



Adresse Fossveien 24  
0551 Oslo  
Norge

Telefon (+47) 22 99 55 00

Post Postboks 6853  
St. Olavs plass  
N-0130

Faktura Postboks 386  
Alnabru  
0614 Oslo

Org.no. 977027233  
Giro 8276 0100265

**Mohamed Ali Fadlabi**  
Maybe MFA Thesis

MFA  
Kunstakademiet 2012

**KHIODA**  
Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo,  
Digitalt Arkiv

[www.khioda.no](http://www.khioda.no)  
[khioda@khio.no](mailto:khioda@khio.no)

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# **Maybe MFA Thesis**

**MFA thesis  
Mohamed Ali Fadlabi  
Spring 2012**

*“The people who leave graduate level studio programs are contemporary artists—that much is clear. They represent the subjective artist operating within a terrain of the general. Yet we now find that the meaning of contemporary art is being redefined by a new art historical focus upon its products, ideas, and projections. That means we are going through a phase in which—whether we like it or not—it is quite likely that a new terminology and means of delineation will be proposed. It is therefore necessary—for artists specifically (although never alone)—to engage with this process of re-describing what gets made now. What constitutes the image of the contemporary? And what does the contemporary produce other than a complicit alonsideness?”*

**Liam Gillick**

## **Facts You should know About My Art**

1- My father was a surgeon. His father was a merchant who had 14 slaves from southern Sudan and three wives. My father's mom told me once that to go to school from Fadlab to Atbra, my father crossed the river Nile daily around 5 am with a little boat and sold eggs and tomatoes till it was time for school. But my first memories of him were in England when he was studying to become a surgeon. I remember him pushing my stroller in the streets of London. He was a handsome tall man. After we went back to Sudan, he joined the military and became a wealthy educated man. He was so educated, he didn't even circumcise my sisters. His childhood friends were farmers and railway workers. He was so proud of being the man he was. And he was hard on me, because he thought I was spoiled, which was relatively true. I went to school driven by a chauffeur. I never washed my cloth myself and he bought me "what ever i wanted". My father asked me once: son, I am a doctor. People come to me sick and I try to heal them. What do you do to people with this art thing?

2- My name is Mohamed Ali. My father named me that because, as a muslim, your first born boy should be named Mohamed.

I start not being a muslim since I was 17 after reading a small book in arabic titled " Introduction to the philosophy of values.. Goodness, truth and beauty " . I started then and I am still quitting slowly but it's really hard. I tried many things to wash myself totally clean from my muslimness. Once my friend Trygve baptized me at Akerselve, but it didn't really work cause christianity was as silly as islam. Since then, I thought so many times about changing my name to cassius. I even did it for a while on Facebook. I really hated Mohamed Ali Clay. For some strange reason, I wanted always to hurt him.

3- I studied at a military school at the age of 15-18. It was established in the early 80s by a dictator who ruled Sudan from 1969 till 1985. He believed that it's really good for young men to learn the arts of war. And we did. I know AK 47 as I know my own palm. I had my first lessons in painting at that school. My teacher was a slim very black gay man named Median.

4- At the age of 21 I was able to make living of my art. I use to paint tourist paintings and sell them to NGO workers and I arrange painting courses for middle age White women who came to Africa to find themselves.

5- I had my first show in Norway when I was at the asylum seekers camp. I titled it: Just for asylum seekers. But, some people from the administration came and bought some paintings. It was a good lesson on understanding (What is a target group?)

6- When I was accepted at the art academy I knew nothing about Marcel Duchamp. and I thought: it is not your art, if you didn't make with your own hands.

7- I like to call my self a post medium artist now, but I end up painting every time i am asked to participate in a show.

8- I always wanted to be a musician.

## **On Music and Heaven**

Music is "the art of arranging tones in an orderly sequence so as to produce a unified and continuous composition"<sup>1</sup>. A man named Philip Dorrel<sup>2</sup> claims that "The problem with answering the question "What is music?" is understanding what would constitute a proper answer. Music arises from human behavior, and the study of human behavior is part of biology. So any question about music is a question about biology, and every question about biology requires an answer within the framework of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection." Well, I don't really know about that. but, I think my biggest suffering trying to integrate into the European cultural ways, was music. Nothing is more confusing than the horrible sounds of noise music and nothing is more painful than the repetition of techno.

I always sensed a desire in western culture to turn people into machines. It's easy to sense in western music and it is clear in Michael Jackson's<sup>3</sup> moon walk and it's obvious in Grace Jones's<sup>4</sup> Corporate Cannibal. I trace that to the industrial revolution, when machines stole thousands of jobs and dreams. I like to think about this desire as something more emotional, that's why I call it " the nostalgia to the machine" I think that a big part of any creative production is controlled by a common nostalgia towards something rooted into the collective memory of the society. If we think of the idea of Paradise, we need to think about the circumstances surrounding the designers of each Paradise. The prophet Muhammad, describing Paradise from his scorching hot Sahara said: "There is a tree in Paradise (which is so big and huge that) if a rider travels in its shade for one hundred years, he would not be able to cross it." <sup>5</sup>

Maybe my taste of music then was affected by the promises designed by Muhammad. Paradise in islam is organic. there are no super computers or 3D movies to entertain us there. In the muslim heaven all you can do is "Eat and drink at ease for that which you have sent forth (good deeds) in days past!" <sup>6</sup> and Those who are chosen "... They will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold, and they will wear green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade. They will recline therein on raised thrones. How good [is] the recompense! How beautiful a couch [is there] to recline on!" <sup>7</sup> "They will never fall ill, blow their noses or spit." <sup>8</sup> "Indeed may you be healthy and never be sick again, may you live and never die again, may you be young and never grow feeble again, may you enjoy, and never feel sorrow and regret again." <sup>9</sup> "They will not hear therein ill speech or commission of sin. But only the saying of: Peace! Peace!" <sup>10</sup> "And We shall remove from their breasts any (mutual) hatred or sense of injury (which they had, if at all, in the life of this world)." <sup>11</sup> there will be "... rivers of water incorruptible; rivers of milk of which the taste never changes ..." <sup>12</sup> "It is sparkling light, aromatic plants, a lofty palace, a flowing river, ripe fruit, a beautiful wife and abundant clothing, in an eternal abode of radiant joy, in beautiful soundly-constructed high houses".<sup>13</sup> "Bricks of gold and silver, and mortar of fragrant musk, pebbles of pearl and sapphire, and soil of saffron. Whoever enters it is filled with joy and will never feel miserable; he will live there forever and never die; their clothes will never wear out and their youth will never fade." <sup>14</sup> last year James Cameron's Avatar<sup>15</sup>, After just five weeks in theaters set to pass Titanic as the highest selling movie of all-time. The movie provided a very similar heaven to the islamic one and made it wins over the best machines, Sci Fi can ever offer. Maybe muslims were right. Maybe their heaven is better than the capitalist dynamic subjective one after all. Maybe at some point when young westerners are offered a key to Paradise they will take it without hesitation.

1 According to Webster's II: New Riverside University Dictionary.

2 software development contractor from New Zealand who wrote a book titled what is music?

3 Michael Joseph Jackson (August 29, 1958 – June 25, 2009) was an American recording artist, dancer, singer-songwriter, musician, and philanthropist. 4 (born 19 May 1948) is a Jamaican-American singer, model and actress. "Corporate Cannibal" was premiered on youtube on July

4, 2008, with a video directed by Nick Hooker, attracting 144,000 views by the time the download single was released late August. In the song she describes herself to be a digital cannibalist

5 Saheeh Muslim

6(Quran 69:24)

7(Quran 18:31)

8(Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

9(Saheeh Muslim)

10(Quran 56:25-26)

11(Quran 7:43)

12(Quran 47:15)

13 (Ibn Maajah, Ibn Hibbaan)

14(Ahmad, at-Tirmidhi, ad-Daarimee)

15 Directed and written by James Cameron 2009 A paraplegic marine dispatched to the moon Pandora on a unique mission becomes torn between following his orders and protecting the world he feels is his home.



## **Talking to Jumana**

**mohamed fadlabi**  
to jumana

11/2/10

That could definitely work.. check Amin Ma'louf on his " Identities that kill" or something like that in arabic it's( Hoeyat Qatilla) It's what you are researching now..  
I start dividing what we go through into states... The most obvious one among those is the state of denial.. it's when you start making art that contains just white visual culture.. we all did it, didn't we? but funny enough we do it the same way we used to make art before thinking that it's really different now. hahaha well but that one is when you start as well finding yourself and start going back to what you've done before.. just a bit smarter..  
well Joomi I am drunk and it's late.. still at One night only.. gotta go home.. talk to you tomorrow..  
**LOVE!**

**jumana manna**  
jumana.manna@gma  
il.com  
to me

11/2/10

well I must say my state of denial goes back further, and I don't even know if denial is the correct term. I was educated in a 'white' school, british schooling, foreign kids. Being Arab for me is my family and my surroundings, which was maybe only half of what shaped the way I think and am. So I don't know how I fit into these categories. I'm just a Jew. haha.

Amin Malouf, thanks... ill check him out. haven't read that one.

Love, or shall I say skål...  
kiss kiss kiss

**mohamed fadlabi**  
to jumana

11/2/10

Ok then ya khawagya inti :) sure you are different joomi .. our friend Adonis told his daughter Ninar Esber ( do you know her? she is cool) he told her when she asked him about if those who are older know better and those who are younger do better? typical arabic way of asking questions..  
but he answered in this really cool way.. he start talking about exactly what you mentioned now and that people are unique and have different stories. but what comes us all is our ability to separate ourselves from nature and that's how we can create history.. cause history in his eyes is when we can stop being what we are designed for- I mean a part of nature.. that's why animals do not have history it's the same short circle for all of them but for us these moments of going against nature or when we try to control it and even sometimes we separate ourselves from ourselves and look at it from outside and judge it..  
and our ability to even destroy nature is what makes history.. and of course we die several times during that and be born again several times.. and this continuous death and birth is our fuel to make art.

what do think? too arabic nostalgic symbolic way of thinking?  
or can we make something out of it?

love

**mohamed fadlabi**  
to jumana

11/2/10

just thought about trying to apply political economy to the idea of how come the west is so dominant.. I mean to make art you just need a human with brain and feelings (kind of)  
In economy there is this question about how did it happen that a small percentage of the population obtained possession of the necessary resources to start businesses which employ people and gain profit; and analyzing how it happened that the vast majority of the population came to be in the condition of having no sources of self-sustainment and having therefore to survive by selling their labor for a living wage.  
could this be what happen to us? I mean what is the meaning of making art and showing it there.. where we come from.. It's here in the west where it is all happening.. and we have to come all the way here showing off and selling our misery to fit in.. do we ever lead or is it already controlled and we just have to be in the margin of it all, doing it the way that they taught us?

**jumana manna**  
jumana.manna@gma  
il.com  
to me

11/2/10

Abu'l Fadlab

I like the summary you wrote of Adonis. Arab nostalgia? Not at all, I mean that is the essence of philosophy, human existence as a conscious existence and a determined one. and that being fuel to make art- sure, because that is part of the creation of singularity, of the the individual, and essentially freedom... as I understand it. I don't know his daughter Ninar, will check her out!

Khawagiya..mhm. thats the story of my life.

I don't share your notions of Western way of art and us as easterners coming in to make it. Assuming such a position is already enforcing a division of east and west which I find irrelevant in the art practice today... or we should at least insist on the erasure of that hierarchal division in order to get any where beyond geography. That is what Rana was arguing you against that night at Park Teatre and I agree. So what if 'art' as we know it orginated from Europe and the US. Enlightenment and secularism did too. Does that mean that my way of not believing in God is some form of imperialism on my brain? Of course not.

It doesn't matter that art is western. Minimalism and modernism is inspired by 'primitive' crafts or 'eastern' representations of the body and figure etc as it a need to purify art from its socio-political context , and that lack of acknowledgement or crediting is maybe something worth discuss, but then again enough books and arguments are made about that already... I believe that the only way to free yourself from these positons of east / west luxury/misery divides is to act as though they do not exist. This is the essence of Jaques Ranceire's theory, if you want to look into him; he is the founder of the contemporary understanding of Aesthetics and Politics (and what has founded my program pretty

much); I am not trying to argue that we have overcome these divisions in the world today; obviously not, and we have all experienced that on our own bodies; but as an artist, you can not uphold these ideas; or else you will be just as bad as "they" who are suffocating you into this representation of the other. Do not exoticise yourself and you will find yourself a lot less exoticized by others.

I've cc'd Rana... since I spoke in her name.. and she probably has enough to say on the issue if she cares to begin. haha..

Much love

**mohamed fadlabi**

11/2/10

to jumana

hahahaa not Rana please :6

just kidding.. it will be really cool to have her comments

well Joomi

I loved this (Does that mean that my way of not believing in God is some form of imperialism on my brain? Of course not. ) very good one.. although I do think partially so ( don't kill me now) It is a form of imperialism just like the English we are using now or the arabic in my case. And it is as well a part of our production that would not be so accepted if it wasn't for that. But it's not a bad thing at all. or it might be if we think about how good the poetry that sophism in Islam produced. Cause I never thought that art was about the truth before. some of it might be, but it's not about that.

The funny thing is art in it self makes you the biggest believer ever. You just have a new God now. What is more religious than museums and what is more holy than the art works within them? and who are better worshipers than us?

and I didn't check Jaques Ranceire's theory but it's pretty much what afro-futurism is all about. I will check him out though. Thanks.

anyway.. I find it hard to think about art the way you do. and that's because I can't really separate the ideas from the practice from the representation from the social and the networking from the administration of the whole process.

exoticise myself Joomi? Come on now! How can we ever go beyond that? I know that when ever I apply for something in our mecca, the western world, Where I come from, is so basic in judging my application or my work or even my behaviour. I see again i am falling into what you don't like, us and them :) but it is a fact. we can't do what we do in our countries.. It's just not possible.

Art is western.. Art as we practice it is western. maybe minimalism and modernism are inspired by 'primitive' crafts or 'eastern' representations of the body and figure, but that doesn't make it not western.. maybe European knowledge is all based on what they learn from Arab and muslims, but we are here and now.

is this going anywhere? Don't get tired of me yet..

got much more to say

more love

**mohamed fadlabi**

11/3/10

to jumana

Good morning Joomi

back at you listen to what Jaques Ranceire have to say about what's given and what is not.. maybe it has something to do with what we are trying to talk about..

here  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-ULbgFkNZs>

**YouTube** - Videos from this email

**jumana.manna@gmail.com**  
**ail.com**  
to me

11/4/10

Poke war haha.

We are always under some form of imperialism if you wanna draw it in such broad terms, I mean, technology? Can you speak of the manipulation of our identity by technology as threatened, controlled in the same way. What I'm getting at is that it's useless to regress to these terms.

Of course art is some form of search for truth, it's a reactionary force to formed ways of seeing and thinking. That is

The 'dissensus' that Ranciere is talking about, and he is the master of acting as though categories of oppression do not exist as a way of change. He talks about that within education in his book 'the ignorant schoolmaster' which I feel is applicable to the art world too.

Isn't China, India, Tel Aviv, Beirut (that list is not comparable in size and influence) hubs that are influential in the art world today? Forget East and West and just deal with the topicality that you are interested in. And bring in knowledge from the Arab literature philosophy and poetry into your practice... Work on form ... This is my approach. Strategies of escaping identity is not easy, you can't escape who you are, you can only develop great ways of working with it.

I think this would feel less like a problem if you were in Oslo. It's easy to get threatened by the homogenous society and the dominant trends but Oslo is small... And great, but the world is big and a lot more confused.

Love  
Jumana  
Sent from my iPhone

**mohamed fadlali**  
to jumana.manna

11/4/10

(you can't escape who you are, you can only develop great ways of working with it.) now we are talking :) and this is what I am trying to say since the very start.

Well... read this

"I died a mineral, and became a plant. I died a plant and rose an animal. I died an animal and I was man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?" – Jalaluddin Rumi (Sufi mystic poet, 1207–1273)

Isn't this just so cool? I think Sufism in Islam is the master plan of not escaping but finding alternative ways to deal with it. I think we should research their ways more.. I mean, when I

read what they wrote it's just pure form of art.. In what jalaluddin says there is no truth but there is. and that's what art does.. Art motivates the truth but never finds it. In fact finding the truth means mission accomplished, khalas! and means we don't need art any more. What should we do then my friend?

Love  
Fadlabi  
sent from my nokia :)

**mohamed fadlabi** 11/4/10  
to jumana.manna

about the denial, I found a perfect example.. Robert Rauschenberg, I know you know him.. your friend AK is stealing his white paintings now a days :) she talks about it the same way he did as if she discovered something new.. ( I know you like her and you wouldn't agree)  
check out his white, black and red paintings, I think at some point he thought red was a really ugly color so he started painting red paintings..  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Rauschenberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Rauschenberg)

**mohamed fadlabi** 11/4/10  
to jumana.manna

And check us in this.. I mean both of us.. I think you are "projection" and I am "minimisation"

Denial is a defense mechanism postulated by Sigmund Freud, in which a person is faced with a fact that is too uncomfortable to accept and rejects it instead, insisting that it is not true despite what may be overwhelming evidence. [1] The subject may use:

simple denial - deny the reality of the unpleasant fact altogether  
minimisation - admit the fact but deny its seriousness (a combination of denial and rationalisation), or  
projection - admit both the fact and seriousness but deny responsibility.

On Thu, Nov 4, 2010 at 2:17 PM, mohamed fadlabi

--  
**mohamed fadlabi** 12/30/10  
to jumana

At some point of islamic history.. right after the prophet died..  
Muslims divided into three groups  
1-" alkhawarij" they went out of the khalifa's authority and carried

the sword against him.. they were the first ever to do that.  
2 "almurje'a" they thought since God made us and he knows what we will do.. since he knows the future, cause he created it.. we will do what we want.. And they did and waited for his judgement when they die.. in the judgement day  
3 "almu'tazila" they left it all.. they didn't wanna fight.. they just wanted to think about the heritage left upon them by the prophet.. they studied every word and became philosophers.. these guys were the roots of sufism in islam  
and some point .. those who were fighting turned back to them when they were faced with world they Concorde. They had no answers when they were asked so they turned to them..

Joomi love, which one do you wanna be?

2010/12/29 mohamed fadlabi <[fadlabihimself@gmail.com](mailto:fadlabihimself@gmail.com)>:

**jumana** 12/30/10  
**manna**  
jumana.m  
anna@g  
mail.com  
to me

how about both almurje'a & almu'tazila at one and the same time?  
i've never heard of these groups. How dot hey fit into Sunni/ Shiia divide today?  
can you tell me more?

Walla, abu'l fadlab, i've been kinda fucked up the past few months. weird life, and much pressure trying to do this program, and many wishes I didn't choose to put myself in such an awkward situation. so i get down sometimes and write some bullshit; and thank you for seeing beauty in my melancholy, but honestly, I think it's a bore.

life is too full of beauty to be concerned  
is too short to have a career  
too transient to be heavy  
and instead of laughing, I actually think by stopping and thinking back something will be revealed.

hows life with u these days? how's your beauty Naomi?

BAck in LA.

Making some more airbags/masks. out of thick white bull leather. Hope it will turn out nice... lezzz see god damn formalism. dabble dabble in form and color. what a relief it is at times

Love

**mohame** 12/30/10  
**d fadlabi**  
to jumana

I guess most of the shia were mostly from the first group.. so you are sunni by choice :)

I can tell you more when you are here

are you staying with me? that will be cool..

good that you are back.. and good that you are working with death,

again :) get it all out so you don't get into a dark place.. hehehe

I am painting and feeling like a retard when I am writing a press release in english tfor the other show I am curating..

Lord! my english is so bad.. and I have to write in english.. it's so fucked up..

hey you wanna look at what I wrote? maybe you can fix my spelling and grammar mistakes??

see? you are complaining about language and you are the luckiest among us :)

Naomi is cool.. her mom now and then get craziness attacks and not send her to me.. but she got her christmas gifts and she is doing ok (

I hope)

big hug

shta'tilak

Inbox

x

**jumana manna** jumana.manna@gmail.com2/26/11to me

keefak ya walad

misht'aeetlak ana

how are you? seems like we (arabs) are the avant-garde in politics and democracy

again, after a few too many centuries. what does this mean for sudan?

Are you proud to be an Arab now?

check this out: <http://www.sternberg-press.com/index.php?pageld=1296> its wonderful.

inspiring. rich. precise.

like we aspire to be

love

jumnu

**mohamed fadlabi**2/26/11to jumana

It's too many layers my friend

Don't be like westerners .. see them all

political islam is coming back

racism is in it's peek

I am not an arab

i don't wanna be..



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIBVT68ICfo&feature=related>

Love

**YouTube** - Videos from this email

**mohamed fadlabi** 2/26/11 to jumana

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8uoNDH1ZnM&feature=related>

**YouTube** - Videos from this email

**jumana manna** jumana.manna@gmail.com 2/26/11 to me

ya illahi, those videos are horrifying ya fadlabi. treating the bodies like dead animals or even worse, absolutely blood curling.

You mean racism between African's and Arabs is on it's peak?

Why do you see this as political Islam on the rise as opposed to the people's call for democracy?

Love

**mohamed fadlabi** 2/27/11 to jumana

Political islam is the fuel of both Egypt and Libya if you read the history of both and understand the revolution in both countries.. racism is an old sickness.. but libya is a teenager among other arab countries..

what happen was.. some of the people who were defending Qazaffi, were black..

and this is what they are doing today to every black man in libya..

can you believe it?

it's a long way Joomi..still.. don't dare to feel happy yet..

don't be cheated..

How are you by the way?

when are you coming back.. i am missing you already ya binti :)

**jumana manna** jumana.manna@gmail.com2/27/11to me

back in mid may for a couple weeks. and we have ALOT to talk about

As I understand what has happened in Egypt. It is a network of grassroots youth organizations and political activists that are for taking down a dictatorship loyal to the US, and

creating a democratic system where they get to vote for who they wish to be in power.

A government that will focus on bettering the economy, job opportunities, and infrastructure of Egypt.

Libya, more or less along the same lines, only they seem to have much less organization and less strong activist voices who keep people focused on the goal. what is happening with the mercenaries is beyond description. Is this really happening to all the black community in Libya? This is sick.

I am not sure what you mean by political Islam. Do you mean this is the same as fundamental Islam? Or is this a democratic, liberal movement that is still under the umbrella of Islam?

Are you on skype?

we have to talk

NOW

also i have some project ideas i want to talk to you about

miss you

**mohamed fadlabi**2/27/11to jumana

Joomi my friend

I am not on skype as you noticed..

working my ass for matias show and some other stuff.. it is as fundamental as hamas.. do you know what will happen if hamas got friends in egypt? Lord have mercy then..

What happen in Egypt seems so much as you described it. but mubark use to oppress The fundamental muslims so bad that they are a very good candidates for being the number one political power in Egypt now as they were the leaders of the opposition all the time in Egypt.

when Mubark fled Egypt next day so many big fundamental leaders came back to Egypt and started to steel the revolution.. they were giving

speeches in "medan alta7reer" and people took them back as heroes..

doesn't that remind you of Gaza and hamas? it's happening again my friend..

tell me about your projects.. what's up? what are you doing this days..

>>>> <%2B47%2092232273> [+47 92232273](tel:+4792232273)

>>>>

>>>

>>>

>>

**mohamed fadlabi**2/27/11to jumana

**180haha95.jpg**

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**mohamed fadlabi**  
to jumana

11/18/10

Shit! this so good :)

thanks

Had a studio visit from Will two days ago.. I think we are doing something soon.. not sure yet but I will let you know

When are you coming back?

oh yea .. was in Berlin some days ago and met Islin.. We should go there together one day.. I think all germans are working with our problems now :) our exotic problems..

first they steal our resources and now they steal our nice exotic problems.. shit! and they are good..

Love

Fadlabi

**jumana manna**  
jumana.manna@gma  
il.com  
to me

11/18/10

ah man you're getting so proff with ONO

your the shit Abu'l Fadlab

keep up the good work!

yeah, i was in berlin right after Oslo last time and had a fantastic time too.

Move there next year together? hahaha world trotting... my feet are getting blisters...

shu stealing exotic stories, are you pressing my buttons again walla? Berlin is the symbol of the cold war east vs capitalist west friction.. of course work there is more politicised, dealing with history... more interesting than scandinavia?

Love

Ju





