

Khok-e Sattar, Shahr-e Sukhte, and Yogurt Drink: Digitally Adapting Kbudnigari with Vignettes from Burnt City: A Dystopian Bilingual One-Persian Show

Joshua Hamzehee

Abstract: The digital performance of “*Khok-e Sattar, Shahr-e Sukhte, and Yogurt Drink*” consists of three vignettes from my full-length autoethnographic performance, *Burnt City: A Dystopian Bilingual One-Persian Show*. By digitally adapting my *kbudnigari* (autoethnography) and embodying Farglish (Farsi and English), I complicate verbal bilinguality with physicality, liveness with digitization, and show that memory, language, and performance cannot be fully separated. A framing essay is included, providing context for the digital performance *kbudnigari*.

Keywords: AutoEthnography, Performance, Iran, Family, Memory, Farglish

The digitally adapted performance of “*Khok-e Sattar, Shahr-e Sukhte, and Yogurt Drink*” consists of three short vignettes collaged together from my full-length autoethnographic performance, *Burnt City: A Dystopian Bilingual One-Persian Show* (created in 2018). In *kbudnigari*, Persian autoethnographic documentaries, inserting the body and voice of the story-teller is as integral as the story’s content (Lotfalian 12). *Burnt City* (or شهر سوخته) has been a *kbudnigari* “for me to performatively interrogate how presentations of United States-Iran relations reflected and impacted my relationships” with my cultures and my identity

Joshua Hamzehee, PhD—Communication Studies Professor and Director of Forensics Speech, Debate, and Performance at Santa Rosa Junior College—is a performance scholar<—>practitioner engaging in critical ethnography, spoken-word roots, and remixed performance techniques. Hamzehee’s creative, public, and award-winning scholarship includes *Burnt City: A Dystopian Bilingual One-Persian Show*, *Baton Rouge SLAM!: An Obituary for Summer 2016*, *The Deported: A Reality Show!*, and *CONVICT*.

(Hamzehee 61). By embodying *Farglish* (Farsi and English) in *Burnt City*, I oscillate between my “Iranian culture and my American identity” (Abdi 8) to show how “cultural implications of being raised as a child in the United States with parents from Iran” are factors in how I have been shaped (Yomtoob 3).

At the 2021 National Communication Association conference, I performed “*Kbok-e Sattar, Shabr-e Sukhte, and Yogurt Drink*,” live, alongside members of this forum. Our performances featured threads of critical nostalgia, characterizing our active attempts to connect with “genealogical, geographical, and genetic past[s]” in order to re-purpose them as potentially productive and useful (Huell 110). With autoethnographic exploration comes change, as memories evolve through re-remembering and re-embodiment. This metamorphosis is similar to how stories change when shifting mediums, or how we grow with the passing of time. Our memories change through the act of adapting and re-performing because, while they “return to past experience,” they “add their traces to the initial story” (Winter 11). Ideally, our entanglements with nostalgia become tools for growth rather than a burden of the past.

Adapted performances of *khudnigari* provide space for members of the Iranian/Persian diaspora to explore where and who we came from; they also open questions into who and what our origins came from. As with all adaptations, what and how we keep, exclude, and heighten impact how we deconstruct or reify memories and social constructs (Michalak Gratch 124). By digitally adapting my *khudnigari* from previously recorded live performances, I complicate verbal bilinguality with physicality, liveness with digitization, and show that memory, language, and performance cannot be fully separated, as our “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity” (Anzaldúa 59). The visuals I’ve edited are spliced from two previous performances, at Louisiana State University’s HopKins Black Box theatre in [Baton Rouge, LA](#) (2019), and University of Northern Iowa’s Interpreters Theatre in [Cedar Falls, IA](#) (2020). The text was performed in Seattle, WA (2021), with audio recorded in Santa Rosa, CA (2022). Below, I provide the Farglish text of “*Kbok-e Sattar, Shabr-e Sukhte, and Yogurt Drink*” (run time: 12:59).

Kbok-e Sattar (*Star Dust*) [0:00-2:13]

Bemoon goftan, shabr-e khodenemoonoh sukhteem

Yad gerefteem if earth is our mother

Global warming was singed into our DNA by our greatest-grandfathers

Yad gereftam to touch *abteesh*,

Dodge *artash*!

Mard meetarcan zan meekhandan azash,

Zan meetabrān mard meekoshanashbb —

Oh, ghosts of grandfathers and gaslights:
I haven't answered your e-mails in 1000's of years.
I avoid writing love letters in *Farglish* to burnt cities I never felt safe in
Domestic cemeteries of skeletons sewn together with backgammon and snake-
skin.

Tu shabr-e-sukhte yad gereftam
Khok-e sattar tu khoonemoon bast.
Flights to Tehrangeles are the future not the past
For when
I speak
Farsi
In sleep
My ancestors scream back:

Kuroshhh—
Names are not words,
Names are sentences.

Shabr-e Sukhte (Burnt City) [2:14-5:21]

[In *Shabr-e Sukhte (Burnt City)*, Kurosh absorbs “1000's of years” of e-mails, intimately dancing with them and a burnt Persian rug.]

Yogurt Drink (Doogh) [5:22-12:59]

Kuroshhh—
Names are not words,
Names are sentences.

Like, *doogh, doogh, doogh:*
Yogurt, water, salt. Yogurt, water salt.
Most, ob, namak. Most, ob, namak. Doogh.

Persians call this drink, *doogh*.
Sometimes carbonated. Sometimes mint. Often sour.
Often makes white people gag and miraculously able to make the *kh* sound.

Many wear their birth-cultures like a military medal.

I—PRIVILEGE ALERT—Have the option to keep my baggage-checked because in this port
 I pass. Like *doogh*, I blend.
 In both cultures and none at once.
 Often feeling as if I am an *other* in the Persian-half I was space-forced into.
 Well, not *an* other, more like *another*.
 And World War 3 is just the tip of history.

My U.S.-born Caucasian mother was caught between traumas of childhood, Catholicism, Christianity, crystal and not concretely connected to culture.
 My brown dad married my white mom for his green card.
 My dad's mom's side, Jewish; my dad's dad's side, Muslim;
 (That's a holy war waiting to happen).

My father was/is Muslim-*kinda*.

Above our VCR:

Koran,
 Bible,
 Torah,
 Dianetics,
 Watchtower pamphlets,
 The U.S. Constitution,
 Winston soft-pack cigarettes.

My father's second wife, my brother's mom, my ex-step-mom, from Iran—
Oon pedar-sukhte helped teleport her here to America when I was seven.
 He was our *doogh's* carbonation. Her immigration was the mint.
 From the first night we were sour—

Still, ancient artifacts of my Persian-slash-Kurdish-half remain despite ephemeral homelands.

While I don't put covers on my couches
 (because then what's the point of having nice couches?)

I have touched Iran.

I still taste *tacheen*, *juje kebab*, *cholo kebab-e soltani*, *saladeh shirazi*, *khoresht-e gheme*,
ghorme sabzi, *tatiq o torshee*!

I bingewatch Shahs of Sunset on Bravo!

I listen to Googoosh on eSpotify!

I saw the hostage crisis at home.

I hear we'll only hate Superman if his name's Mohammad.

That *jihad* means *struggle* in a different language but everyone *over there* is the issue because of the *ghein*, *ghe*, *kov*, *gof*, *DOOGH* tastes tart tongues refuse to swallow.

I know what melts the Middle East into a pot is the dated West.

And I've eaten more dates than 9/11.

I lived with my single father 'til I was seven.
That's when my exstepmom teleported here from I R A N
To 1 3 7 2/*hezaro seesahtobafta dedob*
At night, we watched *cops* a lot---the *actual* cops.

Called over 40 times throughout Dumuzi and Ophelia's eight-year term limit,
He called on her, she on him.
Neighbors two condos down called, Motel 6 called, work called—
When she was pregnant with my brother I called.
Gaslit with pride, he said what she said would set him off,
And the carpet cage match ignited:

Slapping. Chopping. Throwing.
Black eyes and bruises.
Sandpaper, Dianetics, and cigarettes
Burning holes in our chests was what *delam* felt like at 11—
That'd make my brother four:
Above our Persian rug wrestling ring, couch covers:

Thin, green and red stripes running over a white canvas,
Roo pattoo eb seffeed...
Aval, roo paweh Nazi zasbt.
Bad, dorabar dastesh.
Badazoon, tu dabanesh. Seft.
Bad behamehmoon goft:

"Man toro meekoshbb —"

Kurosh and Kakavous watched MiddleeastWorld
From across the universe
Tu shabr-e-suktbe yad gerefteem TV static drowns out sound of the world around
Yad gerefteem khok-e sattar tu khoonemoon hast.
Flights to Tehrangeles are the future not the past
For when
We speak
Farsi
In sleep
Our ancestors scream back:

Blood has nothing to do with khooneh.
Blood has nothing to do with home.

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