates notions of Islamophobia that have a major negative effect on Muslim communities. In the section titled Islamic Context, I provide a description of the Islamic religion, Islamic prayer and other relevant religious factors. The next section, is concerned with the theoretical context of this thesis. I situate myself among the theories of Stuart Hall, Edward Said, and Frantz Fanon. I draw on the key concepts of orientalism, ontological resistance and identity. This assists me to identify the main issues that cause the separation and tension between myself and my religious identity. My identity is related to my religion, race and ethnic group. An important excerpt from Stuart Hall’s article “Who Needs Identity?” (1996) provides a clear explanation of identity and is essential to one of the purposes of my study:

One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that the people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go on in each other’s presence. Identity is the name given to the escape sought from that uncertainty.

Also in this chapter under the section titled, “Created Works Context”, I offer an investigation of created works that address issues of identity. These works are both digital and traditional, and are relevant for positioning myself as an activist artist.

The third chapter, “Methodologies and Approaches”, discusses my two main research

methodologies; autoethnography and research through art practice are explored here. I examine texts by Graeme Sullivan on art practice as research and Arthur P. Bochner on autoethnography. Additionally, given the deep connection between methodology and process in my chosen methodologies, I provide a framework on the technologies, techniques, and materials that I refer to and explore for producing this project.

The fourth chapter, “Production Process”, is divided into sections addressing the components involved in fabricating the final installation. It examines interactivity in the production as well as the process of making. This chapter also describes all audiovisual elements in the installation, including sound, prayer mats and Islamic art, used to build the final art piece.

Finally, after clarifying the limitations and challenges of undertaking this project for this thesis, I move forward into the contributions I aim to provide through this research. This final section addresses the importance of knowledge through lived experiences in the well-being of diverse communities.

Given this research revolves around the Islamic religion which originates in the Arabic language, this thesis involves a great deal of translation. Throughout my thesis, I translate Arabic terms based on my interpretation combined with translations by other acquired sources. There are words that do not actually have equivalent English meanings. In addition, the final installation conveys what some of the terms actually represent. I provide definitions and explanations of all Arabic terms in a Glossary (*Appendix A*).

Context Review

In this chapter, the following contexts are detailed: Socio-Cultural Context, Theoretical Context, Islamic Context, and Created Works Context. Each section investigates relevant selected theories, documents, literature and previous research. A critical synthesis and analysis is made within each of these sections to provide a supportive framework for my argument.

Socio-Cultural Context

This section investigates the cultural tensions within immigrant communities and discusses the hardships immigrants such as myself face in a country that is foreign to our beliefs. It sheds light on the notions of Islamophobia to emphasize their major negative effect on Muslim communities and examines diversity within immigrant communities by providing an example of positive social contributions such as, multi-faith spaces.

Multi-Faith Spaces. A multi-faith space is a quiet area, usually a room, that is located in a public institution for people of all different religions or with no religion at all to use for different spiritual and meditation purposes. It is offered at public places to allow people to embrace their diversity and also acts as a resource, socially, politically and economically. The UN declares that “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one’s religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”. (U.N. Charter art. 18)

Further research shows that multi-faith spaces are referred to using different terms. Some of the titles given to such places are reflection room, prayer space, quiet room and open room. All the descriptions of these spaces fall under a positive spiritual umbrella of adjectives such as

inclusive, vibrant, room for reflection and welcoming as seen in *Figures 1-5*. These spaces support social cohesion and create a positive bond between religious and secular societies.



Figures 1-5. Examples of various descriptions of multi-faith spaces, Cargo Collective (2012)

The work of social practitioners, specifically those who are committed to social change, are relevant to my practice. Initiatives that promote spiritual development, such as, multi-faith spaces aid people in dealing with cultural tensions, separation, trauma and preserving self-identity through connections with our cultural roots, traditions, and homeland. Without this connection new immigrants are at risk of losing this diversity within their new settlement and more importantly lose their essence in the process of assimilation. Studies have been made on the effects of assimilation, which causes immigrants' feeling of being "isolated from his or her culture, unaccepted by the 'majority culture' ... a consequent sense of rejection, alienation and poor self-esteem" (Bhugra and Becker, 2005, p.19). This research involves finding common ground that can intertwine immigrant cultures in their new environment by developing a scenario

that allows diverse communities to be aware and knowledgeable of each other in meaningful ways.

Notions of Islamophobia. Contextualizing my project within the theoretical frameworks of Hall, Said and Fanon requires me to examine ideas of Islamophobia, a term first introduced in the French language in 1910.(Ezzerhouni, 2010) Since my topic revolves around cultural, political and religious factors associated with identity, I find it essential that I define this broad and abstract term to give the reader a clearer picture of what I attempt to rebuff. To define what is known as Islamophobia, I resorted to Katherine Bullock’s research paper, *In Brief Policy Backgrounder: Defining Islamophobia for a Canadian Context* (2017), she analyzes this widespread term in a Canadian context. Bullock suggests that Islamophobia means “dislike and hatred towards Muslims, and an attempt to discipline Muslims through exclusionary tactics.” (p.5) Analysing such a definition, one cannot ignore the atrocity of its meaning and intention. To exclude a whole religion due to hatred is not merely an idiotic notion but inhumane.

In addition to giving a general definition of Islamophobia, Bullock provides other meanings to the term given by scholars who also advocate that this phenomenon should be identified as ultimate exclusion (Sayyid, 2010). Here Islamophobia involves a set of distinct features, including: Islam being inferior and threatening to the West; Islam seen as the “other”; Islam, being a hostile religion. This set of beliefs allows people to take discriminatory practices towards Muslims and marginalize Muslims by excluding them from mainstream society.

An example of how negatively Muslims are perceived in the West is seen in the works of M. Anum Syed, Saeeda Noor in *On Dominant Discourses about Canadian Muslim Women: The Need to Promote Peacebuilding* (2015) and *Maclean’s Magazine* that reports an increase in anti-Muslim sentiments in some parts of Canada (2013). Their article shows that there has been a

great negative impact on Muslims globally in the wake of 9/11. Syed and Noor examine how Muslim women have been the victims of such a problematic change. Some Muslim women are very conservative when it comes to covering their hair and wearing loose clothes to hide their physical features. Some religious women opt to wear *hijab*, a head cover, while other more pious women prefer to wear *niqab*, a veil covering the hair and all or part of the face. Some governments in Canada took a stricter approach in regulating rules around Muslim women covering their heads and faces in public spaces. For example, in *The Guardian* (2017) it is reported that “the Canadian province of Quebec passed a law – believed to be the first of its kind in North America – obliging women wearing the *niqab* or *burqa* to unveil when riding public transit or receiving government services.” In addition, the media has depended on identity and citizenship politics to frame Muslim women as “alien” and “scary” and outside of the mainstream discourse. This ties back to how Muslim women are constantly marginalized as being “oppressed” by Muslim men or “dangerous”. Women have become imprisoned in a certain image; one that is projected and perceived by the West rather than how they see themselves. It is important to know what veiling actually means to a Muslim woman and how she represents her own agency, identity and her freedom to practice her faith as she wishes.

As a Muslim immigrant woman, I feel like I am part of the women who have been affected by such events. I include myself with the women Syed and Noor write about and also strongly agree that we need to find ways of creating a safe positive space where Muslim women’s well-being can flourish. I address my research questions by expressing the need of providing support for peace-building tools through the use of my digital installation as a means of representing the experience of my prayer rituals. I believe it is relevant for a deeper understanding of such issues.

In summary, negative labeling of Muslims through Islamophobia is a prominent issue in the West, promoting isolation of communities instead of integration. This isolation may strip away the identity of Muslims as they cannot practise their religion comfortably due to stigma or law. Hence, in the context of prayer, having more multi-faith spaces may address Islamophobia directly by encouraging public acceptance of the concept of prayer. These spaces also have an indirect effect on Islamophobia by providing privacy and comfort to Muslims to perform prayer until the public eye becomes more accepting of these daily rituals.

Theoretical Context

This literature review provides me with the theoretical framework that I build my thesis around. I cite the following three theorists and how their works integrate to my thesis: Stuart Hall, Frantz Fanon, and Edward Said.

“Cultural Identity and Diaspora” by Stuart Hall. Since my research project revolves around creating an artistic prototype that aims at portraying my cultural identity in a foreign place, I found the work of Stuart Hall to offer a suitable theoretical framework. Hall states that the question of cultural identity is a compelling and problematic one. This is because individuals who have continuously attempted to find a definitive meaning of identity, discover it to be a decentred and deconstructed concept. However, what I hope to do with my installation is to attempt to clarify what identity means for me.

The philosophical questions of who I am and what I am are classic inquiries dating back to Plato’s time. Hall himself falls into the same dilemma of previous theorists on the question of, not only cultural identity, but also the basic question of personal identity. This brings me to the protean term of the self – the need to understand an individual’s own essential being as distinguished from others around him/her. It also refers to the fragmented experiences an

individual undergoes in an uprooted society and in constant process of reinvention. In his book *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1996), Hall says, “Identification turns out to be one of the least well-known understood concepts – almost as tricky, though preferable to, ‘identity’ itself; and certainly no guarantee against the conceptual difficulties which have beset the latter.” (p.2) Identities are created within specific discourses, and we as seekers of their meanings, need to understand them as a discursive practice, one that allows individuals to perceive themselves as beings of reality.

In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990), Hall gives two definitions of cultural identity which complete each other. The first definition conveys cultural identity as one collective element, focusing on shared ancestry origins and cultural codes. This cultural “oneness” also hides under many “selves” which reflect the shifting divisions in our collective history. The second definition states that no matter how united and collective cultural identity is, there are significant differences that we should not ignore as they constitute “what we really are” and “what we have become”. These ruptures signify uniqueness as history is constantly shifting and transforming, even though the origins and cultural codes it originated from are “one”.

These concepts resonate with my research as embracing immigrant Muslims as one united community with many differences.

Frantz Fanon - Ontological Resistance. Frantz Fanon’s writings are good examples of depicting discrimination and most importantly, displacement. In his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon focuses on the dehumanizing effects of colonization on the black race. Fanon explores the repercussions and problems of racism and discrimination which are the main causes for the identity crisis of communities who have been oppressed by dominating societies. Using a psychological and psychiatric approach, Fanon attempts to explore several

interpretations of the social, cultural and political status of the black community under the effects of colonization. In addition, Fanon criticizes postcolonial governments for their corruption, ethnic divisions, racism and economic dependence.

Though my argument is far from Fanon's in terms of the racism he addresses, it is connected in terms of marginalization and displacement of individuals of a specific religion. Fanon states that "The black man among his own in the twentieth century does not know at what moment his inferiority comes into being through the other." (1952, p.83) Similar to him, I believe that our perception of ourselves can be affected by the gaze of others and this becomes evident in my discussion of Muslim immigrants. Fanon also offers a meaning of change. "Since the Other was reluctant to recognise me, there was only one answer: to make myself known." (1952, p.87) This theory of ontological resistance is crucial to any development of my thinking and action.

***Orientalism* by Edward Said.** I find that my reading of Edward Said's book *Orientalism* (1979) and his general idea about the representation of the East in the Western world very relevant to my project. In the preface of his book, Said explains his use of a humanistic critique to challenge thought and analysis that "imprison [Easterners] in labels and antagonistic debate." (2003) What Said attempts to do is to break the chained thoughts of hostile identities and to create a more humane picture of Easterners so that foreign societies can be able to understand their cultural identity which is in most cases related to their religion.

Said also questions a pattern of misrepresentations of the non-Western world. His book demonstrates how Easterners, including Muslims, find difficulties in representing themselves, their beliefs, their cultures and their traditions in a Western culture due to the inferior image given to them by the West. "Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through,

analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined”. (Said, 1979, p.207) This quote clearly speaks of the impact of marginalization in the sense that “Orientals”, who in the context of my thesis I may equate with Muslim immigrants, are not considered as citizens and thus deprived of their rights. A result of such projection may cause feelings of pain and fear but most of all an inferiority and identity crisis as described by Fanon.

By looking deeper into Said’s analysis of orientalism in relation to its critical portrayal of an Islamic environment during the time of the Western colonization of the East, I gain insight into the West’s continued perception of the East as a marginalized group that is in need of Western intervention or “rescue”.

Islamic Context

This section provides detail of the Islamic culture by defining frequently-used Arabic words in this research. Background on the Islamic religion is also addressed here, based on historical insights and religious beliefs. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to describe Islam in meticulous detail due to its complexity. However, prayer or *salah* is described in detail in addition to its environmental factors, including the call to prayer (*athan*) and Quranic verses recited during prayer.

Background on Islam. Islam is based on five fundamental pillars of faith. The first pillar is *shahadah*, the declaration and belief that there exists only one true God (*Allah*), and that Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) is His Messenger. This declaration is a lifelong mantra of all believers of Islam. The second pillar is *salah*, a ritual that is performed five times daily. The third is *zakkah*, which constitutes donating a percentage of the value of your belongings to the needy on an annual basis. The fourth pillar is *sawm*, fasting the holy month of Ramadan. The fifth and final pillar is *hajj*, which is a sacred pilgrimage to Makkah that is

required of a Muslim to perform at least once in a lifetime as long as one is physically and financially able to do so.

Salah. *Salah* is at the core of my research and creative activities. With *salah*, a Muslim becomes closer to Allah and their faith is strengthened. *Salah*, in contrast to the other pillars of Islam is performed daily. For Muslims, the five daily prayer times are among the most important obligations of their Islamic faith since it is performed on a daily basis. Depending on the level of a Muslim's spirituality, one can offer even more than just the five main mandatory prayers during the day. Prayers grant Muslims a connection to Allah as an opportunity for guidance during their journey through life. It is also a way in which I can cut off from the world and speak of whatever I desire with Allah, whom I am faithful to. Through *salah*, the practitioner embraces the submissive feeling of reaching out to Allah and embracing all emotions that are felt during these moments.

There are five prayer times in Islam: dawn (*Salat Al-Fajur*), noon (*Salat Al-Duhur*), afternoon (*Salat Al-Asr*), dusk (*Salat Al-Mahgrib*), and night (*Salat Al-Isha*). Each prayer constitutes a different number of units (*rak'ah*) and each unit starts with standing tall while reciting portions of the Holy Quran. After the recitation phase, one transitions from standing tall to prostrate on the ground through a series of movements (bowing or *ruku'*), prostration while kneeling, and prostration with your forehead on the ground or *sujoud*). Dawn prayer has two units; noon, afternoon and night prayers contain four units; and dusk has three units. The order of movements for the odd units within a prayer are as follows: bowing, standing tall again, *sujoud*, prostration while kneeling, another *sujoud* and standing tall again. The even units are very similar but they add another prostration during the kneeling phase after the second *sujoud*. If the prayer is not over, one stands tall again after this prostration. The second and last units of each

prayer always end with a special recitation prayer during prostration while kneeling which is called *Tashahood*. In addition, to end your prayer after the *Tashahood* of the last unit, you perform *Tasleem* which is a greeting out loud in Arabic to your guardian angels by looking to your right then left.

I can not give an exact description of my personal feeling as I pray, but, to assist understanding, I introduce one of the first female Sufi mystical poets Rabia Al-Basri (717–801). Rabia Al-Basri, also known as Rabia Al-Adawiyya, was a poor woman who was enslaved and separated from her family after the death of her father. Even though her sufferings were unbearable and unimaginable, I share a certain level of reaching out through prayer for that devotion and love we both have for Allah. Through her torture and abduction, she would fast most mornings and pray throughout the day. She did not practice out of fear but out of true willingness and desire to be in the presence of Allah.

Although Rabia Al-Basri's story is a sad one, it is an example of a pious Muslim's spiritual journey. She speaks to me when I think of what prayer means to me. If I am asked how it feels when I am in prayer I think of her. Her poems inspired many people and strengthened their relationship with God. Many people became her disciples. About Rabia Al-Basri, Barbara Lois Helms states (1993): "One of the many myths that swirl around her life is that she was freed from slavery because her master saw her praying while surrounded by light, realized that she was a saint and feared for his life if he continued to keep her as a slave." I find this biographical detail to be informative as my work aims at portraying the need and importance of *salah* in a Muslim's life not just because of religious obligation but due to its significance in defining a Muslim's identity.

Of Al-Basri's many poems, I find *If I Did Not Pray* to be the most relevant to this research as it describes the same love and strength of faith that I am blessed with. That poem in translation by Daniel Ladinsky follows (2002):

I could not move against this wind if I did not pray.
 And all that is said of me that is untrue
 would make lame my gait if I
 could not free myself from
 the weight of other's
 malice.
 I could not move against His light
 if I did not pray.
 See how things become: what a change
 can happen, when we find a way
 to keep Him
 close. (p.11)

The poem clearly portrays a strong connection to a deity. By using her prayer as an anchor, she was able to defeat all the hardships that she encountered and all the malice she faced from those around her. The poem does not express what happens when she prays, but rather what happens to her when she does not pray. The negative “not” is used six times in the poem to emphasize the possible drawbacks of not praying, such as her inability to overcome her life's obstacles and tolerating people's malice. In the last few verses of the poem, the speaker shifts the first person singular pronoun “I”, which she uses in the first stanza and the first few verses in the second stanza, to the plural “we” to involve the readers in her experience with God.

The Athan. The first stage of *salah* starts with a call that reminds people it is the time of prayer. *Salah* begins from that first sound, call to prayer, also known as the *athan*/أذان. Growing up in Saudi Arabia, I used to hear the the *athan* five times a day - corresponding to the five prayer times - from mosques in the neighborhood or even at home. Regarding the latter, my father would call for prayer whenever he was home or switch on the TV and tune to a channel which aired the *athan* live in Makkah. My sisters and I used to mimic our Dad or the TV and

then pray in congregation. It was a part of my daily life that made me feel at home. Since moving to Canada, it was a struggle to for me to let go of this beautiful sound that was part of me. In the majority of Muslim countries in the Middle East, the *athan* is recited at mosques in every neighborhood. It is performed in a loud voice by a person known as the *muathin* who faces the direction of the *Kaaba* in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Holy *Kaaba* is considered the most sacred shrine by Muslims all over the world, as they orient themselves towards it when praying. The phrases recited in the *athan* are as follows:

- "*Allahu Akbar*" is recited four times and means, "Allah is the Greatest."
"*Ash-hadu an la ilaha ill-Allah*" is recited twice and means, "I bear witness that there is none worthy of being worshipped except Allah."
- "*Ash-hadu anna Muhammad-ar-Rasoolullah*" is recited twice, and means, "I bear witness that Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah."
- "*Hayya ala Salah*" is recited twice while turning the face to the right and means, "Come to Prayer."
- "*Hayya ala Falah*" is recited twice while turning the face to the left and means, "Come to Success."
- "*Allahu Akbar*" is recited twice once more. "*La-Ilaha Il-Allah*" is recited once, meaning, "There is no other entity of worship except Allah."

The *athan* originated when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was concerned with finding the best way to announce prayer. He was then approached by Abdullaah bin Zaid bin Abd Rabi who had a dream of the words of the *athan* that we hear at mosques today. These phrases were then taught to Bilal Ibn Rabah who came to be the first appointed *muathin* in history. The *muathin* is a

term given to those who perform the call to prayer. The first *muathin* in history was Bilal Ibn Rabah, from Ethiopia, and was appointed by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He was initially taken as a slave and was tortured by Umayya Bin Khalf when he discovered that Bilal had converted to Islam. Soon after, he was freed by Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq, a companion of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This part in history is very essential to point out that the Islamic culture revolves around compassion and equality.

The beauty of the *athan* lies in each *muathin* having their own unique style of recitation. There are so many variations of intonation when calling people to prayer. From Malaysia, Egypt, Turkey and even mosques in America, the *athan* has a distinctive sound in each country or region. This brings me back to how the Islamic faith is not tied to one particular form of expression and culture. “Each community brings its own colour and harmonies to the faith.” (Mamanushka, 2017)

Created Works Context

This section focuses on created works relevant to my thesis and describes the various work of artists who have inspired and shaped it. As these artists’ work revolve around Islamic culture, they are tied to my research in terms of key concepts, methodologies, approaches and technological tools used. This section includes discussions of artists like Mariam Magsi, Wael Aboelsaadat, Rawaa Bakhsh and Jamelie Hassan.

Purdah. Mariam Magsi’s Master’s dissertation, titled *Purdah* (2017), explores the politics behind the act of women wearing a headscarf as a cultural and/or religious practice. The word *purdah* is derived from the Persian language and is also used by Urdu speakers. It means to cover or wrap around, and in the Islamic culture, it represents a Muslim woman wrapped in a black cloth to cover herself. Magsi states that “rather than situate *Purdah* as an isolated cultural

and religious practice” (p.1), she encourages visitors to her gallery to engage with the term as an idea presented through her photographs and installations. Her exhibition uses photography, audio, and text to form representations of *Purdah*. The photographs in *Purdah* are portraits of *Purdah* users and are accompanied with text and audio excerpts from interviews with these users. The representations of *Purdah* emerge from a collection of interviews between Magsi and these participants. She uses ethnography as her methodology to investigate the stories of participants who practice this form of concealing in their daily lives. Her camera and a notebook were her main research tools. I come to see that photography is not only used as a method of observing these individuals, but also as a form of sharing. She defines it is an empowering process for her as a Muslim female photographer to be able to record the stories around this ritual and share them within a public space to bring “criticality to this discourse.” (Magsi, 2017, p.5) This explains her research based on a theoretical framework by Muslim feminist scholars, such as Reza Aslan and Dr. Homa Hoodfar. They have done extensive research on the act of veiling. Another inspirational contribution to Magsi’s research is Lalla Essaydi, an artist who I explore further in this chapter. Essaydi’s work is part of *Purdah*’s methodological framework that directs and positions the thesis.

There is a particularly important piece in her exhibition involving projected photographs that look as though they are windows. This gives the viewer the perspective of looking into a world they might not be familiar with. Additionally, being projected symbolizes the function of a mirror to show that what they see reflects back on themselves. “The veiled Muslim woman symbolizes the ultimate Other who can also reveal much about the individual confronting her as well as about Western patriarchy.” (Byington, 2001)

Even though Magsi is passionate about offering these stories for viewers to see, it is

important to point out that not all her participants felt the same way. A few did not allow her to use their stories but only contributed to data collection. These contributors were approached by Magsi in Thorncliffe Park in Toronto, an area that is home to many Muslim minorities. By exploring her investigation on *purdah* users in Toronto, I found deeper tensions that Muslims face in the West. “The participants’ refusal to go on record is evidence of both their agency and valid concerns of negative judgement in the current climate of anti-Muslim bigotry in the West.” (Magsi, 2017, p.19) Through this, I find that not all people are open to the idea of presenting themselves and their identity due to concerns of being negatively targeted. In other words, they would rather be excluded than have their identities be portrayed to the Western eye. It is a difficulty I face as well, as I continue to represent my faith and culture in public. My experience of facing difficulties in maintaining my prayers in Canada allowed me as an artist to drive this research forward and ultimately to take action for myself and others with the same challenges. Magsi’s creative work encouraged me to question my topic and illuminated my research questions and objectives.

Other Artists. Many other important artists have contributed to this research. Rawaa Bakhsh is a graduate of the Interdisciplinary Media Art and Design Master’s program at OCAD University. She is a designer who also obtained her Bachelor’s degree in Graphic Design from Dar El Hekma University in 2010, a year after I graduated. We are contemporaries from Saudi Arabia and had similar transition experiences when we moved to Toronto, Canada. Rawaa Bakhsh’s thesis work, *Visual Verses: From the Form of Spirit to the Spirit of Form* (2014), has inspired my spiritual journey in many ways. She discusses how moving to Canada has pulled her away from her intense spirituality. Her thesis investigates how her art practices can act as forms of worship to bring back that lost intimacy. Her research is also a self-exploration journey

through spirituality. Even though my work delves deeper into the Islamic religious ritual, we both use art to express faith and spirituality within Islam. She created a series of visual representations of Islamic holy scripts called *Sab'ah*, the Arabic word for the number seven.

Sab'ah uses ink to develop the deep mystical meanings of the Quranic verse 31:27:

And if all the trees on earth were pens and the ocean (were ink), with seven oceans behind it to add to its (supply), yet would not the words of Allah be exhausted (in the writing): for Allah is Exalted in Power, full of Wisdom” (31:27, Surat Luqman).

وَلَوْ أَنَّ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ أَقْلَامٌ وَالْبَحْرُ يَمُدُّهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ سَبْعَةُ أَبْحُرٍ مَا نَفِدَتْ كَلِمَاتُ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

As a Sufi artist, Bakhsh re-interprets the meaning of this verse. As shown in *Figure 6*, Bakhsh links ink with the above verse. Her emphasis on the importance of materiality and form used when portraying sacred verses is what I investigate in my research through the use of light in combination with Islamic artifacts. How we capture the word of God in material form is vital to Islamic culture yet it is also sensitive, as any major deviation or modernization from the traditional text may be deemed as blasphemous. Rawaa Bakhsh achieves this balance of tradition and modernization by transforming the vocal recitation of this verse into an abstract form made of ink. Molecules of ink are affected by soundwaves and result in something fitting without much intervention; the strength of spirituality in the verse and recitation is instantly portrayed in the resulting artwork.

The holy Quran is the foundation of her theoretical framework as she clarifies how the Holy Scripture is the basis of many Islamic artworks. Since beautiful Islamic calligraphy is the outcome of hearing Quranic verses, Bakhsh creates new means of visualization using sound and ink. Dealing with holy content and spirituality is a difficult task when converted into a different

form. Both of our projects take on that challenge of representing sacred text in a conceptual form using an audio-visual element.



Figure 6. Sab'ah, Rawaa Bakhsh (2014)

Rawaa Bakhsh's core research question is "How can I cope, reflect, and explore spiritual seeking in this new secular context?"(p.5) She connects herself with art-making as a form of spirituality itself. She discovers that through her art practice, she builds a deeper sense for engaging with sacred content in a spiritual fashion. Her approach of "seeking truth" is a way of inspiring her spiritual journey. As a result, her spirituality is embraced at a more intimate level while she is interpreting her faith through the Quranic verses and creating an extension of it through her art pieces. Through exploring her thesis work and further examining her methodological tools and approaches, I was able to clearly plan my research path. Instead of seeking other means of spirituality to cope and adapt, I attach myself deeper into my own religious form of spirituality. This differentiates my approach from hers somewhat, but at the same time clarifies that our methodological approach is similar as we both investigate the most suitable form of visualization.

Jamelie Hassan is another artist whose art is integrated with holy content. She is a Canadian social activist artist of Lebanese descent, whose work revolves around concepts of cultural displacement and political conflict. “Hassan heightens awareness of one’s sense of geographic, societal and political location, while also suggesting the fragility, tenuousness or relativity of any such sense.” (Canadian Art, 2018) Her project *Nur*, an Arabic word meaning light, is based on the Quranic chapter, *Surat Al-Nur*, The Light Verse. (Quran 24) *Figure 7* shows her installation in The Great Mosque of China’s library that uses Islamic scripts from The Light Verse chapter. Her work reflects language and the politics that come with it. Similar to the Sufi poem discussed in the Islamic Context section, Jamelie Hassan uses holy words of worship but instead, they are seen as visually poetic. Her artwork is also used for the purpose of cross-cultural sharing of knowledge. This idea is examined through her questioning of language and politics in both global and local scales. Her production of the installation of *Nur* creates connections between the communities in China and the Arabic culture that are brought to life through calligraphy.

Working with the Arabic language is made more challenging when faced with issues of translation. Through an email conversation between Hassan and the artist Andy Patton, she writes “I have no answers for those who want everything to be understandable. (translations are limited & approximate too ...)” (J. Hassan, personal communication, 2015). Patton replies stating that when one depends on translation, everything becomes obvious which takes away from the value and worth of the original. Thus, “nothing can really be translated.” (A.Patton, personal communication, 2015). This is an element I explore through Jamelie Hassan and Rawaa Bakhsh’s work, considering how the layers of meaning found in the Quran are too rich to simply translate. I believe that the essence of Quranic recitation risks being lost in translation. This is an

aspect that I take on when producing work that includes audio recordings of Quranic verses.

When producing my audio element, I chose to stay away from translating the verses to English and decided to allow the audience to hear my recitation based on my mother tongue and the language of the Quran.



Figure 7. Nur, by Shi Xinhang, Jamelie Hassan (2014)

Lalla Essaydi is a Moroccan photographer known for her photographs of Arab women (*Figure 8*). She has two children who were born and raised in Saudi Arabia, and now lives in Boston, Massachusetts. Her work has been shaped by her experience in both Eastern and Western cultures. It addresses socio-cultural issues by conveying her own experience as an Arab for the purpose of resisting stereotypes. Her practice of photography along with the use of traditional Islamic calligraphic art is focused on portraying the true essence of her autobiographical vision on how she presents herself as a Muslim woman.

I am uncomfortable thinking of myself as a representative of all Arab women. Art can only come from the heart of an individual artist, and I am much too aware of the range of traditions and laws among the different Arab nations to presume to speak for everyone. My work documents my own experience growing up as an

Arab woman within Islamic culture seen now from a very different perspective. It is the story of my quest to find my own voice, the unique voice of an artist. (Essaydi, 2009)

Essaydi uses henna and calligraphy as forms of Islamic art in her photographs. Her subjects are women seen in white veils that are covered with calligraphic henna script. Her photographic series brings together an art form that has been known to be dominated by men which is calligraphy, and another that is traditionally applied by women, henna. Her images signify what it means to be a Muslim woman. Isolde Brielmaier discusses this reclamation to address its importance in the midst of an anti-Muslim environment. In *Re-inventing the Spaces Within: The Images of Lalla Essaydi* (2005),

She rejects a simplistic reading of Islamic culture. Islam, as depicted in her work, is both confining liberating, fluid and rigid. It is, in essence, indefinable. Essaydi challenges not only our perceptions of Muslim societies, but also our expectations of a photographer in this world. What are we expecting to see when we look at a picture of veiled Muslim? What “truths” do photographs really hold, and whose stories do they tell? (p.24)



Figure 8. Converging Territories #26, Lalla Essaydi (2003)

The name of the series of images is “Converging Territories”, which tells the story of the places that Essaydi has inhabited. Essaydi’s work reflects the complex task of adapting to the Western culture by her description of what she sees through the spaces in the photographs. “When I look at these spaces now, I see two cultures that have shaped me and which are distorted when looked at through the “Orientalist” lens of the West.” (Essaydi, 2009) My work addresses this distortion and targets it through exploring how this feeling of displacement can speak for itself through an installation that occupies public physical space.

E-Prayer Rug. *El- Sajjadah (Figure 9)* is a digital prayer rug designed by Soner Ozenc to help Muslims face the right direction towards Makkah when praying. *El* in *El-Sajjadah* stands for electro-luminescent, and *sajjadah* means prayer mat. Embedding prayer mats with functionalities is also seen in *Electronic Prayer Rug: Design and Evaluation* by Wael Abouelsaadat. (2012) The Electronic Prayer Rug is a design project for his PhD research. Abouelsaadat is an Egyptian Muslim who obtained his PhD in Computer Science from the University of Toronto. His main focus is on interfaces that support religious rituals and evaluating their efficiency. This includes the use of monitoring brain waves with devices such as the EEG and EMG.

His production was motivated by studies from numerous psychologists such as Welford, Kizmaz and Loveland that have shown a strong link between a society’s well-being and the practice of faith by its residents. These studies are not only based on the Islamic faith but others, such as Christianity, that also include the act of praying as a pillar. These psychologists’ studies (Ai, Bolling, & Peterson, 2000) have confirmed that prayer not only affects a person’s mental state but also their physical health. In a Harvard-affiliated hospital, Dr. Salih Yucel (2007) conducted studies on 60 Christian patients who confirm positive results from surgery by prayer.

His research is extensive and significant in providing me with a deeper understanding of the way I feel when I am lost and incapable of adapting in the West. My mental health deteriorates when I am not maintaining my daily prayers. Abouelsaadat's electronic prayer rug attempts to enhance Muslims' spirituality by aiding them through the ritual act of prayer. This rug acts as a highly technical functional tool that supports practitioners with reminders of the basic requirements of *salah*. One of the functions of this rug is to remind Muslim users of the relevant Quranic verses that are required to be recited during prayer in case they have forgotten them. Another use is to offer practicing Muslims the benefit of being reminded of the following step they should make during prayer. All these functions are alerts that appear on a screen attached to the prayer rug. They are triggered by sensors that read body movements while the person is praying. I have benefited a great deal from his trial-and-error experiences because they assisted my decisions when choosing technological materials and using the appropriate sensor in the design of my prayer mat. Exploring the functionality in Abouelsaadat's research was very useful in determining how the technological components could work together. My prayer mat is simpler digitally than his E-rug, but mine intends to play a different role than his: a representation of spirituality through prayer.



Figure 9. *El-Sajjadah*, Soner Ozenc (2012)

Methodologies and Approaches

My thesis focuses on two main methodologies that target my research questions: autoethnography and research through art practice. Both methods provide structure to my thesis and further formulate my production process by analyzing the collected data.

Autoethnography

In the article “Autoethnography: An Overview”, the authors Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner (2011) provide a substantial background on the approaches and forms which researchers use with this method. They define autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience.” (2011, p.1) This method focuses on the actual experiences of researchers and artists and not just research and literature reviews like other methodologies. It also stresses social factors like the audience’s interpretation of the final textual product. In addition, autoethnography is both process and product. In the field of art practice, the process of autoethnography is seen in the creativity of projects. Searching for a creative idea related to the artist’s passion and interest is no easy task as novelty is important in this case. The product results from the process of researching and analyzing, ending with a prototype that best projects the process experienced.

Autoethnography creates a connection between my theoretical framework and my production. The route this research takes depends on my personal story and how my religious identity is the main narrative for this project. According to Richardson (1990):

If we wish to understand the deepest and most universal of human experiences, if we wish our work to be faithful to the lived experiences of people, if we wish for a union between poetics and science, or if we wish to use our privileges and skills to empower the people we study, then we should value the narrative. (p.250)

I develop my journey critically by transforming it from the original narrative form, found in sources of documentation through text and video, to a conceptual installation. These sources are autoethnographic tools used to collect details describing my experiences of practicing prayer in shared spaces. I seek out answers to my research question by undertaking my ability to raise awareness on the significance of practicing *salah*.

Using autoethnography, this thesis employs “my personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in doing so, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders.” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) Autoethnography also allows me to analyse my experience of praying in order to portray this cultural experience to people of different backgrounds. This methodological approach makes the projection of a prayer experience equally about my spiritual journey as it is about the final installation. Creating a digital interactive installation of *salah* is a form of self-reflection of my culture. Part of my process consists of expressing my feelings in situations when I find it difficult to practice *salah*, which is when I am in a public shared space.

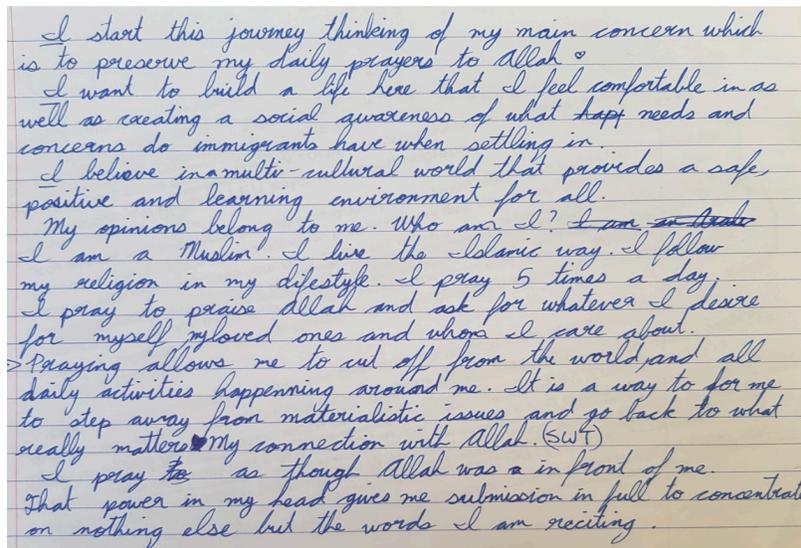
As the process component of autoethnographic methodology, I use the traditional methods of keeping a journal and taking notes to describe how I feel before, during and after the prayer. The process of writing allowed me to reflect on the happenings of my day and the effect of *salah* on my emotional and mental peace. Writing my diary with a focus on *salah* helped me to understand the effect of *salah* not only as an obligatory ritual that is required of Muslims to perform five times daily but as a meditation practice targeted at releasing the negative energy in my body and helping me with the process of relaxation. *Figure 10* shows a page of my journal written on September 2017 that holds a compilation of my written experiences. Below is an excerpt from my diary:

I start this journey thinking of my main concern which is to preserve my daily prayers to Allah. I want to build a life here that I feel comfortable in as well as

creating a social awareness of what needs and concerns do immigrants have when settling in. I believe in a multi-cultural world that provides a safe, positive and learning environment for all. My opinions belong to me. Who am I? I am a Muslim. I live the Islamic way. I follow my religion in my lifestyle. I pray 5 times a day. (Gazzaz, 2017)

I continue with the importance of *salah* as shown in these words:

Praying allows me to cut off from the world and all the daily activities happening around me. It is a way for me to step away from worldly issues and go back to what really matters, my connection to Allah.



I start this journey thinking of my main concern which is to preserve my daily prayers to Allah.
 I want to build a life here that I feel comfortable in as well as creating a social awareness of what ~~happy~~ needs and concerns do immigrants have when settling in.
 I believe in a multi-cultural world that provides a safe, positive and learning environment for all.
 My opinions belong to me. Who am I? I am ~~an~~ a Muslim. I live the Islamic way. I follow my religion in my lifestyle. I pray 5 times a day.
 I pray to praise Allah and ask for whatever I desire for myself, loved ones and whom I care about.
 Praying allows me to cut off from the world and all daily activities happening around me. It is a way for me to step away from materialistic issues and go back to what really matters. My connection with Allah. (SWT)
 I pray ~~to~~ as though Allah was in front of me. That power in my head gives me submission in full to concentrate on nothing else but the words I am reciting.

Figure 10. A page from Fitrah's journal

One of the personal elements of *Fitrah*'s installation is its audio component. I use my own voice to recite the Opening Chapter of the Quran that I chant daily in *salah*. This gives the observer the opportunity to hear my voice on an intimate level. It is a private recitation that I chant silently during praying, but for the autoethnographic reason of building a connection with my audience, I make my prayers public. It was not an easy task to record my voice while being self-conscious that I may be heard by people I do not know. Using my own voice and representing the feelings discovered through this methodology encourages a deeper mystic connection between *Fitrah* and the listener.

This research methodology is non-traditional but frames the process for my thesis. It is to produce meaningful research grounded in personal experience to sensitize readers to issues of identity politics and forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us. “It treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act.” (Ellis et al., 2000, p.1)

Research through Art Practice

This research utilizes the narrative collected from the autoethnography process and uses it as the subject and driver for my art-making practice. It is impossible to look at the two methodologies as separate. Opportunities for explanation, interpretation, and representation also arise during the artmaking process. The materials processed through this methodology in this research act as textual content that enhance a form of representation for dealing with complex realities. (Cahnmann, 2003) The roles of prototyping and artifact in research through art practice begin by experimenting with tools, materials, and digital technology, which ultimately aid me in brainstorming and facing obstacles. Graeme Sullivan states that “there is a need to be able to incorporate the arts as forms that more adequately represent the breadth of human knowing.” (2016, p.24) This section covers the territory between material form and the overall spiritual message.

This approach “argues for an expansion of inquiry practices” (Sullivan, 2006, p.24) Using this methodology, I explore my experience of *salah* as documented in my journal to aid the creation of a conceptual perspective for the digital interactive installation. By undertaking this form of research with autoethnography I use a passage from my journal as an essential description that I take into account when producing the installation:

I pray as though Allah was in front of me. That power in my head gives me submission in full to concentrate on nothing else but the words I am reciting.
(Gazzaz,2017)

This links self-study research, religious lived experiences and subjectivity with aesthetic approaches. Clive Bell says “Art and Religion are two roads by which men escape from circumstance to ecstasy. Between aesthetic and religious rapture there is a family alliance. Art and religion are means to similar states of mind.” In the book *Art is a Spiritual Path*, Pat Allen states “Artemaking is a spiritual path through which we are most able to explore divinity by participating in the act of creating”. (2005, p.1) This form of creation borrows conceptual perspectives from other disciplines that inspire my production along with the contribution of the relevant created works discussed in this thesis.

Apart from my daily journal writing, I documented my practice of *salah* by recording myself while practicing the five daily rituals. I also recorded my interaction with the prototype at different stages to address my core research question concerning the use of digital tools as methods of representation for my spiritual journey. The critique of these videos develops a “process of inquiry that involves creative action and critical reflection.” (Sullivan, 2006, p.244) These sources of documentation (diary and video) were very useful in my production of a final piece that re-enacts the experience of this important ritual in a Muslim’s daily life to target the concern of how there is a necessity for a space where it can be practiced.

The combination of autoethnography and research through art practice methodologies allows artists to incorporate practice into autobiographical research. They simultaneously help transform personal experiences into art by encouraging “systematic reflection”, Duncan (2004, p.3). This integral relation is vital to validate the approaches taken during production when investigating my spiritual journey for further discoveries through art practice.

Prototype Production Process

This section outlines the artmaking and technological processes that form the final interactive digital installation. All the context and framework from the previous sections were taken into account throughout the decision-making process. The production process of *Fitrah* consists of several stages and components. Through the use of digital electronics and sensors, the final installation brings the physical environment to life through audiovisual components. The elements used for this installation consist of a screen, sound, light and Islamic artifacts including five prayer mats and five gobos. All these elements will be explored in detail in this chapter and lead to the discussion of the interaction process. The prayer mats are the interactive foundation of this installation. They all function together to create an abstract audiovisual experience for the audience by allowing them to go through what it feels like for me to practice my cultural ritual of the Islamic prayer, *salah*. The process discussed here starts with a descriptive breakdown of *salah*. This is necessary for identifying the essential features of *salah* applied in the interactive design and fabrication process.

Analysis of *Salah*

This research investigates the act of prayer itself to consider all the aspects necessary for interactive prototyping. These factors are the times of prayer during the day, recitations in *salah*, the duration, and the body movements during prayer.

As Bakhsh states in *Visual Verses: From the Form of Spirit to the Spirit of Form*, (2014) “Five times a day I stand on my prayer mat and recite, recite the opening chapter of the Quran, which includes the phrase ‘Guide us upon the straight path’ (Quran 1:16).” As explained in the Islamic Context section, a Muslim practicing *salah* five times a day performs a set of movements. *Figure 11* displays the body movements which form the unit called *rak'ah*. Standing

tall is known as *qiyam*, bowing is known as *ruku'*; and prostrating is known as *sujoud*, sitting down or kneeling.

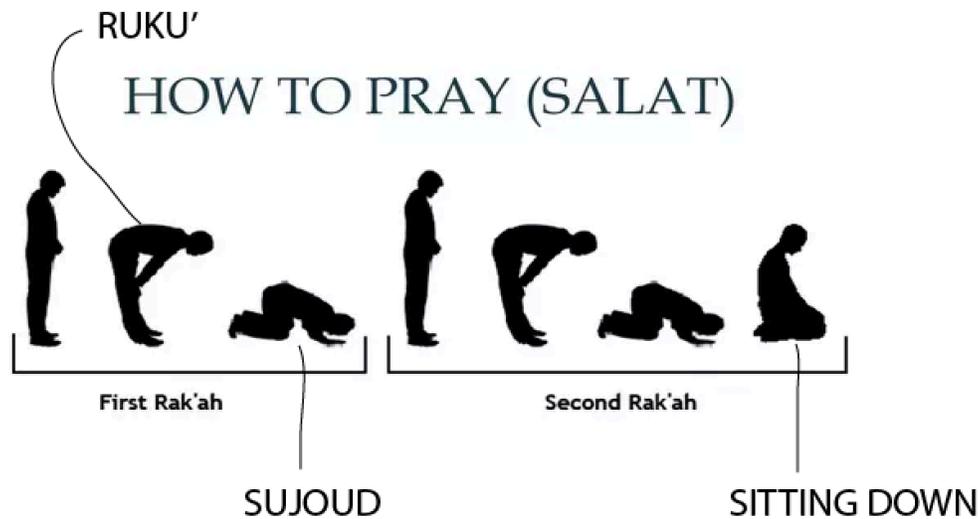


Figure 11. Diagram showing set of prayer positions, Abuu Kalthuuma (2015)

The number of times a *rak'ah* is repeated depends on the time of prayer. In other words, the set of movements in one unit of *rak'ah* are performed a certain number of times consecutively according to which prayer it is. *Fajur* is prayed at dawn and consists of two *rak'ahs*. Figure 11 shows two units of *rak'ahs* that would be the full performance of the *Fajur* prayer. *Duhur* is prayed in the morning and consists of four *rak'ahs*. *Asr* is prayed in the evening and consists of four *rak'ahs*. *Maghrib* is prayed at sunset and consists of three *rak'ahs*. *Isha* is prayed at night and consists of four *rak'ahs*. In Islam these prayers are an obligation for every Muslim to perform whether individually or in congregation. There are additional prayers that a person can pray for other reasons at other times. For this research, I will only focus on the five mandatory prayers.

These prayers involve the supplication of the Quran according to which posture the person is in. To start any prayer, whether mandatory or optional, the practicing Muslim would orient themselves towards the *Kaaba* in Makkah. This geographical direction is known as the

Qibla. They then would stand tall, raise their hands close to their ears and begin by saying, *Allah* is the Greatest, “*Allahu Akbar*”. One would remain in the *qiyam* position and recite the first opening chapter of the Quran, *Surat Al-Fatiha*. *Sura* means chapter in the Quran and any verse within a chapter is known as *aya*. This chapter is the opening recitation that starts out with asking *Allah* for guidance throughout the person’s day and in life in general. It is the start of building a spiritual connection in prayer and is chanted at the start of every *rak’ah* in the *qiyam* or standing position. Joseph E. B. Lumbard expresses it by saying it encapsulates “all of the metaphysical and eschatological realities of which human beings must remain conscious.” (2015, p.3) Through this chapter, *Allah’s* holy words teach us how to supplicate and speak to Him, simply and directly without a mediator. The verses of *Al-Fatiha* Chapter are as follows:

1. In the Name of *Allah*, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.
2. All the praises and thanks be to *Allah*, the Lord of all mankind all that exists.
3. The Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.
4. The Only Owner of the Day of Resurrection
5. You (Alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we seek for help.
6. Guide us to the Straight Way
7. The Way of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, not (the way) of those who earned Your Anger, nor of those who went astray.

After reciting this *Sura*, one would continue standing and recite verses of their choice from the Quran. These are usually small chapters of the Quran and consist of three or more verses.

Following this position, there is an emphasis on submissiveness since the next step of prayer is to go into the *ruku’* position which is the bowing pose with your hands on your knees. It is an act of your conscious desire to declare your calmness and deep respect in the connection

formed with *Allah*. The words “Glory be to Allah the Great, and praise belongs to Him” (Jami‘ al-Ahadith, vol. 2, p. 922.) are chanted in humility during this position giving all honour to Allah. You rise back into standing, hoping for Allah’s mercy and emphasize on that hopeful feeling by saying ‘Allah hears those who give thanks to Him’ *سمع الله لمن حمده*. Therefore, you express your gratitude by following with, 'Allah a grateful praise to You' From this stand, a person bends over placing his hands on the ground with his forehead and nose on the ground between them into *sujoud*.

With the various materials and kinetic movements of *salah* in mind, the following are the four main factors that shape the installation:

- The prayer mat as the fundamental component of the production since it is an essential material in the Muslim household;
- The integration of the required body movements and postures of *salah* in appropriate interactions between the movements and mat;
- Time which awakens the immersive installation by a call to prayer known as the *athan*;
- Audio which is based on the appropriate Quranic verses and Islamic phrases recited in *salah* and the *athan*.

The Prayer Mat

Taking the above analysis through from an initial prototype to the final production, I start by analyzing the first interactive factor in *Fitrah*. Among all the artifacts involved in this installation, the most important one is the prayer mat. Most Muslims who practice *salah* own a prayer mat on which they complete their daily worship. It has two main uses: to provide practitioners with a clean surface to stand and prostrate on (hygienic purposes); and to create a

spatial boundary around them, alerting surrounding bypassers that prayer is currently being performed. This boundary symbolizes the spiritual territory “between the sacred and the profane.” (Minoo Moallem, 2014) “They channel individual moments in time and space towards the universalist impulses of Islamic practices.” (Minoo Moallem, 2014) Thus, one can conclude that the prayer mat acts like a mediator creating a relationship between material form and spirituality by “linking the embodied presence in the ‘here’ and now to the virtual and heterotopia of ‘there’ through the spatial purification of space and perpetuity of time.” (Minoo Moallem, 2014)

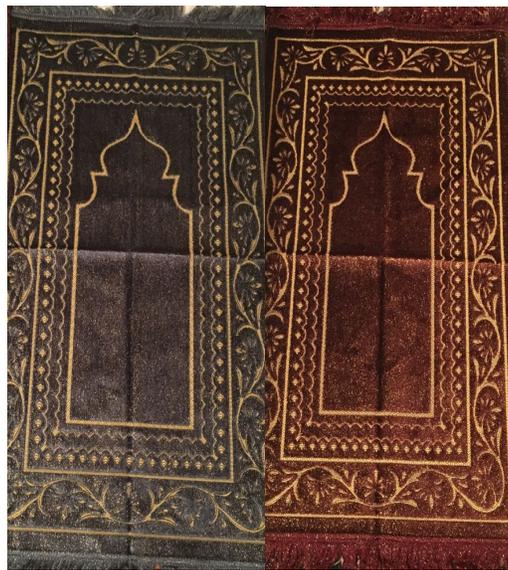


Figure 12. Prayer mats used in Fitrah

The material used for prayer mats may contain different designs and come in various fabrics from all over the world. It is usually a woven rectangular shape with domes derived from different holy mosques, such as *Masjid Al-Haram* in Makkah. They also use different symmetrical motifs for aesthetic purposes. *Figure 12* shows the prayer mat chosen for this installation.

Interactivity

As Stern mentions in *Interactive Art and Embodiment: The Implicit Body as Performance*, “Interactive art can concentrate and ask us to virtually feel our existing practices as they are practiced, and provoke us to engage with what those practices imply” (2013, p.66). The interactive process requires the application of a sensor according to what I wanted to activate the sensor. One of those triggers is activated by users, and the second is the time of prayer.

Following the factors mentioned in the beginning of this Chapter, I use the body positions performed during *salah* on the prayer mat as one factor that activates the output. The sensor chosen for this process was the Force Sensitive Resistor due to its sensitivity and thin features. This allowed a better control in setting the intended body pressure and the sensor is easily integrated into the prayer mat. *Figure 13*, provides additional detail on the concepts and workflow of the light and sensors in the prayer mat. interacting with certain movements of *salah*.

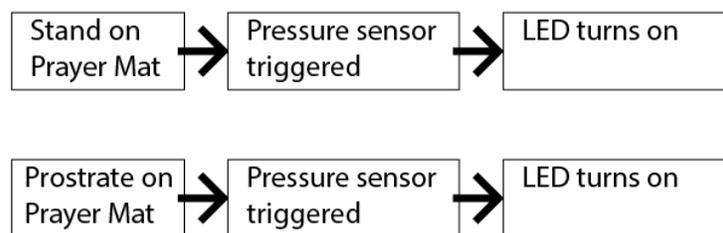


Figure 13. A flowchart of the interaction process

In the first iteration of *Fitrah* seen in *Figure 14*, one movement was chosen to trigger the prayer mat, the prostration posture, *sujoud*. The reason I have chosen this specific movement is because in Islam, it is considered the closest connection to have with *Allah* as it is the deepest and most spiritual position during prayer. "As Muslims, we may respond that true happiness in this world comes from being closer to God. The closer you are to Allah, the more your heart is at rest." (Jinan Yousef, 2011). It emphasizes fear of the Most Powerful and is a submissive form of

obedience and worship. A Muslim feels absolute closeness at this stage because it is known to be the highest peak of prayer as a direct connection between the Muslim and *Allah*. As quoted in the *Hadith* scriptures, Abu Huraira reported via The Messenger of Allah, prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) , “The servant is nearest to his Lord during prostration, so increase your supplications therein.” (Sahih Muslim, 482)



Figure 14. Initial Iteration

Using the mat shown in the Prayer Mat section of this chapter for the final installation of *Fitrah*, the LED needed to be embedded in a certain manner to retain the actual aesthetics of the prayer mat. *Figure 15* is an image showing a illustration of how this was managed.

The calculation of how long it took the lights to turn on to respond to body pressure was based on gathering data on how long it took me in my prostration movement. In the Islamic culture, the longer you prostrate the stronger the connection you build spiritually.

After further investigation through incorporating sound in my installation, I added the standing position to also trigger this interaction process. This will be explained in the next section. The second aspect that triggers the lights in the prayer mats is the time of prayer. This is also described in the Sound section, as it also activates the *athan*, the call to prayer.

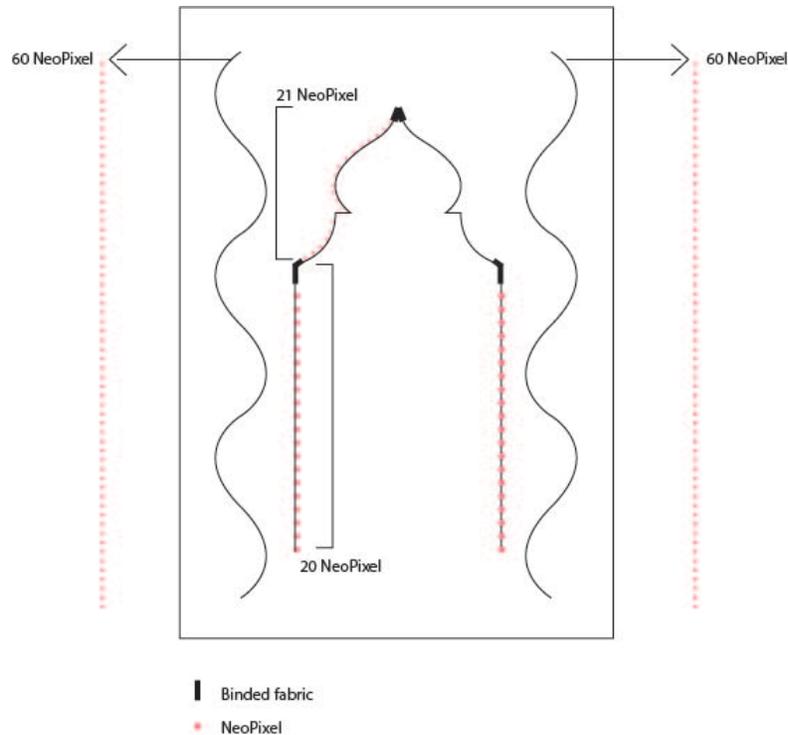


Figure 15. Illustration of NeoPixel placement on prayer mat

Sound: *Athan* and Recitation

Audio plays a major role in my installation as it provides another layer of my prayer practice. Choosing the audio I want to use is critical to my installation. There exists a wide variety of types of *athan*, all dependent on the performer's background and school of religious teaching. For this project, I chose the *muathin* Ali Ahmed Mulla, who is known to be the longest serving *muathin* at the Holy Mosque in Makkah. Sheikh Ali Mulla's rhythmic voice is what I instantly think of when remembering the *athan* from back home. I retrieve this audio file from a live broadcast of the *athan* performed in the Holy Mosque of Makkah.

Prayer Recitation. As my project focuses on *salah*, I have chosen only the verses required for Muslims to recite in the opening of each of their daily prayers and the verses recited in the posture with the highest spiritual connection (*sujoud*). For example, The Opening Chapter, *Surat Al-Fatiha*, is the common denominator that starts every unit of *rak'ah*, so I have chosen to

highlight it for my prayer mat. This is the logic behind adding the standing position in which this Chapter is recited as an additional activation for the lights in the prayer mat.

Choosing the sacred words from *suras* of the Quran for the audio-visual interactions relied on the essential phrases one needs to say during prayer. “I’ve always thought of *suras* as meditations upon which the willful mind applies itself and not as something to be blindly repeated without understanding.” (Miriam Jordan-Haladyn, 2015) The recitation of the Quran has a particular tone and melody. It is clearly a unique and powerful sound. *Tarteel* is the Arabic word for hymnody. According to Ibn Kathir, it is to "recite the Quran slowly, making the letters clear, for this is an assistance in understanding and pondering the meaning of the Quran." (Quran, 73) A person performing *Tarteel* is known as the *Muratil*. For this installation, I take on that task as a *Muratil* and record The Opening Chapter of the Quran to use as the audio that is played during the interactive stage when a user is standing on the carpet. I recite this *Sura* by stressing each syllable to heighten the intimacy intended. I record the chant in *sujoud*, while in a prostrating position to keep a whispering effect that is typical of this prayer.

Additional Installation Elements

I developed an additional installation component through experimentation with 3D models of Islamic motifs. I explored different methods of creating Islamic ornamentation and calligraphic representations of my culture by investigating with software such as Rhinoceros. This led to laser cutting these ornamentation patterns and printing them as physical objects. Learning these tools are part of my research process as I acquire the skills and knowledge to portray the intended results. As Cole and Knowles describe, “the process of research becomes creative and responsive and the representational form of communication embodies elements of various art forms.” (2001, p.10)

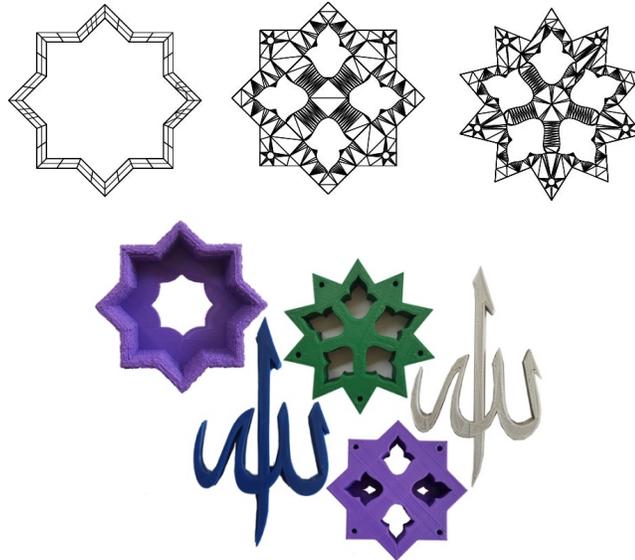


Figure 16. Islamic Motifs rendered on *Rhinoceros* 3D

Islamic art usually takes three basic forms which are Geometric, Arabesque and Calligraphic. “The indirect, stylized impersonal abstract art of Islam symbolizes a transcendent reality which points to the glory of God.” (Ira G. Zepp JR., 2018) *Figure 16* shows geometric and calligraphic patterns for production and *Figure 17* is an example of an Arabesque form that I developed.



Figure 17. Laser cut Islamic ornamentation on black acrylic

They are inspired by the Islamic art found in Makkah that can be seen around neighborhoods in mosques or on building exteriors (*Figure 18*). The patterns create beautiful negative spaces. Comparing the pieces around the spiritual feeling I wanted to achieve, I was drawn towards the laser cut acrylic piece. The three-dimensional printed objects felt too rigid. On the other hand, the laser cut acrylic model (*Figure 17*), felt very delicate and light. It gave a sense of floating which resembled the feeling that I wanted to achieve to balance out the grounded feeling conveyed through the prayer mat.

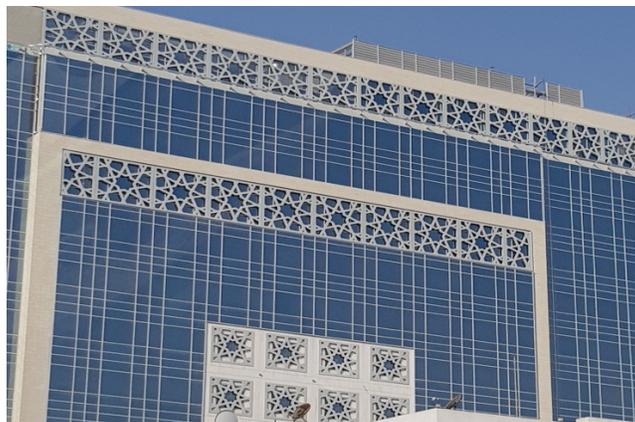


Figure 18. Photograph of building exterior from my neighborhood in Saudi Arabia

Expanding on that creation, I was experiencing what Graeme Sullivan describes in *Research Acts in Art Practice* as, a “reflective intent”, which “fuels on exploratory tendency as new forms and images are created, and these open up the possibility of new meanings.” (2006, p.31) This led me to cut out a new pattern of the Islamic eight-pointed star on acrylic to further create a connection to the Islamic identity. To evaluate my inquiry, I decided to attach them together.



Figure 19. Sibha

This visual problem solving resulted in the addition of another component to the installation. Prayer beads, known as *Sibha* in Arabic, are a counting decorative tool that Muslims use to repeat several prayers that glorify Allah. These beads are in a string of thirty-three (*Figure 19*), or a string of ninety-nine. They include a separator, known as a marker, to divide the beads in three divisions, creating three sets of eleven beads or three sets of thirty-three beads. The *Sibha* shown in *Figure 19*, are those of my childhood. I was given them by family members on different occasions. Adding to the personal ambience of the research, I was compelled to use the same aesthetics as those from my childhood. The beads were also chosen for their crystal form which created a sparkle effect when light shines on them, seen in *Figure 20*.



Figure 20. Prayer beads attached to acrylic form of Islamic star

The Role of Light in the Installation. I explore different ways of employing light: radiant light and reflected light. These various methods of conveying light are explored through selecting the kind of lighting best suited for each component in the installation. The prayer mat is an element that I embed light into to create a radiant spiritual object. The Islamic motifs attached by prayer beads are transformed into gobos. These gobos have a light source shined above them to reflect their negative pattern onto the ground as well as reflect off the crystals, seen in *Figure 21*. *Fitrah* also includes a screen showing the audience a physical demonstration of myself practicing of *salah* on loop.

Choosing light as a visual was based on the feelings that I sensed during my prayers. My aim is to visualize in media the sensuality of my consciousness when I am going through my prayers.

Maududi translates this verse, (اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ) *Allah* is the light of the heavens and

earth, from a Chapter called *Nur* in the Holy Quran. This is the same chapter explored earlier through Jamelie Hassan's artwork. Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi describes this verse in his book *Tafsir ul-Qur'an* (1972),

Light is something which makes things visible; which is itself manifest and helps make other things manifest. The human mind conceives light in this very sense. Absence of light is termed darkness, invisibility and obscurity. On the other hand, when there is visibility and things become exposed to view, man says there is light. Allah has been called 'Light' in this basic sense.." (1972)

Allah is known to have 99 names that are found in the Quran and among those names my personal favorite is *Al-Nur*, meaning The Light. When in prayer, this sensation of being so close to Allah and in deep spiritual connection is when I not only see the light but actually feel it. Even though this sensation is indescribable, my aim is to convey it through the use of light as a central element of the final piece.



Figure 21. Gobo patterns in Fitrah

FITRAH: A Spiritual Journey

In the final stage of production, all the above components are brought together, choreographed to function together. The placement of all the objects is illustrated in *Figure 22*.

The grey rectangular shapes represent the five prayer mats oriented towards the North East corner of the exhibition space facing the *Qibla*. They symbolize the five daily prayers and are laid side-by-side to resemble how mosques align their prayer mats. The alignment of these mats is based on the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s request for people to stand during prayer. It has been reported by Anas that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Make your rows straight for the straightening of the rows is part of the completion of the *salah*." (Bukhari & Muslim) On the North East corner, where the prayer mats are facing, is a screen displaying a demonstration video of myself praying on the same interactive prayer mat and in the same location. The gobos in *Figure 22* are represented by the circles in front of the prayer mats. They are hung from the ceiling.

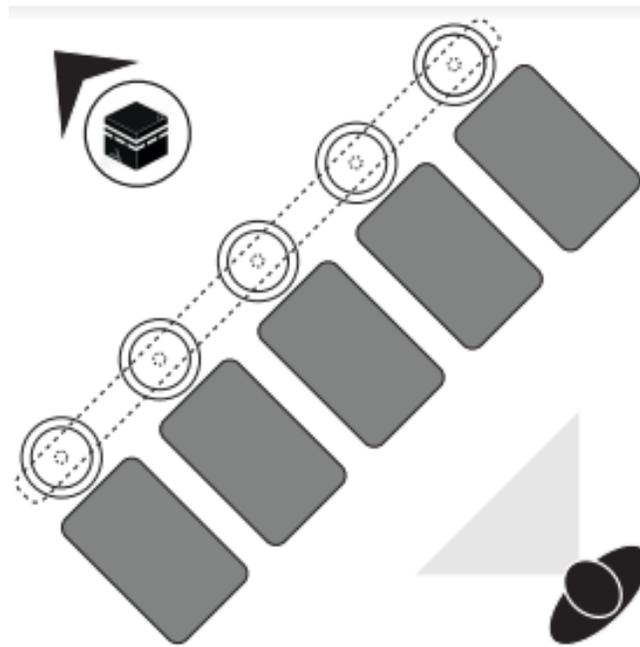


Figure 22. A sketch of the layout, Jad Rabbaa (2018)

The installation required defining the stages of what components activated and at what times. *Fitrah* involves four stages which are the default stage, the interactive standing stage, the interactive *sujoud* stage, and time of prayer stage. The screen and lights from the gobos remain on throughout the exhibit. The interaction triggers through these stages affect two components: the lights in the prayer mats and the sound from the speakers. This creates a sense of synchronization so that when prayer is detected, the intended audio plays and the light turns on accordingly. The table below provides a clear breakdown of the functionality of these components in each of the four stages.

Default Stage:

Screen: Demonstration Time Lapse Video

Gobo: ON

Carpets: OFF/ Subtle Inviting Lights

Sound: Ambience of subtle chants

Interactive Stage(Standing):

Screen: Demonstration Time Lapse Video

Gobo: ON

Carpets: ON- Specific triggered carpet lights

Sound: Reciting The Opening Chapter of the Quran

Interactive Stage(*Sujoud*):

Screen: Demonstration Time Lapse Video

Gobo: ON

Carpets: ON- Specific triggered carpet lights

Sound: whispers of myself reciting chants from *sujoud* position

Call for Prayer Stage:

Screen: Demonstration Time Lapse Video

Gobo: ON

Carpets: All carpets light up

Sound: *Athan* by Ahmed Mulla

Reflection and Challenges

Since my thesis involves only my own act of prayer in shared spaces and how I experience it, I did not require approval from the Research Ethics Board. However, since my research lies within a religious context, I may face criticism because religion is viewed as a sensitive topic for some people. Any major innovation or change from the norm in my work may be viewed as blasphemous or offensive to some Islamic scholars and practitioners. As Bakhsh says, “some teachers and guest critics refused to comment on my art pieces because of the heavy religious content that my art represents. I personally felt that some were bothered by it; in some instances, I was asked to eliminate Quranic recitations from one of my installations that largely depended on the chants, because the content was too spiritual.” (Rawaa Bakhsh, 2014, p.36)

Even though I am in a positive and diverse environment, it is ultimately difficult to predict how the public might view my installation, but I am also interested in how viewers may react. Whether positive or negative responses are received from viewers, I am very confident of embracing my identity through my rituals. Nevertheless, I am proud to represent my culture and religion through my work, even though it may not be considered as “Islamic art” by some scholars and critics. Any attempt to positively represent one’s culture should be deemed a step forward, despite imperfections and critiques.

I also faced a challenge regarding Western public stigma against popular Islamic chants and phrases, in particular, “*Allahu Akbar*”. As previously explained, it is a positive and empowering phrase in Islamic spirituality and integrated into my production as it is an essential component of praying. However, it is negatively associated with terrorist acts. Nonetheless, I chose not to let this stigma affect my thesis, production process and beliefs.

I struggled with the use of autoethnography as the main method of data collection. Even though I found it to be the best method to develop my art and provide context to it, it is a double-edged sword as the personalization is potentially subject to bias. While no research method is free from bias, autoethnography is critiqued for placing too much emphasis on emotion, being too aesthetic, and lacking credible data (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011). However, autoethnography does offer potential for aesthetic research and exploration of otherwise excluded research perspectives, such as identity. All the while trying to minimize bias and maintaining a systematic process. I believe I have managed to maintain a balance between my art and research methods by providing a clear outline of the production process and presenting a personal--and hopefully inspiring--story of spirituality through art.

I was very fortunate to have exhibited this work (*Figure 23*) for the public and to be able to gather some informal responses to the work. Time of prayer and human interaction both activated the installation. Informal observation of the public interacting with the installation when the call of prayer was announced provided some insights into the meaning of the art piece. *Fitrah* raised questions and created discussions within the room about the Islamic culture and the act of prayer itself. The experiences I witnessed were by a range of people whose beliefs do not necessarily align with mine and those of other Muslims. There were a few who responded with tears when listening to the call of prayer. These tears could be a form of faith awareness or

maybe just the *athan* creating an emotional presence for them. Some were following the demonstration video step by step and others were adapting their own body posture to what seemed to be more comfortable for them. Those who prostrated remained in that position for longer than expected. The audio track for the prostration posture is twenty seconds long but several people spent more than a minute in that posture. The different motions of light that take place depending on the number of people interacting with the piece intrigued and engaged users as did the audio that played. The more people on the prayer mats, the audio would add an additional layer creating a deep rhythmic tone. General unsolicited comments from viewers interacting with the piece indicated a range of responses from people of all faiths, all positive, all encouraged in their own beliefs by their interaction with my work.



Figure 23. Fitrah Exhibition

This range of responses addressed to some degree my concern with the shift in the project from its initial intent to engage multi-faith spaces to a more unitary focus on Islamic faith and

practices. In large part, this shift in focus was the result of a lack of time to develop more than deeper knowledge of a wide range of faiths and the understanding of their spiritual needs. This is a future iteration that I plan on producing in collaboration with artists from different communities here in Canada. In fact, during the public exhibition of the work, a number of people from the community, some from other faiths, indicated they are interested in collaborating on multi-faith experiences. I intend to continue my artistic engagement within diasporic communities to expand this project and incorporate other lived experiences in the future.

These results from public interaction with the installation have reassured me in my decision to address *Purdah* and the meaning of veiling. I found that through exposing and unveiling a private act of what goes on in the state of prayer is the best form of expressing the true experience of prayer. The fact that I expose the whole prayer aims to portray a vulnerable experience to address the needs of a Muslim. The process of presenting my own prayer created a complex sense of confidence, fear and vulnerability. The value of exposing people to this experience has allowed a broad public to become familiar with *salah* and its importance to me and to them.

Conclusion

Even though cultural barriers between Islam and the West, and notions of Islamophobia are difficult to eradicate, this project may help provide understanding to those unfamiliar with Islamic rituals, particularly through the use of digital interactive technologies. Additionally, the sections on Socio-Cultural and Islamic Contexts offer insights into the most important aspects of Muslim culture as lived here and now. Said, Hall, and Fanon are crucial thinkers, even today, in conceiving Muslim migrant cultural and religious identity, sense of belonging, comfort, confidence and unity.

This spiritual journey has brought me confidence to express who I am and what is important for me as a practicing Muslim. It allows me to ground myself within my new environment by making people within my world aware of my spiritual life. It has opened up positive understanding between me and the individuals I engage with in my daily life. Expressing my emotions and feelings through my spiritual practice was a challenging task. Digital tools allowed me to intensify and share my spiritual experience more so than other art forms.

While the findings of my thesis may not be generalizable due to the nature of autoethnographic methods and process, my work shows that new and continuing research on expressing Islamic spirituality through art is vital and energetic. Adapting and integrating Islamic culture in the West is challenging, but this thesis may inspire like-minded individuals with similar backgrounds in order to expand the potential of Islamic art and expression.

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APPENDIX A.**GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS**

I have defined the following list of according to my interpretation to assist readers in understanding Arabic figures and terminologies throughout my thesis:

ALLAH/الله : In the Arabic language, when one feels the beauty of something or when one experiences an amazing emotion, one would say *Allah*. In this sense, the word means wow or wonderful. It is an expression of a happy and blissful emotion. There are 99 names for *Allah*.

ASR/عصر : Afternoon prayer.

ATHAN/آذان : A call for prayer that is recited at mosques in the neighbourhoods of every Muslim country. It is performed in a loud voice by the *muathin* who faces the direction of the *Kaaba*.

DUHR/ظهر : Morning prayer.

FAJR/فجر : Dawn prayer.

FITRAH/فطرة : Spiritual instinct believed to be acquired at time of birth that connects a Muslim with their faith.

HAJJ/حج : A sacred pilgrimage to Makkah that is required of a Muslim to perform at least once in a lifetime as long as one is physically and financially able to do so.

HIJAB/حجاب : A veil worn to cover a Muslim women's hair.

ISHA/عشاء : Night time prayer.

KAABA/الكعبة : The sacred sanctuary in Makkah, the focal point of worship for all Muslims.

MAGHREB/مغرب : Sunset prayer.

MUATHIN/مؤذن : The person who performs the call of prayer.

MURATIL/مرتل : A person reciting the Quran clearly and with no haste.

NIQAB/نقاب : A garment worn to cover a Muslim women's face.

PBUH/صلى الله عليه وسلم : Peace Be Upon Him.

QIBLA/قبلة : The direction towards the *Kaaba* in Makkah.

QIYAM/قيام : Standing position facing the *Qibla*.

RAK'AH/ركعة : A unit in a prayer that makes up a set of consecutive movements.

RUKU'/رکوع : Bowing position facing the *Qibla*.

SAJADAH/سجادة : A rug or carpet.

SALAH/صلاه : Islamic prayer.

SAWM/صوم : Fasting the holy month of Ramadan.

SHAHADAH/شهادة : The declaration and belief that there exists only one true God (*Allah*), and that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is His Messenger.

SIBHA/سبحة : Prayer beads used to count number of *Tasbih*.

SUJOD/سجود : Prostration position facing the *Qibla*.

TARTEEL/ترتيل : The recitation of the Quran clearly and with no haste with a certain hymnody.

TASBIH/تسبيح : Repetitive chants that offer praise to Allah or seek forgiveness. Usually uttered in a low voice or silently through thoughts. Prayer beads, *Sibha*, are often used to count number of chants.

ZAKKAH/زكاة : Donating a percentage of the value of your belongings to the needy on an annual basis.