هم گنہاگار عورتیں

(We Sinful Women)

Urban Feminist Visuality in Contemporary Art and Feminist Movements in Pakistan After 9/11

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Abstract

هم گنہگار عورتیں (We Sinful Women): Urban Feminist Visuality in Contemporary Art and
Feminist Movements in Pakistan After 9/11

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This dissertation provides a chronology of the circumstances that led to opposing but symbiotic representations of Pakistani urban gendered bodies as a site of contestation between imperialist and religious-nationalist patriarchies. It uses the War on Terror as a historical context to foreground a body of representative artworks by eight women artists that destabilize the oppressed-versus-pious rhetorical binary and tie the iconography of these artworks to diverse visual and popular cultures. It argues that these artists create "urban gendered subjectivities" through hybrid and rhizomatic ethnic pop-cultural material and symbolic signifiers; they do so not for a regional, religious, or nationalist identity but as a strategic feminist visual resistance against multiple patriarchies.

The attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, followed by the Global War on Terror waged in Afghanistan and the peripheries of Pakistan, had a massive impact on the region's gender politics. For political gain, neocolonial imperialism and regional religious patriarchies exploited the rhetoric of a homogenized gendered Muslim body by substantiating it through their respective singular lens: religiously oppressed or religiously pious and empowered in their subjugation. This gendered binary politics strengthened and reinforced existing patriarchal structures and further demonized urban women who stood up for their right to exist in a mutually conducive urban society.

Using cultural theory, art-historical scholarship, and gender studies through an emphatic postcolonial and non-Western feminist lens, this dissertation envisions an alternative art history by tracing feminist insurgency within urban Pakistan's visual discourse at its primordial stages. Explicitly negating dichotomies, this dissertation gives credence to cultural, historical, and even individual complexities to gender representations of urban Pakistani women.

This dissertation aspires to unpack artworks that entail histories of ancestral wisdom, migratory anxieties, intergenerational feminist struggles, defiant ideologies, and colonial residues. The research warrants academic peripheral-gendered space within art historical authorship transnationally and domestically, much like the female artists under consideration,

who strive to create a nuanced gendered visuality by challenging and destabilizing monolithic representations. For productive and ethical ways of gendered visual representations and knowledge sharing, this dissertation proposes that it is time that Pakistan is seen through the eyes of its alleged "sinful women."

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Introduction

The horrific attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, followed by the Global War on Terror waged by the United States in Afghanistan and the peripheries of Pakistan, immensely impacted the region's gender dynamics in an urban context.[1] For political gain, the structures of power involved—the neocolonial imperialists and the regional religious patriarchies—exploited the rhetoric of a homogenized gendered Muslim body by validating it through their respective singular lens: religiously oppressed (methodological universalism: arithmetic method) or religiously pious/empowered (religious essentialism).[2] These opposing rhetorical representations turned Pakistani urban gendered bodies into a site of contestation, further strengthening and reinforcing the existing patriarchal structures.[3]

This dissertation foregrounds urban women's heterogenous existence within Pakistan's visual discourse as its central theme. The research envisions an alternative visual history by tracing visual feminist insurgency within urban Pakistan at its primordial stages using cultural theory, art historical scholarships, and gender studies through a postcolonial/non-Western feminist lens. Situating War on Terror as a historical context, the study's main objective is to make visible the works of women artists who stand up against patriarchal structures by creating defiant urban gendered subjectivities challenging the single visual narrative politics surrounding their bodies since 9/11. The selected works critically engage with the nuanced existence of urban gendered subjectivities in Pakistan through the performative occupation of urban spaces both symbolically and literally as a form of resistance.

The dissertation locates how these artists perform hybrid ethnicity as a form of resistance by exploring urban women's heterogeneous and nuanced everyday lives. Performing hybrid ethnicity here implies consciously using familiar iconography that highlights the region's diverse

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[1] The military attack on Afghanistan and northern areas of Pakistan followed the United States' invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. It was supported initially by Canada in the form of Joint Task Force 2 and the United Kingdom; the rest of NATO joined the US armed forces in 2003. The term "post–War on Terror Pakistan" is used for economy, referring to the social and political climate that has emerged in Pakistan because of the war.

[2] Chandra Talpade calls Western stereotyping of non-Western women as an analytically reductive method in which a large number of fragmented examples add up to a universal fact (stereotype). Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Boundary* 12, no.3 (Spring–Autumn 1984): 346.

[3] The US War on Terror's gendered media discourse homogenized images of Pakistani and Afghan women. As such, I employ the term "Afghan/Pakistani" when referring to American media coverage of the war in relation to women.

and composite culture, thereby destabilizing the oversimplified singular religious narrative.[4] The dissertation further ties these strategic visual expressions to emerging urban feminist activist initiatives, locating such initiatives in three major cities of Pakistan: Lahore, Karachi, and Rawalpindi.

The focus of the dissertation includes case studies of works by well-known artists, namely Naiza Khan (b.1968, Bahawalpur), specifically her public mural series *Henna Hands* on the walls of Railway colony Karachi (2002), and Farida Batool's (b. 1970, Lahore) lenticular print *nai ressan sheher Lahore Diyan* (2006). The dissertation also emphasizes works by Four less-familiar yet noteworthy emerging performance artists from the Lahore Biennale's (LB01) collateral exhibition, *River in an Ocean* (2018), curated by Abdullah Qureshi (b.1987, Lahore) and Natasha Malik (b.1988, Rawalpindi). The last chapter focuses on the works of two midcareer artists, Maria Khan (b. 1986, Lahore) and her depictions of surreal, sensual, middle-aged women, and Amra Khan's (b.1984, Rawalpindi) melancholic androgynous queer nudes.[5]

These artists perform ethnicity through ambivalent pop-cultural signifiers to critique the sociocultural conditions that emerged in Pakistan as the social repercussions of the War on Terror. On a surface level, these selected works ranging from 2001-to 2018 seem to form a part of a larger concurrent postcolonial art movement in Pakistan that revived traditional and regional art techniques such as Indo-Persian miniatures and the use of local materials and pop-cultural signifiers, rejecting Western artistic influences. However, the dissertation argues that the selected women artists create an alternative conceptual visual niche within the mainstream Pakistani artistic discourse on closer analysis.

These women artists create "urban gendered subjectivities" through hybrid and rhizomatic pop-cultural ethnic (material and symbolic) signifiers not as means of a regional, religious or nationalist identity but as a strategic visual language for feminist resistance against

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[4] Pakistan is a Muslim-majority country and part of the Subcontinent, within South Asia. It lies west of the Southeast Asian region. The Subcontinent's largest country, India, contained Pakistan and Bangladesh before the partition in 1947, and was a British colony from the second half of 18th to the first half of 20th century. The Subcontinent officially became part of the British Raj after the "great mutiny" of 1858, until 1947. Pakistan shares borders with four neighboring countries: India, Afghanistan, Iran, and China. It shares its largest border of 2,900 km with India to the east. It is landlocked, with Afghanistan to the west and Iran to the southwest, while China borders the country in the northeast. Though India and Pakistan were partitioned in 1947 under the British colonial administration (and Bangladesh in 1971), the people of the two countries had been living together in a composite culture since the first arrival of Muslims in the Subcontinent somewhere in the 7th century C.E.

[5] Images are synchronized with chapters in which these artworks formally appear.

multiple patriarchies. Rhizome here is used as non-hierarchical, heterogeneous multiplicities as conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari. Hybridity is used as a pre-existing condition of postcoloniality, as theorized by Homi Bhabha. The example of rhizomatic cultural signifiers in the form of multiple religious iconographies is discussed at length in the work of Farida Batool and in the poster of the Aurat March in Chapter Five. The hybridity resulting from cultural comingling is centralized through Naiza Khan and Amra Khan's works in Chapters Four and Six.[6] These women artists use cultural fluidity as a more accurate metaphor for the fluid, ambivalent, and evolving gendered lives experienced by urban women, creating a stark contrast to the one-dimensional representations perpetuated by mainstream US media and Pakistani religious conservatives. I argue that these artists fashion a South Asian feminist language and initiate a feminist movement destabilizing the transnational and religious-nationalist rhetoric surrounding Muslim women. In the context of gender politics in Pakistan, feminist cultural theorist Rubina Saigol's nuanced definition of the word "movement" is used:

> In some cases, only the visible, collective and continuous outpouring of resistance against injustice, inequality and discrimination is defined as a movement. In other cases, scattered demonstrations of anger and a sudden outpouring of rage over some atrocity also fall under the rubric of a movement. Occasionally, work of an oppositional nature carried out by a single individual in a particular moment of defiance is also regarded as being part of a movement.[7]

Based on the definition above, the focused case studies of individual feminist artistic expressions, when analyzed with the visual aspects of emerging collective urban feminist activism, inform of a feminist movement connected through similar iconography.

The main title of the study, هم گنہگار عورتیں (We Sinful Women), is derived from a poem written in1990 by eminent Pakistani feminist activist Urdu poet Kishwar Naheed (b. 1940).[8] The poem refers to the societal discourses around the demonization of women who stand up for their

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[6] The two terms can be found respectively in Eugene W. Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's "A Thousand Plateaus": A Reader's Guide* (London: A&C Black, 2013), 39; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture.* (London: Routledge, 2012), 21.

[7] The late Dr. Rubina Saigol was an independent researcher in social development in Lahore. Saigol authored and edited several books and papers in English and Urdu on education, nationalism, the state, ethnicity, feminism, and human rights, published nationally and internationally. She was one of the leading feminist historians in Pakistan. Rubina Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan: Actors, Debates and Strategies* (Islamabad: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2016), 33.

[8] The poem was written in the 1980s but first translated and published in 1990. Kishwar Naheed, "Hum gunahgar aurten," in *Hum gunahgar aurten,* ed. Rukhsana Ahmad (Lahore, 1990).

rights and do not submit to patriarchal control over their bodies.[9] It was written to celebrate the role of lawyers, artists, writers, activists, and middle-class urban women in the disobedience movement against General Zia's (1924– 1988) institutionalized discriminatory policies against women in the name of religion during the eleven years of his dictatorial regime (1977 to 1988).[10] Though written for a specific time, Naheed's poem and its title remain relevant and the poignancy of her words is particularly complementary to the theme of this study.[11]

It is imperative to be mindful that postcolonial responses to imperialism, visual imperialism and neo/colonialism have historically perpetuated and continue to perpetuate patriarchy within colonized and neocolonized societies. Feminist author Afiya Zia affirms this premise and maintains that the point of departure for the feminist struggle in Pakistan starts with acknowledging that Pakistan has a complex colonial history, and reactionary political/religious/cultural dualities and complexities have always existed in the region. She further adds that due to the patriarchal nature of society as far as gender is concerned, the neocolonial conditions that unfolded after 9/11 added immensely to these anxieties.[12] The sociopolitical trauma caused by the neo/colonial conditions in the societies tends to render gender issues insignificant within the reactionary nationalist narratives. Therefore, this dissertation stresses that it is only through a non-Western/ postcolonial feminist lens that the

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[9] The colonial forces in South Asia have historically used the premise of "liberating women" as an excuse to conquer, attack, and plunder non-Western countries. This concept is explored later in Chapter One.
In postcolonial nation states, native urban women are educated within the colonial-designed educational systems or are visualized within modern spaces. Hence, when urban women occupy non-traditional spaces such as media and urban spaces, they are equated to "promoting the colonizer's culture" and are seen as an "ally of colonial interests." Only women seem to bear the burden of decolonizing the society though overt/ sartorial religious signifiers. (This is discussed in detail in Chapter 2- section 2). After the War on Terror, this logic is only used against women, while historically and paradoxically in Pakistan's recent history it was General Zia (army) who was an ally of the United States during US proxy war in Afghanistan and the USSR (1978–1989). See, for details, Humeira Iqtidar, *Secularizing Islamists: Jama'at-e-Islami and Jama'at-ud-Da'wa in Urban Pakistan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 131.

[10] This situation, in particular, adversely affected educated working- and middle-class urban women. The entire legal structure was reconstructed to institutionalize discrimination against women and non-Muslim citizens. See Amina Jamal, "Transnational Feminism as Critical Practice: A Reading of Feminist Discourses in Pakistan," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 5, no. 2 (2005): 64.

[11] The term *gendered subjectivity* here signifies how female consciousness and gendered subjects in colonial conditions are shaped with respect to the colonial and the national/regional narratives. The transnational/structural intersections of racism, sexuality, and religiosity further complicate these gendered subject formations. Hence, locating the "feminist consciousness" (or an absence thereof) is the most effective process through which one can assert female subjectivity. See Anna Marie Smith, "Subjectivity and Subjectivation," in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 955–60.

[12] Afiya Shehrbano Zia, "Faith and Feminism in Pakistan: Religious Agency or Secular Autonomy?" (PhD diss. Univ. of Toronto, 2017), 142.

mainstream media formation of Pakistani gendered subjectivities during the War on Terror and its effects on urban gender bodies can be understood.

Postcolonial feminism as a theoretical framework is integral to this research. Postcolonial feminism explores colonialism and neocolonialism and how it intersects within local hierarchies of gender, class, race, and sexualities, which influence women in specific historical contexts and geographical locations. As such, intersectionality forms a critical basis for postcolonial feminist theory. Leading feminist scholar and social activist Rubina Saigol explains intersectionality in the Pakistani feminist context by maintaining that Pakistan "does not have a singular and a monolithic reality; rather, there are multiple realities, and Islam constitutes only one of those realities. Beyond religion, there is ethnicity, class, caste, gender and linguistic and regional identities."[13] "Postcolonial feminist theory engages in twofold projects: it racializes mainstream feminist theory and inserts "feminist concerns into the conceptualization of colonial and postcolonialism."[14] Hence, this dissertation locates the female image in the works of Pakistani artists and activists in a space that exists between the oppressed and empowered/pious binary created by transnational accounts and its regional religious backlash after 9/11 and the War on Terror.

This dissertation maintains a secular, intersecting, and empathetic perspective toward the readings of the visual semiotics utilized in the case studies. The secular perspective here means an acknowledgement of the diverse gendered expressions (of which faith is one source) and various ways in which the selected women artists negotiate their complex existence. Using this approach, I argue that the lived experiences of gendered urban subjectivities are diverse and can

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[13] An observation of Pakistan's topography reveals its elongated shape. Hence, despite being a small country, it is landlocked with five neighboring countries. This makes Pakistan culturally diverse with many subcultures existing within different subregions. Out of four provinces, two of its major and most densely populated provinces. Punjab in the east and Sindh in the south has conjoined borders with India and share many Indian cultural traditions. On the boundaries of Hindu Kush, within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, regions like Chitral district and Kunar valley (near China) have their own unique and colorful cultural and sartorial traditions. The incident of 9/11, and the media propaganda that followed, showed only one picture of Pakistan, women shrouded in burqa. This homogenizing of diverse cultures that encompass Pakistan, turned millions of Pakistani women into a much-photographed imagery of one faceless, veiled: other" woman. Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan*, 16. Islam itself is not a homogenous identity in Pakistan. The Pakistani population is divided between majority Sunni (70 percent) and minority Shite sects (25 percent), as well as other religious minorities (5 percent) such as Ahmadiyya, Christian, Hindu, and Parsi. There are many fractions within the Sunni sect, with Deobandi and Wahhabism the most extremist. See Ahmar Moonis, "Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan," *Pakistan Vision 9* (2007): 19. The Pakistani religious extremist organizations and their support is largely a consequence of American imperial intervention, beginning with the Afghan Jihad in 1979, and will be discussed in Chapter One briefly.

[14] Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2003), 3.

only be conceptualized through multiple frameworks. In order to clearly articulate the importance of these feminist expressions, Chapters One and Two provide the context through which colonial and domestic patriarchies are conceptualized. This background foregrounds the dire need for this dissertation to centre on feminist visuality, methods, and expression.

The dissertation's overall aim is to provide a new chapter in contemporary art history through a metropolitan postcolonial feminist lens in the context of transnational and regional gender politics around Pakistani women after 9/11 and the ensuing War on Terror. This dissertation, therefore, has three main objectives. The first objective is to document the emergence of feminist semiotics in Pakistani art discourse from 2001 onwards. The second objective is to develop and establish a clear theoretical relation between counter-urban images, emerging feminist discourse, and the women's equality rights movement in contemporary Pakistan, drawing from local knowledges. The third and final object is to survey a body of representative artworks that speak to discourses about the construction of visibility of Pakistani urban women in visual art and tie it with a study of diverse visual and popular cultures.

Since 2001, feminist-oriented art-historical scholarship on Pakistan has examined General Zia's regime (1978–89) as the ultimate onset of patriarchal extremist Islam. Art historian Salima Hashmi, in *Unveiling the Visible* (2003), Farida Batool in her PhD dissertation, "New Media, Masculinity and Mujra Dance In Pakistan" (2015), Atteqa Iftikhar Ali in her dissertation, "Impassioned Play: Social Commentary and Formal Experimentation in Contemporary Pakistani Art" (2008), Sadia Toor in *The State of Islam* (2011) discuss at length the effect of the Cold War and the impact of General Zia's dictatorial regime based on religious extremism on art and gender discourse in Pakistan. These studies show that General Zia's regime enforced hypermasculine and patriarchal Islam in Pakistan through institutionalizing concepts of reward and punishment, which incited secular feminist pushback in the 80s and 90s.

The significance of this dissertation lies in the fact that it is the first art-historical scholarship to investigate non-Western feminist semiotics in Pakistani art discourse using 9/11 and the War on Terror as defining historical events. Many recent multidisciplinary feminist studies dwell on the impact of 9/11 and the War on Terror on gender politics in Pakistan. However, comprehensive art historical research that foregrounds the emergence of feminist visual discourse as a response to Pakistan's involvement in the war has been missing. This dissertation fills that knowledge gap by exploring the effects of the War on Terror transnationally

and regionally on the mainstream visual representation of Pakistani urban women. It further documents the emergence of an urban feminist resistance that derives its visual language from local histories and knowledges.

I argue that after 9/11, the role of international media polemic towards Pakistan, coupled with a shift in the local government policy as the US ally, resulted in the proliferation of artworks interspersed with sociopolitical visual narratives.[15] It was not the first time Pakistan had become a US ally and paid heavily for it.[16] From 1977 to 1988, within the context of the Cold War, Pakistan, under the dictatorial military regime, acted as an essential US ally. The United States fought its proxy war against the USSR in Afghanistan through Pakistan (1988–1991), creating a religious extremist force that ultimately led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.[17]

During General Zia's regime, the Islamization of Pakistan was supported by the US Cold War policies flooding the country with foreign aid. This superficial economic boost legitimized General Zia and his dictatorial regime. A hyper-masculinized and militarized version of Islam originated during General Zia's regime.[18]The extremist Islamic laws, anti-women and anti-minority sentiments are rooted in Cold War policies. General Zia's regime ended with his death in an aircraft accident in 1988. However, its negative impact on gender, art, and creativity in Pakistan lingered and is touched upon throughout the dissertation.

According to cultural theorist Saadia Toor, the US War on Terror legitimized another dictator in Pakistan. In 1999, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff committee, General Pervez Musharraf, took over from the democratically elected government of Mian Nawaz Sharif in a bloodless coup d'état. Later in 2001, General Musharraf took the president's office while still keeping the title of Chief of the Army Staff. After the 9/11 incident, General Musharraf's state

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[15] Kanwal Syed, "Caught in the Middle: Socio-Political Imageries in Contemporary Art in Pakistan Post 9/11 (2001–2013)," (MA thesis, University Sains, Malaysia, 2014).

[16] It is argued by Nazish Broni that in the past (Cold War politics) political Islam and US imperialism did not only coexist but also flourished during the Cold War. Hence, they are not contradictory but codependent forces. Nazish Brohi, *The MMA Offensive: Three Years in Power, 2003–2005* (Islamabad: ActionAid International, 2006).

[17] There are many studies cited throughout the dissertation that document this phenomenon. The most direct is the bestseller book and box-office hit, George Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War* (New York: Grove Press, 2003).

[18] Saadia Toor, *The State of Islam. Culture and War Politics in Pakistan* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 157. From 1979 to 1988, Pakistan received substantial aid, weaponry, and technology from the United States. Contrary to its stated policy, the United States supported the dictatorial regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. David S Painter, a leading scholar of the Cold War, writes, "Although for reasons of history, ideology, and enlightened self-interest, the United States preferred to work with democratic forces in the Third World, in practice it often sided with monarchs, military dictators, and other anti-democratic but anti-communist elements." David Painter, *The Cold War: An International History* (London: Routledge, 2002), 46.

policy was in sync with US policies. In collaboration with Musharraf, the US strategy included offensive operations to counter Islamic radicalization in Afghanistan and Pakistan through the Pakistani government's help. Part of the plan was to reverse the Cold War policies toward the region and steer Pakistani society toward modernism.[19] As a result, Pakistan became a US ally and a facilitator in the War on Terror and its people into victims of yet another war. The liberals of the country initially welcomed General Musharraf's westernized lifestyle and politics of enlightenment. Saadia Toor writes:

> Musharraf's abortive attempt to reform the Zina Ordinance and passage of the women's protection Bill were seen as evidence of his progressive credentials, as was his plan to allocate a quota for reserved seats for women from the local to the national level.[20]

Musharraf also set entertainment media and art free from overt censorship policies and publicly advocated a softer version of Pakistan on media internationally.[21] However, Musharraf's superficial "enlightened moderation" strategy against the growing religious extremism in the region did not bear any results. Instead, his decision to support the US War on Terror resulted in devastating consequences for the Pakistani People.

The war that started one month after the horrific incident of 9/11, on October 7, 2001, ended after twenty years under the US president Joe Biden on August 30, 2021, as the last C-17 plane took off at 3:29 p.m. Eastern Time, carrying the last American service members. The principal objective of the War on Terror was to eliminate Al Qaeda, using Pakistan as an ally.

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[19] General Zia's dictatorial regime was closely aligned with the CIA's Cold War policies during the Afghan/USSR War (1979–1989), when Pakistan became a facilitator and an ally for the CIA's "Operation Cyclone." The United States, through Pakistan, helped the Afghan Mujahedeen (Islamic jihadi fighters) to fight against the Soviet Union.

[20] General Zia passed a number of discriminatory laws against women including the Hudood Ordinance of 1979 (based on a specific hardline interpretation of Islam, it calls for women found guilty of adultery, even in the case of rape, to be stoned to death) and the Law of Evidence of 1984 (reduced the value of women's testimony in courts of law to half that of a men's). Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan,* 14.
On the other hand, General Musharraf had a liberal lifestyle; he drank alcohol and had two imported pet Pomeranians. He gave shallow impressions to the liberal sector that finally Pakistan was safe from religious extremism. Especially his effort to dismantle the harsh system imposed by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1979 was seen as the right step. Toor. *The State of Islam,* 196.

[21] Aside from a vibrant print media, there are more than 40 TV channels (54 satellite TV licenses were issued); 50 FM radio stations (102 licenses issued); and 1,218 local cable TV operators. The government-controlled Pakistan Television (PTV) network has four channels, reaching nearly 90 percent of the country, while the 25 state-run radio stations, which broadcast in nineteen languages, have a countrywide reach. Zafarullah Khan and Brian Joseph, "Pakistan after Musharraf: The Media Take Center Stage." *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 4 (October 2008): 33.
Pervez Musharraf, "A Plea for Enlightened Moderation," *Washington Post,* June 1, 2004, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2004/06/01/a-plea-for-enlightened-moderation/b01ff08e-f0c5-4ad5-8e96-b97a32ec084e/ (accessed March 13, 2022).

However, soon the war spiralled out of control, creating severe security and social consequences for Pakistan, discussed at length in the first chapter.

The initial ideological framework of the war curated by the US media represented it as a civilizing mission to rescue Muslim women from under the Taliban regime. Immediately after 9/11, the US media was flooded with images of burqa-clad Afghan women under the Taliban's regime. This hypervisibility of oppressed Muslim women aided the right-wing Euro-American leadership in exploiting the veil as a symbol of all evil in Islam to propagate Islamophobia, mustering populist right-wing political support.[22] However, this single visual narrative constructed around Muslim bodies through region-specific journalistic imagery soon made the veil (burqa) a metonymy for all Muslim women.[23] There is a consensus among mass-media scholars that the US media's massive coverage of burqa-clad Afghan and Pakistani women helped the Bush administration to define the War on Terror as a humanitarian mission.[24] The narrative that the war was a humanitarian mission to liberate Muslim women turned Muslim women in the region into primary stakeholders in the war.

The war, however, resulted in violent deaths, displacement, and trauma for the Pakistani people, especially in the two provinces adjacent to Afghanistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. The numerous drone attacks on the civilian population and transnational anti-Islamic media propaganda left Pakistanis with grave resentment within Pakistan.[25] As the

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[22] Islamophobia has been described as an "intense dislike or fear of Islam, especially as a political force," and is indicative of an exaggerated "hostility or prejudice towards Muslims." See Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, "Art, Activism, and Agitation: Anida Yoeu Ali," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias 3,* no. 1 (Spring 2017): 54.

[23] Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2004), 548. Stephen D. Reese explains that the explicit cultural components of post–9/11 media discourse were intentionally assembled through policy documents, presidential speeches, and consequent news coverage. Furthermore, Reese elucidates that, later, the West vs. Islam discourse was absorbed into general media (and therefore, the general public's) discourses and has "grown beyond its original policy usage to take on a life of its own." Stephen D. Reese and Seth C. Lewis, "Framing the War on Terror: The Internalization of Policy in the US Press," *Journalism 10,* no. 6 (December 2009): 778.

[24] For a detailed analysis, see Carol A. Stabile and Deepa Kumar, "Unveiling Imperialism: Media, Gender and the War on Afghanistan," *Media, Culture and Society 27,* no. 5 (September: 2005). For a feminist analysis of American media projection of Pakistani women, see Moon Charania, *Will the Real Pakistani Woman Please Stand Up? Empire, Visual Culture and the Brown Female Body* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2015). For alternative perspectives, see Brigitte Gabriel, *They Must be Stopped: Why We Must Defeat Radical Islam and How We Can Do It* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008) and C. Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014).

[25] The effects 9/11 had on the lives of the Muslim diaspora is outside the range of this dissertation. The effects of War on Terror on Pakistan and its infrastructure are numerous and beyond the range of this dissertation. See: Hidayat Khan, "Pakistan's Contribution to Global War on Terror after 9/11." *IPRI Journal* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 37–56. According to Phillip Knightley, an ex-investigative journalist for London's *Sunday Times*, the estimated

liberation of women from under the Taliban regime was projected as the ideological framework of the US War within the mainstream media, M.M.A. and other religious discourses started equating female liberation to Western diabolic schemes to emasculate Muslim men further. Muslim men who were killed during the war were portrayed as direct victims of female liberation.[26] The Islamists exploited this situation for political gains by mobilizing the most right-wing segment of the Muslim urban population. This provided an opportunity for the extremist religious parties to mobilize the Pakistani public against General Musharraf's modernization policies and against the female liberation narrative.[27]

As an ally in the War, General Musharraf's apparent moderate persona and his lenient policies toward the media created an extreme backlash from the religious and political parties and started an antagonistic relationship between the religious right and Musharraf's government. However, this public rhetoric and hostile relationship between General Musharraf and the religious right did not stop them from politically assisting each other to gain power. Musharraf and the extremist religious party coalition Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (M.M.A.) allied in Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan provinces in domestic politics.[28] M.M.A. was a swing vote that helped Musharraf's Legal Framework Order (L.F.O.), making it possible for him to be both chief of the army staff and president (head of the state).[29] This fact added further complexity to an already complex situation. As Musharraf introduced policies to facilitate female liberation, M.M.A, through their presence in the Assembly, actively sought to curtail female rights in the name of religious piety.[30] In public, in religious sermons and political rallies, the Islamists

civilian casualties within a couple of years was double the number of civilians killed in the 9/11 attacks. See Phillip, *The First Casualty*, 513.

[26] Zia, "Faith and Feminism," 142.

[27] Jamshed Khan, "The Rise of Political Islam in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: The Case of *Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal* (MMA)," *Dialogue 9*, no.3 (2014): 306.

[28]" Musharraf's decision to support the American War on Terror provided an opportunity to the religious parties which mobilized the people against the America and also against the military government at home. On the other side the Islamists were perceived by Musharraf as the possible future ally and he considered it no threat for his government, that's why they participated in the election more freely. MMA was comprised of six ultra-conservative Islamist political parties of Pakistan, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP), the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-S), Jamiat-e-Ahle Hadith, Pakistan Islami Tehrik (ITP) and the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). All these parties had the same nature of politics but their way of politics is different. In the country's electoral history religious parties had a very weak position but this time they formed government in KPK and coalition government in Baluchistan and in the center, MMA emerged as an opposition party."
Khan, "The Rise of Political Islam in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," 302.

[29]Brohi, *The MMA Offensive,* 27.

[30]"MMA denounced the use of female images in public (in advertisements) to erase their existence from the public memory. The provincial MMA government in NWFP passed *Hisbah law* that gave them permission to create a

accused Musharraf of being a Western agent responsible for the deaths of civilians and for propagating immorality; in politics, they facilitated his power in return for political leverage. The religious backlash that started right after the commencement of the War on Terror, giving political credence to the religious conservatives, played a significant role in strengthening urban-based religious-nationalist patriarchy. According to Brohi, Islamist groups legitimize themselves as the saviours of women who conform to their ideology, and "women who have an informed opposition to the M.M.A. ideology are beyond redemption and have sold out" to the West."[31] She further writes how urban women's presence in urban public areas is perceived as obscene, vulgar, and proof of their westernization. The Islamists fight to obliterate the presence of women in urban spaces, at times literally by censoring female faces from public billboards, advertisements, and public murals.[32]

Even though media and television have no strict censoring policies, they freely construct a dichotomy between pious women at home and diabolic westernized working women.[33] The religious right (Islamists) systematically conflate their interpretation of Islam and Pashtun culture as universal Pakistani identity "by aggressively aiming to change society's cultural mosaic and alter the nation's perception of selfhood" by manipulating the West vs. Islam binary politics.[34]

Euro-American politics use the veil as a sign of oppression, while the reactionary Islamist groups within the country work to enforce it on women as a symbol of religious piety.[35] The

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moral police brigade protected by a *Mohtasib* and would decide the moral limitations of the society. In Punjab assembly in 2002, MMA vociferously opposed the law against domestic violence. They are against the presence of women in public spaces and consider and banned male doctors from attending female patients in the two provinces they got elected through." Brohi , *The MMA Offensive,* 56–62. See also: Toor, *The State of Islam*, 192–97, and Khan, "The Rise of Political Islam in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," 300–305.

[31] Brohi, *The MMA Offensive,* 56-57.

[32] There has already been a historical legacy of demonizing urban working women in Pakistan. Apart from the patriarchy that affects all women in Pakistan, historically, Islamists and leftists alike have demonized Pakistani women who achieve economic independence. For more details, see: Haeri, *No Shame for the Sun*; Rouse, *Shifting Body Politics*.

[33] Discussed in Chapter One.

[34] Pashtun (Pakhtun) are the ethnic groups that have historically been residing in the region that encompasses the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Afghanistan. Brohi, *The MMA Offensive*, 5. There are many Pakistani gender and social theorists that challenge the concept of a monolithic Islam as projected by Islamist as well as transnational propaganda after 9/11 and the War on Terror. Farida Shaheed, a Pakistani sociologist and feminist human rights activist, rejects umbrella terms such as "Muslim world" and argues that Muslims throughout history have been an "amorphous, divergent, shifting composition of individuals and societies not infrequently in conflict." Farida Shaheed, "Constructing Identities: Culture, Women's Agency and the Muslim World," *Women Living under Muslim Laws Dossier 23/24* (July 2001): 35.

[35] By writing 'Euro-America,' I am referring to the United States, Canada, and Western European countries such as Britain, France, and Germany.

contentious subject of covering and uncovering brown female bodies joins other female rights issues, which have become very delicate, even dangerous, debate topics for female and minority rights activists. Hence, the West vs. Islam binary cycle further silences women, especially the heterogenous existence of Pakistani urban women, manifesting in the proliferation of gender violence in an urban context, as discussed at length in Chapter One.

1. Analysis of Art-Historical and Interdisciplinary Scholarship from Pakistan

During the last two decades, contemporary art from the periphery increasingly aligned itself to the 'global' art space through the proliferation of biennales and the inclusion of globally recruited artists and curators.[36] Julian Stallabrass, in his text *Art Incorporated* (2004), indicates another factor that made art from the periphery more visible. He suggests that post–Cold War art from regions directly involved in Cold War and post–Cold War politics transnationally became relevant. For example, in the 1990s, amid the collapse and disintegration of the USSR, art from the former Soviet Union gained epic international attention.[37]

In the same way, Pakistani art's international visibility was, to an extent, a result of its involvement and facilitation in the War on Terror.[38] Media privatization and readier access to the internet after 2001 helped Pakistani artists garner international interest. This visibility, since 2001, resulted in the need for art historical scholarship focused on Pakistan. Journals such as *Third Text,* magazines such as *Himal South Asian* and *Harf* investigate, analyze, and explore South Asian art, and numerous online sources on social media focus primarily on Pakistani art.[39]

There is no official diction for female attire in Pakistan, unlike most Middle Eastern countries. Although most urban women like to wear their traditional clothing, as well as the national dress of Pakistan, *shalwar* (loose pants), *kameez* (long shirt) and *dupatta* (a sheer long scarf that is worn around the neck), there are a large number of urban women who do not cover their heads. As well, head covering and veiling can be an extremely fluid practice in the urban Subcontinent, as the practice of wearing the *hijab* has no traditional or historical background there. In fact, as argued by Rubina Saigol, the appearance of the *hijab* among middle-class girls born in Pakistan is a recent phenomenon. See: Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan*, 33.

[36] Tim Griffin, et al., "Global Tendencies. Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition," *Artforum* 42, no. 43 (November 2003): 152–63.

[37] Reactionary artists like Boris Maikhilov and Sergel Bugaev Afrika became increasingly popular, depicting the poverty, homelessness, and extensive destitution under communist Russia. For a comprehensive study of this Phenomenon, See Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story Of Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004) and Rasheed Araeen, "Art And Postcolonial Society," in *Globalization and Contemporary* Art, ed. Jonathan Harris (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 370–72.

[38] Syed, *Caught in The Middle, "*5. After World War II (1945), The USSR And The U.S Ended Up As The Two World Superpowers. The Cultural And Artistic hub was shifted from London to New York. This indicates a direct correlation between a country's economy and its influence on the world market, of which the art market makes up a small part. It was the dawn of the new world order, with the United States controlling almost half of the global art sales.

[39] Ibid., 5.

The Subcontinent being a former British colony, it is worth emphasizing that most educational and art institutions there were created under colonialism:[40] Part of the colonization process was the study of English as the most prominent feature of teaching.[41] As a result, all significant mainstream art-historical texts in Pakistan, even those written by Pakistani art academics, are predominantly written in English. This tendency should be interpreted as a colonial influence on Pakistani art and educational discourse.[42]

A survey through the Pakistan Research Repository-HEC from the Art History Department of Punjab University gives an overview of the general focus of Pakistani art-historical scholarship. Most research is focused on historical and postcolonial perspectives to decolonize and document local art and craft practices and architectural heritage from regional perspectives.[43] Further, most publications focus on the works of seminal male artists that shaped the initial art canon in Pakistan.

A critical assessment of contemporary Pakistani art-historical and interdisciplinary scholarships helps highlight gaps in existing research and demonstrates the relevance and originality of my dissertation's contribution to knowledge. Expressly, it signifies the postcolonial feminist niche this scholarship creates within Pakistani art-historical canon contextualized through transnational and regional gender politics after 9/11 and the War on Terror.

Painting in Pakistan (1991) by Mian Ijaz-ul-Hassan and Sirhandi's *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan* (1992) were the two significant publications that briefly navigated the modernist art movement in Pakistan through its Indian heritage before 2001. Both publications

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[40]The University of Punjab was established in December 1869, under the supervision of British orientalist Dr. Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner. Later, in 1875, the Mayo School of Arts was founded (renamed the National College of Arts in 1958), and John Lockwood Kipling was appointed as the first principal. Kipling (1837–911) was a British art teacher, illustrator, and museum curator who spent most of his career in British India. He was the father of renowned author Rudyard Kipling. As Punjab had the largest concentration of artisans in all India, "it was suitable ground for testing the ideas and policies of early British modernism concerning the promotion of Indian arts." Nadeem Omar Tarar, *"Official" Chronicle of Mayo School of Art: Formative Years under J. L. Kipling, 1874–94* (Lahore: National College of Arts, 2003), 13.

[41] J. F. Bruce, "A Brief History of the University of the Panjab," *Journal of the Panjab University Historical Society* 2, no. 4 (1933).

[42] During the Lahore Biennale (LB01), in collaboration with Iftikhar Dadi, all artistic statements were translated into Urdu, as a part of making art accessible to the masses.

[43] A few significant dissertations from Punjab University in art history include Sadia Pasha,"*Hur Shahnama:* An Example of the Sub-Imperial Art during the Mughal Era" (PhD diss., Punjab University 2019);Tahmina Ali, "Major Handicrafts of Gujrat: Pottery, Textiles, Wood Work and Metal Work" (PhD diss., Punjab University 2020); Kiran Shahid Siddiqui, "An Analytical & Comparative Study of Jewelry & Costumes in the Panels of Gandhara Art" (PhD diss., Punjab University 2016).

are in the style of coffee-table books, with a substantial amount of coloured artist's pages and a single paragraph on individual artists.[44]

Akbar S. Naqvi's much-acclaimed book, *Image and Identity, Painters of Pakistan* (1997), is the only comprehensive academic work on the history of 50 years of Pakistani artistic practice published before 2001. Naqvi's impressive formal analysis situates the works of early modernist and traditionalist Pakistani artists within the combined, religiously and culturally varied history of the Subcontinent, without which he argues Pakistani art "has no identity."[45] However, Naqvi does not connect early modernist art to Pakistan's turbulent sociopolitical landscape. In fact, he criticizes female art historian Salima Hashmi for identifying that the rise of formalism during General Zia's regime was a product of governmentality. In my assessment, Hashmi does not undermine formalist artists such as Khalid Iqbal (1929–2014) and Ghulam Rasul's undeniable talent and contribution to formalism in Pakistan. Hashmi only identifies the sociopolitical atmosphere during the 80s: General Zia's censorship policies towards conceptual and figurative art favouring the reception of specific art genres.[46]

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[44] Dr. Sirhandi's book is titled *Contemporary Paintings in Pakistan*; published in 1992. According to art historian Salima Hashmi and art historian Atteqa Ali, contemporary art influences in Pakistan appeared during the late 1990s, with the start of material experimentations and as well as the appearance of conceptual art. Atteqa Ali writes in her PhD dissertation: "In 1991 . . . what I saw was works that I could find anywhere in the world—i.e., paintings of still-life and figures that are similar to styles devised in Western modern art movements." Later, she writes, by the late 90s, the formal experimenting with the mediums and concepts had started to take shape and students were producing thought-provoking conceptual works using local materials and techniques."
Atteqa Iftikhar Ali, "Impassioned Play: Social Commentary and Formal Experimentation in Contemporary Pakistani Art" (PhD diss., Univ. of Texas, 2008), 2.
Ali also writes, *"Contemporary Pakistani Painting,* by Marcella Sirhandi, published in 1992 was a gift I received in 1999. It struck me as a textbook, strikingly similar to another publication from 1991 entitled simply *Pakistani Painting* by Mian Ijaz-ul-Hassan, which provides one- to several paragraph entries on individual artists." (Ibid., 2) Mian Ijaz-ul-Hassan is Lahore based Pakistani painter, art educator/academic, art critic, and writer; Dr. Sirhandi is an American art academic. Currently, Sirhandi is assistant professor of art history at the Kansas City Art Institute.

[45] Akbar Naqvi, "Forward to the First Edition," in *Image and Identity: Fifty years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan*. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), xviii.

[46] Disclaimer: The practice of highlighting and giving exposure to certain images that validate a certain political ideology has been repeatedly used as a tool by imperialistic or governmental powers. There are many examples of this in history and the most prominent one is how the CIA used abstract expressionism as a propaganda tool against the Soviet Union, as a form of cultural warfare. This new artistic movement was projected as a proof of the creativity, the intellectual freedom, and the cultural power of the United States and in contrast highlighted how Russian art under strict communist ideological constraints could not compete. As a result, abstract expressionist artists gained immense popularity during the Cold War. Frances Stonor Saunders, "Modern Art was CIA 'Weapon,'" *Independent*, Oct. 22, 1995, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/modern-art-was-cia-weapon-1578808.html/ . However, this information by no means undermines the abstract expressionist movement and the talent of the artist The critical examination of artworks produced in Pakistan around "veil" as a response to US media propaganda after 9/11 in the next Chapter follows the same trajectory. The dissertation only identifies the politics that assisted in the visibility of "veil" images originating from Pakistan. The study does not challenge the artists, their original contributions, and their undeniable talent.

Referring to women artists, Naqvi assigns the most extensive section to Zubeida Agha (1992–97), the pioneer modernist abstractionist. He identifies the 1960–90 era as the most fertile period of her artistic practice, which he calls an "undeviating career in which she tended her art like a vestal virgin." He also narrates how she hated the word feminism, later continuing:[47]

> Zubeida Agha works at more than one level, one of which is the ordinary domestic accomplishments of ikebana flower arrangements and the other the semantics of modern art fashioned as her *Hijab. At all levels, we enter a women's world, a holy of holies for the artist.*[48]

The unsettling phrases such as "she hated feminism," "virgin," "Hijab," and "holy of holies" indicate the construction of a piety discourse so very eagerly produced within nationalist narratives regarding women.[49] He later criticizes Salima Hashmi's claim that Zubeida Agha dominates the modernist era in Pakistan, counterarguing that Hashmi's claim was a "fantasy required to put the women artist in the best, if not true light."[50] He further continues on the subject:

> It should be recognized that she was not a leader. She could not lead painters . . . [as] very few people and none from the art schools have seen her work. The P.N.C.A.'s National Museum of Art has only one of her paintings in the collection.[51]

There are three identifiable conclusions regarding the debate above. Firstly, Agha was indeed a forerunner in introducing the modernist genre in South Asia. Second, due to male domination

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[47] Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 68.

[48] Ibid., 70.
Here the reference to hijab here is confusing, as thoroughly researching the repository of archival images, no reference to hijab in Zubeida Agha's context was found. He may be using the word hijab in its literal meaning: a curtain or a divide.

[49] Vernacularly, the term "feminism" in Pakistan has come to be equated with a Western woman's sexual freedom and hence is considered a pejorative term. Piety discourse (from which originates piety politics) implies the Muslim women's performative docility, submission, conservatism, and embracement of patriarchy as manifestation of their devotion to their faith. This concept is further explored and counterargued in Chapter Four. The definition has been taken from Zia, "Faith and Feminism," 37–39.

[50] Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 72.
Hashmi, in her interview, responded to Naqvi's comments by explaining her position. She said that when women transcend the male gaze (beyond being a muse), it creates discomfort. These challenges to patriarchy also bring forward hidden misogyny and deep-rooted cynicism, camouflaged until confronted. She further explains how Art for Art's sake is a convenient way of ignoring feminist expressions that need extensive historical and political contextualization. She further argued against formalism that if we erase political content from art, we should also erase politics from poetry, literature, and cinema, which is unthinkable. She jokingly mentioned how many male friends ask her why she doesn't write about male artists, to which she jokingly replied, "I think men had good 5000 years," it's time we talk about women. Salima Hashmi, Interview with the Author (Lahore, 2018).

[51] Naqvi, *Image and Identity,* 72.

over the field, historically, women artists did not receive due credit in the art world—which is a universal phenomenon.[52] Lastly, Naqvi's problematic expression towards women artists and their art indicates deep-rooted cultural patriarchy, which can only be addressed by the presence of visible feminist voices within art historical writings.

From the perspective of feminist agency within art discourse, the most important publications since 2001 include works by Salima Hashmi: *Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan* (2010). [53] *Unveiling the Visible* gives a brief but invaluable intergenerational survey of fifty-five women artists as significant art practitioners from 1947 to 2000. She also gives a brief account of feminist art activism in Pakistan during the1980s under General Zia and how his extremist policies affected the practice of many women artists and the construction of their subjectivity. She writes how, in protest against General Zia's policy of censorship and female oppression, not a single woman artist took up calligraphy or formalism nor changed her mode of working to bring it in line with state policies. "Since there was a limited precedent of art that dealt with socio-political concerns, they had to invent ways to deal with these issues." For example, most women artists reverted to small-scale watercolours, defying art patronized by the state.[54] Hashmi's book investigates five historic political periods in

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[52] However, there is an effort underway to revisit and revive the contribution of women art practitioners during the initial years after partition. In 2004, as a joint publication by the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) & AIW, a posthumous artist's monograph dedicated to Agha was published, acknowledging her contributions to modernism in Pakistan: *Zubaida Agha: A Pioneer of Modern Art in Pakistan,* ed. Musarrat Hasan.

[53] As this dissertation focuses on Pakistani art after 2001, it is more critical towards art publications published after that date, in order to highlight its original contribution to art historical scholarship in Pakistan. Other publications by Salima Hashmi include: Salima Hashmi and Quddus Mirza*, Contemporary Art in Pakistan (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications: 2004); Hashmi, Salima. Memoirs, Metaphors and Mutations: Art from India and Pakistan* (Oxford: Oxford University *2007).* These books follow the commercial Taschen model, divided between pictorial compilations (coloured artists' pages), accompanied by minimal information and brief artists' statements.
Salima Hashmi (b. 1942), based in Lahore, represents the first generation of modern conceptualists in Pakistan. She is an artist, curator, and contemporary art historian. She taught at Lahore's National College of Arts for 31 years, before working as its principal for four years. She was the dean at the Beaconhouse National University's School of Visual Arts and runs an influential gallery, Rothas, in Lahore.
Quddus Mirza (b. 1961), based in Lahore, is a conceptual artist and art educator. He currently writes in *The News* and is coauthor of many books. His writings have been published in national and international newspapers and magazines.
[54] Salima Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan* (Islamabad: ActionAid Pakistan, 2002), 98. The significance of small-scale watercolours as a symbol of *default resistance* can be traced by looking at the historical link between art mediums and colonial struggle. Ijaz Ul Hassan's *Paintings in Pakistan,* while framing the dilemma of early identity issues in the colonial Subcontinent, explains how the Bengali movement, which had an all-Indian characteristic, was an artistic movement initiated by regional artists to counter the colonial mass-production policy that destroyed Indian arts and crafts. Headed by Abanindranath Tagore, this artistic alliance rejected colonial artistic techniques to revert back to the roots of the artistic practices in the Subcontinent. These artists shunned oil colours that were seen as a colonial artistic medium. As a result, most

Pakistan till 2000. Whereas this dissertation focuses explicitly on female art after 2001, using the War on Terror in Pakistan as a critical historical event.[55]

Iftikhar Dadi's book *Art of Muslim South Asia* (2010) is a significant publication that traces the salient genealogy of South Asian Muslim artistic subjectivity, informed by postcolonial theory and globalization studies.[56] His case studies mainly include a comprehensive analysis of the artworks by early male modernists and traditionalist artists'.[57] Dadi traces twentieth-century modernism in South Asian art within an awareness of the early modern Islamic cosmopolitan world.[58] Like Hamid Dabashi in *Post-Orientalism*, Dadi locates the necessity for the revival of Muslim identity in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the loss of Muslim rule to colonial powers. Dadi does not conceptualize Muslim identity in core beliefs, rituals, or even overt religious signifiers but rather as a sociocultural discourse. [59]

As mentioned earlier, Dadi primarily focuses on early male modernists and traditionalists. However, he selects two contemporary artists as well: Naiza Khan and Rasheed Araeen. His brief analysis of Naiza Khan's work is the most relevant and significant for this dissertation. He explains Khan's avoidance of overt Islamic signifiers as a thought-out strategy to evade the clichés. He writes:

> Moreover, by her avoidance of images of the Muslim veil and also of the contemporary Western body, the artist refuses to be distracted by the charged yet superficial media debates that equate the modern Muslim veil with subjugation, or by reverse, equally superficial argument by apologists

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paintings that were produced under the Bengali School were small in scale and done in watercolour (the medium of Indo-miniature). Ijaz ul Hassan, *Paintings in Pakistan* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1991), 35.

[55] The Rising Tide: New Direction in Art from Pakistan: 1990–2010 (2011) is another a publication based on an exhibition held at Mohatta Palace Museum (Karachi) in 2010, curated by Karachi-based artist Naiza H. Khan. The significance of this publication lies in its engagement with complex regional issues, paired with the major themes within the exhibition, including partition, urbanization, popular culture, and gentrification. Even though the abovementioned scholarship documents artists who had earlier worked extensively on burqa images, such as Waseem Ahmad and Aisha Khalid, they do not include a single artwork based on the burqa image. This informs a vital inquiry: is the mainstream contemporary art discourse distanced from burqa images, realizing it's more relevant to an international audience? Within Pakistan wearing a burqa, niqab, hijab, or other form of head covering is considered to be part of culture and does not hold fascination, unlike the reception of these images within Western curatorial discourse.

[56] Iftekhar Dadi (b. 1961), based in New York City, is an assistant professor at the Department of the History for Art and Visual Studies, Cornell University. His research focuses on modern and contemporary art from South Asian in a global and transnational perspective, with an emphasis on questions of methodology and intellectual history. Dadi currently serves on the editorial and advisory boards of *Archives of Asian Art* and *Bio-Scope: South Asian Screen Studies*.

[57] Abdur Rahman Chughtai (1897–1975), Shakir Ali (1914–75), and Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi (1930–87).

[58] Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2010), 14.

[59] Ibid., 41.

who claim that veiled woman is "freer" than the Westernized female body under the thrall of mediatized and spectacularized sexuality.[60]

Dadi sums up his argument in the epilogue, pointing out the recent visibility of "mediatized" Islamic art in Euro-American museological frameworks and contemporary curatorial practices.[61] He criticizes the presence of a curatorial binary regarding the exhibition of art by Muslim artists: liberal humanism in contrast to the other extreme: Islamic fundamentalism. Dadi calls these readings under contemporary Islamic art reductive genre while arguing that contemporary Pakistani art has complex and profound connections to past dislocations and future imaginations.[62]

Dadi's scholarship is an invaluable contribution to Pakistani art history, especially in the context of the hypervisibility of Muslim subjectivities after 9/11; his text serves two purposes. It foremostly attempts to counter Islamophobia after 9/11 within the Euro-American context, presenting an alternative aspect of Islam by highlighting artistic visual culture from the Muslim region. Secondly, it challenges the ethnocentric readings regarding Muslim subjectivities by introducing artistic and analytic complexities and aesthetic possibilities beyond Western liberal ideals or merely a resurgence of the Muslim past. Hence, his analysis of Khan's work debunks a binary created around Islamic art in the Western museum setting. In the context of the period since 9/11, Dadi's visual analysis highlights subtle but resilient Islamic influences describing Khan's work. As this dissertation uses Khan's *Henna Hands series* as one of its focus case studies, a thorough but alternate analysis of her work can be found in Chapter Four.

The significance of Dadi's text lies in its title, which strategically negates the overtly encompassing term "Islamic Art." Dadi traces Muslim aesthetics in the early modernist period of Pakistan as modernist art from Muslim South Asia, reminding us that Islam, unlike other religions, did not fashion a specific religious iconography per se, such as "Buddhist art" or "Christian art," which is generally reckoned to deal specifically with the art of faith." [63] Dadi's text briefly criticizes the transnational interpretation and circulation of the representations of gendered Muslim subjectivities purely from a diasporic perspective. However, my dissertation

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[60] Ibid., 215.
[61] Ibid., 217.
[62] Ibid., 218.
[63] Ibid., 32.

focuses primarily on the effects of the neocolonial vs. religious nationalism of post-9/11 gender politics on the lives of urban Pakistani women domestically and the complexity of feminist artistic responses to this situation.

Virginia Whiles' text, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan: Cultural Politics and Tradition in Contemporary Miniature Painting* (2010) and Nadeem Omer Tarar's archival research project, *The Chronicles of National College of Arts (*2003),[64] provide the dissertation with an account of colonial imperialism's legacy and its strategic impact on the Subcontinent's visual, aesthetic, and cultural identity. This helps the study argue that neocolonialism mimics the same pattern and controls, influences, and moulds the visual discourses and cultural identities in postcolonial and neocolonial societies in systemic ways to justify imperialism made easy under conditions of globalized media influences.

Whiles' text is a comprehensive study regarding the historical and contemporary practice of Indo-Persian Miniature (neo-miniature) painting in Pakistan. However, my dissertation primarily looks at Whiles' scholarship through a critical lens and highlights the tendency of simplistic binary creations in scholarships that focuses primarily on marginal art histories. Whiles divides the neo-miniature practices at the National College of Arts into two practicing groups: X (experimental) and O (traditionalist). Using Bourdieu's notion of *Habitus*, she suggests that Group X (politically conscious, experimental) all belong to lower-middle-class families (hence, their inclination towards social change). In contrast, Group O comes from higher-income backgrounds (and believes in the status quo).[65] Her thesis creates a binary that simplifies a complex class system and social dynamics. Further, a choice to revive cultural heritage can be an alternative form of resistance, such as culture as a site for political struggle, rather than merely endorsing the status quo. Most importantly, artist Shahzia Sikandar, who laid the foundation of contemporary or neo-miniature in Pakistan, belongs to Whiles' high-income group (upper-middle class).

Pakistani-American Atteqa Ali's PhD dissertation, "Impassioned Play" (2008) provides an overview of the evolution of Pakistani art from modern to contemporary, discussing the repercussions of 9/11 on the Pakistani diasporic community, such as artists like Ambreen

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[64] Nadeem Omar Tarar (b. 1967) is a historical anthologist and the executive director, Center for Cultural and Development, Islamabad. He holds a PhD in art history and theory from the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, and a postdoctoral fellowship with the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, MIT.

[65] Virginia Whiles, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002), 212.

Mughal, Huma Mulji, and Alyia Hassan Khan. Ali's thesis deals comprehensively with the postcolonial search for identity, urbanization, and the combined pre-and post-partition South Asian identities. However, unlike this dissertation, hers does not employ a critical postcolonial feminist lens.[66]

My dissertation, therefore, is, to date, the first postcolonial feminist art-historical work of scholarship that focuses on a feminist response to the War on Terror gender politics. However, it recognizes that since 2001numerous recent regional interdisciplinary feminist scholarships have foregrounded the heterogeneous lived experience of urban Pakistani women by challenging dominant essentialized gender readings, especially within the urban context.

Such feminist scholarships as the ones analyzed below further indicate the current urgency in various disciplines to negotiate and address the gender politics that followed the War on Terror. Fauzia Saeed's *Taboo: The Hidden Culture of Red Light Area* (2002) introduces us to the lives of urban gendered subjectivities that never appear in the nationalist gendered narratives because their existence negates the homogenized pious discourse regarding Muslim women.[67] Saeed offers a window into the world of the infamous red-light district of Lahore, Pakistan, known as the *Shahi Mohalla* (the royal bazaar) or Heera Mandi (the diamond market). Historically, the courtesans in this area were exquisite classical dancers and entertainers who catered to the elite within South Asia. Saeed traces the phenomenon's downfall to colonial times.[68] She also argues that regardless of the stigmatization of the profession and its denial in the nationalist academic discourse, it served as a repository for many well-known performing artists for hundreds of years. The book examines the ecology of the phenomenon by providing a holistic approach to the actors: the musicians, the prostitutes, and their pimps, managers, and customers in a contemporary context.

Farida Batool's M.A. thesis, "Representation of the Figure: Contemporary Popular Culture of Pakistan" (2003), can be regarded as one of the few critical analyses of Pakistani visual culture that challenge the "pious clichés and oversimplification" that envelopes Islamic

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[66] Another PhD dissertation, by Samina Iqbal, titled "Modern Art of Pakistan: Lahore Art Circle 1947–1957" (2016), focuses on six male artists who founded the Lahore Art Circle (L.A.C.) in 1952 as the forerunners of modernist and nationalist canon in Pakistan, based on visually hybrid discourses. Samina Iqbal, "Modern Art of Pakistan: Lahore Art Circle 1947–1957" (Phd diss., Virginia Commonwealth University, 2016).

[67] Fouzia Saeed, Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area. (Sammamish, Wash.: Made for Success Publishing, 2015).

[68] Also known as "Nach girl" in colonial narratives.

countries in contemporary times.[69] Batool uses the Cold War as a context to highlight the effect of international politics on Pakistan. She constructs the twofold formation of identity within Pakistan. One is a façade of official Islamic Pakistani identity, and the other is a parallel cultural identity constructed and practiced by people in everyday life. She concludes her text by suggesting that Pakistani identity is a mixed palette and a multilayered phenomenon, which must be looked at from all angles. Batool's text highlights paradoxes that engulf practices that do not adhere to orthodox Islamic doctrine. In conclusion, Batool suggests an inquiry: if the Cold War influenced Pakistani politics and media, how will future international political policies affect the representation of gendered figures in Pakistan? This dissertation takes up this question by doing a thorough analysis of the effect of 9/11 gender politics on Pakistan's local gender constructions and its influence on the lives of Pakistani women.[70]

Batool's PhD research explores the ways Muslim Pakistani men use technology to assert their sexuality through the construction, production, and circulation of soft porn videos of traditional *mujra* dance by contemporary entertainers.[71] She looks at how the *mujra* dance tradition in South Asia took a new modern form and became an intrinsic part of Punjabi movies and theatre performances—a sexual fantasy produced by men exclusively for men. Batool calls it a repercussion of the repressive policies of General Zia in the 80s. In the new wave of piety politics, she explores how men, as producers, distributors, and consumers of *mujra* dance videos, successfully entertain their sexual desires while performing the notion of piety and religion.[72]

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[69] The feminist publications emerged basically after 2010 that contest the construction of the Nationalist piety politics that regulates the representations of Muslim women through religion, by narrativizing the many lives of urban women. The publications include Farida Batool, *Figure: The Popular and the Political in Pakistan* (Lahore: ASR, 2004).

[70] Batool explores figurative imagery in three aspects of everyday Pakistani life: through the presence of figures in the religious tradition, folk urban art (popular visual culture), and women's traditional dance formations (*gidha*).

[71] Syeda Farida Batool, "New Media, Masculinity and Mujra Dance in Pakistan" (PhD diss., SOAS, Univ. of London, 2015),7.
The "Urdu-Hindi word tawaˉif طوائف can be translated to English word courtesan. Historically these women were professional entertainers and arbiters of culture throughout much of South Asian history. Their dance performance is known as "*Mujara*" The early modern era (i.e., the nineteenth century) was the golden age of the courtesan in North India, especially in Lucknow and Hyderabad, the successor states to the declining Mughal Empire. Their climate were people of noble backgrounds and it was part of courtesan lore that the nobles (nawaˉb نواب) used to send their sons to the courtesans to receive training in literature, culture, etiquette, and, we can assume, sexuality. Essentially performers, the courtesans earned most of their income singing, dancing, and reciting poetry. They also, of course, had contractual sexual relationships with their long-term patrons." John Caldwell, "The Movie Mujra: The Trope of the Courtesan in Urdu-Hindi Film," *Southeast Review of Asian Studies 32* (2010): 120.

[72] Afia Zia calls piety a performance and writes how after 9/11 and the War on Terror, Pakistan has been under a religious nationalist peak and "piety dominates the political landscape." She writes how piety performance has become an escape route to agency within Pakistan and how artists, performers, and musicians perform piety to

Her study exclusively examined the strategies employed by men in the trade. However, her highlighting of the social phenomenon garnered critical attention and serious consideration of the impact on both male and female subjects. A powerful documentary titled *Showgirls of Pakistan* (2020) looks at the Pakistani entertainment industry from the eyes of female performers. The documentary looks at these performers as survivors of a highly hypocritical society who maintain a violent love-hate relationship with women in the entertainment industry. The documentary's primary focus is how these women thrive in a male-dominated society using their sexuality.

> *Showgirls of Pakistan* is a far grittier look at how the community (female performers) in Pakistan powerfully maneuvers through misogyny, threats to life, and censorship in the era of social media.[73]

It is very recently that these nuances of urban women and their ambivalent existences and experiences are being explored by local intellectuals, which is, I argue, a reaction to the religious washing of society being used excessively as a controlling political tool.

Mazaar, Bazaar: Design and Visual Culture in Pakistan, edited by Siama Zaidi (2009), is an extensive interdisciplinary anthology on contemporary Pakistani design and vernacular visual culture. It includes consumer icons, nationalistic slogans, and cultural surplus, such as "Truck Art." Zaidi's book reveals the hybridity of Pakistani visual cultural identity, juxtaposing it with historical evidence within contemporary writing. The anthology highlights the multidimensional internal and global tensions and historical as well as contemporary image formations. This book is a much-needed contribution to emerging scholarship, bringing together several facets of Pakistan's cultural roots, including the global and the local, the sacred and the profane. It highlights how Pakistan's diverse religious practices concede to the politics of consumerism, visible in the title of the book *Mazaar* (connotes hybrid religiosity) and *Bazaar* (consumerism).[74]

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escape scrutiny. For example, dance actresses famous for hot dance numbers, during Ramazan appear on television with hijabs and moderate religious programs.

Afiya Zia, "The Politics of Piety in Naya Pakistan," Kafila, Apr. 5, 2022, https://kafila.online/2019/07/20/the-politics-of-piety-in-naya-pakistan-afiya-zia/ . Farida Batool explains this phenomenon that the producers and people who sell erotic dance videos get away with it by performing piety such as adorning their walls with religious symbols, Quranic verses, and images of Mecca and the prophet's tomb. This is further discussed in Chapter Four.

[73] Zab Mustefa, "'Showgirls of Pakistan' Doesn't Need Your Victim Narrative," FP (April 20, 2021). https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/20/showgirls-of-pakistan-western-victim-narratives-documentary-complex/.

[74] Though *mazaar* connotes religiosity, it points towards the esoteric spiritual Sufi ideology and the shrines of Sufis who are visited by millions of people.

Both Batool's and Zaidi's texts offer insights into the "figure of women" within Pakistan's historical and contemporary visual vernacular urban culture. These texts challenge the simplistic binary narrative (oppressed vs. pious) curated around Muslim gendered bodies by Western and religious-nationalist discourses for their respective political goals. These interdisciplinary scholarly texts help reinforce my argument in a more extensive visual framework of Pakistan's vernacular urban culture. They challenge the concept of an all-encompassing religious identity as an essentialized perspective representing all Muslim gendered subjectivities.

Through fieldwork, data collection, and examination of Pakistani art-historical and interdisciplinary scholarship, this dissertation claims to be an original and comprehensive contribution to the art scholarship of Pakistan. Transitionally, my dissertation intends to highlight that a conscious deeper understanding of global art histories is essential to initiate an ethical dialogue between the Euro-American reception of periphery/globalized art. The coming chapters argue that traditions and cultures are not static entities. Furthermore, they are not directed solely by fixed dogmatic religious beliefs as highlighted by American media discourses or ideological, religious purity constructed by local right-wing religiopolitical groups. Instead, this dissertation identifies and fills a knowledge gap within the current art-historical scholarship.

2. Research Method

The research primarily uses a qualitative, purposive, and criteria-based sampling method, one of the most common sampling strategies. This methodology selects a group with criteria relevant to a particular research question. In contrast, secondary data are analyzed through academic output, books, journal articles, and online material. As part of the methodology, Eight artists and one curator were interviewed as direct stakeholders. The secondary interviews with secondary stakeholders, such as feminist activists and art historians, were conducted based on the snowball sampling technique.[75]

As part of a methodological framework, the research consciously selected artists who had worked in Pakistan at the time they created the chosen artworks–though, at one point, some may have studied or worked in Euro-American institutions. The data for this research was compiled by travelling between three cities in Pakistan: Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Karachi. Later, due to

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[75] Jean Faugier and Mary Sargeant, "Sampling Hard to Reach Populations," *Journal of Advanced Nursing 26,* no. 4 (June 2008).

COVID-19 travel restrictions, interviews were conducted online via Zoom. Interviews with Lahore-based artists Farida Batool and Sarah Mumtaz were conducted at the National College of Arts in 2019, with Amra Khan at her studio in Lahore Cantt. Furthermore, a series of hybrid interviews with Maria Khan were conducted. Several online interview sessions with Karachi-based artist Naiza Khan and Rawalpindi-based Natasha Jozi were conducted via Zoom due to their travel schedule. In a standardized open-ended question format, the artists were primarily asked: How would they respond to the concept that a whole visual field constructed around brown female bodies in post–War on Terror Euro-American visual discourse, which feeds right-wing populist political movements, transnationally as well as locally, influenced/changed or altered the representation of female subjectivities in Pakistani art discourse as a response? As a follow-up question, they were further asked to expand on their work and its relation to gender and society in post-War on Terror Pakistan and to what extent these international and regional religiopolitical narratives influenced their work.

Along with the artists, I had the honour of interviewing art historian, curator, art academic, and artist Dr. Hashmi at Beaconhouse University, where she holds the office of professor emerita. An interview with Abdullah Qureshi, curator of the exhibition "River in an Ocean," was conducted via Zoom and followed by many discussions during the 109th CAA Annual Conference (2021) in Chicago, where he was part of a panel I chaired.

Even though I enjoyed exchanging ideas with Aisha Qureshi at the Lahore Biennale 01, an official interview did not materialize due to her busy schedule. A discussion with Rashid Rana at Beaconhouse University, where he is the acting dean, did not bear any results. Further, I travelled to Rawalpindi to interview feminist activist poet Kishwar Naheed to seek her permission to use the title of her poem. She was more than happy to grant her permission and shared many anecdotes as an active activist from the feminist wave of the 80s. Even though the title has been used for a feminist Urdu poetry collection, this dissertation could not possibly have any other title than Naheed's poignant words describing women's precarity and struggle within urban Pakistan. Rawalpindi-based feminist activist Nida Mushtaq Esapzai, as one of the Aurat March organizers, shared many insights into the mobilization during the march and the extent of violent threats and media prejudices the organizers and the participants faced.

Last but not least, a detailed conversation with trans-activist Bubbly Malik gave me insight into her perspective, struggle and agency as a transgender activist in Pakistan. This was

possible due to our long Zoom conversations during the pandemic lockdown, her generous soul, and her ability to navigate difficult conversations with a beautiful warm smile. Her narrative helped me immensely in documenting and analyzing the public mural project discussed in the last chapter.

The central methodology to conduct this research was to focus on urban Pakistani subjectivities through a variety of perspectives and multiple frameworks to destabilize the single narrative constructed around the images of brown Muslim bodies. This method recognizes that urban women live in multiple realities, and their lives cannot be conceptualized through a single lens. This method demanded challenging transnational and national/regional metanarratives that simplified the lives of women of colour by silencing their heterogeneity.

Throughout the dissertation, I have been extremely mindful of the sensitive nature of my research topic and the uncertainty of its reception within contemporary Pakistani vigilante culture.[76] Traditionally in South Asia, girls from an early age are trained to occupy less space so that they can grow up to be "good women." Thus, women acquiring spaces through spectacle, individually or collectively, is inherently a politically rebellious act as a means of defiance not only of Wahhabi religious ideology but also of tradition at large.[77] Although sometimes, these acts of rebellion can fall through the cracks of cultural and religious discourses, their documentation is considered an act of treachery even within popular culture. While discussing the dynamics of ethnocentricity and religious nationalist and political undercurrents from a postcolonial feminist lens, there was immense pressure to evade a native informant or Western agent label. Hence, as a female researcher of Muslim South Asian descent in North American academia, I am highly conscious of the precarity of my positionality. In order to somewhat

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[76] Blasphemy is punishable by various degrees in in Pakistan. The Penal Code defines various categories of offenses. They range from defilement of places of worship (punishable by a two-year prison sentence or a fine, or both, per Section 295 of the Pakistan Penal Code) to insulting the Prophet Muhammad by written or spoken word or by visible representation (punishable by death or life imprisonment and a fine, per Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code). However, the language of Section 295-C does not require proof of blasphemous intent and levies no penalty for making a false allegation of blasphemy. This loophole has encouraged a vigilante culture. Although the death penalty for blasphemy has never been enforced in Pakistan despite its existence in statute, people accused of blasphemy have been lynched by vigilantes before their trials. This situation has been especially devastating in academic setups where there can be an intellectual debate over religion, resulting in many teachers and lecturers accused of being disrespectful to Islam. For more details on the blasphemy law, see: Pakistan Penal Code § 295 (1927). Available at https://www.oecd.org/site/adboecdanticorruptioninitiative/46816797.pdf . See also Tabinda Siddiqi, "Timeline: Accused under the Blasphemy Law," *Dawn*, Sept. 19, 2012, https://www.dawn.com/news/750512 .

[77] The popular political and religious discourse took firm hold during the Cold War under the dictatorship of General Zia and is discussed at length in this Introduction and Chapter One.

navigate this dilemma, I have tried to practice epistemological autonomy by drawing my conceptual frameworks from Asian culture and art historical theorists, focusing further on female voices of colour such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Farida Batool, Afiya Zia, Gayatri Gopinath and Rubina Saigol, to name a few.

3. Theoretical Framework and Significant Conceptual Considerations

Postcolonial theory through a Third-World feminist perspective is integral to this research. As a theoretical concern, postcolonial feminism focuses on the issues of representation and location, rejecting the idea of the "Worlding" or the homogenized "Third World Woman."[78] Postcolonial theorists insist upon specificities of culture, region, religion, and class within which women exist and intersect with epistemic and political gender hierarchies in a specific economic, social, and political setup.[79] Postcolonial feminist theory's primary concern is to locate the ethical representation of women in colonial as well as revisionist history[80] The dissertation frames three essential premises through postcolonial/feminist theory:

The research utilizes the postcolonial feminist perspective introduced by Spivak in her texts, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" and "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to highlight the lived experience of urban gendered subjectivities in Pakistan.[81] For Spivak, the voices of gendered subaltern subjects have been silenced by the colonial acts of liberation and by patriarchal reactions in the name of saving religious or cultural identity, which Spivak calls "Religious Nationalism."[82] She argues that the gendered subaltern subjects are silenced in history because they are re-presented either by colonial or regional patriarchal discourses.[83] By silencing, she refers to the possibilities of exchange between the speaker and the listener, as

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[78] Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park, "Postcolonial Feminism/Postcolonialism and Feminism," *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies,* ed. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2000), 54. The terms "Third World Woman" and "Worlding" are used by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak in their respective essays: Talpade "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," 61–88, and "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London: Macmillan Education, 1988), 286.

[79] Rajan and Park, "Postcolonial Feminism/Postcolonialism and Feminism," 54.

[80] Lewis and Mills, *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*, 3.

[81] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999).

[82] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 211–12. Spivak uses the example of *Sati*, where cases of ritual immolation increased in the region with colonial intervention justified by the reactionary religious nationalist narrative that it was a heroic act and "the women wanted to die."

[83] Y. T. Vinayaraj, "Representation of the Subaltern: Spivak and Historiography" in Mar Thoma Theological Journal of Theology, Vol. II, No. 2 (Dec 2013) : 6.

speaking and listening complete the speech process. According to Spivak, social conditions created by imperialism and neocolonialism "obstruct the possibility of being heard for those who inhabit the periphery" and inhibit ethical relations with the other.[84]

Spivak conceptualizes the silencing of the gendered subaltern subjectivities within colonial or neocolonial conditions by using varied class-based examples within colonial historiography and revisionist insurgent history. She uses the examples of the elite immolated *rani*s (wives of Rajput maharajas who died in wars and conflicts) and economically destitute Bengali immolated widows and how their immolation was maneuvered within colonial historiography to justify colonialism.[85] Her third example is the most relevant to this study. She locates the complete absence of ethical representation around the suicide of 17-year-old Bengali girl Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, a middle-class urban freedom fighter from Calcutta, within revisionist Indian insurgent history. According to Spivak's research, the young girl, under intense pressure from a local insurgency to carry out a specific violent act against the British, kills herself instead. Despite strong evidence on the contrary (the girl committed suicide while she was menstruating), her death is misrepresented as an illicit affair resulting in an unwanted pregnancy within family history. At the same time, she remains invisible in postcolonial nationalist history as a freedom fighter.

Spivak's (neo) colonial silenced gendered subalterns are essentially diverse and heterogeneous subgroups that are identified through their gender/location within colonial conditions instead of their economic class.[86] She claims metanarratives created by colonial and reactionary regional/nationalist patriarchal structures invariably present unethical representations of female subjectivities. Hence, the mainstream narrative around colonial gendered bodies is constructed only through patriarchal structures. Translating Spivak's thesis on the sociopolitical conditions created within Pakistan after the War on Terror, the dissertation highlights the

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[84] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 325.

[85] She uses the example of Edward Thompson's book *Suttee (1928),* and how he romanticizes these narratives by translating the names of victims into English, turning their names into common nouns such as "sunshine," "comfort," "smile," etc. In this romanticized ideological production of victims, the identity of the burnt widows of the rajas are almost as lost as the nondocumented lower-class widows from Bengal, where this ritual was most practiced. Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 102.

[86] The essential character of Spivak's gendered subaltern is indicated in the diversity of her case studies in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" For example, Spivak offers a variety of female representations: Rajput widows who were the wives of Rajput rajas or rulers, poor Bengali widows, and a more contemporary case of a middle-class, colonial freedom fighter, 19-year-old Bhvanesuari Bhaduri.

unethical, one-dimensional representations of urban Pakistani women within mainstream colonial and reactionary regional/nationalist discourses as a form of epistemic violence.

The concept of agency within feminist discourse is described as "the ability of individuals to have some kind of transforming effect or impact on the world."[87] Agency is realized in varying shades and in an unequal manner, depending on many variables.[88] This dissertation creates a region-based study that focuses specifically on visual discourse from Pakistan that is globally informed. The main focus of the dissertation is to center and give voice to visually diverse feminist initiatives embedded in regional or colonial history that emerged after the War on Terror. Hence, it creates a genealogy of intergenerational feminist consciousness by analyzing Pakistani artists in historical and contemporary feminist contexts under various periods of the transnational and local polity.[89]

Further, the dissertation draws from the premise created by Dabashi in his text, *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in a Time of Terror* (2009). Dabashi rejects the notions that create a white audience (and Eurocentricity) as the principal interlocutor in the presiding center and periphery metaphor.[90] He dismisses "phantasmagoric fictional" terms, such as "Western civilization" and "Islamic civilization." Instead, Dabashi stresses that these rhetorical terms have nothing to do with reality, and non-Eurocentric critical conversations among historical and contemporary registers need to be created regionally for the lived experiences to "decolonize the analytic apparatus."[91]

The thesis of Dabashi's book is to "map out the contour of a new mode of defiant knowledge production against the grain of the power that demands and exacts a subservient knowledge" and, as an extension, dominant representation. Furthermore, he writes, "The crucial task of the postcolonial intellectual is a locally articulated agenda of a particular action that is

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[87] M. E. Hawkesworth and Lisa Jane Disch, *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 39.

[88] Ibid., 39.

[89] As previously mentioned, for brevity, the term "historical" is being used for events that happened in Pakistan between 1947 and 2001.

[90] Hamid Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in a Time of Terror* (Piscataway, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 149.

[91] Ibid., 144–46, 175, 232. Dabashi analyses the concept of Islam as an ideological purity, a historical outcome of colonially ravaged people in search of an ideology of resistance. Hence, because this notion has in its epistemic center a colonial conception of "the West" as its principal interlocutor, it falls squarely into the trap of a European sovereign subject. Ibid., 235.

universally informed."[92] For Dabashi, these regionally based critical conversations need to be conducted by post-nativist, "amphibian intellectuals," who are located globally and are rooted in a "material reality that embraces both home and exile."[93]

Utilizing Debashi's concept through a postcolonial feminist lens, this study is regionally situated and globally informed and foregrounds the complex regional aesthetical visual narratives without simplifying the shifting historical, sociopolitical, and cultural realities.

The dissertation remains conscious of the phallocentric lens in Dabashi's formation of a regional revolutionary intellectual as a default male. In Chapter Five, "Pilgrim's Progress: On Revolutionary Border-Crossing," Dabashi discusses the role of four male revolutionaries (Ernesto Che Guevara, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, and Ali Shari'ati) as the archetype of revolutionary intellectuals. Postcolonial male theorists invariably identify the colonial subject/colonial intellectual as male. As Spivak argues, the problem of making gendered subjects visible within postcolonial studies is that "male subaltern and historian are . . . united in the common assumption that the procreative sex is a species apart, scarcely if at all to be considered a part of civil society."[94] This dissertation destabilizes the revolutionary postcolonial male intellectual trope by focusing specifically on the women artists and their dissident expressions.

Furthermore, this dissertation uses Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity as a pre-existing condition of postcoloniality to argue against the American media's construct of a homogenized and essentialized image of a Pakistani Muslim woman as well as the reactionary right-wing religiopolitical narrative using Islam as an ideological purity. This research uses nuanced accounts of religion (Islam) with various cultural connections, transnational politics, and regional and sociopolitical conditions specific to Pakistan. Using postcoloniality as a "paradigmatic place of departure" and hybridity as a pre-existing condition of postcoloniality, the dissertation deconstructs the "Muslim woman" as a homogenized category. [95] It thus rejects the Eurocentric

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[92] Ibid., xvii, 231.

[93] Ibid., 230.

[94] Spivak argues that even in historiographic accounts (like *Suttee*) where so much attention is paid to the subject positioning of a female subaltern, there is an indifference to her subjectivity or subjective agency. Especially in insurgency under the (neo)colonial conditions, the conditions of women get "battered" as a by-product. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Selected Subaltern Studies,* ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 28.

[95] Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 21. Many Pakistani historians and feminist scholars have historicized "Islam" within Pakistan's political and cultural specificities and transnational politics. See Mubarak Ali, *Pakistan in Search of Identity* (Karachi: Pakistan Study Centre, University of Karachi, 2009), 62; Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985); Saigol, *Feminism and the*

vs. religiopolitical polarity emphasized since War on Terror. This research asserts that both ideologies complement each other and make each other stronger. The dissertation maintains that Pakistani feminist artistic initiatives under discussion create a *Third Space* that deconstructs and destabilizes the dominant accounts of their existence by imagining nuanced alternatives.[96]

As part of this lived heterogeneity, the dissertation derives an understanding of gendered queer subjectivities from the works of South Asian social and cultural analyst Gayatri Gopinath to frame the queer subjectivity within feminist expressions. She explains the "discourses of sexuality, inextricably from prior and continuing histories of colonialism, nationalism, racism and migration.[97] She defines queer gendered subjectivities that do not resonate with the figure of a pure, unsullied woman in the nationalist narratives.[98] These subjectivities are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional nationalist imageries and are deemed impure, inauthentic, and nonreproductive.[99] And lastly, their mere existence is an act of disruption for the hegemonic patriarchal, heteronormative nationalist narratives.[100]

Lastly, the dissertation claims that the methodological aspect through which all the selected artworks resonate is their performance of hybrid ethnicity. The concept of play as performance in Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (initially published in 1960) is used to describe the theoretical framework of the performative aesthetics of these artworks. Gadamer dismisses the player as the play's subject but as a source or mediator for the presentation (*Darstellung*) of the play itself.[101] The play's presentation does not aim toward the end goal; rather, it depends on the repetitive pattern of the rules of the game itself, so the play becomes the subject rather than the player, [102] as the existence of the play lies solely in *self-presentation*. Gadamer extends the concept of a child's play to *religious rites* within cultural contexts, seeing, for example, theatre

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Women's Movement in Pakistan, Jamal, "Transnational Feminism as Critical Practice"; and Shirin Zubair and Maria Zubair, "Situating Islamic Feminism(s): Lived Religion, Negotiation of Identity and Assertion of *Third Space* by Muslim Women in Pakistan," in *Women's Studies International Forum,* vol. 63, (July 2017), 17–26.

[96] A *Third Space* is created through the use of diverse cultural signifiers that create a new language, or at least create new articulations on existing cultural hybridity. Bhabha, *Location of Culture,* 56.

[97] Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2005), 3.

[98] Ibid., 15

[99] Ibid., 22

[100] Ibid.

[101] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Ontology of the Work of Art and its Hermeneutics Significance," in *Truth and Method,* trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 103.

[102] Ibid., 106.

and music as spectacles that "by nature calls for an audience."[103] As he writes, "artistic presentation, by nature, exists for someone, even if there is no one there who merely listens or watches." Hence, its existence lies between the player, the game, and the audience's reception. Therefore, the participation of the audience completes the dynamics of the play.[104]

Gadamer's play, as a performance specifically in the form of an artistic expression like music, literature, and fine arts, transforms into a structure detached from the player's "performing activity." This transformation of play into a structure gives it absolute autonomy. This transformation of the play takes place in an imagined world, for example, the canvas of the painting, the substrate of the novel, or the sculpture's material. This transformation can "brings to light what is otherwise constantly hidden and withdrawn." According to Gadamer, this transformation, which he calls the "play of art," is an absolute expression of the play's being.[105] Hence, self-presentation in the work of art is the true nature of play, which invites its viewer to participate in the cognitive function of the play's structure.

Gadamer's concept, a play exists only in its presentation/performance. This dissertation uses the idea to conceptualize the focused performative artistic expressions as spectacles of resistance that call for an audience. I would like to link play as performative resistance to Praxis-based decolonial practice and a strategy to reclaim critical personal narratives.

Hence, drawing from the main theocratical and conceptual framework—silenced (neo) colonial gendered subjectivities, cultural hybridity, and performance as resistance—this dissertation explores the homogenization of Muslim brown bodies and the performative defiance to this homogenized version of themselves in the works of selected women artists.

4. Outline of the Chapters

The case studies in the dissertation are introduced according to conceptual demands rather than following a chronological trajectory. Chapter One examines the dominant conceptions of gender in Pakistan within recent historical and political contexts to 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror, introducing the research problem's background. The first part describes the rhetoric used by the US media to construct an oppressed, veiled, and homogenized image of Afghan and Pakistani Muslim women as victims of religious oppression. I argue that this propaganda helped

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[103] Ibid.,108.
[104] Ibid., 108–10.
[105] Ibid., 111–15.

the United States justify their imperialistic designs on humanitarian grounds. The second part of the chapter focuses on a reactionary religious-nationalist wave in Pakistan, discussing how the image construction of Pakistani and Afghan women after 9/11 by the international media turned Pakistani Muslim women's bodies, especially visible gendered urban bodies, into sites of contestation. This transformation immensely affected the visual trajectory representing urban gendered subjectivities resulting in the physical erasure of their presence in public spaces.

Before introducing an alternative feminist aesthetic in the coming chapters, Chapter Two looks at the impact of the War-on-Terror gender politics on the formation of Muslim bodies in transnational and Pakistani visual discourses. It argues that the initial transnational media homogenization of an oppressed Muslim gendered body garnered a response from Pakistani artists who use burqa images in myriad political statements. I classify this set of burqa images that proliferated in Pakistani art discourse as first-generation responses to War-on-Terror gender politics. Based on Rey Chow's concept of "coercive mimeticism," I argue that Pakistan artists felt interpellated by the US media propaganda. These artists reacted to the US media's trope formation by utilizing the very same images of veils (burqa) to negotiate myriad politically charged responses, addressing white audiences directly. Hence the chapter focuses on some high-profile burqa images that emerged right after 2001 and further traces the absence of the veil in the representation of women within the historical works of canonical male artists (before 2001) to argue that veiled representations of gendered subjectivities in contemporary Pakistani discourse after 2001 were a result of neocolonialist conditions.

Chapter Three starts by narrativizing the history of the feminist struggle and the evolution of female voices in Pakistani art discourse. This history provides a precedent of feminist resistance against adverse sociopolitical conditions on gender subjectivities in Pakistan, which, I argue, has been recurrent due to colonial and neocolonial conditions. Chapter Four argues that the gender politics initiated by War on Terror started its reactionary feminist dynamics domestically. This chapter focuses on two female artists who anticipated the War on Terror and the complex shift regarding gendered Pakistani subjectivities. These artworks include a series of site-specific mural installations by Naiza Khan entitled *Hanna Hands* (2002–4) and Farida Batool's lenticular print *Nai Ressan Sheher Lahore Diyan* ("No city in the world can compete with Lahore") (2007). Though these were direct regional responses to War on Terror, the artists addressed regional issues by focussing on the regional audience as their primary interlocutors. As

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these artworks targeted an informed audience, this strategy helped them create complex and diverse feminist visual semiotics. Both artists situate their gendered subjectivities as occupying identifiable urban public spaces. These artworks, I argue, laid the foundation of a regional feminist visual resistance and formed a historical junction. To argue that the emergence of this feminist iconography was not restricted to art discourse, the chapter briefly discusses a praxis-based initiative, "Girls at Dhaba," that transformed the artistic concept of the protagonist occupying urban spaces into the physical occupation of urban male-dominated spaces.

Chapter Five looks at the performative works of five artists as part of a private exhibition, "River in an Ocean" (2018): The selected artists include Sarah Mumtaz, and her performance "Mend me one stitch at a time" (2018), Natasha Jozi's "The Working Cytology of Performance" (2018), Noor us Sabah Saeed's documented media performance and installation titled "I Can Draw Here But I Cannot Sit Here" (2017), "آگ میں بیچ کے نہر , نہر اندر کے شہر , شہر نراا ایک" (a novel city) (2018), a recorded media performance accompanied by photographic prints by Anushka Rustomji & Zara Asgher, executed by Hammas Wali. The artists, very much like Naiza Khan and Farida Batool, occupy urban spaces to claim their place in society using diverse regional urban languages through performative resistance.

Chapter Six looks at the formation of urban gendered subjectivities that dwell on the fringes of society. The gendered disruptive performative desire to occupy public spaces at leisure, discussed in Chapters Three and Four, transforms into a whole new interpretation in the works of two artists, Maria Khan and Amra Khan. These artists go beyond the gender/public routine and enter the realm of performative queer-gendered expressions in a postcolonial urban context. The chapter links the thematic of these case studies to a public mural by a collaboration of Fearless Project (India) and a team from the National College of Arts (Rawalpindi Campus) under the supervision of Dr. Nadeem Omer Tarar (who was then the director of the institution). The chapter argues that even with the best collaboration efforts, the mural could not be executed in a mainstream urban space due to deep-rooted misogyny. However, at an obscure corner, transactivist Bubbly Malik's larger-than-life image can be seen flaunting her femininity in a floral shalwar-kameez unapologetically.

Chapter 1
Oppressed vs. Pious Brown Bodies: Creation of a Visual Binary Loop

The chapter contextualizes the political circumstances that followed the horrific incident of 9/11 and establish how the consequent US war affected the socio-cultural fabric of Pakistan. The chapter explicitly argues that, after 9/11, Pakistani urban women became victims of and were silenced through a visual propaganda exchange between colonial and regional patriarchy, creating an oppressed vs. pious binary loop (Figure 1). This hypothesis is conceptualized through an alternative analysis of Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak," arguing that due to the patriarchal nature of societies, under colonial conditions, gender, just like class, plays a pivotal role in further silencing subjectivities. Hence, this chapter, in its entirety, provides a comprehensive background that leads to the formation of alternative urban gendered representations discussed in the coming chapters.

In a twofold inquiry, firstly, the chapter investigates how the US media utilized visual rhetoric (part of larger colonial discourse) as a political strategy to construct a religiously oppressed, veiled, and homogenized image of Afghan/Pakistani women. Hence the first section lays down the ideological construction of the War on Terror by the United States as a humanitarian mission; the cost the people of Pakistan had to incur as neighbours of Afghanistan.

The second section investigates how US media propaganda during the war garnered a religious-nationalist backlash in Pakistan against the alleged defamation of Islam in the name of "religiously oppressed women." As a response, the mainstream religious nationalists narrativized an idealized Muslim woman: empowered in the subjugation of her faith. As urban Pakistani women occupy non-traditional arenas and have visibility in the media, the religious-nationalist backlash conflated their visibility with Western values, implicating the representation of urban gendered subjectivities in Pakistan.[106]

The central theme of this chapter is to frame the foundational argument that will pave the way for the rest of the thesis. It highlights the significance of the emergence of feminist concerns in contemporary Pakistani art after the War on Terror—arguing that these feminist

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[106] Brohi, *The MMA Offensive,* 58.

semiotics further initiated an ongoing secular feminist movement using regional iconography as a form of resistance to occupying urban spaces.

Section 1
Oppressed Veiled Brown Muslim Subjectivities

1.1. Framing the War on Terror

On the morning of September 11, 2001, a series of coordinated terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington constituted an act of unprecedented violence on the soil of the United States. The extent of this violence on US soil made it the first of its kind; the attacks resulted in the loss of 2,977 civilian lives and injured more than 6,000 people.

Addressing the nation right after the accident, President Bush, With the words, "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists," effectively reinforced a simplistic dualism between "us" and "them"—civilized worlds and the barbarians. In this initial address to the nation, he continued, "This is a new kind of—a new kind of evil. [. . .] This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while. And the American people must be patient." [107] Peter Waldman and Hugh Pope, staff reporters of the *Wall Street Journal,* wrote on September 21, 2001, that the "president's reference to a crusade had already reinforced the anxiety of Muslims that the war on terrorism is a war on them. It also pointed to the vast gulf between two world views."[108]

The book *Philosophy in The Time of Terror* (2001) is one of the initial scholarly responses to 9/11 and the War on Terror. Only days after the initiation of the War on Terror, Giovanna Borradori interviewed Jacques Derrida to frame the philosophical discourse around 9/11 and the War on Terror. Derrida predicted that the attacks carried out by 19 brown Muslim men would change the world dynamics for decades to come.[109] He described how the United States assisted regions (not only Afghanistan) against the USSR during the Cold War. Since the

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[107] George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President Upon Arrival: The South Lawn," September 16, 2001, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html/ .

[108] Peter Waldman and Hugh Pope, "'Crusade' Reference Reinforces Fears War on Terrorism Is Against Muslims," *Wall Street Journal.* Sept. 21, 2001, https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1001020294332922160/ .

[109] Jacques Derrida, "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida," in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida,* trans Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 8.

"end of the Cold War," what can be called the "new world order, in its relative and precarious stability, depends largely on American power's solidity and reliability, on credit." Hence, according to him, these attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon were a digitally archived *Major Event* of the century and threatened the whole Anglo-American political discourse that dominates the world order. Derrida suggests that 9/11 called for an extensive analysis of the "residual consequences" of the US Third World Cold War political discourse when the United States aided in creating a religious extremist force in Afghanistan with the help of Pakistan to fight its proxy war against the USSR.[110]

The extent of the US involvement in forming a violent extremist force during the 70s and 80s in Afghanistan can be comprehended through an article titled, "From U.S., the ABCs of Jihad" (2002), published in the *Washington Post.* The investigative article by Joe Stephens and David B. Ottaway proves that the United States, as part of a covert operation, spent millions of dollars to supply Afghan schoolchildren with textbooks filled with violent images of guns and rockets and militant Islamic teachings, with a strong emphasis on "Jihad al-Kuffer."[111] The article claims that the images were so radicalizing and violent that even the Taliban used these American-produced books to educate their future warriors in Saudi Arabia-funded madrassas (religious seminaries).[112]

President Bush, on the second day of the War on Terror in 2001, addressed the nation with these claims:

> The attack took place on American soil, but it was an attack on the heart
> and soul of the civilized world. And the world has come together to fight a
> new and different war, the first, and we hope the only one, of the 21st

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[110] Especially in the light of the last phase of the Cold War and the United States role in the Afghan-USSR war. Ibid., 98

[111] Muslim jurist and scholar Ibn Qayyim, in his famous categorization of Jihad in Islamic usage, with some additions for further clarification, suggests that according to the scriptural proofs of the Qur`an and the Sunnah, Jihad is of four kinds:
  1. Jihad an-Nafs (Jihad against one's own self);
  2. Jihad ash-Shaitan (Jihad against the Satan);
  3. Jihad al-Kuffar wal-Munafiqeen (Jihad against the disbelievers and the hypocrites);
  4. Jihad Ahl-al-Baghe wa Ahl-al-Bid'ah (Jihad against people of aggression and rebellion and against people of innovation).

[112] Joe Stephens and David B. Ottaway, "From U.S., the ABC's of Jihad," *Washington Post*. Mar. 23, 2002, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2002/03/23/from-us-the-abcs-of-jihad/d079075a-3ed3-4030-9a96-0d48f6355e54/ . For further insights, read, Jared Israel, "Bush & the Media Cover up the Jihad Schoolbook Scandal," Global Issues Social, Political, Economic and Environmental Issues That Affect Us All, Apr. 9, 2002, https://www.globalissues.org/article/431/bush--the-media-cover-up-the-jihad-schoolbook-scandal/ .

century. A war against all those who seek to export terror, and a war against those governments that support or shelter them.[113]

On January 29, 2002, in his first State of the Union address since the September 11 attacks, President George W. Bush described Iraq, Iran and North Korea as an "axis of evil."

> Some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September 11, but we know their true nature. North Korea is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction while starving its citizens. Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom. Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade… States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. [114]

None of the claims in President Bush's initial responses implicated Saudi Arabia in the attacks. At the same time, out of the nineteen hijackers on four different flights, fourteen were Saudi *Arabian* nationals.[115] A master's thesis at the Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California, argues:

> Al Qaeda and other Islamic groups could not survive were it not for the continued financial support of Saudi Arabia. As one noted scholar put it, "Washington's failure even to acknowledge this problem [Saudi support] is the greatest failure of our anti-terror campaign to date. . . . No lasting progress in the war on terrorism can be expected unless and until we deny the fanatics their lifeline."[116]

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[113] US Department of State, "The Global War on Terrorism: The First 100 Days," Jan. 20, 2009, https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/rls/wh/6947.htm/ .

[114] George W. Bush, "The Axis of Evil Speech," January 29, 2002. https://www.wheelersburg.net/Downloads/Bush%20Axis%20of%20Evil.pdf/ .

[115] CNN, "September 11 Hijackers Fast Facts," August 26, 2021 (updated), https://www.cnn.com/2013/07/27/us/september-11th-hijackers-fast-facts/index.html/ . Following an executive order by President Joe Biden, Washington, DC (CNN)The Federal Bureau of Investigation on (Sept 2021) released the first of what is expected to be several documents related to its investigation of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and suspected Saudi government support for the hijackers. Evan Perez, "FBI Releases First 9/11 Document after Biden Order," CNN Politics, Sept. 12, 2021, https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/11/politics/fbi-releases-first-9-11-document-after-biden-order/index.html/ .

[116] Paul M. P. Bell , "Pakistan's Madrassas: Weapons of Mass Instruction?"(master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, Calif., 2007), 57. Leyland Cecco, "Canada Doubles Weapons Sales to Saudi Arabia Despite Moratorium." *The Guardian,* June 9, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/09/canada-doubles-weapons-sales-to-saudi-arabia-despite-moratorium/ .

Notwithstanding, the US government–led military operations initiated the longest war in its history—the "War on Terror" in Afghanistan. However, to date, the United States remains the biggest arm provider to Saudi Arabia.[117]

It is no secret that the US political reaction to 9/11 has had long-lasting effects on Muslims worldwide. The war that started one month after the horrific incident of 9/11, on October 7, 2001, officially ended on August 30, 2021.[118] Being a landlocked neighbour of Afghanistan, it turned Pakistan, a small Muslim country located in South Asia, into a crucial geopolitical entity, an active facilitator, and a victim of the so-called War on Terror. Not only did this two-decade-long war cost the United States $6 trillion, but it also had devastating consequences for the people of the other two countries involved: Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Then, the military head of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf, in many accounts, including in his memoir, admitted that for the sake of national sovereignty, he had no choice but to let US and NATO forces use Pakistani territory and road networks to approach Afghanistan and also to carry out operations within the peripheries of Pakistan.[119] Per Shahid

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[117] Patricia Zengerle, "Defying Congress, Trump sets $8 billion-plus in weapons sales to Saudi Arabia," Reuters, May 24, 2019. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-saudi-arms-idUSKCN1SU25R/ .

[118] Under Joe Biden's administration the United States ended its longest war in history. The last US military official Maj. Gen. Chris Donahue, commanding general of the 82nd Division, left panic-stricken Afghanistan on the August 30, 2021, as the Taliban forces took over Kabul.
To justify his decision, President Biden in his address stressed "We did not go to Afghanistan to nation-build."
If seen in the light of the initial narrative that was build around the War on Terror based on humanitarian ground by the president Bush, there is a major discrepancy between the two narratives.
A recent article by Pankaj Mishra quotes the words of Hannah Arendt "The "white man's burden," she had written in the 1940s, was "either hypocrisy or racism." He connects the United States' violent and deadly exit from Afghanistan to "the murderous anarchy unleashed by British departure from India (1947)." Explains the colonial legacy of complete disregard for brown lives while abandoning conflict torn areas that are their own making, with an air of fool's pride.
Pankaj Mishra, "Taliban Return, Afghanistan Tragedy Show West Needs to be Saved from 'Fools of Imperialism,'" The Print, Aug. 30, 2021. https://theprint.in/opinion/taliban-return-afghanistan-tragedy-show-west-needs-to-be-saved-from-fools-of-imperialism/724449/ .

[119] In "Examining Pakistan's Strategic Decision to Support the US War on Terror," the author writes: Then-DG ISI Lieutenant General Mahmood, who was in the Washington at the moment was summoned by the then-deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage and a few other State Department officials. Later General Mahmood reported back to General Musharraf that Armitage had threatened to bomb Pakistan "back into the Stone Age" if they sided with the terrorists"
Tughral Yamin, "Examining Pakistan's Strategic Decision to Support the US War on Terror." *Strategic Studies* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 120.
Also read: Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).
The military attack on Afghanistan and Northern areas of Pakistan followed the United States' invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. Supported initially by Canada in the form of JTF2 and the United Kingdom, the rest of NATO

Javed Burki, former finance minister of Pakistan, Pakistan's involvement in the war turned out to have far more devastating consequences than anyone could have predicted. Pakistani officials maintain that the economic losses from the spread of terrorism in the country are six times the amount of annual US aid inflows. Pakistan faced 75,000 casualties and over $123 billion in economic losses against US aid of $20 billion.[120]

Historically people from Pakistan's Northern peripheries share many cultural, traditional, and family ties with Afghan people. Along with that, Since the Afghan-Soviet War, Pakistan has been hosting the world's largest population of Afghan refugees. This made Pakistan's involvement in war more than it bargained for:

> The international war against terrorism has caused more agony, deaths and destruction to the people of Pakistan than any other country of this world. There have been numerous incidents of civilian casualties because of the army's operations and increased attacks by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), missile-equipped Predator or Drones, operated by the CIA and the U.S. military in Pakistan Northern areas, for seeking to uproot the alleged al-Qaeda elements operating there. [121]

The main concern of this chapter is not to dwell on the devastation brought about by the war but to focus on a specific aspect of this phenomenon: the United States' extensive use of media as a propaganda mechanism to generate a single visual field surrounding Afghan/Pakistani woman, and its ramifications on the representation/popular cultural (visual imagery) of Pakistani women in general and urban women in particular.

1.2. Gendering War: Saving Veiled Brown Women

Right from the start, the War on Terror was coupled with a massive US media campaign, using the "veil/burqa" as an iconic signifier for gender rights violations in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The spectacles of veiled/oppressed Muslim women provided the United States with a moral justification for military intervention. Literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes

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joined the US army in 2003. The term 'post-War on terror Pakistan' is used by economists, referring to social and political climate that has emerged in Pakistan as a result of this ongoing War.

[120] In a tweet, former Prime Minister Imran Khan recalled the lives lost during the US "War on Terror." He wrote, "No Pakistani was involved in 9/11 but Pak decided to participate in US War on Terror. 2. Pakistan suffered 75,000 casualties in this war & over $123 bn was lost to economy. US 'aid' was a miniscule $20 bn." Islamuddin Sajid, "Pakistan: PM Recalls Sacrifices Made in US War on Terror," Anadolu Agency, Nov. 19, 2018, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/pakistanpm-recalls-sacrifices-made-in-us-war-on-terror/1315757/ .

[121] Hafiz Ahmad Bilal, et al., "War on Terror and the Violation of Women Rights: A Study of the Women's Rights Crises Created in Pakistan," *British Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, no. 2 (2012): 20.

this approach in her text, "Terror: A speech After 9-11," writing that "the war is part of an alibi every imperialism has given itself, a civilizing mission carried to an extreme, as it always must be." On the morning of November 17, 2001, first lady Laura Bush addressed the nation:

> Good morning. I'm Laura Bush, and I'm delivering this week's radio address to kick off a worldwide effort to focus on the brutality against women and children by the al-Qaida terrorist network and the regime it supports in Afghanistan, the Taliban…Their mothers face beatings for laughing out loud. Women cannot work outside the home or even leave their homes by themselves…Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror.[122]

From the start, the war's imperial designs were disguised in a gender emancipation narrative through visual media, playing a significant role in turning this imperialist project into a gender rights intervention. On October 16, 2001, shortly after the invasion, the US Democratic congresswoman Carolyn Maloney gave a speech in the House of Representatives. The speech was aired live by all major news channels. To highlight the plight of Afghan women, she entered wearing an iconic light blue Afghan burqa. She started her speech by saying, "It's difficult to breathe."[123]

Many mass media scholars have argued that US news coverage of Afghan women after September 11 helped the Bush administration define its 2001 invasion of Afghanistan as a humanitarian mission. The suffering women trope has long been used as a prop by colonizers to justify imperialism. Spivak describes this strategy in a sentence representing the history of colonial strategic repression: "white men saving brown women from brown men."[124] Right after 9/11, images of the blue burqa proliferated in media as the single visual field representing Muslim women from the region through region-specific journalistic photographs.

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[122] Laura Bush, "Laura Bush Delivers Radio Address," CNN, aired Nov.17, 2001, http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0111/17/smn.23.html/ .

[123] Bevan Hurley, "NYC Congresswoman who Wore Burqa in 2001 Speech Tells of 'Heartbreak' over Afghanistan," *Independent,* August 17, 2002. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/afghanistan-burqa-congress-speech-b1904142.html/ .

[124] Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak," coins this phrase to explain how the British framing "female liberation" as a justification for colonial imperialism. Spivak, *Can the Subaltern speak?.*
A very interesting article in the New Yorker describes how to persuade President Trump to send more troops to Afghanistan, he was shown pictures of Afghan women in miniskirts in the 1970s and later in burqas to convince him how Western values were a part of Afghan life and should be assisted in returning. Sarah Sentilles, "Colonial Postcards and Women as Props for War-Making," *The New Yorker*, October 5, 2017. https://www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/colonial-postcards-and-women-as-props-for-war-making.

The George W. Bush administration, with the oppressed Muslim woman narrative, found justification with the complete support of the Feminist Majority's campaign. In "White Feminists Wanted to Invade: Afghan Women Never Asked for US airstrikes," Rafia Zakaria writes in *The Nation*: "By November 20, the leaders of the Feminist Majority—including Ellie Smeal, the former head of the National Organization for Women—were attending events at the State Department and meeting with administration officials. The spring 2002 issue of *Ms.* magazine called the invasion a 'coalition of hope.'"[125]

Zakaria further writes that the United States, without accepting its historical role in creating this religious fundamentalist monstrosity, unilaterally decided that war was a good solution for the women of Afghanistan. She further argues that, in contrast, groups like the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, a political organization, had fought and opposed US-curated religious fundamentalism since its founding in 1977.[126]

Ann Russo offers a critical analysis of the Feminist Majority Foundation's Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan in terms of its synchronicity with US imperialism and militarism. She argues how the majority of Euro-American feminist campaigns reified US hegemony by supporting US imperial control under the illusionary guise of protection and security, democracy and freedom. And how ultimately, they became complicit with and even integral to US empire-building.

> By accepting the terms of Bush's 'war on terrorism and its cynical use of gender, the FMF contributes to a legacy of imperial feminism. The efforts to 'save' and 'rescue' Afghan women through US militarism and power ultimately contribute to the problems Afghan women face.[127]

The efforts to "save" and "rescue" Afghan women through US militarism and power only contributed further to the tribulations of Afghan/Pakistani women from the war regions. A study published in the *British Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* by students of Sargodha University, Pakistan, titled "War on Terror and the Violation of Women Rights (A

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[125] Rafia Zakaria, "White Feminists Wanted to Invade: Afghan women never asked for US air strikes," *The Nation.* August 17, 202. https://www.thenation.com/article/world/white-feminists-wanted-to-invade/
Rafia Zakaria is the author of *The Upstairs Wife: An Intimate History of Pakistan* (New York: Beacon, 2015): *Veil* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017): and *Against White Feminism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2021).
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ann Russo, "The Feminist Majority Foundation's Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8 (Nov. 2006): 576.

study of the women rights crises created in Pakistan),” argues how the War on Terror gravely violated women rights in the region:

> The U.S. attack . . . compelled the people of Afghanistan to get refuge in Pakistan; they have centuries-old linkages with Pakistani tribal areas, and here they moved freely. In this backdrop, the Taliban and some Al-Qaeda remnants also found refuge in these areas. This was the starting point of the dark ages for Pakistan. Pakistan was directly affected by the involvement of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan in the name of the War on Terror. Blind bombing on a mass scale and mass migrations of the people of Afghanistan to Pakistan as well and the internal displacement of people within Pakistan resulted in human rights crises. Drones’ attacks are reported to have killed hundreds of females who were not involved in any kind of terrorism.[128]

The study further stresses that the involvement of Pakistan in the war further worsened the human rights crisis of women in Pakistan, resulting in their displacement as an extension of vulnerability. The latest in the wave of such incidents was the virtual destruction of the town of Spinkai in South Waziristan by the allied army’s 14th Division, resulting in the displacement of over 200,000 people, the majority of whom were women and children.[129]

Hence, the formation of the gender liberation narrative as the ideological motivation behind the war was based solely on colonial rhetoric to justify imperialism. Per Bhabha, the visual field created by colonizers (neo colonizers in the case of the War on Terror because it did not follow a conventional colonization pattern) “employs a system of representation . . . that is structurally similar to realism.” It acts as deformations of the representation, and this “relation of knowledge and power within the apparatus is always a strategic response to *an urgent need*.”[130] Said articulates in *Orientalism* that once the specific images of “others” are constructed, they are validated only through their repetition and reinforcement as “unchanging, uniform and radically peculiar objects.”[131]

Hence, this dissertation argues that after 9/11, the neo-orientalism of Muslim South Asian subjectivities was a need-based political strategy that helped the US government justify the war to the world and helped them gather support from their public as well. Therefore, before we

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[128] Bilal, “War on Terror and the Violation of Women Rights,” 21.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Bhabha, “The Other Question,” in *Location of Culture,* 101, 105.
[131] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism.* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 100.

dwell at length on the US media's neo-orientalized veiled oppressed Muslim women trope, a brief look at the history of orientalism in the Subcontinent is pertinent.[132] I argue that unlike French orientalist discourse in the Middle East, there is hardly a precedent of orientalized Muslim South Asian women within British historical visual and literary colonial discourses.

1.2.1. British Orientalism: The Legacy of Selected Gendered Representations

The Western colonial orientalist discourses have long taken the image of the veiled Middle Eastern Muslim women as a homogenous category signifying the exotic in an alternative subjectivity. However, British Orientalist discourse followed a different tangent, at least in the Subcontinent. In British colonial discourse, the visuals and literary/fiction writings mainly revolved around the image construction of Hindu rather than Muslim South Asian women as "exotic/oppressed others."

It is already stated in the previous section that white feminism during War on Terror acted as a tool in colonial ideological warfare by reinforcing the colonial stereotype. Antoinette Burton, in *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (1994), describes how, historically, the image construction of British feminists as the saviours and role models for the underprivileged, subjugated, and victimized Indian colonial subjects was used as a proof of British women's contribution to the "imperial civilization mission."

Hindu women were repeatedly depicted as totally subjugated victims without any capacity or inclination to resist. Throughout middle-class mainstream white feminist discourses, "the Indian women (specifically from Hindu origin, as the subcontinent was shared by both Hindus, Muslims and diverse religious groups) served as the evidence of the British feminist special imperial burden."[133] The most common themes regarding Hindu female subjugation were child marriage, *sati,* and cold *sati* (the plight of a widow who does not immolate herself at the pyre with her husband). A highly significant ethnographic account of the *sati* ritual is *Suttee: A Historical and Philosophical Enquiry into the Hindu Rite of Widow-burning* (1928), written by British historian Edward John Thompson.

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[132] Historisizing the legacy of British Orienalism in Subcontinent also demonstrates that neo-collonization mimics historical collonizations and their need-based orientalism of gendered bodies.

[133] Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: Univ of North Carolina Press, 1994), 10.

Apart from ethnographic accounts, the visual and literary field created by British colonial discourse was also focused on Hindu women as the default face of oppressed Third World women who needed to be rescued by white men through colonial civilization

A Collection of Artworks: Indian Life and Landscape by Western Artists: An Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings from the 17th To the Early 20th Century, organized by the V&A and CSMVS, was organized in 2008.[134] It contains the most extensive collection of images of Indian life and peoples through the eyes of British painters such as William Carpenter and John Lockwood Kipling from the archives of the Victoria and Albert Museum. This collection was part of a recent art-historical attempt to create a broad survey of the historically neglected subject. A visual analysis of these online archives at V&A identifies twelve paintings under the title Hindu women from the collection of 134 paintings. Only one painting, titled, Two Notch Girls, Kashmir (1854), by William Carpenter, stands out as a potential representation of Muslim women entertainers in Srinagar, Kashmir. Based on the statistics in the exhibition, it can be deduced that the ratio of Muslim female visual representation to Hindu female visual representation was one to sixteen.

From another archival visual trajectory, the most significant representation of women from the Subcontinent is the 250 illustrations of Hindu customs, including the ritual of sati in the etching done by Frans Balthazar Solvyns, a Belgian marine painter and journeyman artist who lived in Calcutta between 1791 and 1803.[135]

From the rich British colonial literary tradition, Leslie M. Reich, in her book, The White Author's Burden: Justifications of Empire in the Fiction of British India, analyses British colonial fiction, with the stories depicting "Hindu women" either as erotic bodies and objects of desire or as victims of traditions. The works such as A Tale Told by Moonlight (1920) by Leonard Woolf, Kardoo, The Hindu Girl (1869) by Harriette G. Brittan, "A Sutee" (1839), a poem by Letitia Elizabeth, and her collection of poems "The Zenana," and the book Suttee (1928) by Edward Thompson, to mention a few, depicted the plight of Hindu girls. The primary concern regarding Hindu women in these stories always stemmed from primitive Hindu beliefs

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[134] A book was published in conjunction with the exhibition held in Mumbai at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, (formerly Prince of Wales Museum of Western India): Pauline Rohatgi et al., Indian Life and Landscape by Western Artists: Paintings and Drawings from the Victoria and Albert Museum: 17th to the Early 20th Century (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2008).

[135] Balt. Solvyns, A Catalogue of 250 Coloured Etchings: Descriptive of the Manners, Customs, Character, Dress and Religious Ceremonies of the Hindoos (London: Mirror Press, 1799).

and traditions. It can be concluded that Hindu women were the epitome of the "victimized others" in the colonial imagery of the British Raj and were the prime subject for British colonial fiction and, as an extension, the justification of their imperial rule in India.

Muslim South Asian women, on the other hand, are not visualized significantly in the colonial visual as well as in literary discourse. In E.M. Foster's renowned novel *A Passage to India* (1924), Dr. Aziz, the young Indian Muslim physician protagonist, shows the photograph of his wife to his friend, Mr. Fielding. Mr. Fielding appreciates this intimate gesture; Dr. Aziz replies: "Oh, it's nothing, she was not a highly educated woman or even beautiful, but put it away . . . *she is of no importance*, she is dead."[136] E.M Foster's fleeting rendering of a Muslim woman can be regarded as an example of colonial disinterest in creating complex narratives around Muslim women as colonial subjects. The main reason for this disinterest was that Hindu women, due to their relatively lower position in the Subcontinent, were far more suited for the victim-protagonist "other" narrative that suited the colonial saviour complex discourse.

None of these ethnographic, literary, and artistic accounts documented what Spivak calls the "beneficial ruthlessness" of the British in India as motivated by territorial expansion or management of industrial capital.[137] For example, under Churchill, more than half of India's resources were diverted toward the war budget during the Second World War. As famine ravaged the region, there was no reservoir to sustain the population (as traditionally had been), resulting in the deaths of three million people in the Eastern Indian province of Bengal in 1943. (This episode is now called the Bengali Holocaust.)[138]

Said states regarding the need for representation: "it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting. In other words, representations have purposes; they are effective much of the time, they accomplish one or many tasks."[139] The images of Hindu women served to demonize colonized cultures to justify colonial rule and mitigate the horrors of colonization in the regions. As Muslim women enjoyed a relatively high legal status in the Subcontinent as

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[136] Edward Morgan Forster. *A Passage to India* (Boca Raton, Fla.: CRC Press, 2018), 128–29.

[137] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 101.

[138] Madhusree Mukerjee. *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India During World War II*. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 1–2.
For a comprehensive analysis and investigate of the unimaginable impact of colonialism on India please read: ShashiTharoor, *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India* (London: Penguin, 2018).

[139] Said, *Orientalism*, 273.

compared to Hindu women, they did not serve the agenda of imperialism or imperial feminism.[140] Hence, it was not until the late 20th century but especially the beginning of the 21st century (after 9/11) that Muslim women associated with the Subcontinent came under Western media attention as the neo-imperialistic need arose.

1.3. Neo-Orientalism: Muslim Women After 9/11 and the Creation of a Single Visual Narrative

In the aftermath of 9/11, the mainstream US media, without providing any historical and political context of the United States' role in the rise of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, created a spectacle by providing images of the Taliban's decrees. The War on Terror turned out to be a very high-profile war. According to a former war correspondent Phillip Knightly in his book, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (2004), during the war, media from all over the world started reporting civilian casualties, which estimated within the first year to be double the number of civilians killed in the September 11 attacks. The Pentagon incorporated the media into the national war effort to counter the problem, "embedding" the war correspondents within specified military units. The key was to ensure television footage resonated with the war propaganda. This enabled the media-driven war to show its audience images in alignment with the war strategy.

The neo-orientalized images that reached the Western audience from Afghanistan and Pakistan were those that the military approved. As a result, the military gained full support for the war from the American public and the majority of feminist campaigns, especially in the United States. The United States narrated itself as a civilized protector and saviour of women and children rather than an imperialist invader seeking power and control. Although the main focus of the war was Afghanistan, the photographs of Afghan women were mainly taken from the refugee camps in Pakistan.[141] Along with that, Afghan is the name of the tribe that inhabits the land around and between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This fact facilitated the transnational conflation of Afghan/Pakistani women. Only a single image narrative consistently came out of

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[140] Burton, *Burdens of History,* 108.

[141] As Pakistan hosts the largest number of Afghan refugees the identity of the photo's subject was not initially known, but in early 2002, she was identified as Sharbat Gula. She was a Pashtun child living in the Nasir Bagh refugee camp in Pakistan during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan when she was photographed. Public Delivery, "The Story of Steve McCurry & Sharbat Gula, the Afghan Girl," Oct. 19, 2021, https://publicdelivery.org/steve-mccurry-afghan-girl/ .

this war zone: the image of a religiously oppressed burqa-clad woman under the Taliban regime. This resulted in what Pakistani cultural theorist Moon Charania calls the hypervisibility of Pakistani/Afghan women in US and European media; she writes, "brown bodies become the capital in the formations of benevolent white multiculturalism."[142] The term neo-orientalism differentiates the US "formation of gendered other" from the historical European orientalist discourse tradition around Middle Eastern Muslim bodies. Neo-orientalism refers to the recent US imperialistic orientalization of South Asian Muslim women through modern modes of communication such as social media, journalistic war images, and news and popular culture.[143]

After 9/11, the US media repeatedly used images of veiled women to represent all Pakistani and Afghan women, creating a very strategic single visual field in the Western visual discourse. Though veiling is a practice in the part of the regions, this research claims that this single visual narrative signifying a universal Muslim woman was not representative of women of the entire region; Mohanty called this an analytically reductive method in which a large number of fragmented examples add up to a universal fact.[144] Arjun Appadurai, in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization,* calls this phenomenon "mediascape." Mediascapes are images:

> produced by private or state interests, tend to be image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality . . . out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places.[145]

To save women from Taliban oppression was one of the significant propaganda components of the War on Terror. Burqa-clad women became the symbol of all that was "evil" in Muslim societies. For regionally based images,

> Images of women wearing the *burqa* were featured on the covers of major magazines and newspapers; these images–on their own—became evidence of woman's oppression by Taliban—by–Islam—and by implication, by all Muslim men. . . . The images functioned to distinctively mark the

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

[142] Charania, *Will the Real Pakistani Woman Please Stand Up?*, 2.

[143] The term neo-orientalism here is used as deep lingering historic European knowledge of orientalist inheritance - which is still often expressed through a coded racialized and gendered logic of self and "others."
Elleke Boehmer, "Questions of Neo-Orientalism," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (1998): 19.

[144] Talpade, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," 347.

[145] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 35.

‘otherness’ . . . and to justify US military intervention, which would
‘unveil’ the women thereby securing their ‘freedom.’[146] (Figure 2)

Cultural theorist Moon Charania articulates that War on Terror was signified through the "visual transversal" of women's bodies and stresses that this paranoia has distinctive visuality unique to the American media-driven culture. Charania, in *Can the Real Pakistani Woman Please Stand Up?* (2017), gives a detailed account of statistics that show a massive increase in the newspaper coverage in the United States focusing on Muslim Pakistani women, which "include descriptions of burqas as body bags and trash bags" (Figure 3).[147]

The phenomena Charania calls the "hyper-visibility" and "cinematic representations" of Muslim Pakistani/Afghan women as a result of gender politics that emerged after 9-11, "reminiscent of orientalist's caricatures and occidental self-congratulatory schemata."[148] These representations of Muslim women seeped into Western culture through magazines, newspapers, cinema, and war footage.

To further highlight the significance of veiled image as a need-based colonial trope, it is pertinent to look at the history of visual representation of Pakistani women within the US media. Using *National Geographic* as a case study, the next sub-section foregrounds how images of Pakistani women had always been strategically constructed and intertwined with the US policies towards Pakistan as an important geopolitical region.

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[146] Russo. "The Feminist Majority Foundation's Campaign," 562.

[147] Charania, *Will the Real Pakistani Woman Please Stand Up*?, 11.

[148] Ibid., 9.

For the most cited source and the most comprehensive analysis, see Stabile and Kumar, "Unveiling Imperialism."

For a feminist analysis of American media projection of Pakistani women, see Charania, *Will the Real Pakistani Woman Please Stand Up?*

For alternative perspectives, see Gabriel, *They Must be Stopped,* and Fair, *Fighting to the End*. Other important analyses include Bushra H. Rahman, "Framing of Pakistani Muslim Women in International Media: Muslim Feminist's Perspective," *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 2, no.1 (2012):106–13. Idem, "Pakistani Women as Objects of Fear and Othering." *Sage Open* 4, no4 (2014).

Kelly Anderson, "Cover Story: The Rhetorical Construction of Afghan Women in a *Time* Feature" (MA thesis, Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006).

1.3.1. Shifting Visual Representations of Pakistani Women in *National Geographic*: Pre–War on Terror Representations

The newly independent nation-state of Pakistan became an American ally right from the very beginning of the Cold War.[149] Historically, this allyship between the United States and Pakistan and its manifestation on the representation of women within visual discourse can be traced to Pakistan's first known official censorship of female representation in art. Art Historian Qadus Mirza writes:

> The earliest incident of censoring visual art in Pakistan, however, was probably the rejection of Hassan's painting titled *Mai Lai,* on the well-known Vietnam War massacre, from the national exhibition held in 1971 during the reign of another military dictator, General Yahya Khan.[150]

The painting was redacted from a group exhibition on the pretext that it would impair Pakistan's relationships with the United States (Figure 4). This friendship with the United States has always come with the cost of dictatorship in Pakistan. The US has always projected itself as the defender of democracy in the world, but in practice, it often sides with monarchs, military dictators, and other anti-democratic but anti-Communist elements in Third-World countries; this is especially true in Pakistan.[151]

This historic and turbulent US/Pakistan relationship can be envisaged by tracing the representations of Pakistani women on the cover of *National Geographic*—a quasi-scientific magazine published primarily in the United States. Dinah Zeiger, in her article "That (Afghan) Girl!" Writes:

> *National Geographic* magazine carved its niche as an arbiter of American culture by revitalizing natural history as a topic of popular culture, which in turn provided the material for the stories about the world, above all, the peoples of the world.[152]

Hence, the primary medium of this magazine had been innovative photographic methods to visualize "others" for Western interest. The first known image of Pakistani women appeared on

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[149] Toor writes, "Pakistan was already becoming a key American ally by the early 1950s…In April 1954, Pakistan signed the Mutual Defence and Assistance pact with the US, the first of many such formal alliances." Toor, *The State of Islam,* 79.

[150] Quddus Mirza, "Zia's Long Reach," *Himal South Asian* (Sept 9, 2009).

[151] Painter, *The Cold War,* 46.

[152] Dinah Zeiger, "That (Afghan) Girl! Ideology Unveiled in *National Geographic*," in *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics,* ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2008), 270.

the cover of *National Geographic* in 1965 during the military dictatorship of General Ayyub Khan, who, as mentioned above, was a strong ally of the United States. This 1965 cover shows two cheerful adolescent girls wearing pink festive *shalwar kameez and dupatta* (a standard Pakistani urban attire) riding a single swing attached to a tree (Figure 5). These girls play cheerfully against an ambiguous urban/rural scape. This dynamic image of the youthful girls playing in public stood as a metaphor for a young nation-state and its incredible potential ahead, but also its vulnerability.

In the 1980s, under another dictatorship, Pakistan was yet again visualized through a female image: a metaphor of a beautiful woman. This *National Geographic* cover of 1984 shows Tahira Syed, an elegant classical singer from Pakistan (Figure 6). She is adorned with jewellery and wearing traditional festive clothes (a brocade *Angrakha*). She sits on an exquisite handmade carpet over a marble throne, playing *sitar*, a South Asian musical instrument. The picture was taken at Shalimar Gardens (Urdu: شالامار باغ), a magnificent Mughal garden complex located in Lahore, Punjab. The gardens date from the period when the Mughal Empire was at its artistic and aesthetic zenith. The title reads, "When Mughals ruled." This cover resonates with the congenial US policies in Pakistan during the last phase of the Cold War and its orchestration of the Afghan-Soviet War. The orientalized gendered visualization of Pakistan was synchronized with the massive print propaganda representing Mujahedeen (Afghan religious fighters) and their struggle against Russia.[153]

At that time, the ground reality in Pakistan was far from this romantic orientalist representation. The proliferation of religious extremism, violence, guns, drugs, gender discrimination, and minority marginalization has its roots in this period, which was endorsed and facilitated by Cold War US policies in the region. Pakistan went through rigid and extreme religious and political change as opposed to former democratically elected prime minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's efforts to steer Pakistan towards a socialist Islamic state. Pakistani society was reconstructed and modified into General Zia's interpretation of Islam. It was a time of complete censorship. General Zia's censorship was based mainly on moral issues and curbing of female rights. Faith was reduced to decrees relating to the representation of the female body, for which state-enforced conditions were in effect for the female presence in print media, film,

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[153] Seth Sanders, "Then and Now: Posters Provide Window to War-Torn Afghanistan," *University of Chicago Chronicle,* Jan. 24, 2002, http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/020124/posters.shtml/ .

theatre, and television (PTV, which at that time was the only television channel which the State ran) and in the visual arts. General Zia's regime was a time of social anarchy and complete censorship of all forms of self-expression.[154] On several occasions, the army raided galleries and private art display areas to confiscate artworks that would be considered offensive to the state policy or unaccepted within the sanctioned religious boundaries.[155]

"The Afghan Girl" on the cover of *National Geographic* shows the portrait of 12-year-old Sharbat Gula, an Afghan orphan at the Nasir Bagh refugee camp on the Pakistani border (Figure 7). This famous image was taken by American photographer Steve McCurry in December 1984 and published the following year. This was at the peak of the Afghan-USSR war. The image soon became the most recognizable and iconic representation of Afghanistan's struggle against Russian "infidels." The young girl in a red *dupatta* is looking straight at the camera. Her sea-green eyes resonate with the green background, symbolizing hope and peace. The main focus is the eyes, representing fearlessness, rebellion, and faith, almost like a frightened animal ready to pounce. However, using a young girl as a metaphor for a struggling region creates a "strategic formation"—the region's potential and vulnerability and need to be protected by Western (Read: American) saviours.

1.3.2. Muslim Subjectivities: Post–War on Terror Representations

In 2002, seventeen years after that iconic photograph was taken, a mini-series on *National Geographics* under the title "A Life Revealed" was launched to locate the forgotten Afghan girl (Sharbat Gula) once again in the refugee camps of Pakistan (Figure 8). This production strategically appeared right after the US attack on Afghanistan and the periphery regions of

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[154] For Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan/ USSR war, see Steve Coll, "Anatomy of a Victory: CIA's Covert Afghan War," *Washington Post,* July 19, 1992; Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).
Toor, *The State of Islam.*
For General Zia's dictatorship and its effects on women and their representations in visual media read: Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible;* Salima Hashmi, "Tracing the Image: Contemporary Art in Pakistan," in *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005)*;* Mirza, "Zia's Long Reach." http://www.sacw.net/index.php?page=imprimir_articulo&id_article=1145.
[155] Artist Anwar Saeed's first solo exhibition in 1984 was raided by the police, based on a provocative article that was written about the paintings that consisted of seminude figures at Rohtas Art Gallery, cited in: Ali. "Impassioned Play," 43.
A.R Nagori can be rightly termed the pioneer socio-political artist in Pakistan. He was not intimidated by censorship or worldly prestige and his art exhibitions were usually raided and sealed. ―Nagori was no stranger to bans and censorship. His exhibition in 1982, depicting anti-militarism, was banned by General Zia's regime (cited in) *Himal: Southasian,* "AR Nagori: "The Unreasonable Man (1939–2011)," Jan. 19, 2011.

Pakistan. In order to confirm her as the 'original Afghan girl,' her trauma-stricken face was recorded being examined by a forensic team, including a forensic pathologist. A male optometrist examined her eyes. Most cinematic representations show her at an angle where the audience can see her face, but her gaze does not confront the audience. Without giving the historical context of the US involvement in Afghanistan and the cultural roots of the Taliban regime in Cold War politics,[156] this 2002 cover of *National Geographic* shows Sharbat Gula shrouded in an Afghan burqa that had become the face of all Muslim women from the region. She holds the cover of the iconic "Afghan Girl" 1984 *National Geographic* in her hand—one of the most well-known faces covered under the veil. This time around, she presented the oppressive Muslim regime and the horrific plight of Muslim women.

The soft gendered image of Pakistan also takes a turn, and a 2007 *National Geographic* cover shows the face of an intense-looking brown man gazing into the camera with his piercing light brown eyes; the title reads "Islam's Fault Line: Pakistan" (Figure 9). On the first page is a headshot of a young girl, her face and gaze lowered. Her head is covered with a light blue *dupatta* along with half of her face (Figure 10). The colour resonates with the blue of the Afghan burqa – a colour that came to be associated with female oppression within the Muslim context. Moon Charania writes, "Fundamentally, she is invisible even as this photograph seeks to render her visible as contemporary global (oppressed/Muslim) woman, as de facto Pakistan."[157]

Another dimension to the political and semipolitical US media propaganda after the War on Terror was the sudden overwhelming proliferation of Muslim representations in the entertainment industry. [158] Per Said, in *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, all media fields are profit-seeking corporations and are interested in propagating specific images and ideas that are financially more viable than others. They propagate particular images that reinforce and strengthen the already existing popular societal notions.[159] Hence, this might partially be an official agenda, but the main reason behind perpetuating Muslim stereotypes was to enhance cinema and television viewership

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[156] Zeiger "That Afghan Girl!" 270.

[157] Charania, *Will the Real Pakistani Women Please Stand Up?, 29.*

[158] The term media encompasses television channels, newspapers, and magazines, and social media.

[159] Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 91.

ratings. The manifestation of the mentioned propaganda around the War on Terror harvested many Hollywood and Television blockbusters.[160]

The obvious choice to sum up this part of the chapter is the representation of Pakistani women on the Season 4 teaser poster of the American television series, *Homeland* (2014) (Figure 11).[161] In her article, "Framing Muslim Women: The Problem with *Homeland*'s Season 4 Campaign," Mariam Karim describes the omnipresence of promotional posters on subways, busses, and billboards in New York City. Season 4's plot takes place in Islamabad, Pakistan, and Kabul, Afghanistan, "successfully conflating the two different geographical locations by blurring distinctions of Muslim spaces and combining representations of Muslim women's sartorial traditions into one homogenized visual category."[162] The poster teaser shows the white protagonist wearing a red scarf gazing back at the camera. She is surrounded by a herd of women in black *burqas* with their backs to the audience. The image is even more visually complex in how it creates what Arjun Appadurai calls a mediascape, an "image-centred narrative based on accounts of strips of reality."[163]

The iconic blue (shuttlecock) Afghan burqa has been photographed extensively by the US media. The poster uses the shape of the Afghan burqa while changing the colour to black. This somewhat confusing image invites its viewers to walk down memory lane. People who had been following the news would remember that in July 2007, Pakistan took center stage as international news agencies rushed to cover the conflict between the government and Jamia Hafza Madrassa (Lal Masjid). The mosque, with an extremist-religious school that served as a residence for

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[160] For numerous studies on the portrayal of Muslims post 9/11, consult
Rory Stewart, foreword to *The Impact of 9/11 on the Media, Arts, and Entertainment: The Day that Changed Everything?* ed. Matthew J. Morgan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Evelyn Alsultany. "Arabs and Muslims in the Media after 9/11: Representational Strategies for a 'Postrace' Era." *American Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2013): 161–169; Jeff Birkenstein, Anna Froula, and Karen Randell, eds. *Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture and the "War on Terror"* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

[161] The American suspense thriller series that premiered in 2011, revolves around a CIA agent Carrie Mathison (Claire Danes). The show starts with the protagonist investigating an alleged extremist plot with ties to prominent al-Qaeda member Abu Nazir (Navid Negahban). The American political thriller has received overwhelming support, with six Emmys and five Golden Globes. The show has a 100% rating on rotten tomatoes and is considered one of the most watched television series. Rotten Tomatoes, Review of *Homeland,* Season 4, 2014, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/homeland/s04/ .

[162] Mariam Karim, "Framing Muslim Women: The Problem with *Homeland*'s Season 4 Campaign," The Postcolonialist, Oct. 30, 2014. http://postcolonialist.com/arts/framing-muslim-women-problem-homelands-season-4-campaign/ .

[163] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,." *Theory, Culture & Society* 7, no. 2-3 (1990): 299.

numerous men and women, was located within Islamabad (the twin city of Rawalpindi). The conflict arose when female students "embarked on vigilante raids throughout the capital city to stop what they called un-Islamic activities."[164] The state retaliated against these unlawful activities by raiding the seminaries with armed forces and was met with resistance by around a hundred girls wearing black abayas and niqabs carrying sticks (Figure 12). This became a globally published event covered by all major networks.[165] Therefore visual familiarity of Pakistani women in black veils located in Islamabad (capital city of Pakistan) was in the memory reservoir of the US media. However, the style and shape of the black abaya associated with the specific religious-affiliated group are different from the Afghan burqa (niqab vs. shuttlecock style). By switching the colour of the burqa from blue to black but keeping the shape of the Afghan burqa, the tv series poster encompasses a complex universalized image creating a homogenized gendered Muslim Afghan/Pakistani/Wahabi identity. It successfully created a Worlding—assimilating diverse subjects through acts of epistemic violence (institutionalized violence) facilitated by colonial or neocolonial conditions, combining multiple identities to create an impactful universal.[166]

1.4. Double Ethnocentricity: Reflection on the Veil as an Object of Study within Western Academia

In the Western context, powerful negative visual propaganda of Muslims resulted in an "intense dislike or fear of Islam, especially as a political force," culminating in Islamophobia—"hostility or prejudice towards Muslims."[167] Many racially and religiously motivated hate crimes against Muslims and brown people worldwide ensued. It was also the start of debate around banning traditional veils, hijab, and niqab within many Western countries on the pretext of secular values.[168]

As discussed in the next chapter, the image of the veil proliferated in the Western art world as a reactionary Islamophobic response. This tendency was also followed by several art-

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[164] Charania, Will the Real Pakistani Women Please Stand UP?, 108.
[165] BBC News, "In Pictures: Red Mosque Stand-Off," July 5, 2007. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_pictures/6270396.stm.
[166] For a detailed clarification of the two kinds of coverings, see Mahnoor Sherazee, "The Difference between Black and Blue," *Dawn,* Apr. 24, 2014, https://www.dawn.com/news/1102048/.
[167] See Schlund-Vials, "Art, Activism, and Agitation," 54.
[168] A list of countries that banned head-covering is cited in the next Chapter.

historical, transnational studies on the representation of Muslim women through an overt sartorial iconography: the veil as an iconic signifier of Muslim gendered subjectivities. I argue that while these scholarships aspired to deconstruct the "veil" to familiarize Western audiences with the concept, they created double ethnocentrism within transnational art historical scholarship.[169] Analyzing this scholarship helps situate the dissertation's trajectory as an alternative narrative to mainstream and dominant discourses. I hypothesize that this tendency reinforced a specific "other" in contrast to white gendered subjectivities and hindered a more meaningful knowledge exchange. Representing Muslim brown women collectively through a piece of clothing disregards the fact that cultural, traditional, and sociopolitical conditions play a pivotal role in the formation of various subjectivities and their sartorial choices. Emma Tarlo, in *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*, writes that it is no surprise that most of the early ethnographers on dresses in the colonial Subcontinent were white men, like Colonel Dalton, who were heavily invested in the British imperial administration. [170]This approach to creating "others" by recording their lifestyles within museum settings and through academic scholarships proliferated after the invention of the daguerreotype. The white ethnographers extensively recorded and classified the lives, physiognomy, and clothes of the colonized native people, assuming that knowledge of the "other" could be gained by recording visible markers, creating the "Worlding" of their colonized worlds.[171] Further, Tarlo argues that many historical ethnographic studies based on the classification of clothes and tools were highly superficial, and their authenticity has been challenged in contemporary India.[172]

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[169]Double-ethnocentrism is a term Spivak uses with reference to Derrida's critique of French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's position as an anti-ethnocentric. Derrida argues that Lévi-Strauss actually enforces ethnocentrism under the guise of anti-ethnocentrism. Spivak frames Derrida's critique in contemporary times by calling out the contemporary dominant euromerican narratives which transform the oppositional narratives and turn them into a benign institutionalized alternative. Hence, in Chapter Two the dissertation looks at the proliferation of veiled imagery within the cooperate international art discourse as another form of double ethnocentrism. In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, "*Politics of Deconstruction: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Oscar Guardiola-Rivera in conversation at the Birkbeck," University of London. June 2016,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28zoswK4zF0&t=1513s.

[170] Emma Tarlo. Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.

[171] The concept 'worlding,' introduced by Spivak, implies the assimilation of subjects through acts of epistemic violence (institutionalized violence) under colonialism, such as renaming, remapping, or creating universals out of particular cases. She calls it the "worlding" of what is today "the Third World Women," carefully constructed in contrast to women from the so called First World. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader,* ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mill (London: Routledge, 2014), 307.

[172] Tarlo. *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in Indi*a128.

An analysis of transnational art-historical scholarship focussing on the materiality of the veil as a signifier for cultural relevance post 9/11 is warranted here to highlight this dissertation's novel approach to the veiled subject, as discussed in the next Chapter. An anthology edited by Jennifer Heath, *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics* (2008), is a significant study that deconstructs the veil and veiling practices. *The Veil* traces the different forms of veiling practices and political/social factors behind its usage/abandonment, and manipulation. In her essay, "What is Subordinated, Dominates," Heath writes about veiling (hiding the mouth) practices among men in Timbuktu, Mali, as a mark of maturity. She gives many examples of face coverings used by men worldwide, from the K.K.K. and their white supremacist whole-body ghost costumes to Jain monks covering their mouths with a muslin cloth called *muha-patti*.[173] This book can be understood more constructively with relevance to the contemporary sociopolitical context after 9/11 when Muslim women and their apparel choices became one of the most controversial debates within Euro-American cultures. Even though the study uses multiple religious convictions to normalize veiling as one of the religious practices, it still does not look into the possibility of cultural, economic, and social motivations that play an imperative part in the construction of gendered subjectivities within the South Asian context.[174]

An M.A. thesis by Annique Heijmans, "Veil as Signifier" (2011), endeavours to define the different degrees of Muslim veils, such as the niqab, hijab, *burqa*, and *chador*, as signifiers in contemporary art. Heijmans' thesis attempts to explain the significance of Muslim veiling practices and the ethical dilemma of the veil's representation. In the aftermath of 9/11, according to Heijmans, the veil signified regression and a threat to Western ideals of freedom and equality (a reference to the controversy against the *hijab* ban in France and the Netherlands). These controversies are causing further dichotomies in a debate between the West and Islam.[175] Heijmans concludes her thesis with a discussion on the debate surrounding the Muslim veil:

> The debate is moved out of politics and into the realm of art, which seems to be much more pleasant. A socio-political discourse at the level of art can

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[173](Literally meaning cloth that covers the mouth), Jains cover their mouth with a cloth and noses to avoid killing flying insects by accidentally swallowing them
Jennifer Heath, "'What is Subordinated, Dominates': Mourning, Magic, Masks, and Male Veiling," in *The Veil,* 99–118.

[174] A recent publication from a Pakistani fiction writer Sabyan Javeri explores in numerous short stories the multitude of reasons behind why Muslim women would choose to wear a hijab apart from religious convictions. Sabyn Javeri, *Hijabistan* (New York : Harper Collins, 2019).

[175]Annique Heijmans*,* "The Veil as Signifier in Contemporary Art" (MA thesis, Università di Amsterdam, 2011), 8.

help to bring in a new perspective. Particularly considering the subject of the Veil because of its complexity, it is important it should be viewed from different viewpoints … Contemporary art is an important locus for giving a more nuanced and sincere view on the subject of veiling.[176]

Heijmans argues that different degrees of veiling are acceptable in different Muslim societies.[177] By blurring the boundaries between various head coverings such as the *niqab*, *chador, burqa*, and *hijab,* Heijmans frames these articles as nonnegotiable religious symbols in Muslim lives. In the Subcontinent, head covering is a fluid practice and has a cultural connotation and is also practiced by many Christian, Hindu and Sikh and Dalit women alike. For example, in parts of Indian Rajasthan and Pakistani Thar, women share the same colourful dress code while using *chunni* to cover their heads and sometimes faces. These women can be Muslim or Hindu, but headdresses, in this context, are cultural and regional customs rather than religious.

Valerie-Anne Pocock, in "Cartographies of Cloth: Mapping the Veil in Contemporary Art," a PhD dissertation produced at McGill, quotes Shahzia Sikander, a celebrated Pakistani-born American artist's diasporic experiences as a Muslim woman: "The frustration resulting from being reduced to and misconstrued by the invisible veil of the Euro-American cultural screen led the artist [Sikander] to temporarily don the veil as a performance piece at RISD in order to observe the reactions it aroused."[178] Pocock concludes that the fixed assumptions surrounding Muslim women continue (in fact, they are more potent than ever), impacting the lives of women of Muslim descent living in Euro-America. as a side note, Pocock notes that none of the artists in diasporic conditions discussed in her dissertation and who work on veil images wore veils as part of their regular wardrobe.

Sikander's experience as a diasporic subject contrasted with that when she was living in Pakistan, as is expressed in her thesis project at the National College of Art, Lahore, *the scroll* (1992). Her thesis project visualizes a contemporary urban woman in regional urban sartorial attire in Pakistan. Her interface with the burqa or veil in practice can only be contextualized

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176 Ibid., 59.

177 Besides, if veiling refers to modesty, then any kind of clothing that hides any part of the human body can be considered a veil.

178 Shahzia Sikander quoted in "Miniaturizing Modernity: Shahzia Sikander in Conversation with Homi K. Bhabha," edited by Robert McCarthy, *Public Culture* 11, no. 1 (1999): 146–51.
Valerie Pocock, "Cartographies of Cloth: Mapping the Veil in Contemporary Art," (PhD diss., McGill, 2008), 3.

through the diaspora.[179] Sikander's *scroll* (1992) was an iconic moment of rupture in the evolution of miniature painting from its traditionally archaic and historical imagery of kings and queens to illustrate vibrant contemporary female consciousness. [180] Sikander's thesis project could easily be positioned within the politics of the country in the 1990s, the restoration of democracy after eleven years of military dictatorship.[181] Thus it subtly refers to a particularly amenable period for women, especially during Benazir Bhutto's (1953–2007) two stints in government (1988–90 and 1993–96).[182] This also signifies a time when women artists in Pakistan had begun to conceptualize their consciousness within contemporaneity. Hence, the different experiences resulted in the consciousness of different sensibilities. One was addressing the audience at home, who understood her cultural, class, religious, political, and visual vocabulary. The other was in diaspora, where she visualized herself as the "other Muslim woman" rather than a contemporary urban woman living in specific sociopolitical conditions and within constitutionality.[183]

Pocock writes that veiling forms an integral part of the aesthetics and art of Islam-based societies.[184] Considering that sartorial cultural articles hold much more than objective reality, Tarlo writes, "clothes are not merely defining but are also 'self-consciously' used to 'define,' to present, deceive, enjoy, and communicate, to reveal and to conceal." Like Shahzia Sikander, several Muslim artists have used identifiable Islamic iconography to transcribe their diasporic experiences. Combined with media propaganda after 9/1, focused on veiled Muslim bodies gave

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[179] Sikander in "Miniaturizing Modernity."

[180] The movement called Neo-Miniature or Contemporary Miniature in Pakistan started in the 1990s. Sikander's five-foot mural-like miniature, —*The Scroll* (1992) (fig1) is credited as the turning point. The painting depicts her going through a routine in a bourgeois household. The real quantum leap in this work was the alteration of scale. It must be emphasized that within the historical miniature tradition, the scale was a major component of the content, hence, breaking down the boundary of size from the technique and thus defying its basic nature. Salima Hashimi, "Radicalizing Tradition," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: A Critical Reader*, ed. Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 289.

[181] Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (Urdu: محمد ضياء الحق; 1924 –1988) was a military dictator and religious extremist, who served as the 6th President of Pakistan from 1978 until his death in 1988, after declaring martial law in 1977. His death in 1988 was followed by the fall of the USSR, and an end to Cold War politics.

[182] Bhutto was the first and the youngest female prime minister with in the Muslim majority countries. Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan,* 25.

[183] There was an "Orientalizing" of Middle Eastern Muslim women throughout European history, whereas, there was a disinterestedness and a lack of research regarding Muslim women from sub-continent at least from the imperial feminist point of view. As explained earlier in the Chapter under "British Orientalism: The Legacy of Selected Gendered Representations." Burton, *Burdens of History*, 106.

[184] Ibid.,15.

rise to the equation of these identifiable imageries as core Muslim visual vocabulary within the Western world.

Chapter Two problematizes the essentialized readings of Islamic iconographies in the artistic representation of the veil in Euro-American curatorial practices, highlighting how these images are conceptualized through a singular lens, which perpetuates a homogenized "other." I would like to highlight that this tendency to informally use the veil as a metonymy for Muslim gendered identity is recurrent in almost all the texts that focus on veiled images—reinforcing a neo-orientalist discourse.

Most Western scholarship on the veil resolves around the veil as the object of study, turning a simple clothing material into a costume. Historically studying and objectifying "others" and knowledge around their clothes and lifestyles is coded within imperial projects. The creation of these ethnographic ventures has its roots in a highly violent colonial past. In the next chapter, I try to divorce the veil from an understanding of it as an independent object of study. Instead, I examine the emergence of the veil image as a result of gender politics that emerged due to transnational media hype around Muslim female bodies.   Chapter Two conceptualizes the veil's visibility through the transnational/national reception of these images, critically deconstructing the Eurocentric ethos towards Muslim women and their representation that emerged after 9/11. I first deconstruct the artworks in relation to their political context and then analyze the images of the veil from multiple cultural and social perspectives, in addition to the status quo religious essentialism. Thirdly, it recognizes that the veil is not the ultimate criterion with which the existence of Muslim women can be acknowledged.

The absolute essentialization of the veil with Muslimhood results in a unified, homogenous gendered Muslim identity, signified primarily through female bodies, which I argue is a Euro-American construct and has latent orientalism at its core.[185] For example, many contemporary Muslim scholars *debate* the historical validity of the religious compulsion of the veil in Islam. Religious scholars such as Reza Aslan, Khaled Abou El-Fadl, Javed Ahmad Ghamidi, Abdullah bin Bayyah, Ahmad Ghabel, and Nasr Abu Zayd maintain the concept of hijab connotes modest clothing in the Quran, which is essential for both genders in Islam.[186]

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[185] As also argued by Moon Charania in *Will the Real Pakistani Women Stand Up?*

[186] Junaid Jahangir, "Five Muslim Scholars on the Permissibility of Not Wearing the Headscarf," The Huffington Post, November 15, 2017. http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/junaid-jahangir/islam-wearing-hijab_b_14046520.html/ ;

Nevertheless, as Said describes, the West does "imagine" images and becomes the guardian and reinforcement agents of the homogenized images they create.[187]

A compelling argument is articulated by Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" when she traces the origins of the word *sati* from the word *sat.*[188] *Sat (sach* in Urdu) in Sanskrit means "to be rightful," and the feminine of the word is *sati,* meaning "a rightful wife" (as the manifestation of a woman's identity was only through her husband). The word *sati* was also associated with the powerful Hindu warrior goddess *Durga* and one of her personas, "as a good wife" to the god *Shiva.* During the abolition of Hindu ritual under colonial rule, British authorities named the widow immolation Suttee due to the total ignorance of Hindi, making the word a proper noun and, thus, turning the common noun "good wife" into a synonym for the wife who sacrifices her life. By doing so, they became an accomplice in silencing the Hindu women as a subject, imposing "upon those women a greater ideological constriction by identifying, *within the discursive practice*, good-wifehood with immolation on husband's pyre."[189]

The discourse regarding the veil in Western societies as a mechanism of religious oppression has created its own dynamics in a diasporic context and initiated a resistance based on women's right to sartorial choice. It further formed the veil as the signifier for Muslim identity. In a research paper based on over two decades of research on American Muslim communities in various parts of the United States, Yvonne Haddad explains the proliferation of the use of the hijab and veil after 9/11:

> For many of the young Muslim women who have decided to wear a hijab
> despite the fact that their mothers have never dressed Islamically, the hijab
> has become a symbol of American Islamic identity. As one Muslim leader
> once recounted to me, "If they do not wear the hijab, how will Americans
> recognize that there are American Muslims?"[190]

Many Muslim women whose mothers did not wear hijab and they themselves did not wear hijab donned one after 9/11 in the midst of growing Islamophobia. This reaction gives the sartorial practice a political dimension in a diasporic context. Egyptian feminist Leila Ahmed, in her book

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also, Shabir Ally, "Q&A: Is It Sinful to Not Wear Hijab?" Quran TV, Aug 30, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4hnD8DBdOo/ .

[187] Said, *Orientalism*, 100.

[188] Here the words *sati* and *sat* are used as a common noun in Sanskrit.

[189] Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 101.

[190] Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, "The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon," *Sociology of Religion 68,* no. 3 (Fall 2007) :254.

A Quiet Revolution (2013), documents the same phenomena: after 9/11 wearing a hijab has become an act of political and social resistance.

This situation can be further contextualized through Huma Hoodfar's case study in her famous article "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women ds: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women." She wrote that when the last Shah's father decided to modernize Iran in 1936, he passed a law banning veils and chadors in public spaces. This compulsory de-veiling had many devastating financial and social implications for women from conservative backgrounds. These women were comfortable with head coverings in public domains, and, as a result, they were forced to stay home by the men in their family or by their own standards of modesty, which made these women utterly dependent on men. Hoodfar records how this law was met with strong resistance from women, those who chose to wear veils and those who did not. During the 1980s, under the Islamic revolution, head covering became compulsory in Iran and is being met with the same resistance from all sectors of the female population. Hoodfar concludes that both struggles did not have a single religious connotation, but the resistance was ingrained in the women's right to decide for themselves. The resistance was against enforced gender norms envisaged by men. [191]

This case study helps us conclude that constructing Muslim subjectivities through a single religious lens is a fallacy because subjectivities at large are formed as a result of multiple realities. These multiple realities, such as political, cultural, class, and personal convictions, create heterogenous subjectivities, and the same is the case for Muslim subjectivities: those who do or do not wear veils.

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[191] Homa Hoodfar, "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women," in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital,* ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 9–12.

Section 2

Pious Brown Muslim Subjectivities

1.5. Religious Nationalism: Emergence of Political-Islam (Islamists) and Silencing Urban Women after 2001

Before moving to Malaysia to pursue my MA in art history in 2012, I worked as an art instructor in a co-ed private school that catered to the middle- and upper-middle-class demographic in Lahore, Punjab. While in class, I heard a male student lecturing his cohorts that every Muslim woman that goes out *bepardah* (without veil*)* in public, without a *mehram* (male blood relation*)*, is responsible for taking four men (father, brother, son, and husband*)* with her to *dosagh* (hell).[192] This religious quote (without any religious reference*)* had been circulating for some time in the city of Lahore, written on the back of rickshaws (a two-person inner-city public transport), a space often used to circulate paid advertisements in the cities.[193] The circulation of this specific concept raises a question: which female demographic was this religious advertisement targeting?

Pakistan is a poor, predominantly agricultural country, where manual labour is indispensable, turning rural women into the essential workforce. Along with working in the fields, rural women are responsible for carrying water from wells in areas with no running water, often miles away. Due to the unavailability of toilet facilities, most rural women go out in the fields alone in the middle of the night to relieve themselves. Hence, keeping rural women within the four walls of the home is a luxury most rural dwellers cannot afford, especially in Punjab and Sindh, the most densely populated agriculture-producing hubs in Pakistan.[194] Due to massive urbanization, there is a shift in rural population to urban areas, which provides lower-middle-, middle- and upper-middle-class homes with cheap domestic labour in the form of housemaids. These rural immigrant women work in multiple houses, babysitting, cooking, and cleaning to earn a living wage; they are considered an essential urban workforce. This cheap labour

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[192] Based on a naïve assumption that all women should have these four male relations.

[193] *Hadith* literally means "talk" or "discourse," in Islam refers to what Muslims believe to be a record of the words, actions, and the silent approval of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

[194] In addition to farming alongside men, women are often responsible for fetching water, sometimes from miles away to use it for domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking and washing. Zaheer Ahmad. "Role of Women in Water Management," *Pakistan Today,* June 17, 2021, https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/06/17/role-of-women-in-water-management/ .

exploitation is normalized within middle-class urban homes; hence these rural working-class women are automatically excluded as the targets of the statement above.

To further the argument around the likely targeted demographic for the religious statement within the urban contemporary Pakistani context, we must analyze the sociocultural atmosphere that arose in Pakistan after the War on Terror and US-gendered war propaganda.

Historically, women have been silenced universally, especially in more patriarchal societies. During the struggle for independence from British imperialism in the Subcontinent, the Muslim League leadership demanded an independent country for the Muslim majority population.[195] Though religion was the basis of the struggle, the Muslim leadership mobilized urban women excessively in the political struggle, which led to a great deal of ambivalence towards the role of Muslim women in an urban context. Though their political involvement was eminent for the political struggle, it was only limited to the national causes rather than their own rights, keeping the patriarchal structure intact and in place.[196]

The situation worsened under General Zia-ul-Haq's (1978–89) dictatorial regime, which propagated Wahhabi ideology in Islam. General Zia's domestic policy disapproved of female participation in all forms of indigenously evolved artistic expressions, such as dance, music, and theatre.[197] The whole of Pakistani society was reconstructed and modified into Zia's interpretation of Islam as a specific extremist ideology. This situation, in general, adversely affected all women and, in particular, educated working and middle-class urban women. The entire legal structure was reconstructed to institutionalize discrimination against women and non-Muslim citizens.[198] Urban educated women were discouraged from going out in public, and it became mandatory to cover themselves with a *chador* in governmental and media spaces.[199]

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[195] The All-India Muslim League (popularised as the Muslim League) was a political party established in 1906 in British India. Its strong advocacy, from 1930 onwards, for the establishment of a separate Muslim-majority nation-state, Pakistan, successfully led to the partition of India in 1947 by the British Empire.

[196] Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan*, 6.

[197] Indigenous here is used as locally evolved cultural practices engrained in the local customs.

[198] Jamal, "Transnational Feminism as Critical Practice," 64.

[199] There are many fractions within the Sunni sect, with Deobandi and Wahhabism the most extremist. See Moonis, "Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan," 19.
A *chador* is a large thick shawl used by many women in the subcontinent for myriad of reasons, such as protecting from cold, covering head, or and as a fashion statement. It is even used by men during the winter to protect themselves from cold. The *chador* is originally gender-neutral and protective.

General Zia used excessive force to mould Pakistan into his version of an Islamic state through female marginalization. His policies were accompanied by another subtle yet effective force: quasi-leftist/Sufi intellectuals and writers. The writer duo Bano Qudsia and Ashfaq Ahmad prolifically produced narrative-based televised plays focusing on gender and urban/rural divides, with a spiritual, leftist undertone, presented middle-class urban working women as misguided victims of modernization, misled by the Western promises of emancipation. These plays were aired on what was then the single state-run television (PTV) throughout the decade of the 80s.[200] This created a historical legacy of devaluing and diminishing the contributions of urban women who achieved economic independence in urban Pakistan.[201]

Nevertheless, even during those extremely trying times, General Zia's moral policing was met with massive resistance. It was during this time when feminism in Pakistan evolved from eclectic activist groups to an organized secular (in the Muslim context) feminist movement called خواتین محاض عمل or the Women Action Forum (WAF) (1981). This resistance was joined by men and women intellectuals, scholars, academics, artists, and working-class women from all walks of life.[202] Chapter Three discusses the resistance of women artists during General Zia's regime.

On August 17, 1988, General Zia's regime ended due to his mysterious death as his C-130 plane exploded in midair.[203] Democratic governments followed his regime, and Pakistan elected Benazir Bhutto, its first female prime minister (1989). Though religious fundamentalism already had taken firm roots in society, the next ten years of democracy, at least, superficially seemed like a short collective healing period for women. The media censorship softened towards

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[200] As a case study thirteen televised plays written by Bano Qudsia during the 80s were analysed for the purpose of this research. These plays were later complied into a book, entitled *Footpath Ki Ghass*, 2002 (Grass on the sidewalk). Out of thirteen plays, ten focused on urban women and how modernization fails them. The tile of the collection of the plays is also the title of a play. Grass growing on a side walk is a metaphor for urban/modern working women, who are used and trampled under feet as men achieve their goals in a modern society.
Bano Qudsia. *Footpath Ki Ghass* (Lahore: Sang-e-meel Publications, 2002).

[201] For details see Shahla Haeri, *No Shame for the Sun,* and Rouse, *Shifting Body Politics*. This topic will be further explored in the coming chapters.

[202] Rubina Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan,* 21; WAF Workshop proceedings of the "Plenary Discussion on Secular versus Islamic Framework," 7-8 November 1991, Lahore, cited in Jamal, "Transnational Feminism as Critical Practice," 68. The term 'secular,' here, has a specific connotation. According to the WAF, "secular does not mean anti-religion. All religions are allowed to function, but religion is a personal matter and not the matter for the state."

[203] Naziha Syed Ali, "Dawn investigations: Mystery still surrounds Gen Zia's death, 30 years on," August 17, 2018.
 https://www.dawn.com/news/1427540

female sartorial choices, and bans regarding female participation in international sports events were removed. On October 12, 1999, the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Pervez Musharraf, overthrew the democratically elected government of Mian Nawaz Sharif in a bloodless coup d'état and enforced military dictatorship in Pakistan.

Though state policies remain ambivalent and soft towards most women's issues, the social landscape in Pakistan changed after the War on Terror. The numerous drone attacks on the civilian population, along with transnational anti-Islamic media propaganda, coupled with the time when the Pakistani market was being flooded with cheap satellite dishes, provided Pakistani urban dwellers with 24-hour Western news channels such as CNN, BBC, and Fox News,[204] left Pakistanis exasperated that their sovereignty and religion was under attack.[205] Consequently, politically engaged religious extremist groups emerged, exploiting this situation for political gains, mobilizing the most right-wing segment of the Muslim urban population.[206]

Nazish Broni, in *The MMA Offensive: Three Years in Power, 2003–2005* (2006), writes how during the elections of 2002, the War on Terror and the civilian causalities were extensively used to create a West vs. Islam dichotomy, strengthening religious discourse, which resulted in the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) winning majority seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan (provinces landlocked with Afghanistan).[207]

According to Afia Zia in "Faith and Feminism in Pakistan," the most dangerous outcome of the United States using female liberation as a pretext for war was that it turned all the human causalities and deaths of thousands of Muslim men into victims of the feminist agenda.[208] The Islamists interpret the heterogeneous existence of urban women and their struggle for

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[204] In 2002, almost four million households had cable in Pakistan. Anjum Zia writes, "The reasons for this rapid growth of cable television included easy access, low cost, access to satellite channels and a huge television viewership interested in entertainment." The transmissions included 24-hour American and British News channels (Fox, CNN, and BBC). See: Anjum Zia, "Effects of Cable Television on Women in Pakistan: A Comparative Study of Heavy and Light Viewers in Lahore" (PhD diss., Lahore College for Women University, 2007), 2.

[205] According to Phillip Knightley, an ex-investigative journalist for London's *Sunday Times*, the estimated civilian casualties within a couple of years was double the amount of the number of civilians killed in the September 11 attacks. See Knightley, *The First Casualty,* 513.

[206] Political groups referred to as *Islamists* are distinguished from other Muslim fundamentalists by their insistence on engagement with political structure and state apparatus as a means of establishing a (their version) Muslim society. These were the products of the Afghan/ USSR war (funded by CIA) and saw an opportunity in post War on Terror Pakistan with ongoing US military presence in Pakistan and Afghanistan to mobilize the right wing.
These include but are not limited to: *Jama,at-e-Ismlami, Islami Jam'iyat Tulaba and Lasker-e-Tayyaba.*
For details, see Iqtidar, *Secularizing Islamists?*

[207] Brohi, *The MMA Offensive*, 59-60.

[208] Zia, "Faith and Feminism*,"* 141-142.

equality as propagation of Western ideals and anti-Muslim values. This reactionary religiopolitical view became a widespread religious-nationalist mentality, specifically targeting urban women and their representations.[209] Brohi writes how MMA targets all the cultural signifiers and identity markers, such as representations of women and media, to manifest the pious discourse. Hence, during the initial years of the War on Terror, urban women were trapped between two opposing discourses (Western colonialism and regional religious nationalism) that maintained and followed an identical agenda.

Women demanding equal rights were declared native informants on the agenda to corrupt the Muslim women of Pakistan. This situation gradually graduated urban Muslim women from victims of modernization to demons responsible for taking the nation (read: men) to *dosargh* (hell) four at a time. The Islamists constantly equate educated urban women to Western agents. Brohi writes, quoting Qazi Husain Ahmad, a leader of MMA collaboration, "West is conspiring to destroy the very basis of Muslim family unit in the name of women's liberation and gender equality in order to weaken and degenerate our society."[210]

Subsequently, the contentious subject of covering and uncovering brown Muslim female bodies had devastating consequences for urban women, minorities, and free speech activists.[211]In 2007 the 36-year minister for social welfare Zille Huma Usman was shot dead in Gujranwala (Lahore's twin city), Punjab, by an "extremist," as the press termed him. He claimed to be waging jihad against anti-Muslim forces. "Women cannot become rulers in Islam." He was also reported to have said, "she was not wearing Muslim clothing." The Dawn news further reported, "In 2004, the accused had been charged with killing four female models and injuring a dozen others and was acquitted by a local court for lack of evidence."[212] Likewise, Free speech activist Sabeen Murad, the creator of T2F, 2007 (Karachi, Sind)—a community space that invited youth to participate in open dialogue around religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and politics, with an adjacent café and a well-stocked library—was shot by two men on a motorbike in 2012.

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[209] Here, I emphasize 'urban' because, according to Pakistani historian Mubarak Ali, in rural areas, leadership is in the hands of feudalism, and as such, religious parties hardly have any foothold. Moreover, rural people in Pakistan are agriculturists, and so, they largely rely on tolerance and co-existence to survive. See Ali, *Pakistan in Search of Identity,* 62.

[210] Brohi, *The MMA Offensive*, 67.

[211] There has been a surge of blasphemy cases against minorities and attacks on minor sects. See BBC News, "Why are Pakistan's Christians targeted?," October 30, 2018. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35910331/ .

[212] Dawn News, "Woman Minister Killed by Fanatic," Feb. 21, 2007, https://www.dawn.com/news/233951/ .

Though the killers were never caught, clues to their identities point toward hardline militants.[213] The attack on Malala Yousafzai (2012) and the murder of social media sensation Qandeel Baloch (2016) are two diverse yet similar examples of urban women asserting their autonomy and being punished for it. This tendency is alarming, with numerous examples of violence against urban women who are then held responsible for bringing it on to themselves for not following Islam and not staying at home. This atmosphere has created a vigilante system of control over women and their bodies. The perpetrators are often portrayed as doing a service to the religion by public opinion on social media.[214]

This has created a very complex situation in Pakistan, especially for middle-class, educated women, who are strategically invisible within the transnational visual narratives and demonized within the regional religious polemic that emerged and gained massive public mass support due to the War on Terror and further perpetuated patriarchal Islam.[215]

Spivak traces the doubly silenced gendered colonial subaltern not only within neo/colonial historiography but also in the local revisionist history:

> Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object formation, the figure of the women disappear, not into pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization.[216]

Within Western media as well as Western feminist discourse, the "silenced" from the periphery is always a "gendered other" defined by class (rural, poor, illiterate). The images serve two purposes: one, they create a homogenized picture of the universally oppressed "other," and Two, it has a "cinematic currency" to draw attention to the backwardness of the society under review.[217] Postcolonial theorist Rajeshwari Rajan in "The Death of Subaltern," generates an alternative feminist inquiry into Spivak's famous essay *Can The Subaltern Speak?*

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[213] These are extreme cases and should not be universalised within the Pakistani context. Though at a greater risk, there are many women politicians on important positions and many feminist activists working tirelessly for gender emancipation.

[214] The religious violence has also tremendously increased public violence towards religious minorities (and different Muslim sects)

[215] There has already been a historical legacy of devaluing and diminishing the contributions of urban working women in Pakistan. Apart from the patriarchy that affects all women in Pakistan, historically within Pakistan's history Islamists and the leftist both diminished women who achieved economic independence. (As discussed earlier)

[216] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 102.

[217] Moon, Will the Women of Pakistan Please Stand up?, 74.

Rajan argues that Spivak problematizes the Third World gendered subject repeatedly misrepresented within Western discourse as well as regional nationalist history. She explicitly takes the anecdote of the suicide of an urban middle-class Bengali girl (Bhubaneswari). Rajan argues:

> Bhubaneswari *is not* subaltern, if by subaltern we mean a determinate class position. . . . The more persuasive contention is that it is Bhubaneswari's identity as female (i.e., her gender) as opposed to her class position that determines her subordination. The vulnerability of women lies in their relative disempowerment even when they enjoy class or racial privileges.[218]

Hence, we argue the nuanced existence of a heterogenous gendered subaltern is not solely a class-based category. Despite failing to communicate, there was no noticeable absence of, or incapacity for, speech on Bhubaneswari's part.[219] Hence, gendered colonial subject implies a group of gendered subjectivities who are rendered silenced under colonial or neocolonial conditions. To conclude, that specific political atmosphere that emerged in the post–War on Terror Pakistan silenced the nuanced existence of urban women, not because there was a dearth of communication on their part. However, such conditions are being created that diminish the possibility of ethical dialogue.

1.5.1. Erasing Women from Urban Spaces

Apart from the more extreme cases mentioned earlier, there were many ramifications of the religious, nationalistic tendencies that cropped out of Islam vs. West politics. The political-religious groups obliterated women's presence in urban spaces literally by censoring female faces from public billboards, advertisements, and public murals and equating salaried, educated, middle-class working women with agents of Western civilization. A few online sources have recently started documenting the phenomena of female image censoring in main cities such as Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi. However, Nazish Brohi connects this phenomenon directly to the War and Terror and the rise of political Islam.

The occasional vandalizing or censoring of female images from billboards and advertisements in the major cities started happening in 2001 by self-proclaimed religious

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[218] Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "Death and the Subaltern," in *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea,* ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2010), 120.
[219] Ibid.

moralists. The elections of 2002 and the majority win of MMA from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan province escalated the trend of censoring women from public spaces.

Only months after the MMA election victory in NWFP in 2002 election launched and approved the Hibah Act (implementation of sharia through a moral brigade).[220] The women politicians elected through MMA all followed a strict dress code of all black (Saudi Influenced) abaya and face covering with only eyes visible. According to Brohi, the sartorial choices of these women have become the benchmark for female modesty, and any other form of sartorial choices has been deemed a state of undress and hence vulgar by the Islamists.[221]

In May 2003, censoring women from public spaces became a consolidated campaign. Shabab-e-milli, the Jamaat-e-Islami's youth wing, and Tulabah Jamia Hafsa (a madrasa for women located near Lal Masjid in Islamabad) are some of the examples of Islamists using coordinating campaigns censoring female models in public spaces (which represent the heterogeneity of Pakistani urban women) (Figure 13, Figure 14, and Figure 15).

This self-styled anti-obscenity campaign drive defaced billboards that featured women by blackening their faces. Even though the images of female models in public spaces are incredibly modest, mostly in boutiques advertising regular clothes to female consumers, the defacing is usually accompanied by messages such as "fahashi, bayhayi band karo" (stop vulgarity, immorality). In other words, they equate the presence of women in public urban spaces with immorality and vulgarity.[222] Though it started in NWFP, considered a conservative province in Pakistan, this trend soon took off in other provinces. In Multan (Punjab), a mob burned billboards containing images of women in the middle of the city. A few days later, the same acts of vandalism were reported in Lahore (Punjab) and Karachi (Sindh), both cosmopolitan cities. In the areas of Gulberg Lahore and Clifton Karachi, women's faces on the billboards were blackened. Brohi explains:

> It is symbolic that the women's pictures on the billboards were defaced by being 'blackened' with paint as opposed to being 'whitened' or 'reddened' or any other color paint used. Culturally, black is equated with the loss of honour and lack of shame, and traditionally, wrongdoers would be made to sit on donkeys with their faces blackened and paraded publicly. The tribal and feudal customs of honor killing is a practice of murdering women who

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[220]Brohi, *The MMA Offensive*, 70.

[221] Ibid., 71.

[222] Ibid.

have shamed their families by committing adultery, and the women are then referred to Kari or siyah kari or Tor, translating into the "blackened women." In Urdu . . . a frequent abuse for a woman is kalmoi, meaning a woman with a black face.[223]

Hence, the connotation of blackening faces is ingrained in patriarchal cultural practices and means women who show their faces in public places are declared dishonoured.

In "Vandalism on Advertisement Boards in Pakistan," Bilal writes that this phenomenon is linked ideologically to early Muslim military expansions and the destruction of sculptures and religious figurative imagery categorized as iconoclasm. However, in the case under discussion, only female images are defaced. At the same time, the message of the advertisement, the boards, and the male models are spared.

This conveys that only women are responsible for keeping the Pakistani Muslim men out of hell by staying indoors (a reference to my example above). Bilal points out another fascinating detail: none of the business owners report the damage to the authorities, which may connote that their sales are not affected by this vandalism, or they do not have the moral courage to stand up to the religious vigilantes. Including the business community, all patriarchal structures have scummed to this belligerent censoring of women from public spheres.

The official state-sponsored urban public murals also project only the images that resonate with a religious-nationalist outlook (as all the political parties depend on religiopolitical groups to reach out to the right segment of the masses during elections). On my last trip to Lahore 2017–18*),* I took photographs of the murals on the side of the main road linking Johar town to Canal Road. These murals were a part of a provincial government's campaign to beautify the streets of Lahore. These poorly executed public mural illustrations presented women as the pious agents of religious discourse and tradition. They represented women with hijabs praying (the pious) and participating in an ancient spring festival in the Subcontinent known as *Basant mela (*cultural piety*)* (Figure 16. A week later, when I passed the same area, I saw the women's faces blackened and censored (Figure 17). The censoring of these images sent a clear message that female presence of any kind, even piety-based, was unwelcome in urban settings.

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[223] Ibid.

1.5.2. Social Media: Hijab Shaming and Burka vs Bikini Debates

The other source that the Islamists choose to curb the nuanced existence of urban women is specifically urban mediums—the 37 million social media users in Pakistan.[224] Massive campaigns, illustrations, and pages appeared right after the War on Terror, targeting women and their bodies. These religious memes, social media pages, and religious sermons circulate on the Web, shaming Muslim women for not covering up. However, these campaigns are usually not collaborative and range from advocating hijab to niqab to burqa (depending on the particular ideology of the Islamist sects). The specific genre of memes glorifies women who choose to wear burqas, niqabs, or hijabs and shames those who do not (again, depending on their ideological and sartorial standards for female modesty).

The genre ranges from memes that use orientalist languages such as "the princesses of Islam only look pretty in the veil" (translation from Urdu), targeting urban middle-class women specifically (Figure 17, Figure 18, and Figure 19). The most famous hijab shaming meme from the early 2000s depicts two lollipops wrapped and one unwrapped infested with flies, accompanied by various titles. Some titles engage men ("Would you prefer a wrapped candy or an unwrapped one?"), alternatively, it directly engages women ("Hijab is my choice"), and sometimes an indirect engagement is applied: the wrapped candy is labelled "Hijab," and the unwrapped candy gets the provocative title "You know this one" (Figure 20). These are only a few variations.

Another famous debate that pitched Western women against Muslim women started with a cartoon by famous cartoonist Malcolm Evans titled "Bikini vs Burqa" in 2006 (Figure 21). This cartoon has opened up hundreds if not thousands of extreme visual comparisons between Muslim women and Western women and how their sartorial choice should determine the respect they deserve. This burqa vs. bikini trope also resulted in a few lesser-known artworks.

1.5.3. Changing Iconography: Gogi Baji vs Burka Avenger

Apart from the popular support that emerged towards religious extremist politics that often resort to force in implementing their ideologies, the US gender propaganda of burqa-clad oppressed women had diverse effects on Pakistan's vernacular and artistic visual discourses. Though the

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[224] The number of social media users in Pakistan increased by 2.4 million (+7.0%) between April 2019 and January 2020. Social media penetration in Pakistan stood at 17% in January 2020
Simon Kemp, "Digital 2020: Pakistan." DataReportal, Feb. 18, 2020. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-pakistan/ .

second chapter deals with the proliferation of burka images in Pakistani art discourse after the War on Terror, here I would like to negotiate this phenomenon within pop-cultural imagery in an urban context.

The comic character of an urban woman from Karachi, Gogi Baji *(Baji* means big sister in Urdu), was introduced by Nigar Nasir, the first female cartoonist in Pakistan. This comic strip has been in circulation in private newspapers since 1979 and is compiled into three comic books. *Gogi Baji* appeared at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 80s as a reaction to General Zia's regime (Figure 22). At a time when women were being told that their place was in *Chaader Aur Chaar Dewari* (shawls and four walls of home), quick-witted Gogi Baji always found herself in comical yet controversial public situations clad in her iconic large polka-dotted fitted *shalwar kaeemz,* with *dupatta* hanging around her neck. She is loud, visible, and unapologetic; the signature large polka-dotted pattern of her shirt in loud colours makes *Gogi Baji* as noticeable in public as a bull's eye.

In comparison, in 2013, an award-winning animated series *Burka Avenger* directed and produced by Pakistani pop star Haroon Rasheed premiered on Nickelodeon Pakistan (Figure 23). It narrated the adventures of a schoolteacher who turns into a superhero at night, fighting for gender equality and female education. Her superhero identity is a black burka (turning the burka into the default idealized identity of Muslim women), which is presumably a local take on a superhero costume. The show devised an amazing local semantic and a brilliant theme song, "Do not mess with the lady in Black." Though the show was in Urdu, it was telecast and translated into many languages in Muslim countries.

Though the protagonist wears Pakistani urban attire during the day, her superpower lies in her black burqa at night. This extremely subversive take on an iconic garment that had come to be associated with oppression, used as a powerful superhero costume, makes this a classic feel-good show.

Gogi Baji is a woman's take on asserting her autonomy in times of crisis, and *Burka Avenger* is a man's. Gogi Baji shows us that religions and cultures are different and shape different subjectivities when combined. *Burka Avenger* seems to connect us to a transcendent religious essentialist identity through a woman's attire. Being the first female comic protagonist created by the first Pakistani female cartoonist, Gogi Baji never made headlines transnationally; *Burka Avenger* was nominated for International Emmy Awards in the Kids Animation category.

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The use of the burka as a point of collective reference within a Muslim context seems complacent to the Western academic and artistic take on the burqa/veil/niqab. However, it does not create a regional urban visual vocabulary within the South Asian context, where the black burqa does not constitute vernacular urban culture anymore. It also sends a confusing message to children, especially young girls who are constantly being brainwashed, that their superpower (saving the nation from hell, four men at a time) resides in their invisibility as Muslim women.

1.5.4. Pakistani Media After 9/11: Reading Gender

When General Pervez Musharraf took over from the elected civilian premier Nawaz Sharif in 1999, the Pakistani media world was dominated by the state-owned Pakistan Television Corporation and Radio Pakistan and an influential set of privately owned print newspapers and magazines. Following the liberalization of the electronic media sector in 2002, FM radio, satellite television, and local cable-TV operators flooded the market. During this time, Pakistan also witnessed the phenomenal growth of mobile phone and Internet usage.[225]

In less than a decade, the private media revolution in Pakistan, with the introduction of more than 100 new private channels, has made this the most robust growing industry in Pakistan. The influx of cheap technology provides 76.38 million (35% of the total population, predominately urban) viewership to these private channels and 80 million people—about half Pakistan's total population—with mobile phones. [226]

After 9/11 and the War on Terror, CNN and BBC broadcasting in Pakistan were rejected by Pakistani audiences because major discussions emerging from these newsrooms were overwhelmingly biased against a billion Muslims and turned them into a monolithic uncivilized terrorist group. At the same time, images of oppressed Muslim women from the region flooded these channels.[227] In "The Role of Private Electronic Media in Radicalising Pakistan," Kiran Hassan writes that several private 24-hour Pakistani news channels, such as GEO and ARY, BOL, emerged in the domestic war dynamics. Hence the ratings of these channels depended on anti-American propaganda[228] Hassan writes how these rating-hungry channels found a happy

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[225] Khan and Joseph, "Pakistan after Musharraf," 32–37.

[226] Kemp, DIGITAL 2020.

[227] An extensive study of Muslim and Muslim women's stereotype representations in Western media after 9/11: Peter Morey, and Amina Yaqin, *Framing Muslims: Stereotypes and Representations After 9/11* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[228] Kiran Hassan. "The Role of Private Electronic Media in Radicalising Pakistan," *The Round Table* 103, no. 1 (Fall: 2014): 66.

marriage between good ratings and emerging Islamists, "The ambitions of both the private media and the Islamic groups who sought increased influence in Pakistani politics were both served by playing the anti-American card."[229] Hence, in the context of post–9/11 Pakistan, this media dynamic ended up creating another equally monolithic West.[230] Having a high rate of illiteracy in the country, television, more than print media, determines the knowledge production of people. "Television channels, driven by the race for ratings, often sensationalize news and information that can inflame emotions."[231]

In "Understanding the Gender Dynamics of Current Affairs Talk Shows in the Pakistan Television Industry," Cheema investigates the general attitude towards female politicians in talk shows.[232] She traces the dynamic of six talk shows, concluding that the shows rarely invite female politicians, and when they do, they are not taken seriously by the anchors. However, if a female politician does not get intimidated by men, she is shamed on TV by being referred to as naive, or their morality and character are questioned. The talk shows do not take up issues of women's rights as a priority topic.

These media trends further gave oxygen to the West vs. Islam dichotomy within Pakistan, reflected in the representation of urban women within the urban setting. As already mentioned earlier, religion, culture, and traditions are visualized through women's bodies within South Asia. The West vs. Islam atmosphere perpetuated the patriarchal control of female bodies (as mentioned above). Despite the phenomenal growth of television in Pakistan, Munira Cheema's *Women and TV Culture in Pakistan* (2018) is the only in-depth study to date that examines media genres dealing specifically with gender-based content.

For television content, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) was founded on March 1, 2002, to issue licences and suspend services in cases of violation of authorized content. General Musharraf's government was considered moderate to modern; hence, it had no strict policy for female attire this time around. Women are allowed to appear on camera in westernized clothing. However, this superficial modern outlook does not reflect in the

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[229] Ibid.

[230] Awan, review of *Framing Muslims.*

[231] Beena Sarwar, "Media: New Trends, Old Problems," in South Asia 2060, ed. Adil Najam and Moeed Yusuf (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press: 2013), 285

[232] Her case study is based on six talks shows, which run three times a week. The structure of the talks shows is that three to four panelists are invited to discuss the current political issues.

content of the media. Mainstream media and private channels are dependent on ratings. In the war-torn atmosphere in Pakistan, the West vs. Islam binary is reflected even in the entertainment discourse.

In her findings, Cheema concludes that most television drama serials excessively reinforce gender stereotypes. Most serials glorify female obedience and silence, which is ultimately rewarded by success in gaining the love of their estranged husbands. Social issues such as domestic abuse raised in the serials are linked to women in a private setting. In most cases, women suffer dire consequences when they leave homes to work outside or stand up for their rights. As the current media censorship authority does not focus on female attire and women can be presented in Western clothes, this helps most male producers to create a visual dichotomy between good moral women, traditionally dressed women who stay at home and ambitious, westernized and outspoken women who invariably end up in situations that tarnish their characters.

1.6. Conclusion of the Chapter

The incident of 9/11 and the international media propaganda that followed proliferated pictures of Pakistan: women shrouded in the veil. This homogenizing of diverse cultures that encompass Pakistan turned millions of Pakistani women into the much-photographed imagery of one faceless, veiled/oppressed "other" woman.

After 9/11, within Western popular media and academic discourses, Muslim women are identified through either a veil or hijab. Historically, in the South Asian context, head-covering is not strictly associated with Islam. It has been a symbol of social and cultural modesty. It is practiced by many local Christian, Hindu, Sikh, and Zoroastrian women alike, not only in Pakistan but in India and Bangladesh as well. In most cases, it is a cultural practice that is associated with specific religious ceremonies. Amina Jamal argues that in a diasporic context,

> Islam is frequently accorded a transcendence that obfuscates our understanding of the deployment of religion in specific historical (*regional*) contexts.

Whereas,

> By historicizing Islamization as a political/cultural process rather than a fixed set of beliefs across all regions and times, we are able to see that religion acquires various forms and is differently involved in the construction of subjectivities at various times.[233]

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[233] Jamal, "Transnational Feminism as Critical Practice," 64.

Hence, I argue that the Western visual discourse after 9/11, by equating "veil," "hijab," and "burqa" with "Muslim Women," turned the hijab/veil into a spectacle through which Muslim female bodies feel compelled to identify themselves within the Western diasporic context. Though this logic of instant religious identification does apply to Muslim women, it could not be very effective in the case of Muslim men. This places the phycological burden of carrying the religious identity and religious representations to Muslim women through their sartorial choices.

However, this much-debated subject perpetuated religious nationalism within Pakistan's context.[234] As the manifestation of religious piety is evaluated through the representation of women, and as most urban-educated middle-class women did not fit into this idealized version of Islamic piety that emerged out of this debate, they ended up being deemed inauthentic. A reactionary misplaced religiosity arose using the War on Terror and turned it into a war of Islam vs. the West.

Since General Musharraf's regime (1999–2008), state policies towards women in Pakistan remain somewhat emancipatory, varying in different provinces due to cultural differences and cultural constraints, facilitating women within urban contexts to cross many gender barriers as long as they remain off the radar by not directly challenging patriarchy. They participate in various international sports, are enrolled in the armed forces, fly jets as fighter pilots, and participate in politics. Hence, paradoxically, General Musharraf's regime, on the one hand, paved the way for Islamist politics; on the other hand, even superficially, it created certain emancipatory opportunities for women.

However, unlike General Zia's regime, the piety discourse after the War on Terror comes from public opinion driven by Islamist political propaganda. Considered westernized, urban women have few visual platforms that acknowledge their struggle and contribution. The West vs. Islam rhetoric only applies to especially urban women (and not men) who harbour societal resentment. Unlike rural women who are embedded in cultural and traditional discourses, urban

Islam itself is not a homogenous identity in Pakistan. The Pakistani population is divided between majority Sunni (70%) and minority Shite sects (25%), as well as other religious minorities (5%) such as Ahmadiyya, Christian, Hindu, and Parse. There are many fractions within the Sunni sect, with *Deobandi* and *Wahhabism* the most extremist. See Moonis, "Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan," 19.

[234] In 2002, almost four million households had cable in Pakistan. Anjum Zia writes, "The reasons for this rapid growth of cable television included easy access, low cost, access to satellite channels and a huge television viewership interested in entertainment." The transmissions included 24-hour American and British News channels (Fox, CNN, and BBC). See Zia, "Effects of Cable Television on Women in Pakistan," 2.

women occupy untraditional modern spaces. Hence, the sociocultural/nationalist religious conditions that emerged after the War on Terror made the nuanced existence of the urban woman further disappear "into a violent shutting."[235]

However, before the dissertation deliberates on the reactionary feminist response to this social landscape and more subversive forms of the artist and pop-cultural expressions of feminist autonomy, Chapter Two will discuss how the start of 9/11 media propaganda left artists feeling interpellated. Hence the following chapter documents the sudden proliferation of burqa images within Pakistani art and how these burqa images were absorbed into transnational art. It further dwells into the gendered representational within Pakistani art retrospectively to argue how the burqa image was not part of Pakistani visual language before 9/11.

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[235] Spivak, Can the Subaltern Speak?, 306.

Chapter 2
Tracing Burqa in Contemporary Pakistani Art after 9/11

The main focus of this chapter is to locate the sudden proliferation of burqa images within Pakistani art discourse, especially during the first decade of the War on Terror. The hype around veiled Muslim bodies initiated a sudden demand for veiled imagery internationally, resulting in the visibility of veiled images within the art world. The sudden emergence of burqa (veil) images in contemporary Pakistan right after 9/11 further validates the contention that these veiled images were a product of gender politics created by the U.S media after 9/11. This Chapter argues that the US media's repetitive use of gendered veiled bodies as a political tool warranted a response from the artistic community.

The chapter documents the artistic expressions of Pakistani male artists using burqa images signifying either US imperialist designs in the region, a symbol of religious nationalism or both. his chapter refers to these artworks as "first-generation responses." The term first-generation was coined as an overarching term of convenience to discuss significant artworks after 2001 by male Pakistani artists who used the image of the burqa specifically as a political response to the War on Terror gender propaganda. These first-generation responses do not necessarily designate the chronological order in which they appear in this chapter. As the chapter unfolds, the transnational reception of some artworks will be discussed to argue that these artworks were created for transnational white interlocutors, and most of them got lost in the translation.

The chapter looks further at female representations retrospectively within the works of mainstream canonical Pakistani male modernist artists from a feminist lens. It argues that burqa images that proliferated after 2001 were not part of the mainstream Pakistani art discourse before 9/11. Secondly, the chapter aims to reinforce that female consciousness within colonial and revisionist history is often construed in response to various ideological imperatives and is often spoken for, as argued by Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

2.1. The Proliferation of Burqa Images in Art

In the Western context, the horrific incidents of September 11, 2001, and the visual propaganda around veiled gendered Muslim bodies, coupled with the images of violent Muslim men, helped turn the War on Terror into a humanitarian mission. These political media discourses instigated Islamophobia, leading to racially and religiously motivated hate crimes against

Muslims worldwide. Anti-Muslim activities have increased markedly since the late 2000s. The Council on American-Islamic Relations ("CAIR") documents the rise of Muslim-hate activities in the United States by cataloguing 763 separate incidents from 2012 to 2018.[236]

In a diasporic context, anti-Muslim propaganda reaped its own dynamics for the veiled Muslim woman, who finds herself in a precarious position. The veil became not only the symbol of oppression but, at the same time, it "marked" Muslim women as terrorist sympathizers. Hence, in the aftermath of September 11, Muslim women have increasingly been targets for harassment.[237]

This neo-orientalist-inspired massive US propaganda machine brought Muslim-gendered bodies under direct transnational observation. The intense scrutinization of veiled Muslim bodies in the diaspora started a heated debate regarding Muslim women and their traditional sartorial choices and the contention that these choices conflicted with secular Western values. Many European countries levied bans on hijabs and niqabs in public.[238]

With the stated hope of creating an understanding between Western and Islamic traditions, numerous art exhibitions were organized around the themes of veil and veiling. These exhibitions were also motivated by Western curiosity towards veiling as a Muslim practice. I argue this trend perpetuated certain double ethnocentrism within art discourses transnationally. There was a proliferation of exhibitions within transnational art praxis presenting veiling as a quintessential Muslim sartorial practice. Artists from the Muslim world participated, and these images reinvigorated the existing Western vocabulary associated with a single narrative created around Muslim bodies by the US media. I choose to explain the sudden

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[236] See: "Muslim Diaspora Initiative, Anti Muslim Activities in United States 2012-2018," *New America.*
 https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/anti-muslim-activity/

[237] Sahar F. Aziz, "From the Oppressed to the Terrorist: Muslim-American Women in the Crosshairs of Intersectionality." *Hastings Race & Poverty Law Journal* 9 (2012): 191.

[238] On 11 April 2011, France became the first European country to ban the full-face Muslim veil in public places. The ruling coalition agreed in January 2017 to prohibit full-face veils (niqab and burka) in public spaces such as courts and schools, with the law coming in to force in October the same year.
A law banning the full-face veil came into effect in Belgium in July 2011.
In November 2016, Dutch MPs backed a ban on the Islamic full veil in public places such as schools and hospitals, and on public transport.
The Danish parliament approved a bill in May 2018 to punish anyone wearing a full-face veil and bill l 21 in Quebec (2018) are a few examples. BBC News, "The Islamic Veil across Europe," May 31, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13038095/ .

interest in the *consumption* of veiled images, specifically within the *transitional art* world, through an unconventional theoretical framework: quantum mechanics.[239]

Quantum mechanics is a branch of science that deals with the behaviour of matter on the atomic and subatomic scales. One of the most striking theories in quantum mechanics is that observation affects reality: the act of watching the body of matter alters the reality under observation. This principle is known as the *Observer Effect*. The principle states that atomic particles alter their behaviour when they are being observed under laboratory conditions. Electrons under observation are "forced" to behave like particles and not like waves. "The mere act of observation affects the experimental findings."[240]

"Historically, the observer was intuitively assumed to be a passive entity, independent of what is being observed." Physicists were the first to recognize observer effects during the development of quantum mechanics; it was only later that observer effects were recognized in other fields, including sociology, psychology, linguistics, and computer science.[241] In sociology, this phenomenon is known as the *Hawthorne Effect* after the early research study at the Hawthorne Works in Cicero, Illinois, "where it was found that individuals appeared to modify their behaviour as a result of an awareness of being observed, rather than any changes in the working conditions."[242] Hence, the physical law of actors changing their behaviour under intense observation can be traced in transnational artistic practice, from curators to art critics and the audience. I argue that the sudden hypervisibility and keen observation of the invisible subjectivities (veiled bodies) through print, news, and social media also changed the pattern of the creation and reception of these images. In other words, while the sudden hype around

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[239] My late father, Syed Meenoo Chehr (1940–2020) was an amateur quantum physics enthusiast. When he passed away, he was in the midst of translating *A Brief History of Time* by Stephen Hawking. Hence, growing up, I was introduced to the wonders of quantum physics, such as the Higgs boson, the observer effect, and the mysteries of the universe's hidden dimensions.

[240] Weizmann Institute of Science. "Quantum Theory Demonstrated: Observation Affects Reality." *ScienceDaily.* Feb. 27, 1998, https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/1998/02/980227055013.htm/ .

[241] K. Baclawski, "The Observer Effect," *2018 IEEE Conference on Cognitive and Computational Aspects of Situation Management (CogSIMA),* (June 2018) 83–89.

[242] Ibid. See also Richard Herbert Franke and James D. Kaul. "The Hawthorne Experiments: First Statistical Interpretation." *American Sociological Review* (Summer 1978): 623–43. The Hawthorne Plant studies, and the concept of a Hawthorne effect that emerged from this seminal research, stand among the most influential social science research of the 20th century. The purported influence of observation on measured treatment effects in these experiments has led to a proliferation of research and methodologies to control for the confounding influence that scrutiny can have. Steven D. Levitt and John A. List. "Was there really a Hawthorne effect at the Hawthorne plant? An analysis of the original illumination experiments." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics 3,* no. 1 (2011): 224–38.

Muslim veiled bodies changed the conditions of their reception within the global curatorial art praxis, it also affected their increased creation.[243]

Since 2001 there has been a myriad of exhibitions worldwide, with corresponding scholarship, on the themes of veiling and Muslim women. An example is *The Veil* (2003), a travelling exhibition organized by inIVa (London) at The New Art Gallery Walsall; the Bluecoat Gallery & Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool; and Modern Art Oxford. The exhibition was accompanied by a publication edited by David A. Baily and Gilane Tawadros, *Veil: Veiling, Representation, and Contemporary Art*, containing scholarly articles on the traditions and evolution of veiling in archaic as well as contemporary societies. *Unveiling: New Art from the Middle East* (2009) was another significant curatorial project by the Saatchi Gallery, London. *Maharam – Footnotes on Veiling* (2007) held at the *santralistanbul* in Istanbul. The *Veil: Visible and Invisible* (2012), a documentary exhibition at Saint Mary's College Museum of Art, was a visual response to Jennifer Heath, *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics.* Furthermore*, Shirin Neshat: Facing History* (2015), including her "Women of Allah" photographs, was held at the Hirshhorn in Washington.[244]

The post–9/11 propaganda affected not only transnational art praxis and consumption but also the production of images representing Muslim women. In Pakistan specifically, right after 2001, the US media's images of veiled women served as the pretext for the war (as discussed in Chapter One), generating stark resentment against Western values. As Spivak argues, "because there are sex-gender systems in operation everywhere, women are used as an excuse for violence."[245] With the proliferation of veiled images associated with the region within mainstream Western media and their consumption in the art world, the Pakistani artistic community felt the need to respond. Paradoxically, as a response, many Pakistani artists used the same trope. Hence, one sees a sudden surge of burqa images in the works of contemporary Pakistani artists immediately after 2001. These veiled images as a response were further

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[243] As mentioned, the images did not change themselves but due to the change in receptions, conditions in curatorial practices changed, further effecting their creation practice.

[244] Since 2001, there is a plethora of scholarships surrounding the topic of veil/veiling in context to Muslim women.

[245] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Globalicities: Terror and its Consequences," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 4, no. 1 (2004): 87.

The consequent war had devastating consequences and resulted in the loss of thousands of civilian lives and as discussed in Chapter One, had a massive effect on the sociocultural discourse, reenforcing religious nationalism and religious patriarchy.

augmented by the focus on the veil and veiling in transnational art praxis and consumption of the veiled images in the art world.

This paradoxical phenomenon of using the burqa trope by Pakistani artists to respond to the stereotyping is framed through Rey Chow's text "Interpellation of the ethnic subject." Using Slavoj Zizek's divergent take on Althusser's concept of interpellation, Chow calls this unconscious automatization, impersonation, or mimicry of certain beliefs, rituals and practices "corrosive mimeticism."[246]

2.2. Hypervisibility of the Invisible: Coercive Mimeticism and First-Generation Art

As opposed to more indirect feminist artistic expressions discussed in the coming chapters, the first-generation responses were reactionary artworks that responded directly to the United States' exploitation of women's liberation as an excuse for violence and war. Most of the artworks have highly politically charged themes, but what links them is that they were all created after 2001 and used the image of a burqa. The documentation of these artistic productions is significant because, as discussed later comprehensively, before 2001, the burqa image was not, notably, part of the mainstream artistic vocabulary in Pakistani art discourse. Hence, the sudden proliferation of burqa images in contemporary Pakistani art was intrinsically intertwined with Pakistani artists' engagement with transnational art praxis in the context of September 11.

These first-generation artworks were truly transnational in spirit and attempted to address white interlocutors regarding War on Terror propaganda. I call these artworks transnational in spirit because these works were specifically created to address the transnational trope of a religiously oppressive gender stereotype by using the very same image. This strategy was to address Western audiences with a language familiar to them, a language that transnational art praxis was receptive to at that time.

Chow explains that interpellation works within the confines of an institutional apparatus—in our case, the visual representation in media and Western art praxis—by creating a community interdependence through ghettoizing an ethnicity, hailing the ethnic not only from within the (abstract) ghetto but also from outside it by institutional force. Chow acknowledges that this theory of interpellation has been criticized because it deprives the ethnic subject of its

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[246] Rey Chow. *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2002), 110.

agency. In response, Chow suggests that interpellation works in such a way that it demands a response. The hailing is in itself a trap that works either way: If ethnics do not respond, the representation prevails uncontested; if the ethnic contests the image, it falls into the trap of the admittance and the reproduction of a specific version of their ethnicity that has already been endorsed and approved by the specialists in the field. Hence, the mere response automatically grants the ideology its legitimacy. This ultimately works as "an institutionalized mechanism of knowledge production and dissemination, the point of which is to manage a non-Western ethnicity through the disciplinary promulgation of the supposed difference." Chow calls this phenomenon coercive mimeticism.[22]

After the enthusiastic reception of a few artists using the veil in their work, there were a plethora of veiled images from Pakistan. This convenient visual narrative was absorbed and much appreciated in the global art market. Some of the initial significant artworks containing a burqa image and their reception within transnational art praxis are analyzed below and discussed at length, broadly divided into three political themes.

2.2.1. Burqa as a Metaphor for Neo-Imperialism

Imran Qureshi, an accomplished miniaturist, created one of the most subtle uses of the burqa image to criticize US media propaganda. *How to Cut a Burqa* (2002) (Figure 24), measuring 27×22 cm, is part of a series of four contemporary political miniatures.[247] The other three works are titled *How to Cut a Fashion Brassiere* (2000) (Figure 25), *Difference between American & English Jacket* (2002) (Figure 26), and *The Military Pantaloon Has More Pockets than the Civilian One* (2002) (Figure 27).

The four contemporary miniatures were acquired in 2002 by the Monsoon Art Collection, a collection of international contemporary art established by Peter Simon in 2000 and displayed at the Monsoon Accessorize headquarters.[248] The collection is displayed throughout the

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[247]After Shahzia Sikandar, Imran Qureshi is attributed to have brought traditional Indo-Persian miniature into the realm of contemporary art. Gradated in 1993 he is considered as one of the most successful and innovative contemporary miniaturists, probably in the world.
Whiles. *Art and Polemic in Pakistan*.

[248] Monsoon & Accessorize are two of the UK's leading High Street retailers with 1052 locations in 72 international markets. Comprising over 300 works known for its holdings of works from Central and South America, Africa and Asia. Resonating with Monsoon's own history of ethical trading with local craftspeople in Asia, Afghanistan and India, many of the works in the collection explore themes of cultural exchange and diversity, identity politics and travel and globalization. http://monsoonartcollection.com/imran-qureshi/ .

headquarters of the retail clothing chain in west London. The collection offers no political or historical contextualization of the works on its webpage.

As can be deduced from the date, *How to Cut a Burqa* (2002) was probably one of the first artistic responses to September 11 and War on Terror propaganda using the image of a veil. Qureshi is known for his cutting humour and wit among his circle of friends, as reflected in his works. Hence, it is no surprise that his response to this shift in gender politics was also humorous.

The artwork on a treated *wasli* paper creates an effect of a torn aged page from a sewing book. [249] The illustrative images of different pieces of cloth to be stitched together and scissors accompany written instructions in Urdu on how to cut the cloth to stitch a burqa.

If analyzed along with the other work, for example, the *Military Pantaloon Has More Pockets than the Civilian One* (2002) and the *Difference between American & English Jacket* (2002), only an informed audience can connect these artworks to the colonial and neocolonial and militarized history of Pakistan. The *Military Pantaloon Has More Pockets than the Civilian One* (2002) is a humorous criticism of the conflicting role of the Pakistani military during the Cold War and War on Terror. As an American ally during the Cold War, it created an extremist force, and during the War on Terror, it fought it. The pockets also indicate the monetary benefits the military receives from such allyship. The *Difference between American & English Jacket* (2002) is yet another ironic take on different forms of colonialization in the region, historically by the British and, more recently, by the United States.

Created in the same context, *How to Cut a Burqa* (2002) highlights the paradoxical tug-of-war between fundamentalist and newly formed US policies.[250] One enforces the use of the burqa to impose a religious ideology to gain power locally; the other uses the very image to justify its imperialistic policies.[251] Hence, in Qureshi's work, the burqa signifies the visual side of political/ideological and imperialistic inspiration performed through gendered bodies. The

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[249] *Wasli,* a kind of handmade paper, is the traditional support for the miniature painter and involves gluing sheets of fine cotton together, painting and polishing to achieve a highly burnished effect, prepared by trained miniaturists in the subcontinent.

[250] As explained before in the Chapter One , how the US created a fundamental force against USSR in Afghanistan known as the Mujahadeens, propagating Wahabi Ideology.

[251] Wahabi ideology

word "cut" implies the violent implementation of the dichotomic polemics both by colonial impositions and regional religious patriarchal discourse.

As thoroughly analyzed in Chapter One, since 2001, Pashtun and Afghan women have been scapegoated for the imperialistic presence in the region. Ironically, these women are always absent in statist history and archives.[252] Spivak calls it the "doubly effaced itinerary" of the colonial gendered subaltern subject. Qureshi's artwork highlights this paradox, as both contradictory forces seem to be deciding for the third party—women—who are invisible not only from this decision-making but also from Qureshi's miniature, visualized only through a piece of cloth. In this light, the artwork has a universal connotation around the world where patriarchal powers make uninformed decisions for women and their bodies, sometimes in the name of religion and other times of civilization.[253]

Rashid Rana (b.1968, Lahore) is a high-profile artist who used the burqa trope as a political tool to comment on the US media and its creation of a veiled oppressed brown Muslim body. At the time of this writing, Rana is one of Pakistan's most celebrated and influential artists.

When Rana was a mid-career artist, his *Veil Series I, II & III* (2004) became one of his most controversial and most celebrated artworks. It was shown at his solo exhibition at Nature Morte in New Delhi, Chatterjee & Lal in Mumbai, and Bose Pacia in New York in 2004–5. Another work, *Veil IV* was exhibited in London, at the Albion Gallery, in a group exhibition titled *The Politics of Fear* (2007).[254]

The *Veil Series* is one of Rana's best-known artworks to date and is recorded as the paradigm of contemporary art from Pakistan in Terry Smith's *World Art Currents* (2011). These enormous photographic prints measuring approximately 177.8×130.5 cm were a phenomenal success in the art market. The artworks truly mark the transition of contemporary Pakistani art

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[252] Xenia Rasul, "Time to Rewrite Pashtun Women Back to History," *Nia daur*, Sept. 23, 2020, https://nayadaur.tv/2020/09/time-to-rewrite-the-pashtun-woman-back-into-history/ .

[253] For example, in Texas a law has been passed that prohibits abortions as early as six weeks—before some women know they are pregnant—and opens the door for almost any private citizen to sue abortion providers and others stakeholders.
Shannon Najmabadi, "Gov. Greg Abbott Signs into Law one of Nation's Strictest Abortion Measures, Banning Procedure as Early as Six weeks into a Pregnancy," *Texas Tribune,* May 19, 2021, https://www.texastribune.org/2021/05/18/texas-heartbeat-bill-abortions-law/ .

[254] Rashid Rana Asal Private Auction, Nov. 20–22, 2012, https://www.saffronart.com/auctions/postwork.aspx?l=7695/ ; idem, Catalogue Essay, *Veil IV,* Mar. 27, 2007. https://www.phillips.com/detail/rashid-rana/UK000111/25/ .

from regional to global—as, due to the graphic nature of the images (which will be discussed shortly), they were never intended to be displayed in Pakistan.[255]

Veil III (2004) (Figure 28) shows frontal portraits of women heavily covered by drapes are paradoxical as they are portraits of invisible faces. At a glance, the images reinforce the mainstream US media's homogenization of brown Muslim bodies taken from specific Taliban-dominated regions. As an iconic image, the shuttlecock became a universalized symbol of misplaced piety in Muslim societies, primarily associated with Afghanistan and Pakistan after September 11. The folds of the veils of these static standing figures of five women appear to have a mosaic-like quality. The picturesque and pixelated stylized forms remind the trained eye of French postimpressionists such as Paul Signac and Georges-Pierre Seurat (pointillism), combined with the morbidity of seventeenth-century vanitas still-life. The post-impressionistic quality of the digital print is due to the pixelated nature of the photomontage.

The shadows and highlights of folded drapery of veils appear to be created by dots in hues of blue and pink. As one draws closer to work, one becomes aware of Rana's duality. What seems like pixelated mosaics, on a closer look, turns into small-scale hardcore pornographic images of white female bodies in various sexually explicit poses (Figure 29).

Thousands of small-scale pornographic images of female bodies downloaded from porn sites highlight the voyeuristic or sexually exploitative gaze that forms a large part of mainstream Western visual culture. These smaller images collectively form the original larger veiled images. The naked bodies as "pixels" give the larger image soft, rosy tones; blue backgrounds bring depth to the landscape. At first, the pornographic images that compose the Veils seem an unlikely juxtaposition of opposites; then, one grasps the sardonic relevance. The thousands of naked women seem as depersonalized and faceless as the women behind the veil. Using the two blatantly opposite tropes, Rana highlights the presence and the absurdity of both clichés, the homogenized oppressed brown bodies as well as universally eroticized white bodies.

This artwork uses two tropes as a trap to engage its intended audience in a dialogue. The stereotype of burqa-clad Muslim women engages the white man and his desired saviour syndrome regarding othered Muslim invisible brown bodies. Spivak frames this as "white men

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[255] One of his prints was sold for almost 50,000$, making Rana of the most expensive Pakistani artist at that time.

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saving brown women from brown men." The hypersexualized white female bodies, in turn, feed the brown man's fixation on the imagined eroticized white woman.

I offer an alternative perspective on Rana's photomontage that extends beyond veil vs nide rhetoric. As mentioned earlier, most analyses on Rana's veil series dwell on the overt brown/white female body dichotomy within feminist discourse. The female body has long been used as a trope for nationhood, religion, or region in such usages as the mother goddess, motherland, and the like. In the context of historical Western European representations, women, preferably nude, were a common trope in the sixteenth century for the personification of the New World, intertwined with the prospects of economic exploitation and geopolitical domination.[256] In most representations, this feminization of the land is suggestive of something to be hailed, claimed, occupied, and conquered. [257] Therefore, envisaging colonized land as the feminine is one way of instilling castration anxiety and, hence, inferiority in the minds of native men.[258] Hence, instead of looking at women in the Veil Series as brown and white gendered subjects, I argue that we visualize them only as signifiers for colonial stimuli.

The binary created by Rana constructs Western ontological and epistemological assumptions toward the periphery. The gendered sartorial signifiers are a powerful shorthand for the colonizers to highlight a native culture's inferiority and all that the empire must correct. Hence, the larger veiled images represent the decadent East as seen by the West. It further highlights the white man's alleged ontological superiority over periphery cultures and their mission to civilize savages.[259]

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[256] Louis Montrose, "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery," *Representations 33* (Winter 1991): 2.

[257] Lia Markey, "Stradano's Allegorical Invention of the Americas in Late Sixteenth-Century Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 426.

[258] The fears of genital loss, shrinkage or sexual weakness take their culturally distinctive forms-and links them to that broader class of anxieties, both sex and gender-related, that are metaphorically termed castration anxiety Laurence J. Kirmayer "From the Witches' Hammer to the Oedipus Complex: Castration Anxiety in Western Society," *Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review* 29, no. 2 (January 1992): 113.

[259] "Historians attentive to the work done by textiles have shown that virtually all colonial and postcolonial regimes turned to clothing to shape the gendered subjectivities they understood to be compatible with their ambitions." Hence, colonial powers have historically used female attire to define colonized cultures as inferior. In Leora Auslander, "Deploying Material Culture to Write the History of Gender and Sexuality: The Example of Clothing and Textiles." *Clio: Women, Gender, History* 40 (2015):166.
Emma Tarlo in "Clothing Matters," writes about the documentation of indigenous *Juang tribe* women from Bengal (India) and the painful documentation of the an otherwise an extremely isolated group in front of before "clothing the savage women in inducing them to wear garments." (xviii).

Meanwhile, the presence of innumerable orifices strategically located within the larger contradictory veiled women indicate hundreds of penetrative possibilities and stand as a metaphor for the physical availability of the land to be possessed and represented.

In another alternative political interpretation, the dichotomy of the images in the photomontage, veiled and naked, can also be construed as the United States' contradictory policies towards the region during the Cold War and after September 11.[260] As discussed in Chapter One, the US military played a massive role in the creation of an ideological, religious fundamental force in Afghanistan against the USSR, the same ideology they were up against during the war on terror

I conclude the analysis by claiming that the Afghan burqa, a symbol of universal religious patriarchy, and the hypersexualized and eroticized white women are both productions of the Western patriarchal gaze with preconceived notions attached within Western societies. Hence, in the absence of intense historical contextualization, these images only perpetuate a Western point of view within a transitional context. Therefore, all the interpretations discussed above call for an informed audience and a complex understanding of the historical role of US policies towards the region.

Moreover, Rana's *Veil Series* turns female bodies into "signifiers"—as symbols of oppression, objectified entities, or generic metaphoric emblems within colonial or nationalist discourses. In all cases, these paintings turn female bodies (brown or white) into passive mediums as arenas for the contestation of various patriarchal ideologies. Rana himself clarifies in one of his interviews,

> This work is not about women's rights per se; I am not a crusader towards any specific cause. I try to make work that broadens perceptions rather than compartmentalise them further into divisions created through pigeonholes.[261]

By using female bodies—white or brown—as tropes, clichés, and political allegories, Rana's artwork does not ethically engage with women as human beings. I argue that his work

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[260] There are innumerable [Please refer to footnote 151] studies, researches and books narrate the US military and CIA's in creating Islamic religious force against USSR during the last phases of cold war and have been mentioned in Chapter One.

[261] VP Sharma, "Unveiling the Veil: Pakistani Artist Rashid Rana Uses Pornographic Images of Women to Create the Burkha in His Critique of Cultural Stereotypes of Women," *Open,* Aug. 13, 2010, https://openthemagazine.com/art-culture/unveiling-the-veil/ .

fails to fully engage with the consciousness of the gendered subjects behind the veil, the exposed naked bodies that constitute the veils, or even the gendered audience standing in front of the painting. This absence of female consciousness in his work and the success of this painting in the art world evokes the universal artistic appeal of the traditional male gaze in works of canonical male artists in Western and Eastern art history. The male gaze within the early artistic practice in the works of canonical Pakistan artists is briefly discussed later in the chapter.

2.2.2. Burqa as a Symbol of Gender-Based Piety: Regional-Nationalist Responses Against US Propaganda

Miniaturist **Kausar Iqbal** (b.1983, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**)** graduated from the National College of Arts in Lahore in 2006, and is best known for beautifully composed burqas, *Burqah Series* (2009) (Figure 30). Originally from Sakhakot, a remote area, Kausar Iqbal represents his regional culture as that of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. His burqa-clad women in groups are shown against vague, ambivalent backdrops rather than in confined spaces. These women are represented in bold blue colourful prints, often surrounded by men or walking in groups. Sometimes these women are arranged in what could be termed kaleidoscopic composition, forming a flower through repetitive patterns of burqas.

The artist is mindful of the Pakhtunkhwa region's conservative nature, which is reflected in his work in which he suggests the conservative and other perspectives around the issue of the burqa. Iqbal writes in his artist statement: "Some people see the Burqah as a form of oppression whereas for *many women* it affords a sense of security in a male-dominated society."[262] The curatorial statement on the official gallery page when his *Burqah Series* was exhibited in a group show in 2009 at 12 Gate Gallery reads: "He also honours women by painting a captivating BURQAH *Series* which highlights the fortitude and strength of Pakistani women."[263] We can see that Iqbal, in his statement, speaks of "many women," whereas the curatorial statement universalizes the image by generalizing it to "Pakistani women." These subtle curatorial interpretations reinforce a certain homogenized image of Pakistani women, making the easy assumption or speculating that all Pakistani women can be represented through one piece of clothing.

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[262]Hidayat Khan, "Small Wonders: Through the Looking-Glass of Kausar Iqbal." *Express Tribune,* Sept. 2014. https://tribune.com.pk/story/758925/small-wonders-through-the-looking-glass-of-kausar-iqbal/ .
[263] Twelve Gates Art Gallery, "Kausar Iqbal," 2009, http://www.twelvegatesarts.org/kausar-iqbal/ .

Another well-known artist who successfully negotiated the burqa in his art is **Jamil Baloch** (b.1972, Nushki). Baloch painted many Afghan burqa images during the first decade of the twenty-first century, which were exhibited internationally, but one of his works stands out among the rest of his burqa-based oeuvre (Figure 31).

The sculptural installation *Untitled* (2007) (Figure 32) was initially exhibited outside the National Art Gallery at Islamabad, Pakistan's first national art gallery, built on a small hillock opposite the Majlis-e-Shoora (the parliament) and the Aiwan-e-Sadr (the presidential palace). General Pervaiz Musharraf inaugurated it during his regime on August 26, 2007.[264]

The sculptural installation comprises six veiled figures cast in fibreglass. Each of these larger-than-life figures stands 10 feet tall. This group of faceless closed, formed women veiled in black covering creates an overpowering silhouette. The cone-shaped images of veiled stylized female bodies ironically also bear a resemblance to the phallic-shaped army-sponsored installation of missile heads installed in different parts of cities to evoke Pakistan's pride in being a nuclear power. These tactics also keep the army's role as the saviour of the nation intact.[265] Unintentionally, yet ironically, the artform joins two iconic symbols of Pakistani nationalistic pride—nuclear warheads (military) and pious women (religion)—all tied up in a universal symbol of patriarchy, giant phalluses.

Originally from Baluchistan, Jamil Baloch, through these larger-than-life sculptures, conveys how "Westerners" may view the burqa as a form of incarceration for women, whereas in eastern cultures—regardless of how they dress—women are strong and play a larger-than-life role in society. This interpretation certainly made sense in the context that, at the time of the inauguration of the National Gallery, 60 percent of the artists on exhibit were women.[266] The use of black instead of blue suggests not his regional (tribal) background but an urban relevance. The blue burqa is regionally specific to Afghan tribes, whereas the black burqa has an urban relevance historically, especially in the region of Punjab. However, Jamil uses a stylized version of the more recent Saudi-influenced abaya and niqab, a sartorial choice for women, extremely

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[264] Pervez Musharraf is a Pakistani politician and a retired four-star general who became the tenth president of Pakistan after the successful military takeover of the federal government (1999-2009). https://www.discover-pakistan.com/national-art-gallery-pakistan.html

[265] Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan has spent several decades under military rule: From 1958 – 1971, and 1977 – 1988 and 1999 – 2008.

[266] S. Abbas Raza, "Pakistan's New National Art Gallery," transcript from NBC News, Sept. 18, 2007, https://www.3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2007/09/pakistans-new-n.html/ .

popular among the Islamists. Later, the installation was transported to many locations. In 2017 the figures were installed outside the Karachi art summit.

Alternatively, the installation of the grandiose burqa-clad women outside the National Art Gallery and later at the Karachi art summit needs to be analyzed not only in the face of the religious-political backlash in Pakistan after the September 11 propaganda but also in the context of recent regional history and General Zia's censorship policies.

The manifestations of Cold War policies in Pakistan kept General Zia in power for eleven years. Art historian and artist Quddus Mirza explains General Zia's impact on art culture in Pakistan. Due to his policy of censoring media and art, many artists could not exhibit their works in state-run galleries. This fact generated a need for a "number of private galleries (initially one in Lahore, two in Karachi and one in Islamabad)." [267] Mirza notes, "If, on the one hand, these were venues for artists who could not be shown in state-controlled spaces, these and other private galleries (established later) also encouraged a sense of commercialism in Pakistani art. Hence, freedom of expression and freedom of the market evolved side by side."[268] General Zia had a special dislike for sculpture, which he deemed un-Islamic—unless it was torsos of national heroes and his own. These idiosyncrasies were instilled in the minds of the masses, who started to associate artistic expression, especially sculptures, with prejudices attached to idols in Islam.[269] This situation impacted art reception and consumption in Pakistan. Public art vanished from the lives of the masses, cultivating a culture of disdain for art, while exclusive private galleries opened with limited access to the elite.

With the relaxation of censorship policies, many artists and activists have made a conscious effort, with some help from the state, to introduce installations and sculptures to the masses and in public spaces in recent years. This trend took off during General Musharraf's regime. As already discussed in the introduction and Chapter One, Musharraf, during his regime (1999–2008), as an ally of the United States, introduced moderate to modern state policies to curb extremism in Pakistan. As part of this persona, he initiated the National Art Gallery in Islamabad to show Pakistan's softer image to the world. We have also discussed how his

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[267] Mirza, "Zia's Long Reach."
[268] Ibid.
[269] Ibid.

contradictory internal politics facilitated the swing extremist political vote to gain political leverage

Hence, I argue that the state well-calculated that the introduction of three-dimensional figurative art installations during the General Musharraf regime reflected his contradictory politics. The large sculptures of black burqa-clad women not only introduced sculptural forms in public but did not spark any outrage from the rightist segment of society (especially the rightest parties that Musharraf depended on for his political leverage). Baluch's work, though a result of post–War on Terror gendered politics, also made an excellent choice for a state torn between rights to artistic expression and pacifying the religious right, a potential vote bank.

However, since the fall of General Musharraf's regime, the state policies towards art have been ambivalent. But the artistic initiatives that started during Musharraf's time have continued, even with little help from the state. These artistic initiatives include Pursakoon Karachi (2013), Karachi Art Summit (2017), Karachi Biennale (2017–2019) and Lahore Biennale 01–02 (2018–2020). The Awami Art Collective was initiated in 2015 by a group of artists and activists taking current local and regional issues and cultural practices as a core to engage with the community. These initiatives are bringing art back into the lives of the common urban public, using venues such as historical buildings and parks open to the general public.

2.2.3. Burqa as a Symbol of Religious Patriarchy

Wasim Ahmad (b. 1976, Hyderabad) is another accomplished miniaturist whose earlier work is embellished with images of the burqa.[270] His work was the first piece of contemporary art from Pakistan acquired for the British Museum in 2010.[271] The work is a miniature *Untitled* (2009), created on a handmade *wasli* paper measuring 39.40×22.90 cm. With a dark, textured upper half, the lower half of the miniature depicts a mullah (clergy) standing in the centre of the composition as if walking upon the striking blue waves (Figure 33). Upon closer inspection, one realizes that a pool of flowing iconic blue burqas is arranged in a circular composition beneath the man's feet. The work, consistent with Ahmad's oeuvre, is a sharp criticism of misogyny cloaked in religion.

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[270] He graduated from National College of Arts in 2000, and his first interregional exhibition, *Burqa Series (scripting a new world)* (2008) was held in New Delhi. His *Silver Bullet,* at Laurent Delaye Gallery in London (2010), was his first solo western exhibition. Since he has had many solo and group exhibitions throughout the world.

[271] Laurent Delaye , Curator's statement, The British Museum, 2010, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_2010-3012-1/ .

Ahmad's works and his critical lens towards religion as a powerful mechanism to curtail gendered bodies are informed through his artistic practice and not a single artwork. His single work on the British Museum website, alienated from the rest of his oeuvre, was contextualized based on the visible imagery through an arbitrary curator's comment on the British Museum website:

> Ahmad's watery pool of cobalt blue represents the feminine as well as being a reference to the *blue burquas* [*sic*] *increasingly visible in Pakistan* (and neighbouring Afghanistan) today and despite this not being the traditional dress of Muslim women from this region. [Emphasis added.][272]

As mentioned in Chapter One, the blue burqa is a region-specific piece of clothing that is traditionally worn by women of Afghan tribes in and around the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. As Pakistan is a neighbour of landlocked Afghanistan in the Pakhtunkhwa province and some parts of Baluchistan, the areas share many cultural traditions with Afghanistan. Though I agree, from an autoethnographic perspective, that various veiling practices have increased in urban Pakistan since 2001, the blue burqa per se remains strictly region-specific among Afghan tribal women. The statement, "blue burqas have become increasingly visible in Pakistan," is a generalized statement based on the single narrative generated by US media propaganda after September 11. This uninformed statement erases the complexities of region-specific intricacies that formulate gendered subjectivities.

The statement above also creates a skewed view of artists and their artistic vocabulary. Rasheed Araeen, criticizing transnational art praxis, argues that Third-World art and artists are expected to carry an "identity card" of the region they originate from to be recognized and legitimized.[273] Knowing Ahmad's visual vocabulary, my argument is further reinforced by the fact that Ahmad's oeuvre consists of Muslim iconography as well as Hindu and Christian religious symbols. He uses religious iconography to signify the universal patriarchal manipulation of monotheistic and other religions for power and politics.

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[272] Ibid.

[273] Rasheed Areen, "Art and Postcolonial Society,"373.

Ahmad's first solo exhibition, Pious Fear (2013), was at Gowen Contemporary, Geneva in, Switzerland. The exhibition press release, quoting Pakistani-born artist and art critic Athar Tahir, makes a well-rounded analysis of Ahmad's work and its universal appeal: [274]

> Ahmad's repertoire consists of elements that continue, over the last several years, to combine in thought-provoking permutations. The animal shape, bearded man, blood-splattered surface, chador-wrapped or burka-clad female, chubby putto that will transport the "pious" to heaven, black area indicating man's dark design, letters from the Arabic-Farsi-Urdu alphabet suggesting the "religious" rhetoric, striped mat, figures from the Hindu pantheon, red rose, revolver and pistol in relief under silver-leaf or sketched, rosary, skull-cap, suicide-bomber, suicide-jacket, verdant vegetation of promised paradise, all form Ahmad's visual vocabulary. From these particulars, Ahmad generates the universal concern about the oppression of the weak by the powerful, of the East or the West, whether they are individuals, groups or countries. (Athar Tahir, 2013)[275]

Tahir here is referencing Wasim Ahmad's *Krishan series* (2008), exhibited in New Delhi at Anant Art Gallery, India. He used the figure of Krishna (one of the personifications of the supreme Hindu god) as a metaphor for religious patriarchy to engage with the regional audience. Tahir's interpretation also highlights that Ahmad does not criticize individual religions but the patriarchal exploitation of all power structures. Hence, it is insignificant for him what religious emblem he uses to convey his message.

The global recognition of artists utilizing burqa in their work inspired many younger artists who idealized the works of their mentors or generally looked up to the artists with international exhibitions on their résumés. This turned the burqa image into a popular regional trope domestically. The West vs East binary, imagined through female bodies, is also reflected in many lesser-known artworks (Figure 34). The next section looks at the construction of female subjectivities within the works of canonical early modernist Pakistani male artists to demonstrate that proliferation of the burqa image in Pakistani art was a post-War on Terror phenomenon.

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[274] Born in 1967 in Rawalpindi, Aasim Akhtar is an artist, art critic and curator. He studied English Literature in addition to earning a BA in Design from the National College of Arts, Lahore. He was a curator-in-residence at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Japan in 2002.

[275] Gowen Contemporary, *Pious Fear*, Sept. 18, 2013, http://www.gowencontemporary.com/files/english-2013-2-images_v2.pdf/ .

2.3. Feminine in the works of Canonical Male Artists: Fair Maidens, Temptresses, and Vampire Virgins

Looking at the representation of women in the works of canonical male Pakistani artists retrospectively helps this dissertation argue that the image of a burqa, which proliferated in contemporary Pakistani art after 2001, was not a part of the mainstream artistic vocabulary. However, this dissertation is mindful that the artistic representations of the feminine in the works of canonical male artists have always been conceptualized through a male gaze; this dissertation aims to maintain a consistent non-Western feminist approach. Hence, these artworks are also viewed and analyzed from a feminist angle, foregrounding the inevitability of feminist approaches in art history and further highlighting the significance of this dissertation.

Most art historians and cultural theorists agree that Pakistan is a region with diverse cultures and traditions. In the introduction to the second edition of *Image and Identity,* Akbar S. Naqvi writes, "The thesis of the book is that Pakistan is inseparable from its heritage of Al-Hind, and without this, it has no identity." Naqvi traces Pakistan's heritage from Greek invaders in the second-century BCE to the seat of the origin of Buddhism, and Hinduism, the arrival, later, of Arabs and Persians, and last but not least, to the British colonizers. He writes:

> By the time the Subcontinent was divided into India and Pakistan, the Al-Hind connection between the two countries and also of the newborn country with the rest was an established fact of history. Pakistan, in fact, is the joint custodian of the Al-Hind culture and civilization with India.[276]

Another noteworthy art historian, Ijaz-ul Hassan, writes in *Painting in Pakistan*:

> Although Pakistan is a young country, the cultural history of the region can be traced back to the dawn of civilization. . . The dancing girl in bronze from Mohenjo-Daro, the fasting Buddha in the Lahore Museum . . . the splendid miniatures . . . the exquisite crafts of the Muslim period . . . together weave a unique artistic pattern.[277]

Salima Hashmi, in *50 Years of Visual Art in Pakistan,* writes:

> The painting tradition in Pakistan, like many other traditions, almost defies delineation. The absence of hierarchical structure, . . . it's intertwining with other arts, historical and regional variants, make it a complex task to arrive at a simple generalization.

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[276] Naqvi, *Image and Identity,* xviii.

[277] Hassan, *Painting in Pakistan*, 17

In the initial years of Pakistan's conception (1947), male artists formed a modernist canon while revisiting traditional literary and philosophical narratives; women were deemed more suitable to act as art educators. Hence, with some exceptions, the early art discourse was monopolized by male artists. Salima Hashmi writes:

> There were notable exceptions, like Zubaida Agha, a uniquely self-contained individual . . . It is significant that she was unwilling to describe herself as a "women painter," insisting that she had won the distinction of being "a painter" in a world where professional artists were male, and the "teachers" of art were female.[278]

Though they are often divided into traditionalist and modernist, the pioneering male artists can roughly be termed regional modernists, who took various approaches in their art to create a separatist identity. The main concern of the early artists was to create a visual language that would differentiate them from a combined Hindu-Muslim vocabulary, an identity that the newly formed nation-state so anxiously desired and lacked.[279] Even though Pakistan was demanded in the name of Islam, and Hindu-Muslim differences were used as the pretext for the partition, it could not erase the cultural montage that was the Subcontinent with its thousand years of comingling of various religions and cultures. Hence, while early artists derived their conceptual frameworks from Muslim narratives, Sufism, and nationalist poets, the visuality of the images remained embedded in diverse cultural and interregional influences.

Abdul Rehman Chughtai (1894–1975) is Pakistan's most celebrated and best-known traditionalist painter. Chughtai is known for rendering his delicate and traditionally adorned female forms inspired by Indo-Persian miniatures. Regarding Chughtai's depiction of women, Dadi writes that his female figure is not "a realist or bodily figure but an 'other,' a sum of symbols and metaphors, totally self-absorbed and indifferent, even *sadistic*, in inducing madness and ecstasy in the poet."[280] On another occasion, Dadi quotes Salim Akhter from *Muraqqa-e-*

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[278] Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible,* 13.

[279] The earliest artist dealt with identity issues and shunned almost all the shared imagery that could be traced back to the combined heritage of former joined India. They looked for their identity instead of the roots which were polluted with mixed heritage of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, who before the partition shared the same land, culture and heritage. Millions had been physically uprooted by the partition and shared painful memories, hence the cultural and artist landscape needed new definitions.
Salima Hashmi and Quddus Mirza, *50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1997), 12, 13.

[280] Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia,* 83.
 [Emphasis added]

Chughtai to the effect that the female figures who appear, perhaps excessively, in the art of the canonical traditionalist Chagatai are "melancholy beauties" with "impassive" faces. "Chughtai's woman was not a familiar figure from everyday life but a picturization of the classical *ghazal*'s [Urdu poetry genre] metaphors of the beloved," who live in an "idealized dream world of beauty."[281] Akbar S. Naqvi in *Image and Identity*, confirms Dadi's analysis when he describes Chughtai's portrayal of women as a "Persianized concept of beauty" taken from ghazals, in which "the waist of the beloved is so narrow as to be non-existent. . . . His female figures were entrancingly tempting when garbed in ample robes. The dress was both decoration and provocation."[282]Chughtai's rendering of women's attires is suggestive of Mughal courtly decorum. They are adorned in long, flowing robes, bejewelled with elaborate headdresses that both men and women often adorn in Chugtai"s work.

On other occasions, we can witness highly stylized and erotic nudes and semi-nudes with or without a delicate dupatta (scarf) partially covering their faces. One such composition of semi-nudes is the title مرمومن Mard-e-Momin (Muslim man) (Figure 35).[283] The image shows the Muslim man with an austere green robe covering him from head to toe, and *tasbih,* or worry beads, in his hand as a symbol of religious conviction. He is surrounded by two partially robed women, with a large group of nudes submerged in the background, painted in earthy tones. All these women seek the attention of the man, who is the center of the composition, oblivious to the presence of these temptresses. The text accompanying the painting, documented in *Amal-e-Chughtai* (1960), narrates the artist's inspiration behind the scheme. He traces his visual inspiration to August 1918, when he was a young aspiring art student and was introduced to Dr. Rabindranath Tagore. Amused by the young Chughtai's passion, Dr. Tagore showed him his collection of Buddhist paintings by Japanese and Chinese artists depicting Buddha's enlightenment (Nirvana); Buddha is surrounded by temptations in the form of nude women. Chughtai thus acknowledges the visual influence of Buddhist semiotics, whereas his conceptual framework is a Muslim male identity.[284]

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[281] Ibid.

[282] Naqvi, *Image and Identity,* 32.

[283] مرمومن is phrase coined by Sir Muhammad Iqbal (the national poet of Pakistan): an archetype of a Muslim man.

[284] The information and image have been acquired from Amal-e-Chaughtai, published in 1960 by the artist himself. This massive antique book features the poetry of Muhammad Iqbal in Urdu and Persian with accompanying illustrations by Chughtai. However, each plate has some accompanying descriptive text and a quote from Iqbal in English and the artist himself in Urdu. It contains about 450 pages, including 40 tipped-in colour plates, two dozen

One of the rare works in which we see Chughtai dealing with modernity in Pakistan has a representation of urban women in long frocks (*pishwas*), loose pants, and dupatta worn around their shoulders. The composition of the two girls is titled *College Girls* (1957). Their long hair is neatly wrapped in a *parranda*, suggesting *modern* Pakistan urban culture. However, the treatment of their facial characteristics with long eyes and delicate fingers remains inspired by the Indo-Persian miniature style.[285]

Multiple sources describe female figures in Chagatai's work as having no self-consciousness but rather being a product of a male gaze or simply a visualization of a male desire (poet/artist) or a metaphor for wordy desires through an idealistic or formalistic eye.

We also find consistent use of stylized female nudes in the works of another art patriarch, **Shakir Ali** (1916–1975), alleged to be Asia's greatest modernist (*tajridi*) painter, who laid the foundation of formalist modernism in Pakistan, using cubist vocabulary.[286] The stylized female nude is a recurrent theme in Ali's paintings, which Naqvi describes with words such as *archetypal, fecund-bodied, faceless*, *knob-headed cut-out nudes, man's adversarial,* and *object of man's desire.*

Describing the series of works titled *Bull and Woman* that emerged in the later years of Ali's career, Naqvi writes, "the bull is associated with procreative power at its most primeval . . . Shakir's preoccupation with the animal was, there is no doubt, sexual fantasy of power." The symbolic bull is influenced by Cretan mythology, where a minotaur is "born of a bestial affair between Pasiphaë, the queen of Crete, and a beautiful white bull."[287] Naqvi proclaims that the series "was most certainly the most misogynist ever painted in Pakistan."[288] Ali's composition of bull and women was a recurrent theme throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[289] Sharhandi describes the bulls as a result of varied inspirational associations, such as Picasso's mighty masculine bulls

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photogravures, and several plates of calligraphic design. The book was printed in Lahore in 1968 at Nisar Art Press, though the plates were engraved and printed in England.

[285] Dadi. *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 91

[286] Ibid, 125.

I used the word *alleged* because Sirhandi argues in her book, "From European point of view, there is nothing new, original or noteworthy about these paintings, but for Pakistan, he was the first painter with recent firsthand experience abroad to paint in a modern Western manner."

Sirhandi, *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1992), 43.

[287] Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, (note 144), 97.

[288] Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 85.

[289] Modern art in Pakistan, 27.

and delicate bulls from the Altamira caves, or bulls as an ode to Pakistan's rural and agricultural heritage composed along with stylized female nudes (Figure 36).[290]

Poet, feminist activist and writer Kishwar Naheed suggested that Ali's bulls were a metaphor for male virility, placed along with female nudes who often had enlarged abdomens. She contextualized that Ali, in both his partnerships, remained issueless; hence, in Naheed's interpretation, the bull as a symbol of fertility was the artist's way of dealing with his own insecurity on account of being unable to procreate[291] Naqvi also connects the influence behind Ali's women to the Hindu/ Buddhist prototype of temple dancers, *Yakshi,* and metaphors for fertility [292]

Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi (1930-1987), like Chughtai, became a household name in Pakistani metropolitan bourgeois households in the 1970s.[293]He was awarded the Laureate Biennale de Paris in 1961, and he studied and worked in Paris from 1960 to 1967.[294] He is credited with bringing art out of the confines of art galleries or drawing room walls to public places in the 1970s. His massive works of gigantic scale adorn the walls of Karachi Airport and Mangla power station and the ceilings of the Lahore Museum and the Punjab University Library. Sadequain, like his contemporaries, took inspiration from Urdu literary tradition. Based on Ghalib's poetry, Dadi *in Modernism South Asia* analyzes one such work. The painting entails a group of three half-nude fair maidens, with white loincloths wrapped around their bodies*,* surrounding the artist, who is engrossed in painting a "beastly, grotesque" female figure. According to Dadi, the artist "suggests that his art seeks an encounter with society, even when the social field itself consists of unspeakably ugly elements."[295] Here we witness the nude female as a metaphor for the grotesque face of society, represented with a dark complexion, sagging breasts, ghastly eyes, and jewels around the folds of her grotesque neck.

Akbar S Naqvi's analysis of the artist's inspiration from Urdu ghazals, Freud, Greek and Hindu mythology, and finally Naqvi's analysis of Sadequain's illustrations of Mohammad Iqbal's religious, nationalistic poetry is probably one of the most in-depth analyses of

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[290] Sirhandi, *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan,* 44.

[291] Kishwar Naheed, Interview with the Author (Rawalpindi, March, 2018).

[292] Akbar Naqvi, *Sadequain and the Culture of Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 122.

[293] As a child I remember a mounted print of Sadequain's *Saga of Labour (1978)* hung on our dining area wall.

[294] Hashmi and Mirza, *50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan*, 34.

[295] Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 169–70.

Sadequain's work.[296] However, as this dissertation focuses on female representations through a postcolonial lens, Naqvi's language to describe the female figure in Sadequain's work is pertinent here.

Describing a series of sixty-three sketches from Sadequain's oeuvre, Naqvi describes Sadequain's women as "demanding, cruel, sadistic. . . They were virgin-vampires . . . who tempt men only to destroy them."[297] On another occasion, he writes, "Sadequain's nudes were his Grecian sexual fantasy," and again describes them as "of the Salome kind, that is savage women who lusted after an unapproachable man and had him killed because she could not devour him sexually" (Figure 37). [298]

Zainul Abedin (1914–1976) is another significant artist from the first three decades of the creation of Pakistan. Describing female figures in Abedin's work, Dadi explains that he takes his inspiration from rural and tribal Bengal to form "ornamental schemes."[299] His maidens are indigenous youths with sari cloth wrapped around their delicate brown bodies.

> The strong contoured brown limbs of the maidens, the placement of flowers in their hair, and the rhythmic repetition of their figures evoke formal and colorist parallels with the branches and foliage behind them.[300]

Akbar writes,

> [Abedin] ended up painting Santhal women. He found them attractive . . . because they were vital, lively people who still lived in a state of nature.[301] (Figure 38)

2.4. Conclusion of the Chapter

In conclusion, the first section argued that the sudden proliferation of veiled images in Pakistani art discourse primarily resulted from transnational gender politics permeated through the US media. Furthermore, the sudden proliferation of veiled images in the art market, which were eagerly received by the white audience and potential buyers, resulted from their acquaintance with this stereotype associated with Pakistan/Afghanistan through the media coverage of the war.

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[296] Naqvi, *Sadequain and the Culture of Enlightenment, 123.*

[297] Naqvi, *Image and Identity*,126.
(Even vampires have to be virgin)

[298] Ibid.

[299] West Pakistan is now Bangladesh (violent separation from Pakistan in 1971)

[300] Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asian*,105.

[301] Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 121.
The Santal or Santhal, are an ethnic group indigenous to India and Bangladesh in South Asia

Cross-ethnic artistic encounters after 2001 highlight the psychological ramifications of (neo)colonialism on the cultural legacies of the colonized. In colonial and neocolonial (post-globalization) encounters, knowledge exchange is lopsided. The colonized are often acquainted with the colonizers, their language, and their historical narratives. Under colonization, this happens during the process of being colonized, and in neocolonialism or post-globalization, this is done through the hegemony over visual, performance and print media. Nevertheless, it is rarely the other way around. Therefore, this conclusion brings to the foreground the perils of periphery-center artistic encounters and the ethical responsibilities of curatorial and art historical practices. The section demonstrated how the exhibition of specific images from the periphery requires historical and political contextualization and a profound understanding of representational politics surrounding the images represented, the targeted audiences and whose language is being spoken.

As Rajeshwari, in "Postcolonial Feminism/Postcolonialism and Feminism," writes concerning the interpretation of Third World women's texts in Western classrooms within Western contexts:

> Too often, Third World women's texts (and, by extension, Third World women themselves) are objectified and exoticized or utilized for the convenient and quick edification of Western readers. In the context of global capitalism, where capital flows are seemingly undeterred by national or language barriers, the notion of the equally free and easy flow of cultures is particularly powerful and convincing. Though the texts that are studied finally offer no more than sampling, they tend to be treated either as representative of whole cultures/national histories or as exceptional and token documents of a postcolonial intellectual vanguard.

Hence, on the pretext of diversifying museum collections, generalizing region-specific images into national allegories does nothing more than perpetuating a homogenized ethnic, gendered identity. Instead, these encounters should open up a dialogue towards further exploration of multifarious and complex ethnic existence—in the case of a highly diverse Pakistan. Bypassing artistic intention and oversimplifying ethnic visuality remains one of the artistic hazards of using images that have been linked to stereotypes from periphery regions.

At the risk of redundancy, I would like to point out that propaganda after the start of the War on Terror and the enthusiastic reception of the veil in world art praxis enormously influenced the artistic visual vocabulary in Pakistan and reinforced the burqa as a default face or symbol of the oppressive nature of religious patriarchy in Pakistan. This symbol grossly

simplifies patriarchy to outward and visible signifiers. At a more fundamental level, the ambivalence towards veil images in curatorial statements served the purpose of "othering." It reinforced the images created by the US media in "subtle but precarious racist undertones," strengthening a Eurocentric gaze.[302]

Furthermore, looking at the construction of female subjectivities in Pakistani modernist art retrospectively in the works of canonical male Pakistani artists demonstrate that the burqa was not part of the mainstream visual vocabulary during the initial formation of art discourse in Pakistan. Instead, we can conclude that the construction of femininity, as represented by male artists in the early years after partition—at least in mainstream art—was constructed only as a tool against which male subjectivity was construed. Hence, female subjectivity lacked consciousness and was often projected as either a "romantic other" or an antagonist. This phenomenon can be regarded as a microcosm of a universal modernist approach to art, reflecting deep-rooted misogyny. These female figures reflected "periphery body," entities on the margins that only existed in an artist/poet's fantasy rather than persons in their own right.

However, we do witness the arrival of female consciousness in the face of adversity during the dictatorial regime of General Zia (1977–1988). The next chapter seeks to trace the appearance of early feminist consciousness, foregrounding the evolution of struggles of women (and some men) artists and art educators through Pakistan's initial decades.

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[302] Rasheed Areen, "Art and Postcolonial Society," 371.

Chapter 3:
Tracing the History of Feminist Resistance in Pakistani Art and Contemporary Feminist Responses to the Burqa Trope

The chapter outlines feminist expressions in Pakistani art discourse within its recent history to foreground that Pakistani women artists have historically stood up for themselves in the face of adversity. Furthermore, the chapter seeks to demonstrate that the feminist voices that have risen against the patriarchies consolidated due to War on Terror gender politics are a continuation of that legacy. It briefly touches on the rise of feminist consciousness during General Zia's dictatorial regime, culminating in the rise of feminist voices within contemporary art—voices that rose because of the initial misogynist policies. While the artists that are the focus of the following chapters created subversive feminist initiatives, they stand on the shoulders of art-matriarchs who devoted their lives to art, activism, and a feminist struggle to create niches in patriarchal structures. However, these historical struggles have not always been linear due to uncertain international and regional politics around gendered bodies.

Further, it discusses selected artworks of three female artists: Aisha Qureshi, Amra Khan, and Vidha Saumya. Their works foreground gendered perspectives through varied approaches to what became a familiar visual trope after 2001. These artists created burqa images not as political tropes or emblems of religious or national pride but as signifiers of nuanced female presence under that very garment. Therefore, in contrast to the first-generation artistic responses discussed in the previous chapter, these artists create a nuanced trajectory. The dissertation maintains that these works can be seen as an immediate response to post–9/11 media hype and should be conceptualized as the conceptual forerunners that paved the way to the more subversive but similar feminist iconography in the works of women artists discussed in the following chapters.

3.1. The Cold War and Feminist Resistance in Pakistan

The creation of visible or hidden female subjectivities within artistic discourse in Pakistan and feminist concerns have always intersected with heteropatriarchy, regional politics, religious nationalism, and neo/colonialism. The appearance of a unified feminist consciousness within art discourse was likewise a result of complex political shifts with the rise of the totalitarian regime

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of General Zia-ul-Haq.[303] As mentioned in Chapter One, General Zia's regime followed strict censorship policies in visual and performing arts, with an emphasis on "morality issues" connected with the female body and sexuality.[304] General Zia's interpretation of Islam was overtly masculine and misogynistic. Women were discouraged from appearing in public places, were not allowed to compete in sports, and were instructed to wear *chadars*—large shawls to cover the contours of their bodies—within official spaces.

Chadar and chaardewari, which means "shawl and four walls of the home," was an unofficial slogan of General Zia's regime regarding his policies, especially towards working urban women, translating into many implications for them. The message perpetuated by the state was that women were only safe within four walls of their homes, implying that women could only be recognized through their familial position, such as daughter, wife, and mother. This policy created an underlining assumption that only women who had men in their lives were worthy of being protected.[305]

It is telling that General Zia used the chadar as the iconic sartorial article to cover Pakistani women and not a burqa or hijab, or abaya (the faces of sartorial Muslim female practices in contemporaneity); hence, it needs contextualization within history.

My mother recalls her personal anecdotes about how the burqa had become almost obsolete in the 1960s and 70s within the educated middle-class urban context.[306] According to Saigol, Middle Eastern-inspired Muslim head coverings such as the hijab or abaya have no traditional legacy in the Subcontinent and were unheard of among the 1960s and 70s generations. The introduction of these Islamic garbs was primarily a latent repercussion of General Zia's

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[303] An analysis of historical feminist discourses in Pakistan in the context of global and religious gender politics can be found in the academic works of Shirin Zubair and Maria Zubair, "Situating Islamic Feminism(s)."

[304] Mirza, "Zia's Long Reach."

[305] According to the United Nation's Global Study on Homicide Gender-Related Killing of Women and Girls, "A total of 87,000 women were intentionally killed in 2017. More than half of them (58 per cent)—50,000—were killed by intimate partners or family members, meaning that 137 women across the world are killed by a member of their own family every day. More than a third (30,000) of the women intentionally killed in 2017 were killed by their current or former intimate partner—someone they would normally expect to trust." Executive Summary, "Global Study On Homicide: Gender-related killing of women and girls," *United Nations Office on Drugs And Crime*, *Global* (Vienna, 2018), 8.

[306] My mother often talked about how after her marriage, my father (an educated middle-class civil servant) requested her to stop wearing a burqa, which he deemed unnecessary. My mother, being a 19-year-old complacent Pakistani bride, recalls how her first visit, walking without a burqa through the narrow street to her mother's home, were the longest few meters of her life. She also clarifies that the burqa was often used for populated public places and she didn't wear one in family gatherings and ceremonies.

religious affiliations with the Saudi Arabian brand of Islam: Wahabi ideology.[307] On the other hand, the chadar (large shawl) as a form of accessory has a longstanding historical significance in people's lives from the Subcontinent, used in various capacities. In the absence of the burqa, chadar remained a preferred choice for urban women from conservative families to navigate populated urban places. Most women in the Subcontinent own a chadar, which is even passed on intergenerationally along with many other textile and clothing articles, creating a gendered kinship.[308]

The chadar has many connotations attached. The chadar is a rural as well as urban, and a masculine as well as a feminine accessory. A large rectangle of cloth having no stitched feature (hence the fluidity) can be worn to cover the head, cover the contours of one's body, or save oneself from the cold. Men use it to show status in society, wearing it around their necks, especially in Punjab and Sindh. During General Zia's era (the 1980s), for men, the chadar became a symbol of masculine power and was excessively used in Punjabi movies that romanticized hypermasculine and violent culture (Figure 39). However, General Zia's misogynist policies and his dogmatic religious manifestations to curb female sexuality made the chadar compulsory in official capacities for women. This compulsion altered the attached traditional connotations of warmth and gendered kinship to the chadar. Hence, during the 1980s, the chadar came to have conflicting connotations as a symbol of power for men and submission for women.

There was a strong response from leftist writers, poets, visual and performing artists, and feminist activists to General Zia's newly imposed moral idiosyncrasies and not wearing a *chadar/dupatta* in public became an act of defiance against General Zia's regime.[309]

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[307] It also resulted from a large amount of the Pakistani labour force going to work in oil-rich Middle Eastern countries during the 1980s. In the 1970s and 80s, these satirical practices from Middle Eastern countries had not taken hold in Pakistan. Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan,* 33. Also discussed in Chapter One.

[308] The elaborate nature of the shawls as a cherished commodity within the Subcontinent can be understood from the reference that during the early colonial expansions it was an epitome of taste in France during the eighteenth century. "Napoleon's wedding gifts to Marie-Louise, his second wife, included seventeen Kashmiri shawls, and a painting of the guests at their 1810 wedding showed many of the women with a cashmere shawl carefully folded over one arm." A detailed account of the valuable nature of the chadar in South Asian culture is articulated in Michelle Maskiell, "Consuming Kashmir: Shawls and Empires, 1500–2000." *Journal of World History* (March 2002):39.

[309] Apart from General Zia's regime, there has been no official discourse on female attire in Pakistan, unlike most Middle Eastern countries. Although most urban women like to wear their traditional clothing, as well as the national dress of Pakistan, *shalwar* (loose pants), *kamiz* (long shirt) and *dupatta* (a sheer long scarf that is worn around the

In Naazish Attaullah's (b.1950) *Chadar Series* (1987) (Figure 40), she uses the image of a shawl torn into pieces. Hashmi describes Attaullah's shawl as a metaphor for claustrophobic, shroud-like, savage attributes that it connoted for women during General Zia's misogynistic regime instead of its actual protective, comforting, secretive presence.[310]

Salima Hashmi's *In Spite of the Wrath* (1987) (Figure 41) depicts the shadowy figures of faceless compliant women shrouded in white chadars that seem to be flowing in the wind. On the left corner, there is a small group of nude females submerged in the paint. They symbolize how, by being stripped of their choices, women were being disrobed of their honour. Nevertheless, there is always hope in Hashmi's work. Although the figures are faceless, the flowing of the drapery indicates the winds of change, which is prophetic for those times but inevitable in the extended schema.[311]

In general, we witness the emergence of an indirect conscious feminist resistance in the works of female artists under General Zia's censorship. Hashmi writes in *Unveiling the Visible Lives and Works of Female Artists*:

> The number of women artists increased significantly after 1977 . . . Unlike many of their better-known male colleagues, women artists chose not to modify their creative vision . . . Probably unaware of the feminist maxim of the seventies—the personal is political—women artists intuitively disengaged themselves from the prevalent ideology of the time.[312]

According to Hashmi, most women used indirect methods of retaliation against General Zia's censorship of art. They refused to work within state-sanctioned artistic parameters such as oil portraits and nationalistic sculptures or stylistic and idealized landscapes. Hence, it was also women artists who mostly took the brunt of economic hardship as artists. According to Hashmi, most artists, such as Meher Afroz, Nahid Raza, and Qudsia Nisar, turned towards small

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neck), a large number of urban women do not cover their heads. Also, head covering and veiling can be an extremely fluid practice in the Subcontinent, as the practice of wearing the *hijab* has no traditional or historical background there. In fact, as argued by Rubina Saigol, the appearance of the *hijab* among middle-class girls born in Pakistan is a recent phenomenon. See Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan*, 33.

For a detailed account of feminist struggle against General Zia's regime please consult the following texts: Toor, *The State of Islam*, 170–84; Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan*, 14–20; Jamal, "Transnational Feminism as Critical Practice," 57–82. And for the art historical perspective: Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*, 8, 9, 94; Mohammad Imran, Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, and Sajid Mahmood Awan, "A History of Visual Art in Pakistan: Studying the Resistance Against Zia-Ul-Haq's Military Regime," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 54, no. 2 (2017).

[310] Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*, 98.

[311] Hassan, *Painting in Pakistan*, 138.

[312] Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*, 9.

watercolour paintings, which they could work on from their homes, as a form of indirect resistance.[313] Even in the most state-censor-stricken times of General Zia's regime, in the history of Pakistani art discourse, one does not witness the burqa as a mainstream visual expression of female subjectivity.

The first controversial artist to highlight the heterogeneous existence of Muslim Pakistani metropolitan women was, in fact, a man, Iqbal Hussain (b.1959). He was born to a *tawaif* (prostitute) in a community that is euphemistically referred to *Heera Mandi* (diamond market)—the historical red-light district in Lahore.[314] Hussain came to be admitted to the National College of Arts without any social capital and started his studio practice during the most adverse time in Pakistan's history, during General Zia's regime. His subjects were women who worked in the historic sex trade, known to him as caregivers and friends, around whom he grew up. Hence, his depiction of sex workers is not that of an eroticized and objectified recipient of the male gaze. They are not even (especially in his earlier works) depicted as victims but as living, breathing human beings and companions in their natural habitat, relaxing after a hard day's work (Figure 42).[315] Unlike Monet's *Olympia,* his representations of sex workers were neither titillating nor provocative (at least in his earlier works), but only an attempt to humanize a taboo segment of society, one too taboo to be mentioned. It was not his subjectivities but the reception of his artwork that emphasized the ugliness of a society that denies the very existence of sex workers while exonerating men who use their services. The Alhamra Art Gallery (the only state-run gallery in the 80s) rejected his oeuvre from the exhibition on the pretext that his paintings were obscene. On one occasion, as a protest, he arranged his paintings, like a common vendor, on the roadside of the gallery that refused to exhibit them.[316]

The death of General Zia and the decade of the 1990s brought relaxed censorship policies to media and performing arts, which gave artists more freedom of expression. It was also when I was a student at the National College of Arts. As I remember, the late 90s were a time for experimentation and material innovations. The period produced a myriad of artists using unconventional and experimental techniques, such as the neo-miniature.

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[313] Ibid.

[314] Hira Hyder, "The Walled City of Lahore and Iqbal Hussain; The Painter of Lost Souls," *Eligible*, July 30, 2017. https://www.eligiblemagazine.com/2017/07/30/walled-city-lahore-iqbal-hussain/ .

[315] Hashmi and Mirza, *Fifty Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan*, 80; Sirhandi, *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan*, 170.

[316] Toor, *The State of Islam*. 151. And also documented by Mirza, "Zia's Long Reach."

3.1.2. The Rise of the Art Matriarch

The Neo-Miniature or Contemporary Miniature movement in Pakistan took hold in the 1990s. Shahzia Sikandar's (b.1969) five-foot mural-like miniature, *The Scroll* (1992) (Figure 43), is credited as the point of rapture in contemporary miniature-making history in South Asia.[317] The painting depicts her in a white *shalwar kameez* as a contemporary urban woman, going through her routine in a bourgeois household. The actual quantum leap in this work was the alteration of scale. It must be emphasized that within the historical miniature tradition, the scale was a major component of the content; hence, in breaking down the size boundary, she defied its fundamental nature.[318]

Sikandar's *Scroll (1988–1990)* was an iconic moment in the dynamics of miniature painting from its archaic and traditional imagery of kings and queens. The renewal of miniatures in Pakistan during the 1980s mainly led to duplicating Indo-Persian miniatures as decorative craft. With her thesis project, Shahzia changed it to an expression of vibrant contemporary female consciousness and initiated what is known as a neo-miniature movement in Pakistan. The miniature illustrates a young omnipresent female protagonist, unidentified perhaps but representing a larger female agency.[319] Her miniature signifies a time when women artists in Pakistan had begun to conceptualize their cognizance.

Hence, the late 1990s saw the budding of many women artists who, with strong female academic mentorship, took center stage in Pakistani contemporary art practice and matured into some of the most significant and successful artists in the twenty-first century. Ironically, the raison d'être behind this phenomenon was the initial misogynistic strategies of Pakistani policymakers right after the partition. In *Unveiling the Visible* (2002), Salima Hashmi writes that the Fine Arts department at Punjab University was reserved for female students only right after the partition of 1947. The goal was to make women *artistic*, not artists, to turn them into good wives and home decorators under the surveillance of all-female art instructors and educators. Hashmi recalls that women were for a long time excluded from the discourse. They were not

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[317] Shahzia Sikander (Pakistani, b. 1969) is an eminent Pakistani-American miniaturist based in New York. Sikander is also a performance artist, muralist, mixed media artist, and installation artist.

[318] Salima Hashmi, "Radicalizing Tradition," 289.

[319] Shahzia Sikander, "Traversing Multiple Realities of Contemporary American and Asian Art," talk at the Institute of Fine Arts at NYU, September 22, 2021. https://www.skny.com/news-events/shahzia-sikander-in-traversing-multiple-realities-of-contemporary-american-and-asian-art-shahzia-sikander.

considered practitioners but instructors. "The term artist, therefore, was hardly gender-neutral."[320]

Nevertheless, these academic positions made it possible for many women artists and art academics to rise to important positions during the 1980s and 1990s, altering the gendered landscape of the Pakistani contemporary art scene. For example, Professor Salima Hashmi, artist, curator, and contemporary art historian, taught at Lahore's National College of Arts for 31 years before working as its principal and later dean at the Beaconhouse National University's School of Visual Arts. Professor Naazish Attaullah, an iconic printmaker, feminist activist, and academic, also served as an interim principal of the National College of Arts. Lala Rukh (1948–2017), the avant-garde feminist rights activist, artist, and founder of Women's Action Forum, taught for thirty years, first at Punjab University, Department of Fine Arts, and later at the National College of Arts, where she set up the M.A. Honors Visual Arts Program in 2000. She retired as the head of the Art History Department.

Young female artistic voices were nurtured during the 1990s, continuing to the twenty-first century. Most accomplished contemporary women artists, including Farida Batool, Bani Abdi, Rishim Hussain Syed, Faiza Butt, and Masooma Syed, benefited from these art matriarchs' direct mentorship. This resulted in the emergence of many strong studios practicing female voices within Pakistani art discourse. As mentioned earlier, it is also the reason behind the disproportionately large number (60 percent) of women artists' works in the National Gallery collection. In 2012 artist Aisha Khalid was on the list of 100 most influential women in Pakistan.[321]

Highlighting the conservative policies towards women artists that contributed to their success and the emergence of future women artists in the art world further stresses that colonial gendered subject formations result from multiple realities. By tracing the history of feminist consciousness, this dissertation negates the "totalizing utopian vision of being and history that seeks to transcend the contradictions and ambivalences that constitute the very structure of human subjectivity and its systems of cultural representations."[322]

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[320] Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*, 7

[321] Ben East, "Aisha Khalid is Up for the Challenge," *The National.* October 16, 2012. https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/art/aisha-khalid-is-up-for-the-challenge-1.369575/ .

[322] Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory," in *Location of Culture*, 29.

In *Black Skin White Masks* (1970), Frantz Fanon highlights how the "legends, stories, histories and anecdotes of a colonial culture offer the subject a primordial Either/Or. Either he (she) is fixed in a consciousness of a body as a solely negating activity or as a new kind of a man, a new genius."[323] In other words, within Western narratives, the periphery can only produce a binary which holds valid primarily for the representation of women. Most women from the periphery are projected as helpless subalterns, complacent in their oppression, and those who resist are considered an anomaly within an oppressed culture. This dissertation supports the argument that women in Pakistan have always risen to the occasion by resisting marginalization. However, their acts of resistance are more nuanced than white feminism and may originate from a different understanding of freedom, in which the constant colonial and neocolonial conditions play a decisive role.[324]

Hence, before the dissertation delves into more diverse feminist artistic expressions that emerged in Pakistan as resistance to religious nationalism, it looks at the female artists who used the burqa in their works after 2001. The dissertation argues that the female artists, even while using an image that rendered them stereotyped, were able to generate a feminist consciousness. The artworks documented and analyzed below should be seen as a transitional phase to more diverse and subversive forms of feminist expressions that follow this chapter.

3.2. Under the Burqa: Through a Feminist Lens

The three female artists whose works are analyzed in this section negotiated the burqa image in their artworks after the beginning of the War on Terror. I argue that these artists confronted the burqa subject with female consciousness, if not a feminist point of view. Unlike their male colleagues, instead of using the burqa as a metaphor for colonial impositions against which male subjectivity is constructed, these artists use the physicality of the burqa as a shell inhabited by the living, breathing bodies of women: women as conscious beings and social actors. The three examples are essential to this research because these responses can be interpreted as a form of transitional expression (conceptually and not chronologically). They use the iconic image, but we see a transition towards localized concerns rather than an engagement solely with Western

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[323] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (London, Paladin, 1970), 78–82.
[324] Here Spivak's construct of a colonial subject as opposed to Western sovereign subject comes to play.

interlocutors. These burqa-clad women raise regionally relatable concerns for an informed audience.

Aisha Khalid (b. 1972) is the only known miniaturist who is known to have painted images of a burqa before 2001. The veil or burqa had been in her work since 2000.[325] Her background from Shikarpur, a remote town in the conservative area of Sind, bestowed her with this vocabulary; her mother and sister wore a veil, but, for her, it was never an issue connected with feminist concerns in the Western sense of the term. "Before 9/11, the burqa in my work was more about the experience of being a woman in a society where I belong. It often represented the Self, 'sometimes it was sad, claustrophobic sometimes pleasant, with eyes as metaphors of protection. Sometimes, it was used poetically as a veil between God and man or lover and beloved." Hence, in 2001 the veil in her work was conceptualized through Sufi poetry, especially through the poetry of Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī, also known as Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Balkhī, Mevlânâ/Mawlānā, Mevlevî/Mawlawī, and more popularly simply as Rumi, a thirteenth-century Persian poet. He uses the veil as a metaphor for the distance between God and man, or lover and the beloved. Meeting one's God or beloved is the lifting of the veil. [326]

Khalid's artwork *Covered/Uncovered* II (2002) (Figure 44) did not merely use the image of the burqa but used it as a resistance to highlight a critique of transnational gender politics, using multilayered signifiers through a feminist consciousness.[327] The series was exhibited at the Cultural Foundation Gallery in New York, in 2004, in a group exhibition titled *Cover Girl: The Female Bodies and Islam in Contemporary Ar*t. According to the curatorial statement:

> By covering the female form, they draw attention to it in ways that suggest
> not only Islamic religious doctrines but also Western media images in
> which Muslim women are always veiled. And while the artists in this
> exhibition "veil" their representations of women, they do so in unexpected
> ways that call into question practices in both Western countries and Islamic
> societies.[328]

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[325] Whiles, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan*, 43; Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*, 156.

[326] Syed, "Caught in the Middle," 35. Sufism is a form of Islamic mysticism.

[327] Aisha Khalid (b. 1972, Shikarpur, Pakistan). She graduated from the National College of Arts in 1997 with honours. In 2002, she completed her post-grad at Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, Netherlands on a full merit scholarship. Currently she works as a freelance artist in Lahore and is also a visiting faculty lecturer at the National College of Arts. She has numerous international solo as well as group exhibition to her credit.

[328] New York Gallery, "Cover Girl: The Female Body and Islam in Contemporary Art," Sept. 17, 2004, http://www.isefoundation.org/english/ny/E040917now.html/ .

Holland Cotter, reviewing the exhibition in *New York Times* in 2004, wrote: "Aisha Khalid . . . suggests in collages made from layered fabrics, that clothes, and specifically veils, can serve as a protective covering, a safe vantage from which to view the world."[329] This analysis turns Aisha's works into a benign alternative. In contrast, according to Whiles, Khalid's post-2001 burqas, such as *Covered/Uncovered II,* are confrontational pieces that directly responded to post–9/11 transnational and regional gender politics.

The subject is a woman whose face is not visible due to the veil; the viewer cannot see her, but she confronts her audience. The painting consists of repetitive geometrical patterns in camouflage colours that absorb the standing burqa-clad woman, only marginally visible through an outline. The camouflage colours in the shape of a burqa-clad woman point toward the militarization of the region by the United States, using female bodies as the point of contestation. Art historian Virginia Whiles writes:

> The infusion of camouflage material and the traditional burqa neatly serves as a sartorial metaphor for gendered dissimulation, hinting at how the very symbol of power and Purdah (veil or curtain) both function by masquerade and by disguising form to deny content.[330]

Hence, according to Whiles, the burqa stands as a metaphor for military and religious patriarchy in Aisha's work, both using female bodies to gain political power. She attributes the repetitive geometrical pattern to inspiration from Islamic architectural design, which is often referred to as Islamic Art.

As one of the methods used in this dissertation is to apply multiple perspectives and diverse regional visual semiotics, I analyze Khalid's work from a different lens, a lens of a more informed eye. I deconstruct the formal elements of the work by using transregional yet local visual vocabularies to trace female agency and resistance through the most visible formal element that produces the veiled image: textile. In retrospect, the repetitive embroidery-like quality of the work can be considered a process of evolution in Aisha's practice. An accomplished embroider, Aisha's magnificent and monumental embroidery textile panels hang in prestigious art collections such as *Your Way Begins on The Other Side* (2014) in the collection

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[329] Holland Cotter, "Art in Review; 'Cover Girl'—'The Female Body and Islam in Contemporary Art,'" *New York Times,* October8, 2004, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/08/arts/art-in-review-cover-girl-the-female-body-and-islam-in-contemporary-art.html/ .

[330] Whiles, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan,* 44.

of the Agha Khan Museum, Toronto, and *"Water has never been afraid of fire"* (2018), commissioned for APT9, at the permanent collection of Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art, Australia.

Even in her earlier works, I argue she used feminist agency through repetitive textile patterns as a performative resistance within a theatrical setting. I would like to suggest an alternative interpretation of Aisha's work *Covered/Uncovered II* and the subtle absorption of indigenous Hindu mythology as absorbed by the Mughal Empire during its three-hundred-year rule in Subcontinent. Textile, embroidery, and cloth have a strong presence indigenously in the lives of South Asian people, particularly women, as demonstrated by the two beautiful maps illustrating textile and embroidery traditions of different regions in Pakistan (Figure 45) and India (Figure 46).[331]

The intergenerational transfer of embroidery skills among women in the Subcontinent is as much of an urban preoccupation as it is rural and produces a feminine space of kinship for women, a space that may not be available to them in the mainstream patriarchal culture.

C.A. Bayly attributes the success of a combined movement, known as "Swadeshi," during the struggle for independence in the Subcontinent to the significance of textile held in the Subcontinent.[332] He explains that the sartorial traditions in the Subcontinent could evoke a sense of resistance due to the sacred role cloth held in the society domestically, such as articles of clothing that held mystic significance in Indo-Muslim and Hindu traditions alike. [333] Hence, clothing has already had a significant connotation of resistance attached to it in the Subcontinent.

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[331] Emma Tarlo explains the complex relationship of people in the Subcontinent with their clothes, and Susanne Kuchler, in *Clothing as Material Culture,* compares the changing dynamics of clothing articles in the Subcontinent, and women having the ability to change their appearance several times in day, to the fixed tailored clothing that dominates most of the Euro-American cultures. Tarlo, *Clothing Matters,* 3–5; Susanne Kuchler, *Clothing as Material Culture* (Sydney: Berg 3PL, 2011), 15–16.

[332] For a detailed analysis of "fluidity and significance of clothing" in Indo-Muslim culture in the Subcontinent, see C. A. Bayly, "The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700–1930," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988); Tarlo, *Clothing Matters;* Kuchler, *Clothing as Material Culture.*

[333] The term 'Subcontinent' refers to the Indian subcontinent, also known as South Asia. It lies west of the southeast Asia region. The Subcontinent's largest country is India, which contained Pakistan and Bangladesh before the partition of 1947; Arab Muslims brought Islam to the Subcontinent in 711 CE through trade and military expansion. The last and most powerful of the Muslim dynasties, the Mughals, ruled in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1619, Emperor Jahangir (the fourth Mughal emperor) granted the East India Company permission to trade spices and various other commodities, which ultimately led to the British colonial military rule that lasted more than two centuries (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). The Subcontinent officially became the part of British Raj after the great mutiny of 1858. For a comprehensive study of the history of Mughal rule in the Subcontinent: Ram Prasad Tripathi, *Rise and Fall of the Mughal Empire* (Nagpur: Central Book Depot, 1969).

However, Swadeshi was a man-led resistance, but textiles also have a legacy of gendered resistance in the Subcontinent.

I argue that clothing and textile in this artwork bring forward how clothing and textile can be an article of performative resistance in the Subcontinent with their ancient roots in feminist sensibility within the Hindu mythological epics. *Mahabharata* (between 300 BCE and 300 CE in Sanskrit) is a complex religious-mythical Hindu epic that symbolizes the fight between good and evil: Kaurava and the Pāṇḍava. The fight has many layers, and in one encounter, Draupadi (wife of Pandava and the most potent female protagonist in the epic) is brought to the court of the antagonist Kaurava. He tries to strip her in his court by pulling on her sari to dishonour her. However, she is protected by the god Krishna because of her karma, and the fabric of the sari becomes infinite.[334] This theatrical performance of pulling the cloth off her continues until the antagonist submits to the power of Draupadi and requests her forgiveness.[335]

During Emperor Akbar's reign in the sixteenth century, many Hindu epics were illustrated within the manuscripts of *Akbarnama*. The third volume, *Ain-i-Akbari,* contains many depictions of stories from *Mahabharata.*[336] The theme of Draupadi being disrobed (Figure 47) is said to have been commissioned by Emperor Akbar himself. The painting shows that the story modified its visual referents to suit Muslim sensibilities, mainly by replacing traditional valance practices and changing Draupadi's sari into a never-ending *chadar* (shawl).[337]

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[334] The sari is female garment from the Subcontinent that consists of a drape varying from five to nine yards (4.5 to 8 meters) in length that is typically wrapped around the waist, with one end draped over the shoulder, baring the midriff.

[335] This myth is called "*Draupadi Cheer Haren.*" *Cheer* in Sanskrit means cloth and *Haren* mean to *take away*. It is an extremely popular myth within mainstream Hindu culture and there have been hundreds of theatrical performances and artistic representation of this myth. Vrinda Nabar, "Whose 'Mahabharat'? A Point of View." *Indian Literature* 49, no. 1 (225) (Feb 2005): 176–78.

[336] The *Akbar Nama,* which translates to Book of Akbar, is the official chronicle of the reign of Akbar, the third Mughal emperor, who ruled the Indian subcontinent from 1556 to 1605 and was a great patron of the arts. He commissioned his biography by his court historian and biographer, Abul Fazl, who was one of the nine jewels in Akbar's court. It was written in Persian, the literary language of the Mughals, and includes vivid and detailed descriptions of his life and times through thousands of Indo-Persian miniature illustrations. Akbar also gave orders to translate *Ramayana,* which was completed in 1584, first translated from Sanskrit into Awadhi. Court translators then rendered their translation into Persian verse, and court painters added their interpretations of the various scenes.

[337] Most Hindu Muslim shared vocabulary is indebted especially to him and his rule was a great co-ordination of Mughal expertise and Rajput (Hindu) gallantry. The third volume of Abul Fazl's *Akbar Nama,* Ain-i-Akbari, contains an extensive account of the thoughts and customs of India. The book *Mahabharat,* one of the ancient books of Hindustan, was translated from Hindi into Persian by Naqib Khan, Maulana Abdul Qadir Badauni, and Shaikh Sultan Thanesari. See M. Athar Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works at Akbar's Court." *Social Scientist* 20, no. 9 (September 1992): 41. Akbar also married the daughter of Raja Bhari Mall of Amber to strengthen this alliance. His court is said to have observed many Hindu rituals to please his beloved wife. See Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Hemchandra C. Raychaudhuri, and Kalikinkar Datta, *An Advanced History of India* (New York: Macmillan and Co.,

Khalid was trained as a miniaturist at the National College of Arts, Lahore, the only art college with a separate department for miniature research and practice, and must be acquainted with Hindu themes within the larger Indo-Persian miniature traditions, and her textile-inspired artwork shows inspiration from these sources. I suggest that resistance and theatrics through textiles are recurrent themes in Khalid's works. Her miniature painting, *Covered/Uncovered,* is composed of a continuous textile pattern, which subtly marks the confrontational female figure's outline, which is absorbed into the background. This curtainlike continuity and repetition of the textile pattern give the artwork a theatrical vibe. Like Draupadi, Aisha's protagonist seems to be protected by repetitive layers of cloth layers. If so, this interpretation of diverse regional and hybrid vocabularies complicates the essentialist readings in discourses surrounding veiled images as essentially borne out of austere Islamic aesthetics.

Further, Atteqa Ali, a Pakistani-born American art historian from the University of Texas at Austin, in her PhD dissertation, "Impassioned Play" (2008), interprets the thin red strip of cloth around the neck, which hangs in front of the veiled figure in Covered/Uncovered 11, as a metaphor for female sexuality and desire. As mentioned earlier, Khalid's works are overtly influenced by Sufi mysticism. I will argue through a more recent anecdote, where resistance against religious fundamentalism was performed through such an article of clothing, and that the red scarf in Aisha's painting has an alternative connotation as well.

In 2018 there was a violent terrorist attack on one of the most loved Sufi Mazars (shrines), Shahbaz Qalander, during its yearly *urs* in Karachi, killing a large number of people.[338] As a form of resistance to extremism, Sheema Kirmani, the famous *kathank* (classical) dancer, activist, and performer from Karachi performed *dhamaal* (Sufi esoteric dance) at the destroyed shrine with her pupils in front of the public (Figure 48). Every participant had a strip of red cloth around the neck, signifying resistance to religious intolerance. Traditionally the colour red

1950), 449; Aarushi Syrana, "Iconography of Draupadi," Reading Cloth, Oct. 29, 2013, http://readingcloth.blogspot.ca/2013/10/iconography-of-draupadi.html/ . Various folios of the Persian translation of *Mahabharat* can be seen at: Mridula Chari, "Eight Exquisite Mughal Miniatures of the Ramayana Commissioned by Emperor Akbar," Scroll.In, October 22, 2014. https://scroll.in/article/684556/eight-exquisite-mughal-miniatures-of-the-ramayana-commissioned-by-emperor-akbar/.

[338]Wahhabism is Saudi Arabia's dominant faith. It is an austere form of Islam that insists on a literal interpretation of the Quran; General Zia-ul-Haq (then the chief of Pakistan's army) dissolved the democratically elected government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in a military coup and declared martial law on 5 July 1977. The Wahabi ideology in Islam looks at Sufism, which evolved as a form of Islamic spirituality in Iran and was bought to the Subcontinent by traveling saints, as a deviation and considers the followers of Sufism heretics.

around the neck signified resistance against the normative in Sufi ideology. Once again, we can conclude that Khalid uses textiles as a form of resistance using diverse and multivariant sources within the region.

Though the artwork was exhibited transnationally and did not fully explore the complex historical context within the Subcontinent, we can confidently say that Khalid did not use the burqa as a trope or even as a political signifier. I call *Covered/Uncovered* II a transitional work that—even though it uses an image popularized by the Western media—creates a complex female subjectivity that is thoroughly ingrained in the cultural milieu. Her work engages her subject as well as a gendered audience not only on a political but on a personal level. Her work is as relevant to her global audience as it is to her regional viewers; imbued in diverse cultural signifiers within the Subcontinent, she demands an informed audience.

Amra Khan (b. 1980) graduated in 2008 and is among the young artists who are more radical in their expressions than their senior counterparts. Khan is a multidisciplinary artist who works in media, photography, found objects such as human and animal hair, paintings and decorative sculptural memorabilia. She is also one of the artists on which this dissertation focuses, and her work is further explored in the last chapter. However, her work selected for this part shares with other works analyzed in this part the use of burqa images.

In the video installation *Untitled 2012*, first exhibited at Canvas Art Gallery, Karachi, in 2012, Khan uses a grid to show up to 24 smaller square screens; each screen holds a video portrait, against a clean white background, of a woman wearing a black burqa (Figure 49). Voices of Quranic recitation are in the background. As discussed throughout the first part of this chapter, the first decade of the twenty-first century was riddled with cliched burqa images that were exhibited internationally. So, what makes Khan's work provocative and disruptive?

The video projection offers a critique of urban Pakistan after the onset of the War on Terror, with hundreds of religious images and videos circulating on social media accounts of the urban middle class. It highlights the sudden interest of well-placed urban women in religion, synchronized with the Western literary and artistic discourses exploring the Islamic world. However, there is a twist. The black urban-style burqas these girls wear are kinked with popular cultural icons such as pink-zipped slits through which girls may lick their ice cream cones. Others bear embroidered pop-culture designs, including the logos of McDonald's, Playboy, and the international designers Louis Vuitton and Chanel, and even exploding cartoon bombs from

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cartoon networks. The video creates a satirical commentary on the complicated relationship between Pakistani urban middle-class culture and globalized trends, along with cheap knock-off designer products flooding the markets. The work successfully disrupts the binary—religiously oppressed vs. pious woman—by complicating urban gendered existence; here, women perform between provocation and modesty, religion and Western influence. The work destabilizes the myth of a unified, homogenized religious oppressed gendered identity by introducing the ambivalent and complex gendered subjectivities that are formed by multiple realities.

In 2015, Khan extended the *Untitled Series* into an equally provocative and dissident performance. The performances were documented on video, and eventually, a series of postcards were physically mailed. This time she created a series of archival digital prints depicting the artist herself wearing a black burqa embroidered with various Western and Eastern pop-culture icons and logos, conceived for the initial video installation piece. The series of performances involved the artist visiting markets and public places, licking ice cream through the zip in the black burqa or trying on new shoes (Figure 50). The installation serves as a critique of gender roles, cultural misogyny and capitalism all at once. Khan offers an alternative to one-dimensional conceptions of globalized consumption that projects the power of buying with emancipation in women.[339]

Amra Khan's work has regional appeal as it addresses its regional audience, but it also serves as a commentary on transnational gender politics and the neoliberal economy. It reminds us of a scene from the movie *Sex and the City 2* (2010), where the four American girlfriends in search of ethnic flavour visit Abu Dhabi and are chased by crazed brown Muslim men due to their provocative behaviour and attires.[340] Eventually, they are rescued by two veiled women in black abayas and ushered to safety. Cultural theorist Moon Charania, analyzing the scene, writes:

> The foursome's initial trepidation—even aversion—towards these veiled/oppressed dissolves as the women drop their veils to reveal the same high-end Western couture that hung from the shoulders of our emancipated American foursome. . ."Under hundreds of years of tradition was this year's spring collection!"[341]

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[339] The images and texts on Khan's performance video installation *Untitled* 2012 and extended *Untitled Series, 2015* are unavailable on websites.
[340] See Moon Charania, *Will the Real Pakistani Woman Please Stand Up?*, 8.
[341] Ibid.

Charania called this scene "supremely unrealistic, woefully incongruous and purely pleasurable as it brings together *burqas* and *haute couture*" for its American audience, who inexplicably have come to associate gender liberation with skimpily dressed women, and access to haute couture as empowerment.[342]

The hypervisibility of brown Muslim bodies since September 11 under the neoliberal economy has also turned them into valued consumers. There are high-end fashion hijabs and designer abayas, especially for Arab women, while Nike creates sportswear hijabs for Muslim athletes. Especially within the diasporic context, Muslim women are transitioning from being "othered" to a new "othered" market niche for the Western high-end fashion industry.

Khan's artwork hence becomes relevant to the global audience as a critique of the new liberal market. It asks, "How do consumerism and designer labels empower Muslim women who are otherwise considered oppressed?" just as Moon Charania questions the Western confounding of female hyper-sexualization with empowerment.

Purdah (2018) by **Vidha Saumya** is printed with archival ink on white Hahnemühle folded into a zine (Figure 51). *Purdah* measures 23×13 cm when closed and 23×377 cm when opened. The artwork was first exhibited at the *River in an Ocean* (2018) exhibition in Lahore, curated by Abdullah Qureshi and Natasha Malik. This exhibition was dedicated as a tribute to the art matriarch and feminist activist artist Lala Rukh and was a collateral event to Lahore Biennale 01. The theme of the exhibition was resistance against normative, which will be thoroughly discussed in the last chapter of this dissertation.

The zine enclosed in a glass box depicts twenty-two black-and-white pen and ink illustrations on each side of the page. These are images of a nude female body illustrated to be inside or encrusted by a black shroud-like covering. The black covering suggests a black burqa. However, the artwork does not show a generic faceless woman behind a veil but an actual living, breathing person inside, engulfed in performing various tasks, some sexual, some emotional, and some mundane in nature. One image shows her crying, and another menstruating (Figure 52). In one image, she is wearing red lingerie with red lipstick, sitting provocatively, suggesting a mimicry of a potential pseudo-erotic encounter.

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[342] Ibid., 9.

These images successfully strip the veil of its mystique and the fetishization with which the burqa or veil is usually approached either by Eurocentric discourse or religious discourse. A covering does not make women any less human. The artwork successfully humanizes the women inside the veils by telling different stories and stages in their lives.

3.3. Conclusion of the Chapter

At the beginning of the chapter, an analysis of the feminist struggle during General Zia's regime highlighted the emergence of a consolidated female voice and created a background for a consistent female struggle against colonial and religious nationalist patriarchies within recent Pakistani history. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, in the introduction to "Postcolonial Feminism/ Postcolonialism and Feminism," asserts that the construction of female subjectivity in postcolonial societies can only be conceptualized through the "exploration of and at the intersections of colonialism and neo-colonialism."[343] The women's lives in Pakistan as a post-postcolonial and neocolonial region are products of religious, nationalist, cultural, and (neo)colonial encounters that give their complicated and sometimes contradictory identities a coherence. Therefore, the construction of their identities cannot be separated from these histories. The primary purpose of this dissertation is to foreground heterogenous feminist visuality in the context of transnational and regional politics and, through diverse signifiers, make visible their heterogeneous existence.

The three complex feminist artistic initiatives discussed engage with the burqa image; they create female subjectivities that are not passive, fixed, or political tropes for religious nationalism. Instead, these gendered veiled bodies confront their viewers. Even veiled, these dynamic brown bodies assert their presence and make themselves visible by inviting the audience a glimpse into their lives, making them symbolic predecessors to the artworks discussed in the following chapters.

The next chapter focuses on the works of two artists, Frida Batool and Naiza Khan. These artists refused to engage with clichés and tropes surrounding Muslim brown women, especially when those images engrossed transnational art praxis. As Spivak puts it, one must be able to imagine beyond the stereotype. These two artists make us realize that resistance against being "othered" within colonial and patriarchal metanarratives (visual, textual, or virtual) is not only

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[343] Rajan and Park, "Postcolonial Feminism/Postcolonialism and Feminism," 53.

negotiated through recounting the legacies of queens or religious ideologies or authentic cultural tropes. Alternative resistant histories are also formed through recounting diverse, subliminal, everyday stories.

Chapter 4:
Nuances of Urban Gendered Subjectivities and Symbolic Urban Occupations

The previous chapters discuss in detail the recent history and political context through which the artworks that are the focus of this and the following chapter are analyzed. As mentioned, 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror fueled Islamophobia globally, resulting in the proliferation of burqa-related art and scholarship intended to bridge gaps between two opposing ideologies, the West and Islam. This further motivated artists from Pakistan to create burqa images to participate in the global dialogue or, at the very least, global consumption. I argue that this repeated single visual reference to Muslim brown bodies created double ethnocentricity.

This chapter focuses on two women artists who broke free from the cliché images of burqas that stood for a universal Pakistani woman as projected by the global media. These artworks include a series of site-specific mural installations by Naiza Khan titled *Hanna Hands* (2001–2004) and Farida Batool's lenticular print *Nai Ressan Shehr Lahore Diyan* (No city in the world can compete with Lahore) (2007). The dissertation argues that these artists created the first conscious gendered responses to negotiate the complex shift regarding gendered politics around Pakistani subjectivities due to the War on Terror.

These artists focused their concerns on the repercussions of the War on Terror on the representations of urban gendered bodies regionally and responded to these regional concerns. Although their artworks were exhibited internationally, they did not engage with the populist visual vocabulary to accommodate the white audience. Instead, they created a gender-based feminist iconography that negotiated complex regional signifiers and interregional knowledge, strategically circumventing the oppressed-versus-pious binary rhetoric. By changing their interlocutor from a white to a regionally informed audience, they succeeded in eluding the burqa image that was becoming the face of Pakistani art globally.

The selected artworks have several overlapping concerns. Their familiar iconography signifies a performative urbanity that situates imagined female protagonists leisurely occupying urban spaces. The taboo attached to women occupying public spaces for leisure in the Subcontinent is framed through Mumbai-based feminist writer Shilpa Phadke's book *Why Loiter?* in the next chapter while discussing more subversive and physical expressions of public occupations.

Further, both artworks use hybrid, ambivalent material/pop-cultural signifiers to confront and resist the reactionary populist religious-nationalist backlash to the War on Terror, which demonized urban women and was bent on further diminishing them from urban spaces.[344] These imaginary female protagonists in Naiza Khan's *Hanna Hands* (2002–2004) and Farida Batool's *Nai Ressan Shehr Lahore Diyan* (2007) occupying urban spaces are engaged in a symbolic gendered public occupation. By imagining their protagonists in public spaces, these artists, I argue, provided a precedent for more belligerent forms of gendered urban occupations in art and in many urban feminist initiatives such as Girls @ Dhaba (2012) and Women March (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021).

As argued, the reactionary religious nationalism after the War on Terror used massive propaganda and takes tangible steps to erase urban women from public places. This effort reinforces already existing misogynist discourses against urban women and encourages a vigilante culture, making women even more vulnerable in public spaces.[345] This situation gave birth to homegrown urban feminist initiatives in the form of numerous interregional sporadic communities on social media, consolidating to assert their right to urban spaces.[346] Especially in the second decade of the twenty-first century, Pakistan witnessed a push-and-pull politics between leftist urban gendered subjectivities and the religious, nationalistic mentality perpetuated by the religious right-wing within Pakistan; this is a battle that goes on. These informal community-based initiatives are rarely discussed in academic writings. The last part of this chapter will connect the semiotics of the artworks under discussion regarding gender and urban spaces with one such homegrown urban feminist initiative, *Girls at Dahabas,* initiated by a 20-year-old in Karachi in 2012.[347] I argue that the organic, praxis-based, urban, secular feminist initiatives that have emerged as a voice of resistance against the structures of patriarchy

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[344] The phenomena such as erasing women and their images from urban spaces have been discussed at length in Chapter One.

[345] While I was editing this chapter, there was an attack on a female TikTok star in public. She was violently assaulted, thrown into the air, and had her clothes ripped from her while filming a TikTok video in Lahore. Samantha Lock, "Hundreds of Men Tear Off Female TikTok Star's Clothes in Horrifying Video," *Newsweek.* Aug. 21, 2021. https://www.newsweek.com/woman-assaulted-minar-e-pakistan-video-tiktok-1620465/ .

[346] As discussed in the last chapter, the early twenty-first century was the age of information in Pakistan, with media being privatized by Pervez Musharraf. The number of social media users in Pakistan increased by 2.4 million (+7.0%) between April 2019 and January 2020. Social media penetration in Pakistan stood at 17% in January 2020. These numbers are primarily indicative of urban users of social media.
Kemp, Digital 2020.

[347] Official site: https://girlsatdhabas.wordpress.com/ .

share many dimensions with Farida Batool's and Naiza Khan's imagined protagonists. The most prominent overlap of these initial art responses and the appearance of homegrown praxis-based feminist movements is that both focus on the occupation of urban spaces, traditionally reserved for men, through performative ethnicity. Further, the feminist artworks discussed in this chapter and the feminist initiative both manifest Pakistan's secular urban feminist movement in a Muslim context.

Secular urban feminist activism in Pakistan has always had its challenges. However, 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror started a fresh debate against the validity of leftist secular/inclusive urban feminism within a Muslim context. There is a plethora of alternative faith-based feminist studies within academia that disconnect themselves from mainstream secular feminism, arguing the validity of alternative faith-based resistances. However, this dissertation maintains that faith-based feminism is itself not a homogenized category, considering multiple sects within Islam. I argue further, as feminist researchers such as Amina Jamal and Sadia Toor have rightly observed, that in many cases, patriarchal discourses, whether cultural or nationalist, take precedence over straightforward religious interpretation as long as it serves their hegemonic agendas.

As the artworks in this dissertation are argued to have created multiple perspectives in defining their urban subjectivities, it is pertinent to negotiate the validity of the methodology by addressing the manifestations of faith-based and secular feminism in the regional context.

4.1. Politics of Piety and the Lived Reality of Gendered Urbanity in Pakistan

The emergence of Islamophobia and the rise of consequent populist right-wing politics within the Western world after 9/11 brought about an upsurge in policy bans on veils and veiling in many Western countries (already mentioned in Chapter Two).[348] This upsurge initiated an inquisitiveness, within leftist global discourses, especially within the art world, towards Muslim subjectivities and their sartorial manifestations. This situation further resulted in the proliferation of art exhibitions documenting veil/veiling practices within Islamic cultures historically and in contemporary times. The proliferation of veiled Muslim bodies in gallery settings and scholarship around veil/veiling have already been discussed in Chapters One and Two.

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[348] As mentioned in the Chapter Two paradoxically it was embraced by museums and the art world as a form of leftist-liberal ideology.

As transnational right-wing politics intensified, there was a surge in reactionary faith-based scholarship in the Muslim context inspired by what is popularly referred to as Islamic feminism.[349] These alternative Muslim holistic/feminist texts within academia are well-received in international academia, sometimes seeking to "showcase a supposed commitment to feminist intersectionality, or tokenism and even appeasement policies towards 'progressive' or 'moderate' Islamic politics."[350] According to Karachi-based secular Pakistani researcher and feminist activist Dr. Afia Zia, leftist liberals in the Western context include faith-based feminism as a theoretical alternative in feminist discourses to indicate diversification in academia. However, the ramification of faith-based feminism as an actual force is concerning domestically, as they are well-received and are at par with patriarchy and nationalist agendas, following a "route of stealth and accommodation with patriarchy."[351]

Many noteworthy diasporic Pakistani feminist researchers, such as Saba Mahmood, Humeira Iqtidar, and Masooda Bano, reject liberal secular feminism as a Western construct by reading into faith-based/post-secular right-wing women's piety movements, such as *Jamaat ud Dawa*, the women's commission of *Jamaat-e-Islami*, *Al-Huda, Al-Hafsa,* and *Al-Noor* as decolonial practices. The main argument of these writers is that the universalization of the westernized concept of gender liberation and freedom is a form of a colonized mentality and does not hold legitimacy in a gendered Muslim context. Saba Mahmood writes:

> The meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance, but must emerge through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity. Viewed in this way, what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency—but one that can be understood only from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment.[352]

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[349] Islamic feminism is connected with the question of compatibly of female rights with Islamic teaching and scripture. It described as essentially a postmodernist, diasporic scholarly project that does not recognize any single (male) interpretation or dominant narrative of Islam. This definition is derived from: Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 126-130. For further study, see Shahrzad Mojab, "'Muslim' Women and 'Western' Feminists: The Debate on Particulars and Universals." *Monthly Review* 50, 7 (September 1988); Idem, "Theorizing the Politics of 'Islamic Feminism,'" *Feminist Review* 69, 1 (2001); idem, "Gender, Political Islam, and Imperialism," in *The New Imperialists: Ideologies of Empire,* ed. C. Mooers (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006); Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006).

[350] Zia, "Faith and Feminism," 23.

[351] Ibid.

[352] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2011), 14.

Bangladeshi-born British feminist economist Naila Kabeer responds to this intellectual viewpoint by arguing that the blatant discard of any form of set values for human rights in favour of another form of essentialism forms an argumentative fallacy. She maintains, "if liberal arguments for justice are premised on false universalism, the cultural relativist [read: religious] case rests on an equal false essentialism."[353]

Faith-based feminist scholarship creates Muslim exceptionalism that projects all Muslim women as monolithic entities with identical demands. It does not accommodate the fact that women as social actors act differently in various situations, including personal, social, religious, familial, and political. Faith-based feminism also reinforces the assumptions about what Talpade refers to as "average Third World women" by conceptualizing Muslim brown bodies as a coherent group with indistinguishable interests regardless of location, ethnicity, class, or social conditions.

In *Secularizing Islamist?* a case study of female agency within the religiopolitical groups (Islamists) in Pakistan, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jama'at Da'wa, Humeira Iqtitdar projects a monolithic view of Islam.[354] The study does not showcase the reality that several religious sects of Islam in Pakistan often underplay each other's authenticity and interpretation of Islamic scripture.[355]

In her dissertation, "Faith and Feminism," Zia methodically addresses the concern and contradiction within universalizing Islamic feminism. She argues that these case studies of feminist agency within faith-based politics often come from the diasporic intellectuals who originate from liberal/secular institutions, with a secular outlook in their private lives:

> They seem to be missing the underlying irony . . . most, if not all of the
> time, such advice is usually addressed to a liberal/secular (English
> speaking) readership rather than any faith-based audience."[356]

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[353] Naila Kabeer is an Indian-born British Bangladeshi social economist, research fellow, and writer. She was also president of the International Association for Feminist Economics from 2018 to 2019. Naila Kabeer, "Empowerment, Citizenship and Gender Justice: A Contribution to Locally Grounded Theories of Change in Women's Lives," *Ethics and Social Welfare* 6, no.3 (June 2012): 230. As a critical engagement with imperialism, many scholars document and hold imperial forces to the standards of universal human rights during wars and the treatment of war criminals as in the case of during Iraq and Afghan wars. Hence, it shows that there is an acknowledgment of basic universal human rights hence it can't be negated in the case of women and faith-based feminism.

[354] Islamists as faith-based political groups are defined in Chapter One.

[355] As mentioned in Chapter One: Islam itself is not a homogenous identity in Pakistan. See: Moonis, "Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan, 19.

[356] Zia, "Faith and Feminism," 13.

Saigol tries to contextualize the faith-based scholarship, auguring that the significance of faith-based writings by diasporic Muslim writers lies in post–9/11 identity politics within Western countries. These counternarratives that "seek an empowering identity in the symbols and practices of Islam" were responses to the construction of Muslims' subjectivities as savages and terrorists by Western media. Saigol further argues that "the politics of location has led some among them to perceive Pakistani [secular] feminists as siding with the racist imperialism and hegemonic feminism of Western countries," notwithstanding that gendered identity and minority politics present different challenges within Pakistan.[357] Zia argues that this romanticizing of piety politics neglects these politics' consequential regional ground realities.[358] Further, it is argued that being a Muslim-majority country, it is not the freedom to engage in religious practices but the "existence of pluralist polity" that is usually at stake in Pakistan.[359]

Zia further remarks that most of these Islamist groups actively disengage/disenfranchise women from the political realm. Further, Islamist women focus primarily on the reformation of Muslim family laws, whereas secular feminism in Muslim contexts struggles for the political and legal rights of Muslim women, non-Muslims and transwomen alike; hence it is an inclusive and holistic approach.[360] It is a documented fact that the rise in Islamists' politics of piety has created a certain kind of religious-nationalist mentality, triggering an abundance of blasphemy cases and targeted killings of minorities, members of minority Muslim sects, liberal academics, and public violence, as well as extreme online harassment against urban women and women in performing arts.[361] Hence, these popular piety movements help patriarchy actively restrict "other women's empowerment if its expression does not fit the religiously prescribed mould" for women.[362] According to Zia:

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[357] Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan*, 34.

[358] Zia argues that Islamic feminists within Pakistan target women within entertainment media who pursue a liberal lifestyle. The Islamist and pietist women also tend to reinforce nationalist, patriarchal, traditionalist, conservative, masculinist religious percepts. Ibid, 52–53.

[359] Deniz Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation." *Millennium* 20, no. 3 (March 1991): 29.

[360] Zia, "Faith and Feminism," 220.

[361] Ibid. Zia uses the violence towards the female polio workers in Northern areas as an example. These violent crimes, usually of a private or political nature, are hidden in the garb of religious piety and moral codes.

[362] There is no standard form of female piety attire within the Islamist movements, which start from covering the hair to covering the face to covering the entire body. Afiya Shehrbano Zia, "Faith-based Challenges to the Women's Movement in Pakistan," in *Contesting Feminisms: Gender and Islam in Asia*, ed. H.A. Ghosh (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2009), 242.

> Feminism in particular has become a suspect handmaiden in the post 9/11
> era that is dominated by the analytic framing of all Muslim related matters
> through the lens of Islamophobia, and especially when it challenges Islamic
> laws, patriarchy or male norms in the Muslim contexts.[363]

Analyzing the arguments from various scholars, this dissertation agrees with Saba Mahmood's argument in favour of the validity of alternative feminist agency; however, even obedience and docility within a framework of religion manifest themselves differently in different regional specificities and conditions. I argue that various sects within Islam create various degrees of limitations for women. Further, the *pursuit* of the agency itself should not be static and should not only be negotiated within a single norm. As Kabeer writes, "empowerment should be viewed as a *process* that [ultimately] enables one to make choices and that it is through choice that real power is exercised."[364]

The austere leftist liberal feminism, such as Zia, and faith-based feminism, which advocates agency within a monolithic version of Islam, both have their limitations regarding regions such as Pakistan. Due to hundreds of years of cohabiting as a minority in the Subcontinent, Pakistanis have a complex multicultural history, where religion plays a pertinent role.

As leftist liberal feminism and religious essentialists wish to restructure society through a single anti/religious lens, both create two extremes that foster intense resentments. The reality on the ground of secular activism-based feminists in Pakistan has been more ambivalent and inclusive. However, Zia makes a compelling case when she argues that, being a democratic country, Pakistan cannot create different criteria for the rights of its citizens based solely on gender, which is only possible with the separation of religion from state politics.[365]

Further, I argue that the concept of an essentialized Islamic feminism as a progressive lens addressing and challenging patriarchy within a religious domain is problematic, as it implies that it is only Islam as a religion and its wrong interpretations that are the root cause of female subjugation and misogyny in Muslim majority societies.

The fact remains that Islam did not introduce patriarchal practices within the Subcontinent. As Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed argue, "The patriarchal system to be

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[363] Zia, "Faith and Feminism," 44.
[364] Kabeer, "Empowerment, Citizenship and Gender Justice," 230.
[365] Zia, "Faith and Feminism," 186.

found in Pakistan does not *only* owe its existence to Islam and predates the arrival of the latter in the Subcontinent."[366] The region's history of indigenous and Hindu patriarchal practices is integrated within Islamic traditions due to the 800 years of coexistence of Hindus, Muslims, and various minorities. These patriarchies were further augmented by imperial capitalist patriarchy under the 300-year British colonial rule, creating systemic discourses against women.[367]

The fact remains that what appears to be the face of Pakistani culture and religion is a result of this historical, cultural intersectionality and transnational and regional power politics, where religion is often calculatedly used as a tool for political, imperial, and patriarchal ends. The love marriage of Saima Waheed, a 22-year-old urban girl outside her *baradari* (tribe/cast), as documented by many feminist scholars, proves that tradition and religion are interchangeable when patriarchal hegemony is at stake. The case proves that, on occasion, cultural hegemony takes precedence over religious practices and hence creates ambivalence towards religion. Saima Waheed's case demonstrates how an adult Muslim woman's legal rights within Islam and the Pakistani constitution became a "nationalist debate because it challenged the patriarchal imperatives."[368] Waheed belonged to a middle-class, moderately religious family; her love marriage was challenged in court by her parents on the grounds of being illegal due to the absence of the consent of her "wali" (male guardian). The case was fought pro bono by Asma Jehangir, the in/famous feminist activist lawyer.[369] Jehangir argued that under "both Islamic law and Pakistan's penal code, Waheed (as a sui juris) had been perfectly within her legal right" to

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[366] Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step back?* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 154.

[367] Ibid. Bolivian postcolonial feminist theorist Aymara Paredes, who calls this double-oppression created by patriarchies, in the plural, "entroque," when patriarchy of ancestral origin combines with imperialistic patriarchy. Julieta Paredes, *Hilando Fino: Desde el Feminismo Comunitario* (La Paz: Comunidad Mujeres Creando Comunidad, 2010), 66.

[368] The example is documented in the following published texts: Toor, *The State of Islam,* 167–78; Sadaf Ahmad, ed., *Pakistani Women: Multiple Locations and Competing Narrative*s (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 123–37; Amina Jamal, "Gender, Citizenship, and the Nation-State in Pakistan: Willful Daughters or Free Citizens?," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 2 (Winter: 2006): 284–304; Editors Yearbook of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law, "Pakistan-Abdul Waheed v. Asma Jehangir (the Saima Waheed Case), Opening Pandora's Box: The Impact of the Saima Waheed Case on the Legal Status of Women in Pakistan." *Yearbook of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law Online* 3, no. 1 (Jan 1996): 518–31.

[369] She was one of the founders and served as chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), which has been active in highlighting human rights violations by the Pakistani military and intelligence services. Asma Jahangir served as UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions from 1998 to 2004 and as Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief from 2004 to mid-2010. She also served as the President of the Supreme Court Bar Association. She died of a cardiac arrest in 2018.
Front Line Defenders, "Case History: Asma Jehangir," 2012 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case-history-asma-jahangir/.

choose whom to marry. Though the final verdict came in Waheed's favour, the three-member bench called for basic amendments to family laws to enforce parental authority and discourage courtships, extramarital relationships and secret friendships and marriages. Justice Ihsan-ul Haq Choudhry called this the influence of westernized values and secularism that led to immorality, premarital sex, and adultery in society and disapproved of this code of Islamic law written by a "modernist Muslim." Khalil-ur-Rehman Ramday, the other judge on the committee, wrote, "this husband shopping which obviously involves testing and trial . . . cannot be viewed with favour."[370] Even though the verdict was favourable towards the defendant, the judges' lengthy disapproving verdicts resulted in further violence against women and further ambiguity regarding the status of unmarried women in Pakistan. Ultimately the couple had to leave Pakistan for their safety.

A rather amusing recent incident (2019) further shows how nationalist patriarchy can take precedence over religious rhetoric in certain circumstances. A nationalist propagandist film funded by the military's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) agency against Pakistan's archrival India, released in 2019, included a provocative dance number.[371] The overtly sexual nature of the dance and lyrics (item number) resulted in an uproar in the religious sector of the society on the pretext that such obscenity was downright un-Islamic.[372] The response of the young actress (Neelam Muneer) who performed in the song was rather patriotic: "This project was from ISPR. . . . For Pakistan I am willing even to sacrifice my life." The director-general of ISPR, Lieutenant General Asif Ghafoor, also took to Twitter to defend their project: "The item song is by an Indian girl in the movie as per her role, you may watch the movie to know the context."[373] This was the end of the controversy. This absurdity of logic can only be understood within the ideological apotheosis achieved by Pakistan's army as almost a sacred institution since partition within a nationalist context. But it also shows that the Pakistani state is more

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[370] Toor, *The State of Islam*, 176.

[371] *Kaaf Kangana,* released in 2019, written and directed by Khalil-ur-Rehman Qamar, and distributed by ARY films. The film is a project of Inter-Services Public Relations, the public relations wing of Pakistan's Armed Forces.

[372] The terms "item number" or "item song" are commonly used in connection with South Asian cinema to describe a sexually provocative dance sequence in a movie. It is a dance performance that has little to do with the film, but is added to showcase beautiful women dancing in revealing clothes, to lend support to the marketability of the film.

[373] Global Village Space. "DG ISPR Defends Neelum Muneer's Item Song in ISPR-Funded Movie," Oct. 31, 2019, https://www.globalvillagespace.com/dg-ispr-defended-neelum-muneers-item-song-in-ispr-funded/ .

concerned with projected gendered representations as a political nationalist agenda rather than enforcing genuine religious doctrines.

The cases prove that the contradictions and ambivalence between religion and cultural values are manipulated by patriarchy (because men remain in power positions) on several occasions when Islamic provisions are in conflict with patriarchal hegemony specific to the Subcontinent.[374] Hence when Islamic injunctions prove inconvenient to patriarchy, they are sidelined for cultural and traditional values and reinterpretations that favour the version of "the accepted norms of the Islamic society" that favours patriarchy and vice versa.[375] As a result, as argued by Amina Jamal, feminist activists in Pakistan also "contest and appropriate" the discourses of Islamization and modernity. She argues that the reality on the ground is that feminism in Pakistan has been "both framed by and have to mobilize the tension between private and public and home and nation to press for women's rights."[376]

This ambivalence between religious practices and patriarchal desires has recently been explored by contemporary feminist postcolonial writers and scholars from Pakistan, such as Farida Batool and Fouzia Saeed.[377] In her PhD thesis on film studies, Batool investigates the rise of homemade semi-professional videos of *mujra*, a popular genre of erotic female dancing in Pakistan. Her methodology is to explore the discourses of male sexuality and how it circumvents religion to create, circulate, and consume soft pornography:

> The technological flow bypassed the orthodox regime and its severe control over modes and agencies of cultural production . . . A major part of [the] 'aesthetic formation' of these negotiations, primarily by male citizens, are situated in the imagined sense of Muslim nationhood, which claims piety despite indulgence in illicit sexual practices.[378]

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[374] For the last 75 years of Pakistan's history, the religious political parties have not been able to have a sweeping win in an election and until 2018, two major parties, PPP and PML, gained power alternatively. This further shows that for most Pakistani people, religion plays a massive role in their lives but they do have reservations against uncontested religious politics.

[375] Toor, *State of Islam,* 170–71.

[376] Jamal, "Gender, Citizenship, and the Nation-State in Pakistan,"301.
Modernity brings the concept of nation-states and nationalism that erodes other forms of alliances in the face of adversity; we witnessed after the War on Terror how women became the religious-nationalist symbol.

[377] Fauzia Saeed's recent book traces the various rural and urban feminist initiatives in contemporary Pakistan: Fouzia Saeed, *On Their Own Terms: Early Twenty-first Century Women's Movements in Pakistan*. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2020).

[378] Syeda Farida Batool, "New Media, Masculinity and Mujra Dance in Pakistan" 47.

She calls these contemporary cultural productions "a power play between the state and citizen [male as default], religious ideology and sexual desire."[379] She explores how men use productive manipulative means to assert their agency by direct or indirect ways of creation and distribution of such sexual content using subversive and creative tools involving the performative display of orthodox religious and political structures—such as the presence of religious symbols, Quranic verses, and images of Mecca and the prophet's tomb adorning the walls of the shops where these films are sold, such as Hall Road plazas (markets which are considered reserved for men).[380]

Fouzia Saeed, in her book *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* explores the historical presence and impact of prostitution within Mughal rule and the unexplored discourses surrounding male desire in Pakistan.[381] According to Saeed, the extreme hatred towards sex workers in society based on religious and cultural piety does not affect the consumption of the product being sold.[382] She argues that this is just another symptom of a systemic but strategic moral code for taming female sexuality to serve male desires by creating a dichotomy between private and public women: *naik*/pak (pious/private) *ghasti/ harra'fah* (slut/public).[383] As an extension to this logic, the patriarchal discourses in the Subcontinent in general and Pakistan in particular keep educated urban women in check through linguistic slurs equating education and financial independence (a desirable quality in men) with immorality and promiscuity in women.

The colloquialism attached to the word حرافہ (*harra'fah,* feminine) indicates further ambivalence between religion and patriarchy. *Harra'fah* originates from the Arabic/Persian word حرف (*haraf),* which means an *alphabet*, *the building block of a scrip*t. The noun of *haraf is* حرفت (*hirfat),* which means skill/craft/education/art. The adjective of the word *hirfat* is حراف (*harraf*). "*Haraaf*" (masculine), according to the dictionary, means a man who is skillful with words, a charmer (a quality that usually comes with education). The feminine of the word is حرافہ (*harra'fah*). Colloquially, in the Urdu language, this word is equivalent to a slut or a morally depraved woman. This phenomenon may be embedded in the early Mughal period. Fouzia Saeed writes about how the Mughals were great patrons of music, literature, and performing arts in the

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[379] Ibid., 2.

[380] Ibid., 204.

[381] "The Mughals during their rule in sub-continent patronised the performing arts and kept open the possibility of an accomplished singer or dancer rising to highest echelons of prostitution. Under Mughals position flourished considerably." Saeed, *Taboo!,* ix.

[382] Ibid., 37.

[383] Ibid., 300–303.

Subcontinent. As most courtesans were accomplished singers, performers, and poets, they received much favour. Though the majority of homemaker women in the Subcontinent were not educated, as their sole purpose was to procreate, courtesans were often the only ones who had the freedom and means to indulge in educating themselves and cultivating literacy and cultural accomplishments, which helped them rule over aristocratic men with their wits and charm.[384] Part of the prejudice against secular education, therefore, stemmed from apprehensions that education would result in the loss of Muslim women's virtues.[385] Hence, a woman who knew words (who could read and write or had skills to earn her livelihood) was associated with bad character and immorality.[386] This association can also be traced further in more extreme cases in the form of the hatred for girls' education in more conservative areas of Pakistan, such as the Taliban's destruction of girls' schools in the Swat region.[387]

Interestingly, the *first* word to have been revealed upon to the Prophet—a commandment prescribed to all Muslim men and women—is أقرأ (*iqra*), (Surah Al'Alaq 96), which means "*Read*." For Muslim men and women, "to read" is the first message delivered by God to the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him), orphaned at the tender age of two, who himself has been recorded to have received no formal education.[388]

Equating women's learning with immorality is another example of how straightforward religious and linguistic discourses are overwritten and manipulated by broader patriarchal discourses to maintain hegemony. While I was editing, a new meme on social media caught my attention; it read: *An uneducated veiled and modest woman is much superior to an unveiled and immodest woman with a* PhD (Translated from Urdu). Yet again, Pakistan's religious propaganda targets educated urban women.

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[384] Prostitution in the Subcontinent under the Mughals had a different connotation from sex workers. All prostitutes did not perform sexual favours for money, but they were expert entertainers, dancers, accomplished singers, and poets. Ibid.

[385] Rouse, *Shifting Body Politics*, 11.

[386] Saeed, *Taboo*! ix.

[387] Saman Zia-Zarifi, "Lessons in Terror: Attacks on Education in Afghanistan," Human Rights Watch, July 11, 2006, https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/07/10/lessons-terror-attacks-education-afghanistan/ . The prejudice against female education continues after the US army left Afghan soil after 20 years of occupation. The withdrawal of US forces unleashed a new wave of violence towards female education: Jennifer Deaton and Sheena McKenzie, "Death Toll Rises to 85 in Afghanistan Girls' School Bomb Attack," CNN, May 10, 2021. https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/09/asia/afghanistan-girls-school-attack-intl-hnk/index.html/ .

[388] *Rabbi Zidni Ilma* (O' my Lord, increase me in knowledge) a prayer revealed to the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) by Allah in Surah Taha, Ayat 114, in the Holy Quran, also emphasizes on the importance of knowledge and learning.

Hence, the heterogeneous existence of urban women and their struggle for equality have always been precariously balanced. But after the War on Terror, feminism or a right to gender equality further started to be regarded as the propagation of perverse Western values and anti-Muslim propaganda, playing a massive role in further strengthening discursive patriarchal forces. Any active secular feminist campaigns against local patriarchal abuse are interpreted as Western-influenced or Western-funded projects.[389] This tendency has left Muslim Pakistani urban women with limited choices in regional politics; either they can be anti-imperialist passive victims of foreign propaganda or foreign agents/agents of Western civilization. There is nothing in between.[390] Tracing the history of urban feminist struggle in Pakistan, Rubina Saigol, in *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan,* strongly suggests that women of Pakistan have always risen to the occasion by fighting against religious-nationalist patriarchy.

Saigol argues that Pakistan's secular urban feminist struggle is not a recent phenomenon; instead, it has been an interregional and intergenerational struggle against patriarchal structures. Different historical moments gave rise to different sets of issues, influencing the strategies, priorities, and nature of activism. Hence, the emergence of women's political consciousness in Pakistan was not a result of the westernization of feminist thought but a result of the trans/national political landscape within the region, including factors such as

1. Colonialism and the Education Reform Movement (post-1857)
2. Rise of anti-colonial nationalist movements in India (early nineteenth century)
3. Postcolonial restructuring of state and society (after 1947–78)
4. Cold War imperialist conflict and the reconfiguration of Islamization (1978–91)
5. Democracy and the rise of neoliberalism (1991–2001)
6. Global War on Terror and the post–9/11 reconstruction of identities (2001–2020)

Firstly, Saigol traces the female political mobilization within the nationalist struggle for independence in pre-partition India. "In 1947, when the Civil Disobedience movement was launched . . . by the Khudai Khidmatgar and nationalist movements . . . Pathan women marched unveiled in public for the first time and scaled walls to hoist the Muslim League flag."[391] In fact, the first person to hoist the Muslim league flag on the Civil Secretariat (Lahore) was a 14-year-old Muslim schoolgirl, Fatima Sughra (1932–2017), the youngest member of the Muslim

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[389] Zia, "Faith and Feminism," 166.

[390] Ibid., 162.

[391] Pathan or Pashtun culture is considered one of the most conservative cultural discourses for women in the South Asian region.

League. In 1946, during a protest rally, she climbed to the Civil Secretariat Lahore, took down the British Union Jack, and pulled up an ad hoc Muslim League flag made out from a dupatta.[392] In the feminist oral history version, she took off her own white *dupatta* that she was wearing and hoisted it as an ad hoc Muslim league flag.[393]

This participation in the nationalist struggle against colonialism (Western imperialism) based on fundamental human freedom led to the awareness among Pakistani Muslim women of their own rights as women; the awareness was not due to the influence of Western feminism. However, at this early stage of the country's history, there was no coherent and organized women's movement to challenge the measures of patriarchy as well as the clergy.[394]

This soon changed when the military dictator Zia-ul-Haq seized power in an illegal coup in 1977. The Cold War imperialistic polity provided a perfect opportunity for General Zia to gain legitimacy by wrapping himself in Islamic garb. The entire legal structure was reconstructed to institutionalize discrimination against women and non-Muslim citizens. A number of discriminatory laws, including the Hudood Ordinance of 1979, the Qisas and Diyat Ordinance, and the Law of Evidence of 1984, were promulgated. The Qisas and Diyat laws privatized the crime of murder and saved the perpetrators of 'honour-killing.' The Law of Evidence reduced the weight of women's testimony in a court of law to half that of men's testimony.[395]

As a reaction to this institutionalized marginalization in 1981, a group of women met in *Shirkat Gah* Karachi and formed the Women Action Forum (WAF), which extended to Lahore, Islamabad, and Peshawar in a short period of time. For the next decade, WAF became the face of the women's movement in Pakistan.[396] WAF has always held a secular outlook, arguing that

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[392] Xairi Jalil, "Fatima Sughra is No More," Dawn News, April 2021, https://www.dawn.com/news/1360098/ .

[393] Saigol Rubina, Interview with Zainab Najeeb, "Dismantling Myths about Feminism and Aurat March through a Historical Lens," Episode 2, via Zoom , Lahore, Karachi, March 4, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/auratmarchlahore/videos/2976358935917824/.

[394] Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan*, 17.

[395] In 1961, there was a formation of *All Pakistan Women's association* headed by three elite women: Mrs. Bogra, Mrs. Liaqat Ali Khan and the daughter of General Ayub Khan Naseen Aurangzeb. Rafia Zakaria. *The upstairs wife: An intimate history of Pakistan* (Bostan: Beacon Press, 2016), 46.
To Islamize Pakistan, General Zia introduced the Deobandi/Wahhabi version of Islam, which was derived from Jamaat-e-Islami (Islamist) and Saudi Arabian articulations of Islam during the Cold War. Zia did so while acting as an ally to the United States in the Afghanistan/USSR war (1979–89). See Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan,* 14.

[396] Sindhiani Tehreek in Sindh is radical organization which uses direct action as a method to fight not only the military regime but also patriarchy as articulated in interior Sindh. In the 1970s, women's organizations appeared within metropolitan areas such as Shirkat Gah, Aurat Foundation, Women's Front. In 1981, Women's Action Forum (WAF) (Khawatten Mujalis-e-amal) was established to counter General Zia's misogynistic policies. Saigol's

Islam had multiple realities within the Subcontinent that manifest beyond a monolithic religiosity, such as caste, language, gender, class, and ethnicity. However, they strategically invited liberal religious clerics to reject the state version of General Zia's regime.[397] Hence one can conclude that even having a secular outlook within the legal and democratic framework, secular feminism in Pakistan is always conscious of the role religion plays in Pakistani people's lives and wants to stay relevant to that aspect.

Since the War on Terror and the US media's projection of Pakistani women as victims of Islamic extremism, the reactionary religious-nationalistic groups and clerics (and even diaspora post-secularist feminist scholars) blame the secular feminist movement (WAF) for being holders of westernized values and American agents. Saigol argues in WAF's defence that secular feminism historically has always opposed the Pakistani state's assistance in forming a religious extremist force, called Mujahedeen, to facilitate US imperialism during the Cold War.[398] Hence, according to Saigol, tagged as Western agents, the secular feminists in Pakistan opposed US imperialism, even when the religious clerics were working alongside the United States. She further argues that feminist movements in Pakistan have never endorsed unwarranted military operations within the state.[399]

Saigol concludes that due to the rise of religious nationalism during the War on Terror, the most devastating result of religious propaganda against secular feminism is that most middle-class, educated women refrain from expressing themselves for fear of appearing westernized and alienated from their own cultures. This self-censorship and invisibility among the majority of females have "been deeply wounding for many who have a need to engage at the level where patriarchy is most in control—family and body."[400]

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research also traces the antagonistic apprehension that the Pakistani artists and secular feminist share against monolithic and rigid political interpretation of Islam historically. General Zia's regime justified misogynistic measures by invoking his preferred version of Islam and imposed it uniformly on all sects and all citizens. Hence the laws were made to appear divine and not open to challenge. Those on the secular side of the debate, such as WAF, argued and challenged these assumptions by articulating that the country does not have a singular and monolithic reality; rather there were multiple realities and Islam constituted only one of those realities. Beyond religion, there was ethnicity, class, caste, gender, and linguistic and regional identities. Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan.*

[397] Ibid., 16.

[398] Ibid., 36.

[399] Ibid.

[400] The constraints under which women must conduct their struggle in colonial/postcolonial societies has been addressed by many postcolonial feminist theorists.

For the holistic improvement of gendered and minority conditions in Pakistan, it is not as much for want of a better religious interpretation but a need to change the imbalance of power dynamics ingrained in the psyche of the society/societies, which needs to be challenged regionally and universally.[401] Therefore, addressing a single form of patriarchal discourse (religious) does not automatically erase the hierarchal layers. These patriarchies need to be understood in their complexity and addressed rather than simplifying their multifaceted origins.

Hence, the term secular feminism in a Muslim context needs to be understood in the framework of its panoramic vision of Pakistani society and gender-based politics within its historical and recent political discourses, including but not limited to post–War on Terror politics.[402]

To conclude, I argue that specifically in the aftermath of the War on Terror, the precarity of a secular feminist lens in a Muslim context became jaded with westernization and strategically silenced not only by religious-nationalists but also leftists "who warn feminists against washing their dirty laundry in front of the Western eyes."[403] This created many challenges for diverse feminist expressions who wanted to explore the various dimensions of gendered urbanity, which was more needed than ever in Pakistan and globally in the context of the War on Terror's gendered politics.

With the context provided, the dissertation argues that the artists discussed below hyper-regionalized their gendered subjectivities through local literature, fiction, textile, language, and indigenous practices as a strategy. Through these means, they could, to an extent, curate an

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bell hooks argue that during the civil rights movement in the 50s, black women were an equal participant in struggle for racial equality with black men, yet black female activists did not receive the public acclaim awarded to black male leaders. Civil rights movement turned into a struggle for black men to gain racial equality while patterns of sexism within black communities were considered beneficial to the cause. Black women were expected to assume a subservient position and help their men fight for the cause. Bolivian postcolonial feminist theorist Aymara Paredes, who calls this double oppression created by patriarchies, in the plural, "entroque," when patriarchy of ancestral origin combines with imperialistic patriarchy. bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3–5. and Julieta Paredes, *Hilando Fino,* 66.

[401] I used the plural "societies" because patriarchy is not a problem of a single society but is universal.

[402] WAF, in collaboration with female legislators, are at work to counter legal loopholes against women and transwomen. These groups are working for women's legal protection against traditional, cultural, and religious extremism. Their successes can be measured by the following bills: Honor Killing Bill in March 2015, the Sexual Harassment Bill in 2010, the Domestic Violence Bill in 2013, and the Acid Control and Attack Bill in 2010 and 2011. These bills show that, at least on the legislative level, Pakistani liberal feminist have affected serious demonstrable changes over the past decade. Annie Serez, "Feminism in Pakistan: Dialogues Between Pakistani Feminists." *Laurier Undergraduate Journal of the Arts* 3 (2017): 12.

[403] Zia*,* "Faith and Feminism," 141.

iconography cloaked in regionality, legitimizing the gendered diversity of their work without seeking expressions within superficial religious signifiers as the only valid option. The artists under discussion in this chapter negotiated their way out of the rhetorical transnational sartorial signifier by creating protagonists that perform composite regionality, assertively demanding an audience. This strategy further helped them look more grounded in local customs and regional traditions, helping them circumvent being shamed as westernized, a theme that will continue in Chapters Five and Six.

The artworks that are analyzed in this and coming chapters are secular in spirit, and the artists I discuss below and in the forthcoming chapters negotiate patriarchy within the urban context—imperialist and religious-nationalist alike—with all the tools available, including but not limited to religion.

4.2. A Tale of Two Cities: Symbolic Urban Occupations and Cultural Flux as Metaphors for Complex Urban Lives

This part of the chapter consists of works by two women artists, Naiza Khan and Farida Batool, from two major Pakistani metropolitan areas, Lahore and Karachi. The regionalist language in their artworks is relatable to the revival of local visual trajectories in Pakistani art discourse as a form of postcolonial practice. Unlike many Pakistani artists who address postcoloniality in their artworks, these selected artists create a separate trajectory. These artists employ postcolonial/decolonial strategies as a form of resistance to patriarchy, using cultural flux as a metaphor for complex and ambivalent urban lives to revive a secular spirit within a Muslim context. These artists specifically engage with the regional reactionary religious-nationalist discourse that emerged in Pakistan by creating a familiar regional language.

This methodology applied by the selected artists can be conceptualized through Homi Bhabha's concept of the inherent hybridity of colonized cultures. According to Bhabha, cultures are dynamic processes characterized by change, flux, and hybridity. The concept of cultural hybridity and cultural flux debunks the binary created in the post–War on Terror transnational visual discourse that substantiates Pakistani female subjectivities merely through a static, unchangeable, and universal body as well as (reactionary) religiously galvanized nationalistic discourses.[404]

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[404] Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 34–37.

To break free from this cycle of Western dominant hegemonic ideology, Iranian-American decolonial theorist Hamid Dabashi insists that the process of decolonization should consist of "formulating a new mode of defiant knowledge production against the grain of the power that demands and extracts subservient knowledge and validates all that sustain its course of global domination."[405] Foregrounding the complex metropolitan subjectivities and the sublimity of their lives, these selected artists generate multifaceted interpretations of feminist agency within the regional urban context, a synchronistic response to the specific religious and cultural atmosphere that emerged in Pakistan post-2001. These selected artists break free from imposed metanarratives by disengaging directly with white interlocutors.

Hence, these artworks seek polyfocal sites of resistance within regional creative cross-cultural conversations, disengaging their artistic expressions from Eurocentric versions of female subjectivity. These artists intentionally refrain from generating gendered images familiar to the Western audience (veiled) in a Muslim context while still keeping them relevant. By altering their iconography that addressed regional concerns through urban vocabulary post War on Terror, instead of addressing white interlocutors, they managed to engage both transnational and regional concerns without falling into the trap of what has been described as coercive mimeticism in Chapter Two. Relevant regionally, when shared transnationally, these artworks challenge their Western audience to broaden their vision beyond stereotypes and convenient metaphors and invite them to absorb complex imageries ingrained in complex histories of patriarchies, colonialism, and need-based gendered politics.

This cultural performativity can further be conceptualized by Gadamer's concept in *Truth and Method* (1960); Gadamer compares child's play to religious rituals, theatre, and music, calling them spectacles that in their performance "by nature calls for an audience." Hence, their existence lies in between the player, the game, and the audience's reception. Through this pop/cultural spectacle and performative disruption, I argue, the women artists locate their protagonists to reclaim their urban presence while calling for the audience.[406] The performative play through the decolonial framework is inherently praxis-oriented. In *Critical Methodologies and Indigenous Inquiry,* Denzin and coauthors write that autoethnic narratives, counternarratives,

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[405] Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism*, xvii.
[406] Gadamer, "Ontology of the Work of Art," 102–61.

performances, and stories that disrupt official discourses by exposing the complexities are "the central genre of contemporary decolonization practice."[407]

4.2.1. Case Study: *Hanna Hands* and Universalizing Regionalism

Naiza Khan is considered one of the most successful multidisciplinary artists in Pakistan and is by far the best-known among the selection of artists that will follow her in this dissertation. She was the first Pakistani artist to host the Pakistan Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale with a work titled *Manora Field Notes* (2018). She is also the only artist among the focused group of women artists in this dissertation who received her formal art education outside Pakistan.

Naiza Khan, born in 1968 in Bahawalpur, Pakistan, was trained in England at the prestigious Ruskin School of Art, Oxford, and Wimbledon School of Art. She lives and works in Karachi, Pakistan, and London, a practice spanning more than 25 years; Khan has created a body of work around the female urban body and explores broader themes of urban lives. This dissertation will only focus on her body of work entitled *Henna Hands* (2002–2004) among her massive oeuvre (Figure 53 and Figure 54).

Henna Hands is a site-specific installation comprising what appears to be nude female silhouettes, ranging from torsos to life-sized full female forms. The figures are built up with henna—a dye traditionally used to ornament a bride's hands and feet—as an artistic medium, applied directly to the walls through reusable plastic hand-stencils with intricate geometrical designs. *Hanna Hands* was first exhibited in Canvas art gallery Karachi around 2000, where the images were applied directly to the gallery's walls. These wall prints, placed in the commercial art gallery, caused inevitable tensions. While being in a consumer setting—a commercial gallery—the audience could not own the works.[408] Later this series of works was exhibited at the Cultural Foundation Gallery in New York, in 2004, in a group exhibition titled *Cover Girl: The Female Bodies and Islam in Contemporary.* The exhibition consisted of many well-known Muslim women artists, including Ayasha Adil, Aisha Khalid, and Emily Jacir. Though only one artist from the group used the image of the "veil," the curator (as shared in Chapter Two) could not help but sensationalize the word veil in a Muslim gendered context:

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[407] Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, eds. *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* (New York: Sage, 2008),13.

[408] Naiza Khan, Online Interview with the Author (Karachi-Montreal, February 2020).

And while the artists in this exhibition "veil" their representations of women, they do so in unexpected ways that call into question practices in both Western countries and Islamic societies.

The curatorial statement reflects how post–9/11, the mention of the burqa had almost become the zeitgeist of the time in the Muslim context, as the images or the concept of the veil had become a source of curiosity, intrigue, and fetish globally.

Though the series *Henna Hands* was started in 2000, the specific works that emerged from 2001 to 2004 within Pakistan are invaluable to the theme of this study. In 2001 Khan decided and felt the need to relocate this body of work beyond the confines of private art galleries and without audience restrictions. In a successful project, Khan recreated the stencilled-nude female figures on various walls in Karachi in a community (railway colony) that is home to the lower-income class. Khan writes in her statement:

> In an attempt to relocate the Henna Hands out of the gallery and studio space, I have been working in different locations near the Cantonment Station and Railway Colony, a working-class area in Karachi. In search of a home for this body of work, I found myself in a 'mohalla' (5) that was unique. This *mohalla*/neighborhood is home to a community of Parsis, Muslims, Christians and Hindus.[409]

She recalls how she used to get up at the crack of the down, gather her materials, and drive to create her artworks on the walls, working until the first pedestrian appeared. The concept of using city walls as canvases is not a novel idea, street artists have been doing it for decades, and some of them became highly celebrated mainstream artists, such as Basquiat, Keith Haring, or the anonymous artist Banksy. However, Khan's nude female silhouettes do not exist in Brooklyn, the graffiti capital of the world, or London. Her women appear in conservative areas of Karachi, making these installations exceptionally provocative in their own right.

In retrospect, Khan's work almost seems prescient in the context of 9/11 and the massive politics it generated surrounding urban women. The justification of that claim regarding *Henna Hands* lies in the long conversations I had with Khan over Zoom. Recalling her twenty-year-old project, she mentioned how, while driving to work, she saw a call for a protest march painted on a wall (in Urdu) by the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami (one of the oldest political-religious parties in Pakistan). As these religiously motivated political marches only include male

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[409] Naiza Khan, Artist's statement, *Henna Hands,* 2002. https://www.naizakhan.com/henna-hands/ .

participation, as a response, Khan decided to create silhouettes of three nude women standing one after another, erect in almost a manner soldiers march. As the side pose shows clear female contours, according to Khan, the three images were the most censored over time.

The significance of these site-specific installations right next to the protest march needs to be contextualized in the events between 11 September 2001 and the longest war in US history, the War on Terror. The call for protest was documented along with the site-specific installation, seeking Muslim men to march to save the honour of the Muslims, indicating the date 24 September 2001, which directly responds to the aftermath of 9/11. However, the real significance appears if we look at the timeline. On 12 September, President Bush addressed the nation, declaring war and stating: "The United States of America will use all our resources to conquer this enemy."[410] Pakistan not only shared a very porous border with its neighbour Afghanistan, but it was also hosting the most significant number of Afghan refugees since the Afghan-Russian War. Pakistan was under the power of yet another dictator, General Pervez Musharraf—who writes in his memoirs that the very next day, the US deputy secretary of state, Richard Armitage, in a telephone conversation, told him that if Pakistan did not surrender and assist the United States in this war, they "should be prepared to be bombed back to the Stone Age."[411] Therefore, Pakistan itself was under the threat of a full-blown US military attack. On the other hand, the religious parties were gearing up to use this situation to evoke religious sentiments against the government for political purposes, hence the call for the march from Muslim men to protect the honour of the Muslim world. At this precarious time in Pakistan's history, Khan decided to go and paint three nude women marching on the wall. As documented in various publications, this specific graffiti-like art was conceived in January 2002. This timeline places the conception of the artwork right after the War on Terror (October 2001).

The symbolism of silhouettes of nude female bodies at the moment in time, caught between the unavoidable imperial war and religious nationalism, is best expressed by Spivak:

> Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-
> formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine
> nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of
> the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization.[412]

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[410] History.com, "A Timeline of the U.S.-Led War on Terror," Feb. 1, 2019. https://www.history.com/topics/21st-century/war-on-terror-timeline/ .

[411] Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire*, 251.

[412] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Naiza, within the political context, was the first women artist who consciously or unconsciously presciently predicted the phenomena that eventually turned brown bodies into a spectacle for piety and oppression, as Zia writes about post–War on Terror Pakistan:

> The Muslim woman's body as a spectacle has taken on a new political meaning, across which post 9/11 international and local politics are played out. Whether it is the veil, crimes of honour or occupation of public spaces or mobility, the Muslim woman's body has transformed beyond being just an international signifier or a marker of the Islam-versus-the-West debate. It has become a signpost over which local religious narratives compete, in order to manipulate its symbolic power and in order to construct their version of Islam as the normative one.[413]

Pakistan's involvement in the War on Terror turned out to have far more devastating consequences than anyone could have predicted. Pakistan's border being used by the United States and NATO forces to launch attacks on Afghanistan and Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) resulted in unrest on the borders, and the majority of wealthy Pakhtun (people living in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, adjacent to Afghanistan) migrated to Karachi (metropolitan city of Pakistan). This had a massive effect on the city's delicate economic balance, resulting in many ethnic riots between the Pakhtun and Muhajirs (the immigrant community in Karachi).[414] The lifestyles of the immigrants from the religiously conservative regions in Pakistan also clashed with Karachiites and their cosmopolitan lifestyles. The Afghan refugees across the border poured into Pakistan, and many insurgents entered the country along with them, resulting in an epic amount of suicide attacks and violence since 2002.[415] In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Karachi became one of the most dangerous cities in Pakistan. Khan further adds in her interview that within two years, Karachi's circumstances became so hostile and violent that she was advised by her friends and family to

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[413] Zia, "Faith and Feminism," 89.

[414] Upon the creation of Pakistan in 1947, millions of refugees and migrants from India made Karachi their new home, settling alongside the native Sindhi population. They identified themselves as mohajirs, and have since been part of the long process of assimilation into Pakistan's multiethnic, multilingual, Islamic republic.
Kriti M. Shah, and Sushant Sareen, "The Mohajir: Identity and Politics in Multiethnic Pakistan." Occasional Papers (November 2019): 1.

[415] Shahid Javed Burki, "Pakistan After 9/11," *Project Syndicate*, September 7, 2011. http://www.project-syndicate.org/
Muhajirs: The migrated Indian Muslim community that settled in Karachi during 1947 partition of India and Pakistan. Kriti M. Shah and Sushant Sareen, "The Mohajir: Identity and Politics in Multiethnic Pakistan," ORF Occasional Paper no. 222 (November 2019): 1.

stop her practice of going out and working on the project; hence the last of the series date to circa 2003–2004.

As the regional dynamics of the War on Terror around gendered urban bodies unfolded in the course of a few years, the process of relocation of these artworks within urban public spaces and the major ideological shift became visible. In light of new political gender-identity shifts, the artwork's meaning changed and warranted a new interpretation entirely.

In *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, Iftikhar Dadi points out that the craftiest aspect of this series is the complete disconnect from complying with the visual politics of representation regarding Muslim women transitionally and regionally perpetuated right after 9/11 and the War on Terror. Dadi writes:

> Absent from Khan's works are direct references to controversies regarding veiling and headscarf—including the dupatta, burqa, chador, the hijab, the niqab, and so on—that have become a staple of Western media representations of Muslim women but also a concern internally in Muslim [*majority*] countries.[416]

Dadi further argues that although the Islamic signifiers are overtly missing in Khan's work, their manifestations through complex Muslim aesthetics are informed by textures and designs. The ritualistic aspect of adorning a bride's hands and feet with henna or mehndi by her friends before the wedding is historically a cultural commonality between Hindus and Muslims in South Asia. However, Dadi only points to the design aspect of the artwork containing Muslim aesthetics. He writes, "The plastic stencil designs are composed of small angular or curved geometrical spaces—not unlike carved Mughal window screens or contemporary decorated cement blocks that separate private interior space from the public street."[417] The Mughal wooden screens were traditionally used as separators between quarters allocated to women (*zenana*) and the public areas in South Asian Muslim homes. According to Dadi, this stands as a symbol for the separation of Muslim women from urban spaces, historically and in contemporary times. He further comments on the plastic stencils as the replacement of female bonding rituals based on skill and aesthetics into "transformation towards mechanical reproductions."[418] By highlighting the Muslim design aesthetics and reference to contemporary industrialization of local crafts,

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[416] Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia,* 208.
[417] Ibid., 202.
[418] Ibid.

Dadi successfully constructs the relevance of Khan's work to modern Muslim South Asian aesthetics and concerns.

Starting from Dadi's interpretation of Khan's work through an Islamic iconographic lens as a point of departure, the dissertation analyzes Khan's public installations from a broader regional perspective. The dissertation maintains that the unconventional medium, imagery, place of inscription and technique implied by the artist to create a feminist resistance is embedded in a complex regional yet universal language, of which Muslim aesthetics form a minor part. Therefore, in order to understand Khan's use of regional iconography within the context of performative feminist resistance, it needs to be analyzed more carefully through deconstruction.

Henna as Medium

Traditionally, the application of mehndi or henna to decorate the hands of a bride in the company of the bride's friends and family is a traditional and overtly ritualistic and performative act. Henna, an organic pigment in its capacity to mark the body, works as a metaphor to suggest the vulnerability and sensuality of the body.[419] Henna as a medium is also an ingenious use of a non-permanent dye to paint figures, as it automatically breathes life to them. Henna, through the fading process, changes its colour, hues fading from dark red to orange to yellow and ultimately turning into pale yellow ocher. This process of fading within the frame of weeks to months turned the graffiti-like mural into a performance in itself, creating an animated effect on the otherwise stationary artwork.

Naiza's henna women made with hands imprinted on walls with red pigments is a ritualistic schema embedded in Hindu and indigenous practices as much as in South Asian Muslim aesthetics. Mehndi or henna itself as a medium suggests Islamic as well as Hindu origins. Khan writes in *Mazaar, Bazaar: Design and Visual Culture in Pakistan* (2009): "Its cooling effect makes it a popular cosmetic in warm climates and especially in Muslim countries, as it is considered Sunnah, a practice followed by Prophet Muhammad [PBUH], but it also forms an essential part of Hindu feminine practices, ancient Hindu Sanskrit texts also lay down the importance and utility of henna as, included in *sola singhar*, the sixteen adornments with which women from sub-continent are expected to beautify themselves"[420]

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[419] Naiza Khan, "Njoo Mehndi and Henna Hands," in *Mazaar, Bazaar: Design and Visual Culture in Pakistan*, ed., Saima Zaidi (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 133.
[420] Ibid.

The Figure

The placement of the figures on the walls of the city of Karachi turns these figures into living, breathing entities, a sort of unconventional relational art that interacted not only with random visitors but also with the forces of nature. Natural factors such as rain and sun fade away these images into oblivion, while the random human contact escalates the erasure through a juxtaposition of political and religious material; the moralistic censoring of the female contours further documents the misogyny that accelerated after the War on Terror within Pakistan. This brings us back to the erasure of female presence in urban spaces and female images from billboards and state-sponsored murals (as discussed in Chapter Two).

The situation's complexity is that, while the private high-end art galleries catering to specific clientele are full of male artists creating sensual female nudes, the presence of real women on the streets is becoming even a greater challenge than it ever was—these urban complexities are at the heart of contradictory existence of urban women in Pakistan.

That henna is an ephemeral medium that naturally fades away with time further signifies the precarity of gendered lives. The geometrical design created through the plastic henna stamps is known as the *jaal*, which is a polysemous word. Here the word translates into a *net* (trap) in English. This changes its connotation from benign Islamic aesthetics. The play of words turns *jaal* into a trap—like a fishing net. As it stands for sensuality and feminine sexuality and is a symbol of marital bliss, henna connotates a sinister side of societal pressure on women. Khan writes in her artist's statement:

> At one level, this work merged the idea of seduction and simultaneously
> turned it into a symbol of subjugation, a sort of 'sold' stamp, as we see on
> the bride's hand. Desire and submission simultaneously resonate and
> contradict as the eye is focused on the pattern and the body that surfaces out
> of it.[421]

She writes, "The shift in my own understanding is entirely due to the dislocation and relocation of the works. Between this space of the private and public, the body of woman becomes a 'site' for inscription."[422] Though the fading away of the figures at first glance seems melancholic, the visible changes and additions that emerge out of altercations between these figures and the everyday patriarchy on the walls are embedded in resistance.

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[421] Ibid., 137.

[422] Naiza Khan, Artist's Statement (2002). https://www.naizakhan.com/henna-hands/.

The Hands

Salima Hashmi, in her book on women artists in Pakistan, *Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists in Pakistan*, recalls Khan's comments that an incident of self-immolation of two women as a protest against injustice in Pano Aqil in Sindh was one of the inspirations that initiated the series *Henna Hands* [423]

This context transforms the hand imprints into a performative feminist resistance that calls for a more complex interpretation from its audience. It takes us back to the henna hand imprints left by *satis* (the nameless Rajput ranis who self-immolated after the death of their husbands in wars) outside the pyre gates in Rajasthan (Figure 55). Naiza'a henna hands turn into an inscription of one's presence, no matter how insignificant it seems. It turns these imprints into a mode of communication, an alternative to speech, a desire to live, and a desire to carve one's niche in a masculine world.

Leaving handprints as a mode of communication is ubiquitous in the everyday lives of South Asian women. The decorative hand imprints in indigenous (*delit*) homes in Gujrat, India, left by women after plastering their homes (Figure 56), the ephemeral imprint of hands left by women after kneading the traditional dough (*atta*) before preparing flatbread (rotis) for the family (Figure 57), these all come together as forms of the regional gendered language of persistence and perseverance, and the desire to leave one's signature even in ephemerality.

These hands also turn into a signifier of universal resistance and recognition, as they stand for historical and contemporary times. These hands make a full circle by taking us to the primordial human instinct in the ancient caves of Lascaux and Altamira, France, and many other prehistoric sites. Markings one's presence by imprinting hands-on walls by prehistoric artists remind us of their presence. These red hands then bring us to contemporary times—red handprints as they stand universally for silenced and missing indigenous women (Figure 58).

The Wall

On the wall, the images were slowly erased, scratched, censored, in part preserved, and took new forms of existence in due course of time. The residue remained as part of the wall, marking a different image juxtaposed with graffiti, *paan* stains, and political and religious slogans. The wall becomes an extension of the lives of urban women. Naiza claims:

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[423] Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible,* 160–61.

> This body of work needed a 'home' and a different audience, as it did not belong in a gallery space with limited and selected viewers. . . . I wanted the viewer to have a very direct relationship to *Henna Hands,* in terms of scale and the physicality of the object-figure on the street. They were confronted with a different set of rules and material properties, where associations to work came through sight, smell and personal history.[424]

The unintentional markings on the wall, the natural factors, and censorship stand as a metaphor for the impediments that stand between urban women and public spaces. These overlapping markings signify hurdles, the origins of patriarchal control, the jurisdiction to create cultural, religious, and societal norms, and distorted discourses.

The figures become ephemeral markers of resistance and resilience. As Hashmi documents, Khan's henna women depict "anger as well as submission, a will and a desire to have a life and space of its own making."[425] In the light of this statement, the walls become the space of rest that hold these imaginary urban women amid harassment, bullying, and judgments that hundreds of thousands of urban women endure as they leave homes early in the morning as teachers, nurses, sanitation workers, maids, health workers, and vendors, to sustain themselves and their families, many using public transportations.

4.2.2. Farida Batool: *Nai Reesan Shehr Lahore Diyan* (2006)

Batool's lenticular print *Nai Reesan Shehr Lahore Diyan* (No city can compare with Lahore, 2006), measuring 32⅛×64⅛ in. (81.6×162.9 cm), depicts a young girl in yellowish ocher traditional clothes skipping rope in front of what seem to be ruins of burnt buildings (Figure 59).

It was first exhibited in a group exhibition titled *Tradition, Technique, Technology* at Aicon Gallery, New York (2008), along with works by two other contemporary Pakistani artists. It was later exhibited along with her works at the Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi, in 2011 in an exhibition curated by Naiza Khan titled *The Rising Tide*. Later it was shown at Gandhara Art Space, Karachi, curated by Hajra Haider Karrar; the show was a part of three-part series titled *Look at the City from Here: By the High Wall and the Closed Gates* (2012).

A pop-cultural textual reference anchors Batool's artwork, *Nai Ressan Shehr Lahore Diyan,* created with both the regional and transnational context in mind. This title is derived from a song from the superhit vintage romantic Punjabi movie *Guddi Gudda* (She-doll he-doll,

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[424] Khan, Artist's Statement (2002). https://www.naizakhan.com/henna-hands/.
[425] Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible,* 160–61.

1956).[426] The movie's title refers to girls playing with dolls and serves as a Punjabi expression equivalent to the phrase "the birds and the bees." The song's video in the movie shows the visuals of the multiethnic and multireligious historical sites of Lahore in the form of vicarious cinematic tourism.[427] Over time, the song's title acquired the status of a popular cultural phrase, an idiom in Punjab, suggesting Lahore's pride in its cultural legacy, often painted as decoration on trucks, rickshaws, and buses.

The work embodies Batool's experience of witnessing the riots in Lahore against the controversy that arose over the depiction of the Prophet Mohammad under the title "Mahomet débordé par les intégristes" (Muhammad overwhelmed by fundamentalists) by the French publication *Charlie Hebdo*.[428] Farida, in her interview, recalls taking a group of students from the National College of Arts, where she has been teaching, for a field trip. On their way, the group witnessed a violent mob burning cars and destroying property. She remarks how witnessing that experience and being worried about the safety of the students made her connect religious violence to her city, Lahore. Before that, she continues, "it was mostly news from Northern areas and seemed far from the lives in Lahore," which is situated in the center of Pakistan. After witnessing violence up close, she realized how the fire had also engulfed her city.

The cartoon, from 2006, was published within the context of 9/11 and the Islamophobia that followed. It significantly hurt the sentiments of 1.3 billion Muslims around the world, but the reactionary protests from certain Muslim segments were reckless and unwarranted. In Lahore, an angry mob of two hundred men with stones and pelts destroyed public property to show their disdain for the published cartoons. Mobilized by religious groups for political reasons to destabilize the democratic government of the time, many buildings were destroyed on Mall Road, the commercial district of Lahore. These protests made headlines all over the world, flooding every American news channel with images of violent bearded men protesting (Figure 60). Charania argues that since 9/11, within Euro-American media, if any image "complements, replaces, or reifies the stereotype of veiled oppressed Pakistani/Afghan women," it is the images

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[426] The film *Guddi Gudda* was released on 2 November 1956 and produced by Walli Sahab. IMDb. *Guddi Gudda, Full Cast & Crew.* https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0403088/fullcredits/?ref_=tt_ov_st_sm/ .

[427] Sung by Abdul Shakoor Bedal and Munawar Sultana. Music director G.A.Chishti. Lyrics: Walli Sahab. Walli Sahib, "Nai Reesa'n Shehar Lahore Diya'n. Film Guddi Gudda (1956)," Oct. 22, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-tSFwaqL9A/ .

[428] Compared to a regular circulation of 100,000 sold copies, this edition from February 9, 2006, enjoyed great commercial success: 160,000 copies were sold and another 150,000 were in print later that day.

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of angry bearded Pakistani/violent Afghan men..[429] These images of extremists at once evoke the presence of an oppressed/veiled woman in our memories, warranting their presence in their absence (Figure 61)

Extending the concept of gender and play, Batool plays with the image by not juxtaposing a religiously oppressed gendered body, which the media conditions us to link with the violent image from the specific Muslim regions, but rather an image of a playful adolescent girl in front of the burnt-out buildings, dressed in *shalwar*, *kameez,* and a *dupatta* tied across her body.[430] The particular style of the girl's clothing is a standard urban female attire in the region of Punjab (which stretches from the city of Multan, Pakistan, to Chandigarh, India, and is shared by Muslims and Sikhs alike). The particular style evokes the nostalgia of vintage Eid cards due to its somewhat old-fashioned demeanour.[431] Per Batool, the choice of the age of the girl in the photograph was pertinent. The young girl, who is yet not an adult, is old enough to represent a female presence while she points towards posterity.

Barefoot, the adolescent girl, seems to be immersed in her play, oblivious to the surroundings. The image joins the two worlds of old (burnt-out buildings resulting from the protest) and new (the young girl) in almost a surreal fashion. With yellow ochre and earthy tones composed vertically in the foreground, the protagonist seems to be both out of focus and yet the focus of Batool's artwork. Batool's work signifies layers of connotative meaning. The use of multiple picture frames shows the girl's body at once in different sequences of play. Using lenticular printing technology as a medium, which has been popular for making toys for children, continues Batool's thematic based on play and performance. The technology allows the viewer to see the figure come to life or move as it is viewed from different angles, creating an illusion of motion and a cinematic temporality (flux).

The motion is designed to display the girl's arms in various positions at the same time. With a subtle reference to the cosmopolitan heritage of the Subcontinent as well as its interculturality, Batool manipulates the positioning of the protagonist's arms and feet into a stark

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[429] Charania, *Will the Real Pakistani Woman Please Stand Up*?, 35–36. Spivak writes, "White men are saving brown women from brown men," explains the line of thinking that one might use to justify the history of imperialism and neoimperialism alike. See Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?,"296.

[430] *Shalwar are* flared trousers, *Kameez is a* long shirt, and *Dupatta is* a sheer scarf usually worn around the neck.

[431] The research does not condone or condemn Muslim women's right to veil or unveil; the purpose of the study is to reject the single visual narrative of the racialized other. This study is committed to generate multiple narratives that highlight the heterogenous existence of Pakistani urban women.

resemblance to one of the most reinforced personifications of the powerful Hindu goddess Durga. Durga is often represented with many arms, each carrying a weapon, often defeating Mahishasura (buffalo demon). The image of Goddess Durga was also a popular visual reference in Bollywood cinema (extensively consumed in Pakistan), especially in the 1980s and 90s (Figure 62).

The real significance of this piece, however, lies in its contextualization. Hence, before we further delve into the artwork's iconology, we need to transport ourselves back to Chapter Two, which explains at length the politics around gendered Muslim/Pakistani/Afghan bodies within the transnational and South Asian art world during the first decade of the twenty-first century, that is, after 9/11. It was the time when images of static bodies and veils/veiling proliferated in art galleries. Within art practices, the cliched visual vocabulary was celebrated, associated with, and expected from ethnic Muslim artists. At a certain unconscious level, the repeated visuality of these images reinforced the US media propaganda of oppressed Muslim women or at least gave the Western audience an easily recognizable signifier for gendered Muslimness.

However, Batool's work, depicting an everyday urban female, never found the recognition that Rana's *Veil Series* achieved.[432] Her profound aesthetic response refused to be interpellated by the carefully fabricated rhetorical image of the US media. As opposed to many Pakistani artists (in the first decade of the century) and their easily decipherable familiar visual tropes (veiled, static, motionless, and ambiguous bodies), Batool's female figure has an open, dynamic form with blurring boundaries and out of focus limbs. It creates a moving, vibrant chaotic composition. The use of lenticular technology—showing the image in motion—seems to further reinforce Batool's girl as a reaction and resistance to the rhetorical static images of Muslim women that were so enthusiastically absorbed in the Western art world.

The semiotics of her work is nuanced, embodied in regional, political, and urban contexts that demand a complex cultural understanding. Her work generates political signifiers that translate the artwork into something multifaceted, rendering the idiosyncratic Western readings of the gendered "others" and rhetorical visual tropes redundant. Three formal aspects of the image provide us with telling details about how it signifies the message: Firstly, the tangible

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[432] Rashid Rana's "*Veil series*" has been discussed in Chapter Two.

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architectural background (Mall Road, Lahore) locates the female protagonist occupying an actual identifiable urban space. Secondly, male actors in the vicinity of buildings, the building itself rendered undecipherable due to fire, stand as a metaphor for dated systemic patriarchal control. And thirdly, the open, dynamic position of female figures occupying an urban space insinuates a gendered insurrection regionally.

Apart from the relevance to the gendered transnational/regional representational politics, the artwork ironically also has an uncanny visual semblance to the vintage *National Geographic* cover from January 1965 depicting two Pakistani girls at play (as mentioned in Chapter Two). From this point of view, this seems to be a tongue-in-cheek reference to the shifting and convenient transnational visual politics towards Pakistani Muslim gendered bodies. The burnt background could alternately signify damage caused by neo-imperialistic policies, the Cold War, and the War on Terror.[433] Through this frame of reference, the artwork becomes relevant to post–Cold War and War on Terror politics but not by using an image that the contemporary Western audience associates with Pakistani women. Batool makes this relevance complex, compelling her audience to do their homework.

Her dynamic, performative female seems to be engaged in a dialogue within society, unapologetically reclaiming her space in the urban realm. Her figure is being erased due to the increasing foothold of religious and political groups as a reaction to global Muslim gendered politics. In his book *Truth and Method* (1960), Hans-Georg Gadamer compares child's play to spectacles, such as religious rituals, theatre, and music. Through this spectacle, Batool's protagonist reclaims her presence. Gadamer adds, "One can only play with serious possibilities."[434] Hence, the transformation of the adolescent female protagonist at play, using the imagery of the fierce goddess Durga, suggests a gendered uprising. In her interview with me, Batool adds confidently, "The future of Pakistani art is not only public, but it is also gendered."[435]

Batool is one of the few artists who are working to assimilate art into the lives of the public through various community urban projects. She is a co-founder of the Awami (public) art

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[433] The changing narratives of American media around brown Muslim bodies within recent history fit into its transnational strategic narrative. Many mass-media scholars have written about this. For further details, see Charania, *Will the Real Pakistani Woman Please Stand Up?* and Zeiger, "That Afghan Girl."

[434] Gadamer, "Ontology of the Work of Art," 102–61.

[435] Farida Batool, Recorded Interview with the Author (National College of Arts, Lahore, February 2019).

collective. The collective organized a social media art project during the Lahore Biennale 2018. People were asked to take selfies with an app containing diverse regional sartorial props such as the different forms of regional head covering (men and women both) and clothes from different regions. This, on the one hand, was designed to foreground diverse cultures of various provinces against the new religious homogenizing, but later, the selfie was shown on digital billboards around Lahore and also posted on the Awami Selfie Facebook page, which was another form of occupying urban public spaces through art and public participation.

Batool's prediction can only be comprehended within the push-and-pull politics between urban gendered subjectivities and the religious right-wing within Pakistan. Since 2001, the Islamists have been creating a narrative around their version of pious Muslim Pakistani women on social media, on private channels on television, in public places, and sometimes using force. This endeavour plays a big role in further strengthening discursive patriarchal forces within the region. This propaganda created a backlash in the form of numerous independent feminist initiatives.

4.3. *Girls at Dhabas* (2015)

In the summer of 2015, Sadia Khatri, a young graduate and Karachi-based freelance writer, photographer, and journalist, photographed herself sitting at a *dhaba* (roadside tea stall) in Karachi alone, sipping some tea leisurely, and shared the image on her Instagram with a caption #girls@dhabas.[436] In a short while, girls and women from across the Subcontinent started sharing their pictures, sipping tea at dhabas using the hashtag and tagging her in their pictures (Figure 63)

As already mentioned, though many urban women in Pakistan share their burden of financial responsibilities, the concept of women leisurely occupying urban spaces is usually met with hostility, such as public harassment and unwarranted attention. This holds true for the rest of the Subcontinent as well. Though class does provide affluent women spaces such as fancy malls and high-end resultants, the roadsides and public spaces such as public parks remain male-dominated domains, where girls are advised to take a male chaperone such as a brother, husband, or son. The simple pleasure of leaving home at will on foot to buy something from one's favourite store is a luxury many Pakistani girls cannot afford.

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[436] Chapter One discusses in detail General Musharraf's liberation of media and the proliferation of mobile phones and Internet connections throughout urban Pakistan.

Dhabas are mainly male-dominated leisure spots on roadsides, where mostly blue-collar working men, male college students, and young men sit and take tea. Hence, for a girl to sit at a dhaba was seen as subversive.

However, within a year, the simple organic project developed from a single hashtag on Sadia Khatri's Instagram account to a movement uniting thousands of women, aiming to reimagine how public spaces are used in urban Pakistan, expanding from Karachi to Islamabad and Lahore. Sadia, in an interview, writes, "Girls at Dhabas is very much about personal experiences, sharing personal stories, thinking about how we can change and impact our personal relationships with public spaces and open streets."[437]

It also generates this idea of personal experiences and collective experiences of women and girls and redesigning their relationship with each other through public spaces rather than within homes and confined spaces. She remarks, "We must watch out for each other because we live in a society that just turns a blind eye and lets incidents of violence against women and girls go unnoticed."[438] The *Daily Times,* the most well-reputed English newspaper in Pakistan, calls her a chai (tea) rebel in an article. As she believes, to sit down at the side of the road under the shade of a tree on one's way from work and enjoy a cup of chai is not a luxury but a fundamental human right. While the founding members of the projects are too young automatically to link War on Terror religious politics to the ever-growing hostility towards urban women, it is a fact that the constant religious-nationalist rhetoric since the War on Terror and reactionary Islamist politics has further strengthened the discursive forces around controlling female bodies.

Since 2015, Khatari, as the founder, with the help of a team of young professional girls, has organized and executed public activities in three major cities, such as organizing cycling rallies and late-night cricket matches in the streets (which is the most beloved activity of men in Pakistan). These activities are not only considered rebellious but can even be dangerous for girls in Pakistan.

Girls@dhaba has a webpage which is updated regularly. It invites girls and women to share their stories, pictures of their public activities, and even stories and information about road harassment. It provides tips on claiming one's public space and provides a welcoming space to

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[437] The Missing Slate, "Spotlight: Girls At Dhabas," Mar. 24, 2016. http://journal.themissingslate.com/2016/03/24/girls-at-dhabas/ .

[438] Muhammad Salman Khan, "Meet Sadia Khatri: Karachi's Chai Rebel," *Daily Times,* Oct. 12, 2017. https://dailytimes.com.pk/124372/sadia-khatri-karachis-chai-rebel/ .

find support and advice, believing that streets and public spaces are the real sites for resistance and action for the feminist struggle in Pakistan.

Though a simple idea, sitting at a roadside tea stall, riding a bike on the street or just taking a walk down the road alone is considered an act of resistance in Pakistani urban culture. Traditionally in South Asia, from early on, girls are trained to attract less attention and keep a low demeanour. Thus, women acquiring urban spaces through spectacle, individually or collectively, is inherently a politically rebellious act as a means of defiance to Wahhabi religious ideology and tradition at large.

3.4. Conclusion of the Chapter

The relationship between artists and the societies in which they reside is highly complex. This complexity is further enhanced when it comes to representing gendered subjectivities, especially in postcolonial contexts. As women are already subjected to a hierarchy within identity politics, the precariousness of female identity in colonial/postcolonial societies makes them perfect victims of imperialist agendas. Even in the regional leftist postcolonial discourses, class takes precedence over gender and misogyny, notwithstanding the fact that women in colonial/neocolonial circumstances are the victims of imperialism and systemic patriarchy. Spivak writes:

> Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. . . . The ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.[439]

This precariousness of brown women within postcolonial societies has led to critical explorations of de/postcolonial theorists by many ethnic feminists. Postcolonial feminist theorists like Talpande criticize postcolonial theorists, especially Said, for being overtly phallocentric; they succumb to "hegemonic humanistic problematic that repeatedly conforms and legitimizes (Western) man's centrality."[440]

Likewise, Rey Chow, in her text *The Politics of Admittance: Female Sexual Agency, Miscegenation, and the Formation of Community in Frantz Fanon*, writes how Western interpretations of Fanon's texts focus on the psychic vicissitudes of the black man's identity and,

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[439] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 287.
[440] Mohanty. "Under Western Eyes," 81.

as an extension, the identity of all colonized men. Nevertheless, Chow explores not questions about the colonized or postcolonized subject per se but how the community is articulated in relation to race and sexuality.[441]

> Fanon's analyses of the woman of color are found in a chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks,* the chapter entitled "The Woman of Color and the White Man." The title signals, already, that identification for the woman of color is a matter of exchange relations, a matter of how the woman of colour is socially *paired off* or *contracted.*[442]

In Pakistan's case, the conditions perpetuated after the War on Terror turned Muslim women's bodies into a site for a spectacle annotated with political meanings for neocolonial discourses as well as the local religious narratives seeking political gains. That reduced Muslim women and their overtly recognizable religious signifiers to an object of propaganda exchange, West versus Islam. The feminist artistic interventions we discussed above disrupted this status quo.

On the one hand, global gender politics erase Muslim women's right to a heterogeneous existence through monolithic representations. On the other hand, locally, feminist groups or individuals who openly challenge right-wing religious beliefs and polity are labelled as agents of Western civilization and infidels.[443] This situation is further worsened due to the Pakistani government's indifference and inaction towards these extremist religious organizations.

The artworks discussed in this chapter were produced almost parallel to the first-generation artistic responses to the post–9/11 phenomena discussed in the second chapter. Naiza's series *Henna Hands,* especially the relocation of her installation outside the confines of art galleries away from the viewership of selected audiences, was an initial step in addressing the need to challenge narratives and tropes that surrounded Pakistani women after the War on Terror. The project successfully presents us with the heterogeneous figure of an urban woman occupying urban spaces, shown in different postures such as relaxing, standing still, stretching, and submitting. Amidst the hostile social atmosphere since 2001, Khan's henna figures have become a homage to urban women and their resilience.

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[441] *The Rey Chow Reader,* 56–58.

[442] Ibid., 60. The response to this critique is articulated by Valldejuli, who argues that "Fanon's rapport with his subject is that of a psychiatrist attempting to understand the effects of colonialism and racism on the colonized subject's psyche: that is, the internalization of racism and the development of a 'dependency complex.'" Luis Valldejuli, "Malinchismo and Misogyny in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*: Reading Fanon from the Hispanic Caribbean." *Karib: Nordic Journal for Caribbean Studies* 32 (November 2015): 112.

[443] See Serez, "Feminism in Pakistan," 73.

Much like Khan's symbolic henna women occupying the walls of Karachi, Batool's lively young girl is liberated from the confines of studio space and homes, where primarily the portraits and figurative paintings of women are located and leaps to inhabit a dangerous space, unperturbed. Batool liberates the woman's figure and relocates her, very much like Khan, to a public space symbolically as an act of artistic intervention. This phenomenon was later realized in an organic, homegrown feminist movement that we briefly discussed—girls@Dhaba—a group of young professional girls, despite all odds using their bodies as resistance, decided to occupy and claim their *chai ki pyali* (cup of tea) under a roadside tree.

Like girls@Dahabas, many sporadic feminist interregional communities use social media to regroup and plan initiatives, such as The Fearless Project (2008) and I Will Go Out (2015). Although the urban women are pressured, shamed, and silenced through religious and cultural rhetoric, and many keep their silence for fear of being alienated, there are a handful of young women who refuse to be silenced and demand their fair share of public spaces.[444]Arguably, the women artists in this chapter were the first to identify and illustrate the occupation of urban spaces by their imaged Pakistani,

The contributions artists make to society are subtle. Even though their contribution is often not connected to societal changes directly, these artists are often the first ones to indicate issues that affect our lives. These interventions eventually form society's mainstream transformational process. As Bracha Ettinger rightly argues, "artists put ideas into culture like a Trojan horse from the margins of their consciousness that transgresses the limits of the current symbolic."[445]

The artworks discussed in this chapter can be considered the predecessor of the thematic artworks discussed in the following chapter. The concept of a symbolic relatable urban female presence in public spaces as a metaphor in the works of Farida Batool and Naiza Khan takes on the form of physical occupation of urban streets and parks and even art galleries by the artists that are discussed in the next chapter. The works of four artists discussed in the next chapter were part of an exhibition titled *River in an Ocean* (2017), the title named after one of the series

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[444] For the Pakistani government's official discourse after 9/11, see Ijaz Khan, *Pakistan's Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy Making: A Study of Pakistan's Post 9/11 Afghan Policy Change* (New York: Nova Science Pub, 2007).

[445] Bracha L. Ettinger, 'Matrix and Metamorphosis,' Divergences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies, 4:5 (1992), 196.

of artworks by artist Lala Rukh, Pakistan's iconic feminist activist who lived an unconventional life.

Chapter 5

Public Places as Sites of Gendered Performative Resistance

This chapter looks at an exhibition held in Lahore in 2018, titled *River in an Ocean,* curated by two emerging artists and curators, Abdullah Qureshi (b. 1987) and Natasha Malik (b. 1988).[446] The exhibition was designated as a collateral event for the Lahore Biennale 01 (2018), as advertised in social media and promotional materials. On the margins of the Lahore Biennale—a mega art event that took over Lahore for twelve days—*River in an Ocean* created an alternative aesthetic and conceptual niche within contemporary Pakistani artistic discourse. Of particular relevance to this dissertation is that the entire exhibition revolved around controversial ideas of sexuality, gendered and queer spaces, and decentralizing heteronormative and conforming cultures.

The exhibition encompassed the work of twenty-seven early- to mid-career artists. This chapter will focus primarily on four performative installations by five participating women artists. Unlike the case studies in the previous chapter, in which we discussed the image of a woman inhabiting identifiable urban spaces as a signifier for resistance, the artists in this chapter occupy urban spaces through performativity, using the physicality of their bodies as a tool for resistance and contestation. Through various performative and autoethnographic decolonial strategies, these artists challenge stereotypes surrounding Pakistani urban gendered subjectivities. Their artworks bring to the foreground the ambivalent regional urban piety-

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[446] Abdullah Qureshi (b.1987) is a Pakistani-born artist, educator, and cultural producer. His practice incorporates painting and collaborative methodologies to address personal histories, traumatic pasts, and childhood memories. Qureshi's ongoing doctoral project, Mythological Migrations: Imagining Queer Muslim Utopias, examines formations of queer identity and resistance in Muslim migratory contexts. His work has been presented internationally at the National Gallery of Art, Islamabad, and Alhamra Art Gallery, Lahore, both in Pakistan; Rossi & Rossi, London; Uqbar, Berlin; Twelve Gates Arts, Philadelphia; and SOMArts Cultural Center, San Francisco. Abdullah Qureshi, Bio/statement. Residency Unlimited, 2020.
http://www.residencyunlimited.org/residencies/abdullah/ . Natasha Malik (b.1988) received her bachelor's in fine arts from the National College of Arts, Lahore, and her master's from the Slade School of Fine Art, London. She is an artist and curator. Her first solo show, titled *A Cage Elusive as a Shadow* (2016) took place at Sanat Gallery, Karachi. She received a Special Commendation from Dentons Art Prize (2016), London, and was nominated for the Sovereign Asian Art Prize (2018). Under The Creative Process, she curated Of Other Spaces. She cocurated *River in an Ocean* as a collateral event of the Lahore Biennale 2018, and cocurated *Unmaking History* (2019), which took place in Lahore. Graham Foundation, Natasha Malik Bio, 2020, http://www.grahamfoundation.org/grantees/6107-barrages-and-the-fragmentation-of-the-river-indus/ .

policing politics that enforce the idea that women's place is at home and only respectable and worthy purposes might justify their presence in public spaces.[447]

These works highlight the resistance of heterogenous gendered urban lives in post–War on Terror Pakistan and share aesthetical iconography with the works discussed in the previous chapter. Unlike the works of the artists in Chapters Two and Three, these performances do not respond directly to the politics of gender in post–War on Terror Pakistan; rather, they address the repercussions of these policies on the sociopolitical fabric of the country.

The selected artists and their works are Sara Mumtaz, and her performance *Mend Me One Stitch at a Time* (2018); Natasha Jozi and her work, *The Working Cytology of Performance* (2018), a long-durational site-specific performance; Noor us Sabah Saeed and her documented media performance and installation titled *I Can Draw Here, but I Cannot Sit Here* (2018); and ایک نرالا شہر (A novel city) (2018) a recorded media performance and photographic prints by Anushka Rustomji and Zara Asghe, executed by Hammas Wali.

The four performances, with overlapping concerns, were synchronously exhibited. The order in which they are introduced in this chapter is intended to delineate a conceptual progression of performative resistance and feminist agendas in the contemporary Pakistani urban context. Mumtaz invites audiences into her emotional space. Jozi objectifies herself through conscious interpellation within the gallery's four walls. Saeed's video and installation consist of images of her occupying a café reserved for men through cultural codes on the pretext of working on her drawing. The last performance, by Rustomji and Asghe, is a short film of the two artists loitering on the streets of Lahore unapologetically, claiming the right to public spaces. What further unifies these performances is that they combine the cultural environment with the spatial environment of the gallery. Their ephemeral performances are designed with a regional cultural milieu in mind. Thus, their primary interlocutor is the regional audience, even as they destabilize stereotypes around transnational gender politics and representations of brown Muslim women.

In keeping with the theme of gendered occupation of urban spaces, the last part of the chapter will briefly discuss the massive successes of the Aurat Marches (Woman marches) in the major cities of Pakistan, which have been taking place every year since 2018. The marches

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[447] Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan, and Shilpa Ranade, *Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets* (Gurgaon: Penguin Books India, 2011), 25.

mobilized hundreds of women to occupy the streets, dancing and chanting for gender equality in Karachi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi. Further, the section will briefly discuss the visual aspect of the marches and the massive backlash they faced from society's most right-wing sector and many who claim to be moderates, followed by a social media battle that ended in courtrooms. As Salima Hashmi appropriately said in her interview, "When patriarchy is directly challenged, it unveils its hidden misogyny and deep-rooted cynicism towards women, camouflaged until confronted."[448]

Though the focus of this chapter is on four performances by five artists, it is pertinent to discuss the significance of the exhibition itself in the artistic climate of Lahore to fully underscore the imperative of this exhibition as a gendered cultural event. Before moving on to the case studies, the section below contextualizes *River in an Ocean* within Pakistan's contemporary and recent historical-artistic discourse.

5.1. Lahore Biennale (2018)

Contemporaneous to Lahore Biennale 01, the exhibition *River in an Ocean* was on an entirely different conceptual plane. Lahore Biennale (LB01) was a mega-event that showcased the works of Pakistan's superstar artists, including but not limited to Shahzia Sikander, Rashid Rana, Imran Qureshi, Ayesha Khalid, Hamra Abbas, and Naiza Khan. A total of fifty talented Pakistani and non-Pakistani artists and collectives, including those based in Bangladesh, India, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Europe, and the United States, participated in the event.[449]

The works were exhibited at nine historical and popular urban cultural locations all over Lahore. It was as if Lahore were taken hostage by aesthetics, demanding a renewal of its glorious past as the seat of Mughal artistic heritage. The exhibition, which lasted from March 18 to March 31, 2018, included the following venues: Delhi Darwaza, Shahi Hamam, Sabeel Wali Gali, Masjid Wazir Khan, Lahore Qila, City Cinema, Haveli Yousaf Sali, Naqsh School of Arts, Mubarik Haveli, Mall Road, Tollinton Market Gallery space (NCA), Alhamra, Amrita Sher-Gil Residence, Lawrence Gardens, and Canal Bank Road, from Dharampura underpass to Punjab

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[448] Salima Hashmi, Recorded Interview with the Author (Lahore, March 2018)

[449] Lahore Biennale Foundation director Qudsia Rahim describes: "Our vision for the biennale is a decentered one which means that instead of curatorial authority being divested solely in one person, we have chosen to work through collaboration." Shoaib Ahmed, "Everything You Need to Know about Lahore Biennale 2018," Dawn Images, Mar. 17, 2018, https://images.dawn.com/news/1179671/ .

University (Figure 64).[450] Housing the oldest and finest art college in Pakistan, the National College of Arts, Lahore, has been historically known as the home for artisans and artists in South Asia.

I would like to signify the importance of LB01 by recounting my experience of visiting my alma mater, the National College of Arts, Lahore, almost eight years after having left the country. The religiopolitical unrest in the country had taken its toll. An open-yard college overlooking the historic Mall Road and famous Zamzama Chawk, where students hung out all day, NCA had always been an island of leftist and liberal ideas. It was now caged and barricaded with three security checkpoints and metal detectors before one could even enter its outer gates. Facing the highest security threat from religious fundamentalists, NCA now looked like a prison.[451] For artists to be confined physically in space appeared to be a metaphor for their intellectual containment.

Hence, LB01 was a sight for hopeful eyes, which could see the artworks spread and occupying the most populated public spaces, such as inner-city historical locations, public parks, the state museum, and cultural complexes, with all artworks accessible to the public. The concept behind the curatorial strategy was, apparently, to reach out to as many accidental audiences as possible—such as random couples strolling in the park, schoolchildren coming to the museum on field trips, and families picnicking at Shah Jahan's Qila (a popular spot for a day out with family), or college boys looking for an evening of fun at Alhamara Arts Council.

Every work of installation art was created and conceived for a specific location by applying two strategies: either the artworks blended within the cityscape, or they stood out, creating an overtly dramatic effect. Along with individual cooperate sponsorships, LB01 was massively supported and funded by Punjab and the federal government (both governments headed by PML, one of the two most important political parties in Pakistan). This investment in the project was somewhat politically motivated, with impending elections, but also due to many setbacks and political turmoil, PML as a political party was facing scrutiny in connection with

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[450] Old Tollinton Market is a Gallery space run by National College of Arts next to Lahore Museum (and is not inside the College).

[451]Pakistan's contribution to the War on Terror far exceeds its strength and size. Pakistan lost more than 35,000 lives just in terror attacks. Pakistan's economic loss amounted to 67 billion US dollars. Hidayat Khan, "Pakistan's Contribution to Global War on Terror after 9/11," IPRI Journal 13, no. 1 (July 2013): 37–56.

the involvement of its leader, Mr. Nawaz Sharif, in the Panama scandal.[452] For the government, the Lahore Biennale was not only an exhibition but also a well-timed political stunt to distract the public, bring back party loyalty, and exhibit a softer image of Pakistan internationally to gain support.

The Lahore Biennale was undoubtedly the public event of the year for the city, bordering on themes of the colonial past and postcolonial anxieties, the perils of urbanism, and interregional projects between Indian and Pakistani artists. Masooma Syed and Hira Nabi were the two women artists who stood out with works that directly or indirectly negotiated a feminist voice within the conditions of postcoloniality.

Lahore-based writer, director, and cinematographer Hira Nabi's fascinating documentary filmed on the shores of Gadani shipyards, *All That Perishes at The Edge of Land* (2018–19), was exhibited at Alhamra Complex. The film documents the shipbreaking industry while interviewing destitute workers. The account starts with the narrative of the vessel itself as a woman, narrated by Sheherezade Alam.[453] The brilliant semi-fantastical film touches on eco-feminism, the perils of industrialization, class struggle, and regional politics at the same time.[454]

Masooma Syed's work was an anomaly with overtly sexualized content in the form of an artistic statement that created a surreal narrative recounting the life and work of a femme fatale in undivided urban India.[455] The artist statement, available in both English and Urdu translations, titled "*Last Name Isabelle,*" recited the life of an interracial [Anglo-Indian] woman.[456] The work

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[452] Hassan Belal Zaidi, "'Panama Papers' Reveal Sharif Family's 'Offshore Holdings,'" Dawn, Apr. 4, 2016, https://www.dawn.com/news/1249888/ .

[453] Sheherezade Alam (b.1948-1922) was a celebrated Lahore-based ceramic artist.

[454] Later the short film was exhibited at various international film festivals and much appreciated.

[455] Masooma Syed is an interregional Pakistani-born artist who has lived and worked in Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.

[456]Masooma Syed, Artist statement, *Last Name Isabella* (2018): "One of the accounts is that these works are by a woman, who was a wealthy perfume maker, a traveler, and also an occasional jewelry maker. She is said to have lived to be 134 years, and while no one knows the truth, the record of her death describes the event in three different ways. This eccentric perfume maker created drawings/objects under special circumstances, and strangely enough, not for wealthy clients, but for ordinary people. Her customers ranged from a refugee from a war zone, a famous beggar, a soldier who lost his arm in battle, a woman in love, a sleep walker, a talkative hermit she once slept with, and many others. This is also the story of a city. The city of the rich, the poor and the famous, the city of nights, lights, and the dead, poetry is to be found only on the edges, the margins and borders." (Copied from the exhibition text, 2018).
The name Isabelle connotes the Anglo-Indian community in the Subcontinent. They formed a minority cultural and ethnic group and were a product of coloniality. "Anglo-Indian means a person whose father or any of the other male progenitors in male line is or was of European decent but who is or was born within Subcontinent. The cultural gap between Anglo-Indians and other religious communities such as, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs were wide, but they

touched on the themes of abandonment, sensuality, nostalgia, and colonial fantasy visualized in the forms of surreal fragile sculptures encased in display boxes; these included a parrot and a black cat made of dyed human hair (Figure 65), human limbs made of fibreglass, a silver twig dipped in whisky (Figure 66), and an elaborate necklace made of red dried chillies. Her art pieces took the audience to a seductive, nostalgic, and rather queer melancholic gendered space. Exhibited at the Lahore Museum (one of the venues), her works were placed in a remote part of the museum, at the Indus Valley Gallery, as if intentionally kept partially invisible, like the lost and forgotten civilization of the Indus Valley itself.

It can be safely stated that apart from the few examples mentioned, LB01 trod lightly on controversial subjects regarding gender and sexuality, even though almost half of the participants were women artists.

On the other hand, exhibited in a private space, *River in an Ocean* revolved around controversial themes, homoerotic and provocative imagery, and extremely subversive material. From the provocative lives of the transgender community (*hijra*) as sex workers to homoerotic prints and calling out performative religious rhetoric, the exhibition was the antithesis of the Lahore Biennale as a whole in its subject construction. As a private event expecting a limited audience (though it was advertised on social media), the exhibition used this freedom to create a brave space, especially considering the religiopolitical circumstances in contemporary Pakistan.[457]

Critic Mirza reviews the history of dynamics between governmentally approved art and private galleries in his text, "Zia's Long Reach," tracing it back to the dictatorial regime of General Zia. He argues that the eleven years of General Zia's repressive regime had two long-lasting visible effects on the art scene in Pakistan. Firstly, small private art galleries proliferated in the 1980s and 90s to escape General Zia's state censorship policies toward visual culture. Secondly, art vanished from the lives of the public and became visible to the elite class only. Mirza writes,

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were also not viewed favourably by the British India and were excluded from the reference group of the overseas colonial establishment." Noel Pitts Gist and Roy Dean Wright, *Marginality and Identity: Anglo-Indians as a Racially Mixed Minority in India* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 2–8. Though India still houses the community, most Anglo-Indians migrated to European countries from Pakistan after independence due to cultural differences.

[457] Brave Space: A space that allows full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society. Maurianne Adams, Ed,. Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2007).

> Freedom of expression and freedom of the market evolved side by side . . .
> Paradoxically, this limitation has provided freedom from censorship, much
> like the serving of alcohol and watching banned movies are possible at
> Pakistan's high-class parties.[458]

Though censorship towards art is not overtly visible in contemporary times, the government keeps a delicate finger on the scale through governmental funding projects, thus keeping rightist voters on their side while projecting a softer image of Pakistan. The carefully curated artworks exhibited during the Lahore Biennale signified soft governmentality. In contrast, a more forthright and upfront approach by a privately funded project is another manifestation of ambivalent politics embedded in the urban lives of postcolonial societies.[459] According to Mirza, official policies regulate the cultural diet of the general public, while members of the elite enjoy the privilege of freedom of expression that comes with class in Pakistan.[460] Mirza's conclusion may have been true in the past; after the War on Terror, however, in the light of contemporary reactionary religiosity, the freedom of expression has not been a straightforward class-based phenomenon.[461] The religious persecution of leftist professors and students in the universities on accusations of blasphemy and the reaction of many middle-class/upper-middle-class urbanites towards the Aurat March on social media indicates the shift. The events that unfolded within the last two decades specify that religion has become a convenient tool to control new ideas and gendered and minority lives within mainstream urban culture.

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[458] Mirza, "Zia's Long Reach."

[459] Tessa Solomon, "Prominent Pakistani Biennial Roiled by Controversy After Authorities Remove Work About Police Killings," October 29, 2019. https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/karachi-biennale-artists-condemn-adeela-suleman-censorship-13481/.
This unwritten censorship was successfully challenged in the Karachi Biennale (2020) by Adella Suleman, who made visible to the artistic community how overt political criticism is not tolerated under any administration throughout Pakistan.

[460] Mirza, "Zia's Long Reach."

[461] In 2011, *Sohbet,* the school's journal, was shut down because of a charge of blasphemy by the jihadist group Lashkar-e-Taiba. The *New York Times* reported on the story, but the Pakistani media was eerily silent. The journal had reproduced homoerotic art in the context of religion. *Sohbet* was shut down, the remaining copies were destroyed, and all the editorial staff was fired. Someone within the art school (administration, faculty, or student) leaked the information to an Islamist group. This incident proved that extremism and religiosity is not a class-based phenomenon in Pakistan anymore. Jillian Steinhauer, "College Faces Backlash Against Homoerotic Art," Hyperallergic, Jan. 4, 2013, https://hyperallergic.com/63034/college-faces-backlash-against-homoerotic-art/ .
The murder of the governor of Pakistan in the name of blasphemy and Sabean Murad's execution are other examples.

When all is said and done, *River in an Ocean* pushed boundaries and was a valiant and ingenious curatorial project that created a brave gendered space while provoking a sense of feminist nostalgic kinship.

5.2. "River in an Ocean" (1992–93): Foregrounding Intergenerational Feminist Links

The concept of the river (of minor cultures and alternative lifestyles) within the ocean (of mainstream heteronormative culture) can easily be deciphered through the title of the exhibition *River in the Ocean*, but only through contextualization can one grasp the full impact of the title. The exhibition was titled after Lala Rukh's (1948–2017) series, *River in an Ocean* (1992–93), as a homage to her life as an artist, a veteran feminist activist, and a teacher and to her unconventional life choices.

The series *River in an Ocean* (1992–93) was conceived during a plane ride from Lahore to Peshawar (Figure 67). Lala is quoted as saying on many occasions that while she glanced through the window of the plane, she witnessed a shimmering snakelike pathway created in the ocean by the rays of moonlight as they hit the water's surface, "It looked like this brilliant river shining silver in the dark . . . and it stayed with me." As a result, Jyoti Dhar writes in "Lala Rukh: Tranquillity amid Turmoil":

> She developed a series of small-scale works on photographic paper that were darkened and made to look almost translucent, then gently painted on with tiny wave-like brushstrokes. The result is an ethereal pattern of silver light against a moody, grey sky and deep-black sea: a glimpse into a brooding, wondrous and miniature landscape . . . "River in an Ocean" continued Lala Rukh's abstraction from real elements—but this time drawing its impetus from bodiless spaces rather than the actual body.[462]

Though Lala, in an interview with Hashmi, rejected the idea of using overt feminist forms or female symbols in her art or any recognizable elements that connected her art practice to her activism, she acknowledged, "Ultimately, whatever you are comes out in your work."[463] Known for her minimalist approach, Lala allows the glistering, silver curve in "River in an Ocean" (1993) to stand as a metaphor for a gendered figurative abstraction floating within the boundless grey ocean, indicating, on the one hand, a gendered entity within the patriarchal world but also, on the other hand, imagining women, as she desired them to be—free.

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[462] Jyoti Dhar, "Lala Rukh: Tranquility Amid Turmoil," *ArtAsiaPacific* 102 (March 2017): 123.

[463] Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*, 130.

Born on June 29, 1948, Rukh earned her bachelor's degree in fine arts from Punjab University, Lahore, and later her master's from the University of Chicago. She taught at Punjab University before joining the National College of Arts as a faculty member, where, in 2000, she established the MA Honors Visual Art Program. She also served as the head of the NCA Art History Department for many years.

Lala (as her students and her friends called her) spent her entire life as an activist for female rights. Her struggle started in the 1980s during General Zia's regime. General Zia, as already mentioned, manipulated religion, using his dictatorial powers to marginalize women and minorities actively. Lala was one of the cofounders of the Women's Action Forum (WAF); talking to Salima Hashmi in *Unveiling the Visible,* she explained:

> You must view things from a women's perspective. A lot of my awareness grew from the Women's Action Forum. Of course, I got hold of a lot of books and theoretical knowledge. But the practice of what one believed did start off with feminist organization, although we never claimed that that is what it was because we wanted it to be open. It operated democratically, being nonhierarchical.[464]

Lala established a women's resource and publication center called *Simorgh* in the 1980s as a response to the strong censorship imposed on both visual and textual content while publication houses were under scrutiny and governmental control. She conducted poster-printing and screen-printing workshops with women from all economic and social classes and taught them how to illustrate their issues and demands visually.[465] She created many poster series to challenge Zia's misogynistic policies against women and minorities. Her famous poster, *Crimes Against Women* (1985), is part of the Met collection (Figure 68). The poster is a collage composed of crimes reported against women in the newspapers during the 1980s, "The aggregation of all these reports into one image is to highlight the extent and volume of violence perpetrated against women."[466]

In 2018, for the purposes of this research, I visited the offices of Shirkat Gah in Model Town, Lahore—a tributary of the Women's Action Forum. I witnessed there the continuation of the poster-making tradition to highlight gender issues and create educational visual aids for

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[464] Ibid., 129.

[465] Ibid.

[466] Metropolitan Museum of Art, Private Collection, Lala Rukh*: Crimes against Women* (1985), 2019, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/815496/.

uneducated rural women for human rights awareness; topics included the perils of child marriage, sexual harassment, and women's right to inheritance.

Lala was a skillful photographer, and that aided her in documenting the political and social unrest during the 1980s and women's struggle against General Zia's fascist regime. In her artwork, she used pencil sketches, photography, and printmaking as a medium, rejecting oil, which she considered a colonial tradition, signifying colonial impositions.[467]

Lala fought for women's rights and lived an unconventional life even when the stakes were extraordinarily high—being a woman and an academic. Throughout her career as a teacher, she wore extremely gender-neutral clothes and kept short hair that grew silver before its time. She never married, as she valued her independence and did not deem it necessary. The exhibition *River in an Ocean* was a timely tribute to the legacy of a brave activist and a brave woman who navigated through life on her terms. Her untimely death in 2017 left a massive vacuum for a role model for the younger generation of artists and activists.

The exhibition *River in an Ocean* successfully linked the present struggle for gender emancipation to the previous generation's struggle, creating an intergenerational feminist link.

5.3. *River in an Ocean* (2018): Decolonizing Gender

The exhibition was held in an old towel manufacturing factory on Guru-Mangat Road, Gulberg, Lahore. In a transition to being demolished and reconstructed, the factory building provided an austere venue for the exhibition. Scattered in the unkempt courtyard were old electronic appliances such as industrial washers and dryers, probably used for towel dying and drying; they were rusted and retired. A poorly lit narrow staircase led visitors to the first floor. On the midway landing, right above the emergency black metal door and next to the ominous "Emergency Exit" sign, was a satirical text in red paint: "We Broke Borders and Laughed and Cried and Fucked (Up)." This project by emerging artist Aziz Sohail, titled *At Midnight There were No Borders* (2018) (Figure 69), challenged manmade borders and boundaries through technology. The artwork was conceptualized after the artist visited bordering areas of Pakistan and hooked up (online) with people in neighbouring countries such as India, China, and Iran through Tinder and other online dating apps.

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[467]As discussed earlier, the importance of rejecting oil painting and embracing watercolour or other artist techniques are embedded in the postcolonial discourse in the subcontinent, and has been discussed earlier.

Seeing an unkept old building as the venue for an art exhibition makes one aware of the deliberate curatorial effort to create an antithesis to serene spotless white museum spaces. According to the curator, Abdullah Qureshi, in an interview, the venue choice was the result of a conscious discussion. The ephemerality of the building (in transition, to be demolished) and its melancholic conditions resonated with the exhibition's themes.[468]

> It is here that we, as curators, pick up the conversation through this exhibition. Metaphorically, the idea of a river in an ocean interested us very much because this in itself is a physical impossibility. Of course, rivers flow into seas and oceans. However, once they flow in, they merge and become one. So, what is this idea of an intact river existing within an ocean? Could it be read as a utopian idea of resistance too, where it could be seen as navigating through the expansive wilderness? Is it possible to consider that this navigation through a larger body of water is symbolic of a transformative journey? We would like to think so.[469]

For Abdullah, the building in transition spoke to artworks that touched on precarious subjects (*River in an Ocean*), alternative life choices, sexual orientations, and trans lives challenging the permanence and persistence of somewhat dated normativity. The old, still-standing building that housed the subversive elements turns into another metaphor for the dated ocean of patriarchal heteronormativity.

> In an effort to build strong connections between the present and the past, and in times where violence based on gender and persecution of minorities continues to increase on an exponential level, perhaps this exhibition can also be seen as a form of resistance. We hope that this will open up ways to further conceptualize alternative frameworks built upon larger histories of Pakistan's sociopolitical and artistic narrative.[470]

The conjecture of a possible transition of the building into futurity seemed to be the core concept and justification for the venue. On entering the first floor, one could see no attempt to uplift the walls and floors. A space in the center of the hall was kept open for the two-week event. It included contemporary dance and Kathak performance by Rehan Bashir and Gillian Rhodes, titled "Nibiru"; a discussion panel, "Gender and Film: Abdullah Qureshi in Conversation with Akifa Mian and Rabia Hassan"; and a panel, "Trans Lives are Our Lives: Taking the Conversation Forward," with Sarah Suhail, Ashi Jan, Mehlab Jameel, and Sabahat Rizvi.

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[468] Abdullah Qureshi, Online Bubbly with the Author (Montreal-Helsinki, April 2019).
[469] Abdullah Qureshi, Curatorial Statement (Gulberg 2018), *River in an Ocean*, Lahore.
[470] Ibid.

The main hall displaying works led to smaller rooms where various projects were displayed. A portion of the main hall, divided into cubicles, served as a space for performances. The carefully curated works decentralized masculinities and brought perspectives silenced strategically within nationalistic narratives. Zahrah Ehsan's work, titled *The Sky Looks the Same on The Other Side* (2018)*,* was a cluster of small paintings that traced the visible *plein air* from private spaces (Figure 70). The artwork looks like "whimsical doodles" painted directly with water-colour markers and acrylic paints on the colonial-style windows.[471] The images showed tops of houses, electric poles, crows flying in the sky, clouds, and part of blue skies or just a tiny painted window. The painting referred to women's lives in the walled city (andaroon-e-mohallah), where many-storeyed buildings are squeezed into small spaces, and narrow pathways provide limited views from the windows. The artwork touched the lives and struggles of homemakers in lower-income urban areas who spend their days within the buildings and look at the partial view of the world through these windows. They socialize with each other, buy fresh vegetables, and keep an eye on their kids playing in the narrow streets. In *The Sky Looks the Same on The Other Side,* the artist successfully creates two views, the view of the audience looking through the window and that of an urban gendered subjectivity.

Apart from the performances of the four selected artists, other works touched on the anxieties of urban life through a gendered perspective and much-hidden queer urban culture, as well as Malcolm Hutcheson's archival digital prints series "Angelcopiers," documenting the lives of the trans-Khwaja Sara community (also known as Hijra community) (Figure 71).

By reclaiming personal experiences, the selected four performative installations aim at decolonizing gendered experiences from mainstream nationalist gendered discourses. The four case studies discussed here are presented in three sections, given their overlapping themes and strategies. These performances create provocative gendered spectacles, calling for the audience and bringing to the foreground the experiences and nuanced lives of urban gendered bodies located somewhere in between spaces of national and transnational visual discourses surrounding their bodies.

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[471] Zohreen Murtaza, "Dialogue For Engagement," *Dawn*, Apr. 1, 2018, https://www.dawn.com/news/1398479/ .

5.3.1. Sara Mumtaz: Performing In/Validation

Sarah Mumtaz's *Mend Me One Stitch at A Time* (2018) is a noteworthy site-specific installation and live performance (Figure 72). Mumtaz is a contemporary interdisciplinary artist, an embroiderer, and a shoemaker. In an interview, she states that due to the versatility of her mediums, her art evolved into complex relational performances where she fashions a certain personal space.

During her interview, she started by recalling her first performance at Taseer Art Gallery, Lahore. The performance consisted of repeating a mantra, "Sara ko pata hai sub teekh ho jai ga" (Sara knows everything will be all right). She explained that performance played a therapeutic role in her life.[472] Living with cerebral palsy, a genetic condition that causes walking impairment, Mumtaz's anti-ablism works mostly surround her personal struggle and society's expectation of flawless gendered bodies. Her performance, *Mend Me One Stitch at a Time,* foregrounded the gendered bodies' internalized obsession with societal validation.[473]

In her performance, the artist brings her private space to the public. The cubicle creates an atmosphere of a bedroom, with a lamp in the corner and a *singhar maiz* (a white net cloth covering a table with an oriental-style brass mirror, creating a makeshift dressing table). The table is laden with beauty products and accessories like bangles and small jewellery items. A large rose bouquet sits on the corner. In the background, her small circular embroideries, still in their frames, hang from a coat hanger. Obsessive and repetitive black-and-white scribbles like drawings of what seem like grotesque birds and flowers cover the walls, which also mimic the forms of the embroidery pieces. The whole atmosphere creates a private physical space and takes the audience inside the artist's mind, encroaching on her emotional space. The dark cubicle, lit with the light of the lamp, with black drawings on the white walls, creates an exceptionally emotionally charged space.

Mumtaz sits in front of a dressing table, wearing a black knee-high dress. She puts on her makeup with a forced smile constantly lingering on her face, inviting random audiences to help her adorn herself, put lipstick on her, comb her hair, and tie her shoe. She invites the audience into her personal space; this interactive relational performance is reminiscent of Yoko Ono's early performance *Cut Piece* (1964). In Ono's work, the artist sits on the stage motionless

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[472] Sara Mumtaz, Recorded Interview with the Author (National College of Arts, Lahore, March 2018).
[473] Ibid.

with a pair of scissors in front of her; she invites the audience to cut a piece of her clothing, giving them power over her.

However, Mumtaz perceives her performance differently; she insists that the performance gives her agency over her audience. The artist brings to attention the internalization of a male gaze within feminine spaces. The performance further foregrounds the societal pressure on women from early childhood to seek validation, not only towards their physical attributes but also for life in general, work, and social interactions. Pressures like, "Unless women look a certain way, act a certain way, speak a certain way, they should not seek attention, should not be too shy," all are ways of controlling female bodies within cultural discourse. The performance becomes almost a parody of the desperation women feel in pursuing societal approval to justify their existence. Sarah further adds that being a single woman in her mid-thirties in Pakistan, she feels invisible and visible for all the wrong reasons.

In Pakistan, in most cases, unless women are married after a certain age, their existence is not particularly legitimized in society; hence, their presence is under constant scrutiny. Mumtaz argues, "The most interesting part is when I am performing, I have no fear of attention. . . . I enjoy being in focus. While I am performing, I am the centre of the attention, and I feel in command; I manipulate people."[474] Traditionally, women are emotionally and physically visualized as caretakers. "During my performances, I make people polish my toes, hand me my brush, put on my lipstick, and make my hair. This gives me power over strangers that I would not usually have."[475]

Sometimes she offers roses to men in the audience from the rose bouquet and breaks them before people get a chance to hold and receive them. At the end of the performance, the performing cubical looks like a place of violence, where roses are scattered and stomped all over the floor. She adds that people bring their own energy to the performance when she interacts with them, leading to various emotional responses from her—laughing, crying, or acting out.

Mumtaz calls herself insanely optimistic in life; however, her performance generates a melancholic surreal space. We witness the artist go through emotionally vulnerable stages, the emotions that middle-class urban women usually save for private spaces like homes. Sarah turns this emotional vulnerability to her favour through an artistic licence. She added she wants to

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[474] Ibid.
[475] Ibid.

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perform on a more public platform, like on a street or a sidewalk, because she thinks that would be different energy and different dynamics altogether.

The abundance of rose petals scattered during the performance generates references to female sexuality and desire, both taboo subjects. The scattered petals bring to mind subtle pop-cultural references to generic wedding night scenes in Bollywood and Lollywood movies from the 1980s and 1990s. Due to censorship and general cultural constraints, the image of scattered rose petals was used as a signifier for consummation, as wedding-night scenes were the only legitimate references to sex during the 1980s and 90s in cinema, apart, of course, from the abundance of rape scenes. Hence male sexual fantasy within popular cinema in the Subcontinent has been associated with violent images; the most obvious reason is that female appetite for sex or willingness to engage in it is often attached to immorality. Explaining the dynamics of expressing sexuality between men and women in urban cultures, Batool writes:

> The sexual need of a woman as a woman, regardless of her public or private status, is always viewed through the lens of prostitutes/public woman's sexuality in a binary of piety and vulgarity. The perception that women [who] would indulge in sexual fantasies [have] low moral values is common.[476]

Mumtaz's performance takes us inside the unconscious messy performative urban gendered lives. With a sharp wit, she explores the burden of societal expectations, the internalization of the male gaze, which can both be pleasurable and traumatic, and the desire to express their sexuality. Sarah's performance is meant to provoke a reaction from her audience and challenge gendered roles through a spectacle. These themes of spectacle, provocation, and resistance continue within the subsequent case studies we discuss.

5.3.2. Women in White: Sabah Saeed and Natasha Jozi

The two performances, Noor us Sabah Saeed's work titled, *I Can Draw Here, but I Cannot Sit,* and Natasha Jozi's, *The Working Cytology,* chosen for this section, have many overlapping concerns and strategies. In both performances, the artists use their bodies as tools for resistance; both performances signify the complexity of urban gendered lives, but the most important signifier for resistance common to both works is the colour of their clothes—white. Before a contextual analysis of each performance separately, the significance attached to the colour within

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[476] Batool, "New Media, Masculinity and Mujra Dance in Pakistan," 255.

the historical struggle, recent colonial struggle, and transnational feminist struggle is discussed. The use of white makes both the performances relevant to regional as well as transregional feminist resistance without ironing out the complexities of Pakistani urban life as experienced by women—and thus reinforcing the overall theme of this dissertation.

Though both works are performative and repetitive and signify the multiple variables that create urban experiences for gendered lives, one aspect that stands out is the use of white shalwar kameez, which both the artists wear while they perform. Emma Tarlo, in *Clothing Matters,* argues that historically the significance of clothes has not been researched in its entirety; "it has largely been the subject of anthropology rather than ethnography, and when discussed, it was in terms of production and design."[477] Under colonial and now recently neocolonial conditions concerning Muslim subjectivities, most discussions revolve around the significance of the veil and veiling as an object of anxiety and mystique.[478]

Tarlo writes, "Amid the sartorial silence of ethnographic accounts, small incidents have crept in which suggest that a person's cloth are not so easily determined," and are not fixed within dogmatic beliefs, especially in the case of the Subcontinent.[479] Quoting Bernard Cohn in *An Anthropologist Among Historians,* she explains how the specific style of Sikh turban, now seen as the badge of their identity, was standardized by the British to bring about uniformity in the royal army uniforms inducting Sikhs for the Second World War. She further discusses the fluidity of clothing by recounting how Muslim women in North India veil their faces within the community and not when they visit other communities.[480] This phenomenon has also been discussed in *Women of Pakistan*: *Multiple Locations and Competing Narratives,* while discussing how *Bibian* (respectable women from northern areas, the most conservative areas of Pakistan) take off their veils while visiting other provinces and cities such as Islamabad, Lahore,

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[477] Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, 4.

[478] For the full extent of the essentialization of the veil though a Western lens, see, for example: Katherine Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and The Veil: Challenging Historical & Modern Stereotypes* (Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2018); Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan, eds., *Islam and the Veil: Theoretical and Regional Contexts* (London: Continuum, 2011); Elizabeth M. Bucar, *The Islamic Veil: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2012); Phil Parshall and Julie Parshall, *Lifting the Veil: The World of Muslim Women* (Westmont, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Christian Joppke, *Veil* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009).

[479] Tarlo, *Clothing Matters,* 7.

[480] Ibid.

and Karachi. [481] This concept of the fluidity of veiling and veils has recently been the topic of a fiction titled *Hijabistan* (2020). The author, through various short stories, creates a premise that sartorial choices are often part of a relationship between the wearer and social, political, cultural, personal, and familial codes; sometimes, they respond to certain conditions and are not always signifiers of oppression, empowerment, or even religious commitment, contrary to what is projected by transnational or religiopolitical gendered politics. [482]

Tarlo, tracing the lineage of stitched garments in the Subcontinent, challenges the belief that all Hindu women draped themselves in one piece where the upper body was left uncovered or draped with a shawl. In contrast, she argues that Hindu women of higher caste covered their faces. It is a common misconception that Muslims brought stitched garments to the Subcontinent. She argues *ghagra* and *choli* (a long-flared skirt and short top) were already worn by some Hindu women in the Subcontinent even before the arrival of the Muslims in the eighth century. [483] The attire of urban Muslim women evolved historically in the Subcontinent to three distinct articles: *shalwar* (loose pleated trouser), *kameez* (long shirt), and *dupatta* (sheer long scarf), worn around the neck, used to cover the bosom and extended by many to cover the head while in public spaces. Due to Muslim influence in the north, many Indian women adopted Muslim sartorial traditions, and the shalwar/kameez/dupatta became the Indian style, known as the Punjabi style. It is worn by local Christian, Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim women alike within India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. [484] In Pakistan, it is not limited to the province of Punjab, though different provinces do have their distinct variations and features. The return to shalwar/kameez as a sartorial choice for performance by most artists instead of black Western clothes is a form of decolonial resistance in the light of current circumstances. By embracing locally evolved urban sartorial attire, these artists consciously disengage with Western sartorial influences and other religious but traditionally alien garbs, such as abayah and hijab. [485]

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[481] Amineh Ahmed, "Death and Celebration Among Muslim Women," in *Pakistani Women: Multiple Locations and Competing Narratives*, ed. Sadaf Ahmad and Ali Khan (Karachi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 234–36.

[482] Traditionally covering the dead is an extremely performative and fluid act in urban Pakistan.

[483] Tarlo, *Clothing Matters,* 26.

[484] Ibid., 25–28.

[485] Rubina Saigol argues that the Abiah and hijab started as a fashion among middle-class educated women because of the large number of male members of their family travelled to Middle Eastern countries for their livelihoods during the 1980s especially, while bringing back the traditions of affluent Muslim countries as a symbol of status.

Bayly presents strong evidence to argue that the emergence of a unique united anticolonial *swadeshi* resistance movement (as discussed in Chapter Three) originated in Bengal from 1905 to 1910 and was imbedded in textile (white muslin cloth) as well.[486] According to Bayly, the imported cheap British machine-made cloth in the early nineteenth century destroyed the Indian homegrown textile industry because the British saw an opportunity in the Subcontinent not only as a colony to harvest raw resources but also as a market for their products. Buying and wearing homespun products became a political nationalist symbol of disobedience, which ultimately led to the first Muslim-Hindu unified non-cooperative movement against the British Raj.[487] Bayly traces this unified resistance to the fact that within the traditions of the Subcontinent, for both Hindus and Muslims, clothes were more than just signifiers of class but also a vehicle to "transmit holiness, purity and pollution."[488] Hence it became an essential unifying factor for their struggle against the British, momentarily, despite their religious differences.

The myth of Draupadi and her endless sari, linked to textile traditions as gendered resistance adopted within Indo-Persian miniature, has already been discussed in Chapter Two; further, Bayly talks about how different colours within the Subcontinent were also associated with power and divinity, and were open to various elucidations. In Muslim traditions, green is associated with the prophet; under specific conditions, it carries healing powers. White in Hindu traditions was associated with purity. Hence, it is worn by the upper Brahman class (clerics). It was also a colour that widows wore, symbolically distancing them from worldly desires and worldly attention. [489] The use of white as a neutral colour, which connotes disconnect from worldly desires, is also embedded in a Muslim culture where dead bodies are clothed in white unstitched cloth (one piece for men and two pieces for women). When Muslims worldwide proceed to hajj, they wrap themselves in such large white pieces, symbolizing their complete submission to God, away from worldly aspirations. White, a symbol of purity and neutrality in Muslim and Hindu cultures, is embedded in grief rituals regionally. Whereas in most cultures,

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[486] Bayly, "The Origins of Swadeshi," 287.

[487] Sumit Sarkar, "Hindu-Muslim Relations in Swadeshi Bengal, 1903–1908," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 9, no. 2 (June 1972): 179.

[488] Bayly, "The Origins of Swadeshi," 285.

[489] Ibid., 291.

Muslim widows in the Subcontinent traditionally also wore only a white dupatta, a significant Hindu tradition. My grandmother lived to a ripe age of 91 and was widowed for almost 55 years; no one ever saw her wearing a dupatta of any colour other than white.

black is considered the colour of mourning and grief, wearing white is preferred at funerals in the Subcontinent.

The use of distinct urban sartorial choices and white signify resistance and provocation through neutrality in the focused performances by Saeed and Jozi, creating an extremely contradictory situation. The choice of the artists to wear certain clothes and colours help them to blend in the environment while creating a spectacle and provocation through the sheer presence of their bodies. This clever choice of neutral apparel elucidates how it is not clothes that make gendered bodies provocative. Rather the provocation comes from the sheer existence of their unregulated physical bodies within urban spaces, which disrupts the traditional legitimacy of control over female bodies. Referring to the precarious lives of urban subjectivities in India's most prominent metropolitan, Mumbai, Shilpa Phadke explains:

> The public woman is not so much a direct threat to "good" women as much as an illustration of what might happen to good women should they break the rules. Namely, if they break the rules, they are no longer deemed worthy of "protection" from society.[490]

From this perspective—that women who break the rules are not worthy of protection—our performers create a spectacle in public wearing all white, metamorphizing the meaning of the white colour from its neutrality into the symbol of grief and further turning it into the colour of abandonment. Though regionally ingrained in culture and religion, these artists also create a transnational feminist link through white apparel. In the 1900s, the women's suffrage movement in the United States and Europe capitalized on white as their preferred colour, referred to as suffragette white, to unify women belonging to all classes. The symbolism continues to this day. Under the Republican president Donald Trump's administration, Democratic women of Congress repeatedly wore white as a way to show their unity and a commitment to defending the rights of women and disenfranchised groups at the president's State of the Union addresses to Congress.[491]

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[490] Phadke, *Why Loiter?* 63.

[491] Female members of Congress in the United States wore suffragette white at the 2020 State of the Union address. Cady Lang, "Why Democratic Congresswomen Wore White Again to Send a Message at the State of the Union," *Time,* updated: Feb. 5, 2020, https://time.com/5777514/women-wearing-white-state-of-the-union/ .

5.3.2.1. Natasha Jozi's *The Working Cytology of Performance* (2018): Intentional Interpellation

Jozi's *The Working Cytology of Performance* (2018) long-durational site-specific installation and performance lasts five hours (Figure 73). Each performance is recorded for documentation purposes. Several elements within the performative illustration indicate the core theme as reinforcing the heterogenous existence of urban gendered subjectivities in Pakistan. These elements, such as texts, a diagram, the sartorial choice, and several signifiers embedded in the diverse history of the Subcontinent, need to be considered in the following analysis.

The artist sits or lies prostrate statically on what seems like a rectangular display pedestal, painted red. This grave-like structure in bright red shares attributes with Anish Kapoor's *Monochrome Grave Red* (2018). The colour red has a special significance in South Asia as the colour of celebration. The concept of celebration comes from the fact that South Asian women (both Muslim and Hindu) traditionally wear red on their wedding day. Hence even today, the term *sorah jora* (red dress) is colloquially used for a bridal dress, even though young brides may choose different colours. Jozi lies on the red display box in white shalwar kameez, a colour of grief in the Subcontinent. The title of the performance and personal information about the artist, such as geographical location, gender, weight, and height, are printed on the top right of the side of the pedestal, which turns Jozi into a display item.

A diagram of a large irregular shape that looks like a swollen womb is painted on one of the walls with a thick black outline. A red cell or an unfertilized egg inside a mesh of several black horizontal and vertical lines represents the self. This single-cell image creates a reference to the title, *The Working Cytology of Performance*. Cytology is commonly known as the branch of biology that examines the cells of the body under a microscope. Merriam-Webster lists two definitions for the word:

- A branch of biology dealing with the structure, function, multiplication, pathology, and life history of cells: cell biology
- The microscopic examination of cells obtained from the body (as by aspiration or scraping) for diagnostic purposes: exfoliative cytology[492]

A total of fourteen written words such as gender, class, societal structures, values, race, language, politics, communication, ritual, beauty, and religion, accompanied by arrows (that also

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[492] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cytology.

look like sperm), travel towards the red egg within the womb signify intersectionality and complexity, determining one's individuality. Foregrounding that subject formation/perception results from multidimensional modalities within social relationships. Through this assemblage, Jozi seems to be dissecting the formation of humans as social constructs and destabilizing the homogenized formations of subjectivities.

During an interview with Jozi, I inquired about the context of scientific terms such as cytology. She recalled how her feminist concerns dated back to her school days. In her biology class, she recalled that after explaining the female reproductive system, the teacher made sure to erase all diagrams and information before the next class started, as if female sexuality was a shameful secret. Jozi described how that act left a substantial impact on her psyche.[493]

There is a poem written on the next wall:

> Static body is not moving, yet performing
> Artist is outside the static body
> Static body generates Perception,
> Perception generates performance,
> Static body is not non-performance,
> Perception is the performing self,
> Verb is not always an action,
> Performance is not always a movement,
> Who is the performer, and who is being performed?

During the five-hour performance, the artist lies still, sometimes on her back, giving us the impression of a body lying on a funeral pyre—a structure, usually made of wood, for burning a body as part of a funeral rite (cremation) or execution. While the artists remain static, the audience turns from inquisitive to restless to slightly agitated. The camera catches these audience movements, turning the audience into performers, bringing us back to the poem:

> Performance is not always a movement,
> Who is the performer, and who is being performed?

Women within art have been the recipient of the male gaze for centuries; Jozi's apparently lifeless body in front of the audience on a pedestal display and under the spotlight does not perform. But her sheer resilience exhausts her audience and metamorphoses them into the subjects of the performance and the recipient of an electronic gaze.

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[493]Natasha Jozi, Online Interview with the Author (Rawalpindi-Montreal, September 2021).

Jozi states that women are always the recipient of a gaze, whether imperialistic or religious, cultural or erotic. She calls her performance an intentional interpellation. As women have been traditionally objectified, "I present myself as an object of the gaze, allowing my audience to move around the display, turning myself from metaphorical to an embodiment of an object."[494] On a certain level, this performance creates a connection with Shirin Nishat's short film titled *Turbulent* (1998).[495] A two-screen video installation shows two singers (Shoja Azari playing the male and Iranian vocalist and composer Sussan Deyhim as the female), creating a powerful musical metaphor for the complexity of gender roles and the cultural power dynamic. Apart from regional Iranian gender politics, what really captures the interest of a feminist lens is the fact the camera captures the male vocalist from only one angle, the front. In contrast, the female vocalist is viewed from all sides while the camera revolves around her, showing her from every angle. This creates a powerful metaphor for how men and women are perceived differently and how women are never only perceived through their work but are critically analyzed, dissected, and objectified when under the spotlight.

Jozi, as she lies straight, sits, or bends over with her eyes closed on the red box, foregrounds her vulnerability within the crowd around her. The sheer defencelessness of the act of lying with her eyes closed among strangers becomes an act of resistance. Her apparently lifeless body, lying in the center where the audience moves around her, creates a certain kind of incitement or provocation, which can only be explained as intentional. In a society where even billboards that contain images of women in public spaces are not tolerated, a society where women can be accused of provoking male desire if they go out of the house late at night or sit in a public park unchaperoned, this performance, within the four walls of a gallery and under the electronic gaze, changes Jozi from gendered subject to an object to a mediator, further highlighting how perceptions create identities.

During the interview, I asked if she felt vulnerable being displayed among strangers and if she anticipated an incident. She replied, "Oh! that would have proved my point to a conclusion." However, she mentions subtle sexist reactions to her performance. As most evening newspapers (evening-ers) hire male reporters, she recalls how most newspapers, without context,

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[494] Ibid.

[495] Shirin Nishat, *Turbulent* (1998), dual-projection work, short duration video installation, 9min 8 sec. The film was also part of Lahore Biennale (LB01).

published large images of her performance from provocative angles, capturing the contours of the female body in order to sensationalize her performance and provoke a public backlash.[496]

> Women who are inadequately able to demonstrate (this) privacy are seen to be the opposite of "private" women, that is, "public women." This binary between the private and the public woman defines all women's presence and relationship to public space.[497]

Jozi, lying on her back in an art gallery, presents herself as an object, turns from a private woman into a public one, and is treated as a sexualized object like the female protagonists in generic movie posters. In the next performance, we witness Saeed being denied a *chai ki piyali* (cup of tea). At the same time, she manages to salvage her place at the public café by justifying her presence through her work (concentrating on the drawing). Hence, with a degree of difference, the desire to provoke a reaction from their audience continues.

5.3.2.2. Urban Women and Nuances of Subalternity and Agency: Noor-us- Sabah Saeed's *I Can Draw Here, but I Cannot Sit Here*

Saeed's *I Can Draw here, but I Cannot Sit Here* (2017) is an ingenious performance-based installation, which with wit and cynicism, brings to light the paradox of the lives of Pakistani women occupying urban spaces (Figure 74). *I Can Draw here, but I Cannot Sit Here* is an installation consisting of a drawing attached to the wooden drawing board often used by art students to practice, resting on a wooden chair. On the wall, a monitor plays a closed-loop short film at the back.

The film shows the back of a girl wearing a white shalwar/kameez sitting in what appears to be a café of sorts, the kind one finds in lower-income commercial urban areas. As mentioned before, the privilege of class and capitalist codes provide upper-middle-class Pakistani women somewhat safe spaces within commercial malls, eating spots, and high-end restaurants. The more proletarian urban spaces do not offer women the luxury of not being hassled. These different dynamics between high-end restaurants and lower-income food places, though, indicate that the real threat to upper-middle-class women is lower-class, uneducated, blue-colour men, but in reality, this logic becomes redundant on the streets, where without any administrative watch such as security in the mall or restaurants, women are more at risk from men who are in their own

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[496] Natasha Jozi, Online Interview with the Author (Rawalpindi-Montreal, September 2020).
[497] Phadke, *Why Loiter?* 26.

conveyances, such as a car or a motorbike, indicating their class positioning.[498] The reason

behind the safety at the malls and high-end restaurants mimicking Western consumer patterns is

articulated by Phadke within the greater urban culture of the Subcontinent:

> In a consumption-driven economy, shopping is an act that is both
> respectable and respected because consumption demonstrates
> power. . . While many women find pleasure in these spaces of consumption,
> access to these spaces demands a demonstration of their capacity to buy.[499]

The café scene shows the artist sitting engrossed in her work, surrounded by older men

sitting at separate tables, some staring at her, while a few young male college students are

chatting in a corner. The stained green table covers, the black-and-white damaged commercial

tiles on the floor, and half-tiled pink and green walls all reflect the location of the café in a

dense/lower-income part of Lahore. There is a large poster of a Coke bottle on the wall. Another

wall-hanging consists of a historical image of an architectural heritage building, the kind of

haweli one could find in the old parts of Lahore before the gentrification process and the

commercialization of those areas started (Figure 75).

Another poster in the corner, half-hidden behind the artist, shows an unclear image of

what appears to be an advertisement, showing a young sensual white model with light brown hair

wearing a provocative low-cut dress, which appears to be a bikini top. While there might be a

hidden family or couple's space at the back, this advert points directly to the unwritten public

code that this is an exclusively male space, where men come and loiter after a hard day's work.

This concept of public spaces reserved for men also relates to the debate in Chapter Four,

where the dissertation dwelled on discussing the contradictions between culture, traditions,

religion, male sexuality, and male desire in Farida Batool's dissertation, "New Media,

Masculinity and Mujra Dance in Pakistan" (2015). Discussing the outlets of male sexuality,

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[498] Research based on testimonies of "women commuters who navigated the area between the office district of Fort and Churchgate railway station lamented that ever since the hawkers vending books on the pavement were cleared in 2005, the area became uncomfortable after dark inducing them to walk through it at a faster pace." The argument that middle-class women's, and indeed all women's, access to public space will improve substantially if we remove lower-class men from the scene is thus flawed even at the level of rationality. This argument is used to justify and reinforce various kinds of exclusions from public spaces, thus rendering both women and other marginal citizens outsiders to public space." Phadke, *Why Loiter?* 50.

[499] Ibid., 86.

Batool writes: "The fulfilment is primarily considered for male sexuality and his 'natural' requirements, whereas female desire is judged with moralist values."[500]

This concept is further extended to explain the male desire to have public leisurely spots as a requirement. At the same time, unchaperoned women occupying urban spaces such as parks and mainstream eating spaces are considered infringing on male spaces. Furthermore, it is considered that they are calling for unwarranted male attention. This makes "public spaces" congenial for men and riddled with paradox for a woman navigating these spaces; "she is asking for trouble" reinforces the binary—*naik*/pious (private) and *ghasti/*slut (public).[501]

The installation is based on the artist's experience in older and more conservative parts of Lahore, where public places such as chai *dhabas* (tea cafes) are culturally deciphered as male spaces. This tradition is considered unchallenged without having any formal rules around it. Visiting one such cafe unchaperoned, the artist, on ordering a cup of tea, was refused the service on the pretext that, being a woman, she was not welcome and could not be served in the establishment. However, she insisted that she sit there and work on her art project and paradoxically, the man running the café agreed. Hence, as a woman, she is not served refreshments in the café, but her presence is tolerated in the space as a working artist. Receiving unwarranted attention from customers, she decided to focus her eyes on the ceiling fan and draw it, helping her ignore the attention. While not served a cup of tea but allowed to work, the short film captives the paradox of being an artist and a woman, who at the same time is being treated like two different people, one based on her gender and the other tolerated due to her work. Phadke explains this phenomenon in the following way:

> The demonstration of purpose is another way in which women enhance
> access to public space while maintaining the cloak of respectability.
> Women manufacture purpose through the carrying of large bags, by
> walking in goal-oriented ways and by waiting in appropriate spaces where
> their presence cannot be misread.

The installation connotes extremely complex signifiers that feature the lives of women in cities in Pakistan, where their presence is a weird balance of subalternity and agency. What

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[500] Batool, "New Media, Masculinity and Mujra Dance," 257.

[501] The prejudice ingrained in the societal discourse against unchaperoned women occupying urban public spaces for leisure purposes and an antagonistic relationship of rightist and leftist views against emancipated liberal women will be fully explored in the last section.

really makes this work ingenious is that it obliterates the idea of a straightforward interpretation of women's lives, reinforcing the core statement of this dissertation.

Here Spivak's critical concept and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's interpretation of "Can the Subaltern Speak?" frame the above concept. Rajan points out that Bhubaneswari is not a subaltern determined by her class as she belongs to a middle-class urban home. Bhubaneswari is not a "'true' subaltern"; however, her subordination is determined here not by her class position but due to universal systemic culture that disempowers individuals based on their gender.[502]

Farida Batool, in her interview, commented on this intricate balance between subalternity and agency of working/urban women in Pakistan.[503] From her personal experiences, she pointed out that being the head of the Department of Gender Studies (National College of Arts), the male students in her class are bound by a contract to listen and conform to her through the syllabus and university policies. However, she says as soon as "I leave the college, I am a woman and observe the subordination the society and culture have designated me; in the marriage, on the road, and in the family."[504]

The nuances of subalternity and agency are demonstrated in Saeed's work. Women who challenge male hierarchy (or due to financial independence) and achieve certain degrees of success, but "unlike men, they struggle on several fronts," such as religious, familial, political and cultural, "simultaneously to reach their goals."[505] Even when they are considered fundamental members of the workforce, such as doctors, teachers, nurses, maids, and receptionists, they are not allowed to enjoy full citizenship status. Hence:

> To access public space, then, women are expected to conform to the larger patriarchal order by demonstrating respectability and legitimate purpose. If women are seen to misuse the "freedom" granted to them or to inadequately perform their roles as "good" women, then the weight of the watchful gaze becomes visible in the shape of articulated codes relating to dress, norms of behaviour and modes of acceptable conduct.[506]

When these codes of conduct are challenged (discussed in the last section of this chapter under Aurat March 2019–20), in a twisted logic, their education that legitimizes their access to public

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[502] Rajan, "Death and the Subaltern,"120.

[503] Farida Batool's work has been analysed in the previous chapter. Besides being an urbanist-artist, her role as an emerging feminist scholar within the parameters of gender studies is enormous.

[504] Farida Batool, Recorded Interview with the Author (National College of Arts, Lahore, 2018).

[505] Shahla Haeri, *No Shame for the Sun*, xi.

[506] Phadke, *Why Loiter?* 36.

spaces is used against them. They are labelled as westernized/privileged, not representing the marginalized class. In a paradoxical Catch-22 situation, the marginalized gendered subjectivity is only represented through her silence.

By capturing the gendered struggle to assert one's space, Saeed's work skillfully destabilizes and challenges the archetypical "Muslim woman" as a homogenized entity within the popular transitional narrative as well as the reactive rightist religious account. It further indicates that women, especially urban women in Pakistan, do not have straightforward lives that can be conceptualized through a single image.

The video repeatedly plays the same film, and the never-ending loop reminds us of Batool's lenticular print. It is the repetition of the performance to create a spectacle, but this time around, it is not a playful girl skipping a rope. Instead, we witness a girl engrossed in her work in a café, keeping her eyes on the ceiling fan, which she draws on a white sheet of paper, legitimizing her presence. While men around her are busy cracking jokes, some look at her and are completely at ease in the specific surrounding. There is an inherent contradictory element in this performance; while the girl seeks an audience through a spectacle, the audience is also the source of her distress, highlighting the contradictory relationship urban women share with society.

The drawing the artist accomplishes is displayed in the exhibition, along with the drawing board resting on the chair in front of the monitor. It stands as a testimony of the artist's experience. The never-ending loop makes the viewer relive women's lives and experiences over and over again until the subject of the performance—the artist—vanishes and becomes just a mediator, showcasing the process through which the bodies are marginalized and the worn-out audience moves to the subsequent work.

5.3.3. *A Novel City:* Unapologetic Public Occupations

ایک نرالا شہر (A Noval City) is a recorded performance and photographic installation by Anushka Rustomji and Zara Asghe, executed by Hammas Wali. The performance and installation entail a three-minute fifty-nine-second video and photography based on the experiences of the two artists wandering in the city of Lahore as pedestrians (Figure 76 and Figure 77). The video shows them lying idly in the park or sitting, checking their phones on the canal bridge. This performance has the most direct and confrontational engagement with public places and is more provocative than the other three performances discussed earlier. The performance is in absolutely unapologetic

defiance of public/private culture codes. But before we dive into the intricacies of intent by these performance artists, we need to first look into the title of the performance that links it to vernacular urban culture.

The title of the performance is derived from a nursery rhyme (poetry for children) by iconic twentieth-century Urdu, Punjabi, and Persian–language poet Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum (1899-1978, Lahore, Pakistan). Apart from his massive contribution to literature and poetry throughout the Subcontinent, he is known for his poems written for children and as the creator of the *Tot Batot* character. It is common knowledge among literary circles that Tabassum started writing poems for children to amuse his young daughter Suria. In pre-partition India, the collection was published in 1940 under the title *Jhoolnay* (Rhymes) (Figure 78). There are direct references to his daughter in the book, and it also contains a poem titled "Suria's Doll." The poem "A Novel City," which is also the title of the performance under discussion, is also from the collection:[507]

<div dir="rtl">

ایک نرالا شہر

شہر کے اندر نہر

نہر کے بیچ میں آگ

آگ میں کالا ناگ

ناگ کے اوپر پیڑ

پیڑ کے نیچے بھیڑ

بھیڑ کے سر پر مور

مور مچائے شور

</div>

A Novel City

The Canal runs through it
Burning fire in the water
An ebony cobra lurks inside the fire
A tree grows on the cobra's head
With a lamb resting underneath
There is a peacock on the lamb's head
The peacock squawks away relentlessly[508]

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[507] Sufi Tabasum, "Jhoolnay," Internet Archive. Mar. 21,2018, https://archive.org/details/JhoolnaySufiTabasum/page/n1/mode/2up/ .
[508] Credits translation from Urdu: Bushra Syed.

Reference to the poem helps us contextualize the performance within a gendered vernacular urbanity. A novel city with a canal running through is a direct reference to the city of Lahore and its iconic man-made Canal, also known as Lahore Canal, that has divided the entire city into two parts since Mughal times. It was expanded by the British in 1861. It enters Lahore at Wagha and ends by joining the river Ravi at Niaz Baig, with a total length of 59.5 miles.[509] Though today, with urban expansion and gentrification, the Lahore Canal is the city's most beautiful "linear" park, with trees on both sides that form a rare green belt, it must not have been not so in 1940, when the poem was written. The murky waters of the Canal must have been a dangerous place for young children to play. According to Jack Zipes—one of the most celebrated authors in fairy-tale studies—the fantastic and surreal arrangement in children's literature and poetry works as codes for reinforcing normative behaviour in little adults, acceptable for the context of society.[510]

In the light of Jack Zipes' analysis, the city in context becomes an archetype and the Canal a signifier of danger. Hence, the poem, with its surreal arrangement of fire, and the snake inside the Canal, signifies real dangers, holding a profound message for the poet's daughter—the cultivation of fear of external spaces. When seen within the cultural milieu of the Subcontinent and its disdain for female presence in public spaces, the message becomes more forceful.

This dissertation associates the revival of religiosity within urban Pakistan, popularly associated with General Zia's regime, as a response to Islamophobia and media propaganda that started immediately after 9/11. The popular diasporic notion that Muslims are being targeted worldwide and Islam is under siege is exploited by Islamists for their political gains; they use the West-versus-Islam rhetoric to gain political control by *reinforcing* patriarchy within the region.

The term *reinforcing* is pertinent here because we need to understand that the patriarchal structures in the Subcontinent have always been robust and impregnate all social, cultural, and linguistic discourses. Specifically, the prejudice ingrained in the societal and linguistic discourse against unchaperoned women occupying urban public spaces for leisure purposes is evident within historical and contemporary Pakistani society in particular and the Subcontinent in general.

Tracing the etymology of the word گشت (*ghasht*) gives us an insight into the paranoia attached to women and public mobility and the politics of public versus private women. The

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[509]G.C Walker, *Gazatteer of Lahore District 1883–4* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1989), 62.

[510]Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 2012), 3.

word *ghasht,* which means patrolling/strolling, is also used in a lighter term مٹرگشت (*mater-ghasht*), which means wondering/strolling off leisurely or idly with friends. These verbs do not have visible negative or pejorative connotations attached to them. However, when the verb turns into a noun, in its feminine form گشتی (*ghashti*) (a woman who wanders off leisurely), the popular definition shifts meaning drastically. *Ghashti* is a slur used to imply a morally depraved woman, a prostitute, and is most commonly used to dismiss and discredit nonconforming women. The word has a conflicting connotation to the myth of the figure of the Flâneur in Western thought, a term that, of course, was reserved for men (at least traditionally). Terms that connote mobility in women are laced with hatred.

The unchaperoned women who occupy public spaces for pleasure—as already stated above—in society's collective psyche do not deserve to be saved. Hence, "respectable women" need to earn their right to public places through performances. Unchaperoned women are seen as a threat to public morality and are controlled through the construction of the public/prostitute schema. "This not only justifies denying 'respectable' women access to public spaces but also serves to derecognize any violence that 'non-respectable' women might face in public."[511]

Phadke writes, "The very presence of women in public is seen as transgressive and fraught with anxiety"[512] Hence, due to an unwritten cultural code, women have created ways to legitimize their public presence through performance:

> Women also have to indicate that their presence in public space is
> necessitated by a respectable and worthy purpose. Further, this purpose has
> to be *visibly* demonstrated to the effect that when any woman accesses
> public space, she has to overtly indicate her reason for being there … This
> performance cannot be a one-time thing, as appropriate femininity has to be
> enacted again and again each time women access public space.[513]

She further adds that travel for religious purposes also liberates women from the confines of the four walls and legitimizes their presence in public; hence performing religiosity plays the role of an important marker for respectability in women.[514] She notes how unchaperoned

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[511] Phadke, *Why Loiter?* 63–64.

[512] Ibid., 72.

[513] Ibid., 59–60.

[514] Ibid., 76. Gadamer, as mentioned in the chapter first describes all form of religious rituals as a form of performance. This aspect of rituals is also explored by Humira Iqtidar in *Secularizing Islamists?* who argues that performing religion gives women opportunities to access public spaces without challenging patriarchal control over their itinerary.

women in parks need to produce a "particular type of body language of purpose […] The effort appears to be to legitimize their presence by demonstrating that they are walking for exercise and not for fun or social interaction."[515]

> To access public space, then, women are expected to conform to the larger patriarchal order by demonstrating respectability and legitimate purpose. If women are seen to misuse the 'freedom' granted to them or to inadequately perform their roles as 'good' women, then the weight of the watchful gaze becomes visible in the shape of articulated codes relating to dress, norms of behaviour and modes of acceptable conduct.[516]

These patriarchal codes are kept in place through harassment, molestation, and, in extreme cases, legitimization of violent behaviour in public places. A very recent incident on the Lahore/Rawalpindi motorway and the reaction of the investigating officer demonstrates just that. A woman who was a Pakistani-French national was driving to Rawalpindi from Lahore (almost a 4-hour drive) with her two young children at night. Her car broke down, and while she was waiting for help to arrive, she was assaulted and raped by two men in front of her children. The senior investigating police official in Lahore, Umer Sheikh, discussing the police's progress on national TV, blatantly blamed the woman. He questioned why she was travelling at night and why she did not take a busier road, given that she had been alone with her children or checked her car before departing.[517] Another harrowing incident in Pakistan happened on August 14, 2021, (Pakistan's Independence Day), a day of celebration in Pakistan. A female Tik Toker was filming a video for her social media platform at the Minar-e-Pakistan monument in Greater Iqbal Park, Lahore. She was molested, sexually assaulted, and mugged by hundreds of men while the whole incident was filmed and posted on social media.[518] The erasure of women from public spaces and victim-blaming, as argued, encourages a vigilante atmosphere where men feel morally justified to punish women who transgress these boundaries.[519]

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[515] Phadke, *Why Loiter?* 76.

[516] Ibid., 36.

[517] Farooq Naeem, "Pakistan Outcry over Police Victim-Blaming of Gang-Raped Mother." BBC, Sept. 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54186609/ .

[518] David Averre, "Woman Making TikTok Video is Sexually Abused by Crowd Tearing Off her Clothes in Pakistan: Police Investigate Hundreds of Men After Attack," *Mail Online, updated August 25, 2021. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9925335/Woman-sexually-abused-HUNDREDS-men-Pakistan-making-TikTok-video-park.html/* .

[519] For more interregional accounts of women caught between religious nationalism and modernism, see Chapter One and Conclusion.

Historically within the feminist struggle and early feminist initiatives post-partition, access to public spaces for pleasure as resistance was not explored. It was not until very recently, to be precise, it was not until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century that we witnessed feminist initiatives exploring this aspect of liberation. As mentioned in the third chapter, women are not silent, static spectators but social actors. The further encroachment on their rights in public after the War on Terror and its gender politics gave birth to this resistance from urban women, as mentioned in Chapter Four, in the form of non-formal urban feminist initiatives. Women feel their space is being further restricted under the current circumstances and need to react and reclaim it.

The performance under discussion, *A Novel City,* explores just that. These artists, clad in hybrid attire, jeans, with long kameez and a chadar hanging around their shoulders, sit around Lahore Canal bridge or a park, relaxing, lying down, and checking their phones within a public park. The captured images show men looking at them with curious and disapproving eyes, or generally, they are the focus of attention in masculine crowds that encircle them.

Though seemingly mundane, this performance disrupts and challenges the unwritten patriarchal codes set in place that determine how female bodies engage with public spaces. As discussed above, performing a desire to occupy public spaces for pleasure without going to lengths to legitimize their occupation provokes and questions these codes and subverts the public (prostitute)/private (pious) women binary. This performance is further realized within a larger initiative on a massive scale in Karachi, followed by almost all major cities in Pakistan, the unapologetic occupation of public spaces and streets during the Aurat March. This collective unapologetic performative desire to be outside started a social media war that ended in the courtrooms.

5.4. Aurat March (2018–20): The War of the Sexes

As projected by the two artists in the early 2000s, the theme of occupying urban spaces symbolically took a physical form in later years. As discussed in the last chapter, the need to occupy urban spaces within sporadic urban initiatives by female activists is most prominently materialized under Aurat March's umbrella. However, unlike the art world, where Naiza and Farida's images of symbolic gendered subjectivities occupying identifiable urban public spaces caused a little commotion, women's actual occupation of urban places met with intense hostility

in the real world, primarily because the religious gender politics within Pakistani society had taken deeper roots a decade later.

During my time in Pakistan to collect data for the dissertation, I had the honour of participating in the earliest onset of the Aurat March in Lahore on March 8, 2018.[520] Organized by an independent collective of women, Aurat March 2018 (Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi) was just the beginning[521]

Aurat March solidified the sporadic feminist initiatives around the country into one event that demonstrated the presence of thousands of (secular/socialist) women, genderqueers, and trans members of the society to raise voices against persistent gender-based inequality and discrimination under the collaborative platform of the Aurat March Foundation initiated in Lahore and Karachi in 2018.[522] Since 2018, Aurat March and its support, participation, and organization escalated quickly, and in 2019 it became more organized and provocative. This year it was organized in many cities across Pakistan, such as Multan, Faisalabad, Larkana, and Hyderabad. In 2019, the Aurat March Foundation went door to door for a call for participation from women of all classes and economic backgrounds before the event. In 2019, the women participants started bringing up domestic issues and male privilege in domestic settings through provocative placards such as:

- "Reheat your food,"
- "I do not know where your socks are."
- "The road does not belong to your dad."
- "Yes, I am sinful. I have a bad character."

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[520] Aurat is the Urdu word for woman; Aurat March literally translates to "Women's march." This day is also UN international Women's Day.

[521] Aurat March 2018 was a massive event in Karachi but was not particularly advertised in Lahore. Many accounts consider the Lahore Aurat March 2019 as the first march. But as I personally participated in Aurat March 2018, I can be certain that the Aurat March initiative started in 2018 in Lahore but accelerated from 2019 onwards.

[522] In Karachi one of the organizers of Aurat March is Sadia Khatri, who is also the initiator of the Girls@Dhaba movement in Karachi and is discussed in the fourth chapter. Khatri, an organizer of the Aurat March, insists upon the "right to unapologetically exist in public" and expresses her joy that on the day of the march this demand was met for a whole day and women could be 'loud and boisterous outside, occupying a public space that they felt welcome in." Rubina Saigol and Nida Usman Chaudhary, *Contradictions and Ambiguities of Feminism in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2020)," 8. In Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Nida Mushtaq, a social worker is one of the organizers. Though there are dozens of women who are part of organizing Aurat Marches, due to 2020 propaganda and death threats and threats of violence, most organizers don't wish to be named. A large number of placards that mocked real life situations were deemed inappropriate and vulgar by a conservative society and media unprepared for sexual rights and body autonomy asserted openly and unapologetically.

Though these statements seemed benign, they somehow challenged the fundamental dynamics of South Asian homes. There was an intense backlash on social media and private channels.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly unanimously passed a resolution presented by Rehana Ismail (provincial member assembly) of the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA).[523] The resolution accused Aurat March organizers and participants of holding obscene and morally inappropriate placards (Figure 79). It accused these women of being Western-sponsored agents bent on destroying Pakistan's family system and social customs.[524] Ismail added, "while the progress, education, health and needs of women should be talked about, they should not be 'brought out into the streets to be disgraced.'"[525] As a response to the petition against the cancellation of the Aurat March on the grounds of obscenity, the court dismissed the allegations; however, it expressed concerns and ordered organizers to ensure participants adhere to "decency and moral values."[526]

Angry men responded on social media, starting a social media war. Some extremely vindictive acts were witnessed that showed how deep-rooted and hostile patriarchy could be. The placards were torn in the streets (Figure 80) and digitally altered with obscene and vulgar statements, and doctored pictures were posted online. Saigol and Chaudhary write: "A large number of placards that mocked real-life situations were deemed inappropriate and vulgar by a conservative society and media unprepared for sexual rights and body autonomy asserted openly and unapologetically. The slogan that became the most contentious and caused heated controversies across the country was *Mera Jism, Meri Marzi* (My Body, My Right)."[527]

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[523] Political alliance consisting of conservative, Islamist, religious, and far-right parties of Pakistan.

[524] Arif Hayat and Ali Akbar, "KP Assembly Unanimously Passes Resolution against Aurat March, Terming it 'Shameful,'" *Dawn.* March 20, 2019. https://www.dawn.com/news/1470834/ .
Editor, "MMA Lawmaker Says Will Seek Police FIR Against Aurat March," *Dawn*. March 14, 2019. https://www.dawn.com/news/1469421/.

[525] The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2021, was initially moved in the National Assembly by Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari on April 19, 2021 and was passed by the Lower House on the same day. In a country where the domestic violence rate is extremely high, the right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami are the most vocal opponents of the bill and successfully obstructed it in the Senate. This shows that the right wing doesn't really support female rights, as stated above. So did it pass or no? can't tell by above.

[526]There is absolutely no moral code in effect or yardstick to measure morality and hence the court decision left the moral issue open ended. Mubasher Bukhari, "Pakistan Court Gives Green Light to Women's March - With Conditions," *Reuters*. March 3, 2020. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-womens-day-pakistan-march/pakistan-court-gives-green-light-to-womens-march-with-conditions-idUSKBN20Q1YA.

[527] Saigol and Chaudhary, *Contradictions and Ambiguities of Feminism in Pakistan*, 7.

In 2020, the provocation, as well as the pushback, intensified. In 2020, there was a physical attack on March participants. Several participants were injured in Islamabad in front of the press club when they came under attack by religious moralists, one of whom disguised himself as a woman in a burqa. These men threw stones at the demonstrators and chased women with sticks. The police arrested the burqa-clad man, who later revealed that he and a few others had infiltrated the march pretending to be female supporters and later attacked the marchers.[528]

The slogan *Mera jism, meri marzi* (My body, my right) probably was met with the most hostility. The Aurat March Foundation maintains that most crimes against female bodies, such as sexual harassment, forced marriages, and honour killings, are committed due to society's inherent entitlement over women's bodies. This slogan stressed that women have a right to their body autonomy. However, Given that a woman's body is only associated with sexual or religious connotations (in which case, it should be completely hidden), this slogan was conflated with the idea that the women holding these placards were asking for sexual freedom.

 The cleric Molana Dr. Manzoor Ahmad Mengal, in his Friday sermon delivered at Jamia Siddiqia in Karachi on March 15, called the poster "an open call for fornication and adultery." [529] He also mockingly suggested that if women are given this right to their bodies, men should also have the right to rape anyone they wish.[530] The well-known actor Ahmed Ali Butt, son of a flamboyant female singer in Pakistan (irony), stated that the slogan would legalize prostitution.[531]

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[528] The Wire, "Religious Hardliners Disrupt 'Aurat March' as Pakistani Women Take to the Streets," Mar. 9, 2020, https://thewire.in/women/aurat-march-pakistan-womens-day/ .

[529] Molana Dr. Manzoor Ahmad Mengal received his PhD from Sindh University in 1991 and is a student of Molana Saleemullah Khan, who formed Jamia Farooqia in Shah Faisal Colony in 1967. Mengal is also a member of the Wafaqul Madaris curriculum committee. He is thus one of the people responsible for giving input on what madrassa students should be taught in Pakistan. He is one of the members of the government's committee that was formed to check the translations of the Holy Quran. After the committee gives its approval, the translations will be included in the secondary school course books in the country.

[530] Molana Doctor Manzoor Ahmed Mengal, "Aurat Azadi March | Mera Jism Meri Marzi," video. Mar. 15, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r20UuETye5E/ .

[531]During last three years, nearly 3,794 persons became victims of social crimes in the country that included violence like enmity (572 killed, 214 injured), honour killing (512 and 28), domestic violence (320 and 91), sexual violence (90 and 282), petty dispute (220 and 71), property dispute (181 and 83), child abuse (101 and 75), matrimonial dispute (100 and 32), and many other crimes left 188 dead and 155 injured. If we look at the gender of the perpetrators into account, we find only; 122 females out of 3794 perpetrators – nearly 3 percent of these crimes were committed by females against 97% male crimes. It is a woman's body (Jism) that becomes the highest victims of violation that are not only sex related.
Muhammad Nafees, "Deconstructing the Slogan 'Mera Jism Meri Marzi,'" Nayadaur, Mar. 7, 2020. https://nayadaur.tv/2020/03/deconstructing-the-slogan-mera-jism-meri-marzi/ ; Siasat, "Ahmed Ali Butt Believes

Through 2021, Aurat March organizers have been attacked and had blasphemy charges levied against them; the organizers have met with countless death and rape threats. A leading newspaper, *Daily Ummat* (Local avengers), refers to [feminist] marchers as prostitutes and whores.[532]

In Lahore, a woman's poster that recounted a sexual assault by a clergyman was labelled blasphemous. "A picture of someone holding a flag for a local feminist group was shared with false information that it was a French flag, further 'proof' that the feminist movement is foreign-funded."[533] Without any investigation, TV hosts like Orya Maqbool Jan, Ansar Abbasi, and Ovais Mangalwala disseminated false information on TV channels.[534]

Under life threats and threats of violence and litigations, these women are risking their lives to be heard. Rubina Sagal writes:

> Several of the organizers faced online harassment and death threats because of the hatred engendered against them. Similar voices of disapproval echoed in the Sindh provincial assembly against the placards carried by the marchers in 2019. The marchers were condemned, and a complaint was registered, terming the event a manifestation of vulgarity. The provincial government was called upon to act against them. Lawmakers thus added their voices to the general atmosphere of animosity created by the media, journalists, lawyers and religious leaders.[535]

Though the prejudice and hateful speeches towards Aurat March have continued since 2018, it still attracts hundreds of women every year from all walks of life, and various classes, supported by a considerable number of men, fighting for women's right to public spaces and equality.

5.4.1. The Visual Aspect

The most intergenerational aspect of the Aurat March is its visual component incorporated in poster art. Poster art-making was a prominent part of the 1980s feminist struggle against the

That 'Mera Jism Meri Marzi' Means Legalizing Prostitution," May 6, 2020, https://blog.siasat.pk/ahmed-ali-butt-believes-that-mera-jism-meri-marzi-means-legalizing-prostitution/ .

[532] Asad Hashim, "Pakistan Police File 'Blasphemy' Case against Feminist Marchers," *Aljazeera*, Apr. 16, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/16/pakistan-police-file-blasphemy-case-against-feminist-marchers/ .

[533] Mariya Karimjee, "A Coordinated Online Attack Has Forced Some Organizers Behind Pakistan's Women's March into Hiding." March 17, 2021. https://restofworld.org/2021/a-coordinated-online-attack-has-forced-some-organizers-behind-pakistans-womens-march-into-hiding/.

[534] Ibid.

[535] Saigol and Chaudhary, "Contradictions and Ambiguities of Feminism in Pakistan," 50.

dictatorial regime of General Zia. It was led by the prominent Pakistani artist, academic, and feminist activist Lala Rukh, who used poster art as an effective way to reach communities. In Aurat March 2020, artist and designer Shehzil Malik designed, created, and supervised poster art in Lahore. Apart from its nostalgic value, her artwork seems to have an affinity with iconography to the artworks we discussed above.[536]

I will only briefly visually analyze one such poster that stood out as the face of the Aurat March 2020 Lahore. The poster has earthy tones created in ocher, rust, and hues of earthy green (Figure 81). Inclusivity is the core message, as women in different attires and roles are composed within or outside architectural structures, representing vernacular Pakistani culture. There are images of women depicted sowing and embordering, pointing towards the women's role in the cottage industry, rural workers, homemakers, and working women.[537]

The protagonist figure in the foreground stands outside the arch, leaving home with a book in one and a pencil in the other hand, symbols of girls' education. The unruly curly hair creates a bun-like shape on her head, and the features are depicted in a classical Indian linear technique with a closed mouth and tan skin pointing toward Buddhist iconography, especially found in the region of Taxila (Gandara civilization).

The very consciously rendered earthy green gender-neutral kurta that does not define the anatomy of the protagonist probably points towards adolescence. In the Buddhist Mahayana movement,[538] the representation of women as bodhisattvas (disciples on the way to

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[536] Lala Rukh and her work has been introduced in the beginning of the chapter within the context of the exhibition *River in an Ocean*. Shehzil Malik is an award-winning designer and illustrator with a focus on human rights, feminism, and South Asian identity. She is an internationally published book illustrator and leads a studio that works on social-impact projects and collaborations in fashion design, publication design, and branding. Her work has been featured in CNN, DW, BBC, and Forbes with clients including Sony Music, Penguin USA, Oxfam, the *New York Times,* Sterling Publishing, GIZ, and Google. Bio taken from the artist's website: http://www.shehzil.com/home-ultra-extended/about-me/ .

[537] In Pakistan, approximately 65 percent of women earn their livelihood from handicraft work and has a significant impact on financial status of their households and also contribute to almost 5% of Pakistan's annual GDP. Hira Fatima, Essence of Pakistan Cottage Industry: A comprehensive Report (Islamabad: R&D Department, 2018), 1.

[538] Mahayana, (Sanskrit, "greater vehicle") was a movement that arose within Indian Buddhism around the beginning of the Common Era and became by the ninth century the dominant influence on the Buddhist cultures of Central and East Asia. Jonathan A. Silk, "Mahayana: Buddhism," Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mahayana/ .

nirvana/liberation) [539] is always in the form of adolescent girls.[540] The hand, though, does not replicate any of Buddha's mudras but does create a stylized posture with a pencil, a subtle hint to Buddhist mudra iconography.

Furthermore, another quintessential iconography from Gandara represents Buddha with a halo behind his head or enclosed within an arch. An arch behind the protagonist's head is designed to create a stylized flaming halo-like effect. However, the semiotic of the arch is derived from the multifoil arch (dated 1625–58) introduced in the Subcontinent during the reign of Shah Jehan, the fifth Mughal Emperor.

We can conclude that converging diverse cultural and religious visual signifiers connect this poster to the themes discussed earlier, creating an affinity with the feminist artwork. With the same strategy, the artists create an image that is rooted in the diverse regional iconography, a constant reminder of Pakistan's cultural and religious multiplicity.

Many of these posters were vandalized, torn, and set on fire by mobs of men that found the Aurat March an infringement of their cultural and religious traditions.[541] The very idea of women leaving homes to occupy streets seems to have triggered an immense hatred.

The Aurat March has the potential to be a consolidated feminist movement in Pakistan, but its future remains uncertain. The personal attacks, the accusation of blasphemy, and other threats escalating each year with little or no support from the government keep women vulnerable. Only time and resilience of Pakistani women can decide the future of the feminist struggle in Pakistan.

5.5. Conclusion of the Chapter

In *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan: Actors, Debates and Strategies,* Saigol writes that South Asian women have historically risen to the occasion during trying times. She

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[539] This term is usually translated either as the awakened mind or as the mind of awakening. Jay L. Garfield, "What is it Like to be a Bodhisattva? Moral Phenomenology in Śāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (summer 2010), 334.

[540] There are other Mahayana scriptures also where the main figure is a child, usually a girl, occasionally a boy; examples are the Hodhisathwaiydnirde'sa (T. 14.488) and Candrottaraddrikdvydkarana (T. 14.480). It seems that the point of presenting a wise young girl as the Buddha's interlocutor is to demonstrate that this child is really a Bodhisattva, has already pursued the Bodhisattva career through many previous existences, has reached a high level of attainment, and nonetheless is now reborn in female form. Femaleness is thus not incongruent with the highest levels of understanding. Nancy Schuster, "Changing the Female Body: Wise Women and the Bodhisattva Career in Some Mahāratnakūṭasūtras," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (1981), 60.

[541] Pallavi Pundeer, "Pakistani Men are Tearing Down Posters of the Annual Women's March, Again," *Vice.* 2020, https://www.vice.com/en/article/dygwwz/pakistani-men-vandalise-aurat-march-womens-day-posters/ .

traces the struggle of women and men from during the partition against British colonialism to the massive protests against General Zia's policies during the 1980s. After 9/11 and the War on Terror, the transnational propaganda regarding brown Muslim women homogenized their existence as oppressed, faceless, docile entities who were too weak to fight for themselves. Of course, this was a classic colonial imperial strategy discussed in Chapter One. However, it reduces the status of Pakistani women as silent spectators. Even when women from Pakistan appear as heroes in international news in the War on Terror, they are portrayed as exceptions. Moon Charina writes how Malala Yousafzai, the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, quickly became a household name in the West, seen as an epitome of the feminist struggle from Pakistan against the Taliban. She writes:

> The fact that Malala is seen as the ultimate symbol of Pakistan's failure towards girls and the only form of hyper-secularized feminism imagined in Pakistan has the dual effect of radicalizing Islam and erasing the multi-faceted feminist work that has always been a part of Pakistani culture and political fabric.[542]

By quoting this, I am not discrediting Malala's courage and valour. However, showing her as the first Muslim woman from Pakistan to work for women's rights is a highly inaccurate narrative. It especially infantilizes and "elides four decades of women's rights activism and feminist labour in Pakistan."[543] It also extends the stereotype toward Muslim women. As Bhabha further elaborated on the creation of stereotypes:

> The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations.[544]

Although the silencing of urban women within Pakistan has been discussed at length, the transnational visual discourses by disregarding the decades of feminist struggle in Pakistan further silence these women; even though these struggles are presented sporadically to maintain

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[542] Charania, *Will the Pakistani Women Stand Up*?, 68.

[543] Ibid., 69.

[544] Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 75.

the romance of exceptions, they have never been holistically viewed least of all in an art-historical discourse with reference to the War on Terror.

Regionally, incidents of violence against urban women have proliferated since the reactionary piety politics, as mentioned in Chapters Two and Three. Caught between various patriarchies, the mainstream representations of Pakistani urban women are reduced to sartorial cliches while being categorized into a binary: Oppressed or empowered in subjugation.

This whole scenario plays an essential part in reinforcing masculinities in the region, creating an apparent struggle between the rise of urban female autonomy through education on the one hand and reactionary religious and cultural fundamentalism on the other. This struggle instigated a feminist response, especially within urban spaces, to move beyond binaries through efforts visible in visual arts and social politics.

The work of artists in Chapter Four who used female imagery to occupy urban spaces symbolically is furthered by the artists in this chapter which discussed two case studies where artists ventured into the public for direct engagement and challenged the public/private binary. They also strategically repeated the iconography created by the artists in the previous chapter, working to enhance the visibility of Pakistani gendered complex heterogeneous existence, which was being strategically "essentialized" by transnational, as well as reactionary, local, religiopolitical, identity politics in the context of post-War on Terror Pakistan, a society that is increasingly becoming hostile towards identities on the margins. Lastly, the chapter aimed at constructing a holistic wave of gendered urban defiance resisting the further encroachment of their spaces, even though the intense propaganda attached to feminism or feminist struggle as the propagation of Western values continues to shame women from demanding their rights. These chapters accentuate the visual strategies that the women artists employ to resist the label of being Westernized, connecting them to the region's diverse gendered subjectivities that are transcending religious barriers while continuing to subvert and resist the patriarchal canon.

Though not chronologically placed, the next chapter discusses the works of two artists who ventured into occupying the urban imaginations with their queer (the term is used here loosely) imagery and themes. The two artists' works are paired with an art initiative by a collective that originated in India and, in collaboration with the National College of Art Rawalpindi, created a mural of a transactivist "Bubby" titled *Hum hain takhleeq-e-Khuda* (I am a Creation of Allah) (2014).

Chapter 6
Queering Gendered Brown Urban Bodies through Material Cultural Hybridity

The theme of gendered resistance and performative desire to occupy public spaces at leisure, discussed in Chapter Five, takes a new form in the works of Maria Khan and Amra Khan. These two artists go beyond gender and public debate and enter the realm of hybrid performative sexuality reinforced by postcolonial cultural signifiers in an urban context.

Frances S. Connelly, in a 2014 publication, *The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture*, defines the grotesque genre as culturally relative and, in contemporary times, associated with negative connotations such as horrendous, disfigured, disordered, misshapen, deformed, formless, and in a form in a state of flux.[545] Even though this chapter can connect this definition to the images on which it focuses, this dissertation deliberately uses an alternative theory to analyze the artworks. Connelly's use of cultural relativity in defining *grotesque* to *feminine grotesque* can be expanded to consider how the criteria of feminine beauty vary from one culture to another and, indeed, from one human being to another. [546] The beautiful, empathetic words of Louis Fermor, the runner-up for the Canadian Art Writing Prize (2019), on the feminine grotesque in a Western context resonate with this dissertation's use of an alternative theory for the images discussed in this chapter:

> I feel that the feminine grotesque has been similarly misattributed. At times, the genre's artists forget that what might be a reclamation of ugliness for one person is violence to another or that what may seem to be images of exaggeratedly grotesque bodies for one person is, in fact, the reality of the lived experiences of others.[547]

Similarly, this dissertation claims an empathetic postcolonial feminist lens towards female representations and their right to diverse, heterogeneous, and ambivalent selfhoods, a

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[545] Frances Connelly, *The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture: The Image at Play* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014), 1–3. Grotesque comes from the Italian *grotta* (underground cave); the term became popular in art through Vasari's accounts of Renaissance art, as an antique ornamental style, and in reference to pagan themes, described as bizarre, imaginative, or strange fantasies, which was later changed into the art movements of Mannerism and Baroque. Over time, *grotesque* became associated with irrationality, bad taste, and immorality. Francis K. Barasch, *Grotesque: A Study in Meanings,* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018), 20, 21, 22, 24, 30.

[546] African sculpture was seen as abhorrent in the middle of the 17th century but a few decades later the same imagery was rarely described as such, especially when it is absorbed in Western aesthetics though modern art. Barasch, *Grotesque: A Study in Meanings*, 14.

[547] Louis Fermor, "The Feminine, the Grotesque and the Reclaimed," Canadianart. Nov. 24, 2020, https://canadianart.ca/features/the-feminine-the-grotesque-and-the-reclaimed/ .

fundamental human right. It frames this chapter's alternative gendered brown bodies through a feminist-queer lens. Due to the lack of precedence of queer theoretical scholarship in feminist discourse within Pakistan, the term feminist queer in this chapter draws from the interpretation of "gendered queer" by British-South Asian queer-feminist theorist Gayatri Gopinath, discussed in their book *Impossible Desires: Queer Diaspora and South Asian Public Cultures*.[548]

Gopinath's book examines queer gendered South Asian visuality and discourse in the diaspora. She argues that these "discourses of sexuality are inextricable from prior and continuing histories of colonialism, nationalism, racism, and migration," which she traces back to the South Asian visual language in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. She further argues, "there is no queer desire without these histories, nor can these histories be told or remembered without simultaneously revealing an erotics of power."[549] Specifically, using Homi Bhabha's concept of the *Third Space,* she makes "female subjectivity central" to her queer project, thus disrupting the queer diasporic cultures that "replicate heteronormative and patriarchal structures of kinship and community." [550] Her book traces the presence of female figures and their representations or lack thereof in the recent historical diasporic South Asian visuality using colonial, regional cultural dynamics as a background. This chapter will only look at the historical part of these queer subject formations, as diasporic subjectivities are beyond the scope of this study.

Contextualizing the figure of women—as pure and unsullied sexual beings within nationalistic discourses, the term queer feminism in the context of this chapter "becomes a way to challenge nationalist ideologies by restoring the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive potential of the notion of diaspora."[551] Hence, the term "queer" here is used as sexual "desires, practices, and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and [or] unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries."[552]

The images discussed in this chapter are historically and regionally informed and bear the scars of coloniality, neocoloniality, and regional religious nationalism. Using Gopinath's definition of gendered queer, I describe focused images as queer because they challenge national

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[548] Gopinath, Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public.

[549] Gopinath, *Impossible Desires,* 2–3.

[550] Ibid., 76.

[551] Diaspora here is used as a conceptual construct, an alternative identity to nationalism: impure, inauthentic. Ibid., 11.

[552] Ibid.,11

and transnational gender ideologies around brown Muslim bodies through their impure, inauthentic, and hybrid nature.

Maria Khan's charcoal drawings of surreal, large-sized older women in sensual lingerie, sitting in secretive rose gardens, and Amra Khan's feminized androgynous nude or seminude figures in strategically lit rooms surrounded by Indian damask tapestry and wallpapers, can best be described as urban feminist queer. These queer subjectivities project urban signifiers, but instead of existing in public, these figures are located in a closeted-homelike space, which will be discussed in depth shortly.

Continuing the theme of queerness, the second section of the chapter looks at a third case study in Rawalpindi, a community venture in collaboration with an interregional feminist project, Fearless Collective, to create a twenty-foot-high public mural figure of a trans activist, Bubbly Malik, entitled *Hum Hain Takhleeq-e-Khuda* (I am a Creation of Allah) (2014), flaunting her femininity in a floral shalwar kameez. All three case studies highlight a performative visual subculture that subverts and complicates the transnational and religious/nationalist heteronormative and homogenized patriarchal narratives and stereotypes surrounding Pakistan's Muslim female bodies created through the construction of mainstream visual narratives.[553]

In Chapter Five, we framed domestic women performing a desire to occupy urban spaces, a role that is only assigned to *bazaari* women (market women, an alternative to the slur *ghashti* that we discussed in the third chapter), hence the subversion. Traditionally domestic urban women do not only belong at home but are also desired—as sisters, daughters, and brides. Maria Khan and Amra Khan mediate female subjectivities that instead impurify homes and challenge the notion of a pious and pure sexual being projected by mainstream nationalist gender constructions. They radically disrupt homelike but not quite home spaces through queer feminine and nonreproductive images. The sheer presence of these images in homelike settings is as radical as young middle-class girls occupying urban spaces for leisure.

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[553] The definition of subcultures as used in this chapter:
  1. "Groups of people that are in some ways represented as non-normative and/or marginal through their particular interests and practices."
  2. "Subcultures are social groups" and their particular "social-ness" distinguishes them "from society itself."
  3. The emphasis subculture studies is "not on homogeneity, but heterogeneity; not standardization but difference or . . . deviance," to look "at what binds groups of people together in non-normative ways, but it does that as an argument against standardization and anomie or 'normlessness', simultaneously."
  4. Not every subculture "is oppositional or transgressive" or at least cannot afford to be.
Ken Gelder, ed., *The Subcultures Reader* (Sussex: Psychology Press, 2005), 1–6.

6.1. Ugly in Their Heads: The Imaginability of Older Women (of Colour) as Aesthetic Subjects in Maria Khan's Charcoal Paintings

Born in Rawalpindi (b.1986), Maria Khan graduated from the College of Art & Design, Lahore, majoring in painting and completing her master's in visual arts at the National College of Arts Lahore. The artist explained and defended charcoal as her choice of the medium during her interview. While doing her MA, she recalls creating immaculately rendered oil paintings in painting class—a residuum of the colonial era and colonial art education in the Subcontinent. However, she recalls she always felt the need to express herself differently, so on the side, she would create large charcoal drawings, cartoons/studies of her paintings on paper. These drawings were so expressive and spontaneous that practicing printmaker and artist Afshar Malik, then the instructor, insisted she exhibits her drawings for her thesis exhibition. It was a difficult decision for her, as due to colonial imposition, oil is considered within the Pakistani art world as the higher form of expression and pencil and charcoal drawings are often considered outside the realm of the genre of painting.[554] However, the change of medium brought life to her work, and she started creating large spontaneous drawings in charcoal with smudges of bright reds.[555]

Her charcoal paintings have a particular repetitive language. Drawn with charcoal, these mega-sized drawings (some measuring five by six feet) can best be described as chaotic linear. The method gives an impression of a continuous line contour drawing technique, a technique in which the rendering material (pencil, charcoal, pastel) remains in contact with the paper throughout the process of drawing. These anarchic lines transform into line-based drawings of large, aged, and silver-haired female figures with a black background. The continuous lines of wrinkles on these women's faces seem like scars healed with time. These large black-and-white

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[554] As a result, oil on canvas became the official contemporary form of artistic expression and the local artists from the Indian Subcontinent largely emulated European saloon and academic styles to be a part of the Western canon. This mindset was inherited even after independence by Pakistani artists who continued to follow Euro-American art trends. During the 1960s in Pakistan, cubism became the most eagerly followed technique and as a result became synonymous with what was considered progressive and current. Sirhandi, the United States–based South-Asian art historian criticizes Pakistani art from the from the 1950s and 60s era in her book *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan* in this way: "from a European point of view, there is nothing new, original and noteworthy about these paintings." Sirhandi, *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan,* 43. Whiles, in *Art and Polemics in Pakistan,* suggests that this imposition of Western art discourse superiority was laden with commercial motivations. She cites Mahrukh Tarapor, a widely respected museum professional: "This can be interpreted as the token syndrome of the equivocal attitude so carefully constructed by the British administration towards indigenous art. Whilst promoting Indian decorative design ability as an economic counterpoint to the fine art of the West, those in powerful positions were steadily collecting Indian art, as proven by current accounts of museology." Quoted in Whiles, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan*, 106.

[555] Maria Khan, Online Interview with the Author (Second) (Toronto-Montreal, December 2021).

(monochromatic) figures are surrounded by different kinds of flowers found in South Asian gardens, such as گلاب (rose), a گُل داؤدی (chrysanthemum) or fruits trees, such as figs, grapevines, and pomegranates. The flowers and fruits are partially filled with red paint, giving an impression of incomplete works, the same red that adorns the smudged red lipstick on the lips of the figures (Figure 82 and Figure 83).

Their expressions are highly animated, smiling, laughing, sharing secrets, or staring directly back at the viewer with a highly confrontational gaze. Their gaze and laughter hide a secret as if the viewers are being mocked and left out of the stealthy magical knowledge these women have over their audience. It is a secret world that they refuse to share. These mischievous women are adorned in lingerie such as night robes with frills and laced bralettes with popular designs such as hearts, candies, or stars. The sheer provocativeness of their attire makes the audience uncomfortable, as, in popular culture, the audience is accustomed to seeing lingerie worn by beautiful young models. These contradictory and contrasting elements also continue in the use of material and medium, black and white and bright red. The colour red seems to be smudged and runs slightly on the paintings and adds to the overall surrealistic atmosphere.

Though Khan's work has never been documented and published, it has been the center of much debate on online platforms and art web pages. The much-published and acclaimed artist and art critic Quddus Mirza writes about Maria Khan's solo exhibition in Karachi in this way:

> Contrary to many artists of her generation who are exploring the idea of beauty, glamour, perfection … Maria Khan has always been drawn towards out-of-ordinary (weird?) ideas. During her course of studies in the MA Visual Arts programme at NCA (2010–12), she portrayed women who were dark, fat, and bloated to some extent. However, these figures were painted with such care, affection and love that these became emblems of attraction. Through her sensitive use of lines, manipulation of spatial relationships and preference for varying shades of dark hues (black and greys), she created these figures, which became eternal.[556]

In another such article titled "This Pakistani Artist has an 'Ugly' Addiction," her work has been described as "grotesque," "ridiculous," and "strange," among other adjectives; there are references to her "signature 'scary' women." Quoting Quddus Mirza, the writer argues that these ugly women stand as a metaphor for the ugly, exploitative, and abusive societal and cultural

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[556] Quddus Mirza, "Age and Art," *The News,* 2017. https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/564872-age-art/ .

pressures women have to face in Pakistani patriarchal society. The writer of the article under discussion further explains:

> When I went home and looked up more of her work, the women became more and more absurd. In most of her paintings, these "older women"—a symbol of maternal warmth and affection in almost every Pakistani household—were exposed in all kinds of vulnerable situations, literally and metaphorically.[557]

She further writes, "Whether you find it ugly, distasteful or downright scary, a wrinkled old Pakistani lady walking through a garden at night with a sheer bra on is sure to demand your attention."[558] She finishes by writing:

> A large middle-aged woman grinning from ear to ear rendered like a caricature … an exaggeratedly large head, enormous teeth and broad shoulders but ridiculously tiny feet stuffed in painfully small shoes . . . Her need to look good was as potent as the discomfort of her tiny shoes, and her smile was as fake as could be. I couldn't stop staring—here was an aunty trying to stuff her larger-than-life personality into society's tiny set of expectations. It was sad and beautiful and brave, all at the same time.[559]

The term aunty has recently been reclaimed in diasporic critical queer studies. The journal Text and Performance Quarterly recently dedicated a symposium and a special issue to "critical Aunty studies." However, here the term aunty is used with misogynist cultural baggage.[560] The term aunty in postcolonial/diasporic communities refers to any woman who belongs to one's parents' generation within urban lower-middle-class and upper-middle-class families. It is a term of endearment towards a woman in one's domestic social circle, not necessarily a relation. Many local linguistic variations are used equally in urban and rural contexts, such as *ajumma*, *ayi*, *tannie*, *tantie*, *tía*, *tita*, *cioty*, *khala,* or *mausi*.[561] However, the term *aunty* has pejorative connotations attached to it, especially in urban public contexts in South Asia, appropriated by men and sometimes by younger girls. In public, this term is used as a derogatory call reserved for assertive and confident or defiant women who are slightly past their childbearing years (from the

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[557] Anam Mansuri, "This Pakistani Artist has an 'Ugly' Addiction." Images Dawn, updated Jan. 22, 2018. https://images.dawn.com/news/1179302/ .

[558] Ibid.

[559] Ibid.

[560] Kareem Khubchandani, "Critical Aunty Studies: An Asynchronous Symposium," Tufts University, https://www.criticalauntystudies.com/cfp/ .

[561] Ibid.

mid-30s). It is deemed derogatory because it implies that the woman seeking attention is no longer sexually relevant to men, hence just an inconvenience. Hence, the writer's use of the term aunty here is not a term of endearment but implies a derogatory connotation.

The writer hits the spot with her analysis of Maria's paintings. She uses language such as *wrinkled*, *grotesque*, and *ugly* as synonymous with aged women. The above-shared quotation asserts that for older women, sensuality, sexuality, and adornment are a sad sight that, at worst, is painful to watch and, at best, a brave attempt. This harsh language surrounding primarily single older women who sensually adorn themselves comes from a linguistic discourse that demands interrogation. Demeaning vernacular terms in Urdu such as *naika* (old whore) or idioms such as *budhi ghori laaal lagam*, which literally means an old mare with a red martingale and *budhi churail*, an old witch, are common terms used to demean aged women who do not act or dress according to societal expectation—specifically as a pious asexual mother figure.

The women Maria Khan draws are not attractive according to standards set by the male gaze in Western art as well as South Asian miniature traditions. These women are not young, with a narrow waist, large almond eyes, and supple bosoms. However, they are also not just straightforward representations of older women, as argued by Quddus Mirza.

These large-bodied older women, relaxing or hanging out unapologetically in flower gardens and secret backyards of domesticity, with red lipsticks, alluring lingerie, dark Smokey eyes, and roses tucked in their hair, are nothing less than brazen. The dogma attached to older women in any role except a pious mother is associated with the distaste for sexuality women are expected to acquire after a certain age. The domestic female sexuality in traditional heteronormative discourses becomes desirable with infantile qualities such as young, innocent, inexperienced, small, petite, sheltered, fertile, and reproductive. Hence, way past their reproductive age, Maria Khan's overtly sexual beings, big, wise, and confident women, are just the opposite of a sexually desirable female. Hence, it is scary for the society that has been conditioned to see women as subjects of desire through a male gaze.

Maria Khan locates these women not quite at home but not outside—on the fringes of domesticity and public space, in a *Barzakh* (The literal meaning of 'Barzakh' is a barrier that stands between two things and which does not allow the two to meet) between the domestic

and public—situating the protagonists in Khan's painting in a *Third Space*.[562] In *Epistemology of a Closet,* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes the concept of closets as an imaginary space, encompassing qualities such as secrecy, privacy, and imagination, and yet having permeability.[563] Perhaps the definition by Alan Bloom, as quoted by Sedgwick, is apt for our case study at hand:

> Bloom is unapologetically protective of the sanctity of the Closet, that curious space that is both internal and marginal to the culture: centrally representative of its motivating passions and contradictions, even while marginalized by its orthodoxies.[564]

The aged sexualized and sensual figures Maria Khan creates are on the margins of domesticity and public spaces because their sexual currency is *undesirable* in public and *unacceptable* in a domestic landscape. Some of her works, such as *Women of the Night* (2017) and *Grape Wine* (2017), depict compositions of two and a group (respectively) of nude/seminude women in gardens laughing uncontrollably or whispering in each other's ears, which makes these specific pieces overtly queer in nature (Figure 84 and Figure 85). Nevertheless, the actual queerness in Maria's work is not the hints at so-called deviant sexuality or same-sex desire but the sexual subjectivity she makes imaginable and visible. The expressions of overt sexual desire of these older, large, gendered subjectivities are queer because they are redundant within the imagination of the mainstream sexual fantasy of a heterosexual cis male, as projected through literature, cinema, and art. What makes these images of these older women queer is their unimaginability as sensual aesthetic subjects as they challenge and subvert heteronormativity and the role it allocates to gendered subjectivities, young/old (desirable/asexual).

Here I return to Gopinath's significant observation, which is worth repeating. It is a typical traditional critique of feminist activists and other defiant feminist discourses by religious, nationalist and patriarchal discourses, specifically in South Asia and generally postcolonial societies. She argues that nationalist, patriarchal/religious discourses equate defiant feminist discourses to the internalization of Western/colonial values by alienating these discourses from

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[562] Technically in Islamic thought Barzakh is a realm kept by the Lord of the Universe between this world of ours and the forthcoming Hereafter in such a way that both might maintain their individual limits. Barzakh is a state between these worldly and otherworldly affairs.Sayyid Abdul Husayn, The Hereafter (Ma'ad), Islam.org. https://www.al-islam.org/hereafter-maad-sayyid-abdul-husayn-dastghaib-shirazi/barzakh-purgatory-stage-between-world-and.

[563] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2008), 19–54.

[564] Ibid., 56.

local histories and cultures. She uses an example of a film by Canadian Indian director Deepa Mehta *Fire* (1996). The film attracted much critique and hostility due to its theme suggesting lesbian relationships between two sisters-in-law in a traditional urban middle-class Delhi household. In addition to garnering hostility from religious Hindu Nationalists, mainstream liberal newspapers criticized Mehta for being a Westernized Indian elite far from her Indian cultural heritage (due to her Canadian nationality). She was accused of dishonouring and disrespecting the sanctity of Indian family life.[565]

According to Gopinath, the riveting part is that this movie was inspired by a short story written by a Muslim pre-partition feminist writer, Ismat Chughtai, some fifty years before Mehta's film was created. The short story, *Lihaaf* (Quilt, 1941) narrates a tale of a "sequestered wife and her female maidservant" in an upper-middle-class Muslim household, recounted by a young girl (her daughter). Every night the young girl "is fascinated and alarmed by the energetic contortions of two women under the quilt; curious sounds and smells emanate from there."[566] Chughtai was charged with obscenity under the British colonial Raj. Even though the story had representations of both male and female homosexuality, the colonial government, along with the elite Muslim community in Lahore,

> deemed Chughtai's representation of female homoeroticism a far greater threat to public decency than her representation of male homoeroticism [which] speaks volumes about the tremendous symbolic and discursive weight attached to female bodily desire and practices.[567]

Returning to Khan's queer sensual female figures, Chughtai's example gives us a precedent for the expressions of female, queer sexuality within Muslim South Asian's recent history and, interestingly, Chughtai's short story uses a similar language to Maria's work. The quilt in Chughtai's short story stands as a metaphor for the secret and marginalized space that allows sexual expression, just like the secret gardens in Maria Khan's work. Both the quilt and secret garden can easily be related to the definition of the imaginary Closet we discussed above— secretive, safe, private, and yet permeable.

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[565] Gayatri Gopinath. *Impossible Desires*, 130

[566] Ibid., 131–32. As a female raised in Pakistan in a literate household, my first exposure to narratives about female body autonomy and feminist ideology were in fact through Chughtai's Urdu writings. Translation of *Lihaaf* available at: https://www.manushi-india.org/pdfs_issues/PDF%20file%20110/9.%20Short%20Story%20-%20Lihaaf%20%5BThe%20Quilt%5D.pdf/ .

[567] Gopinath. *Impossible Desires*, 132.

I like to narrate another example of a space within South Asian culture (which originates from Muslim culture) similar to the concept of Closet, even though not quite in a queer context. The concept of *zenana* (the female quarters) as a feminine space that allows expressions of female sexuality share many qualities with the Closet—both spaces possess secretive, secure, and yet permeable qualities.[568]

The concept of Zanna was briefly introduced in Chapter Four while discussing Iftikhar Dadi's analysis of Naiza Khan's *Henna Hands*. Dadi writes that in traditional Muslim households in undivided India, the female spaces were separated from the main house through *jalis*, geometrically carved stone screens that created a netlike design—reminiscent of Mughal traditional architecture.[569] During my conversation with artist and gender theorist Farida Batool about the expressions of female sexuality or lack thereof in contemporary urban Pakistan, she narrated an oral tradition from her grandmother. She said her grandmother would recall her childhood within *zenana* and how older women like her grandmother (Batool's grandmother's grandmother) would sit together and stitch their own brightly coloured undergarments (bralette) lined with glittering golden laces (*gotta kinari*). They wore these sensual garments under their sheer white muslin *kurtas* (long loose shirts).[570] She said they would cover themselves up with a large *chadar* when men entered the female quarters, implying that those acts of feminine sensuality and sexual agency were not designed to cater to a collective male gaze.

In *Encounters in the Zenana: Representations of Indian Women in 19th Century Travelogues of Englishwomen,* Sujata Bhattacharyya writes how zenana was riddled with mystery and seduction in the initial accounts of white male colonial travellers, full of twisted facts and fancy surrounding the impregnable female spaces. It was not until the 19th century that *memsahibs* (white colonial women) could get access to these forbidden spaces. Already existing keen colonial interest in these spaces turned *zenana* into a genre of study within white colonial female accounts that were guided by an austere colonial and imperialist ideology based on the white savour complex. "These colonial political compulsions hence projected a colonial stereotype of native women as downtrodden and backward"; They saw *zenana* spaces as

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[568] In English, *zanana* literally means feminine/female.

[569] Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 202.

[570] Farida Batool, Recorded Interview with the Author, (National College of Arts Lahore, 2018)

"breeding grounds of ignorance and inequality" instead of "imagining *zenana* as a feminine space—a space symbolic of a totally feminine consciousness."[571]

Hence, unlike in contemporary times, these all-feminine spaces could be suffocating at times but did allow room for female sexuality and sensuality in secrecy, without the broader taboos attached to age as translated by a male gaze in present times. The female body as a recipient of the male gaze is partially a parcel of colonial and Victorian sexual moral codes forced by colonial masters in the Subcontinent for almost two-three years. The ramification of these moral codes, specifically on the South Asian queer community, will be discussed in the following case study.

Ingrained in historical and cultural precedents within South Asian histories, Khan uses artistic license to create performative sensuality and gendered sexual desirability, namely through exaggerated and hybridized signifiers. As Homi Bhabha writes,

> The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with the "newness" that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as a social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent "in-between" space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The "past-present" becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.[572]

Therefore, Khan's art is not just a reproduction of the past; she creates a hybrid approach that challenges contemporary urbanity but also repurposes the region's cultural history. The concept of gardens or manicuring of nature is in itself an urban concept. Mughal Emperor Akbar turned gardens into specialized places within larger programs of urban development in India.[573] Gardens are linked to the Mughals' obsession with reinventing Central Asian traditions of gardens in South Asia with India's conquest in 1526. During the Mughal period, the city of Lahore alone had more than fifty gardens.[574] These garden designs were built on two levels: the

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[571]Sujata Bhattacharyya, "Encounters in the Zenana: Representations of Indian Women in 19th Century Travelogues of Englishwomen," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 70 (2009): 652.

[572] Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 10.

[573] James L. Wescoat, Jr, "Gardens of Invention and Exile: The Precarious Context of Mughal Garden Design during the Reign of Humayun (1530–1556)," *The Journal of Garden History* 10, no. 2 (1990): 106.

[574] Lahore is known as a City of Gardens. The most famous garden complexes constructed during the Mughal Empire is Shalimar Bagh; and Chauburji Bagh.

upper-bricked walking area (*paka rasta*) and the orchards of sunken gardens for shade and privacy for Mughal ladies.[575]

In Saadi Shīrāzī's *Gulistan* (Rose garden, 1258), the single most influential work of poems and prose in Persian literature, gardens are laden with homoerotic connotations. In numerous poems and anecdotes within *Gulistan*, the garden is not a place for solitude but a "place of passion and desire, where the natural blends with the human, the floral with the corporeal."[576] Due to Saadi's popularity and literary genius, *Gulistan* was copied and illustrated numerous times in all three contemporary Muslim Empires: Safavid, Ottoman, and Mughal. Mughal Indo-Persian miniatures have a plethora of queer and homoerotic images in sensual garden settings.[577] In Indo-Persian Miniature tradition, the garden is a sensual landscape, a rendezvous for carnal desires, not tolerable within normative sexual discourses. Through this alternative Muslim literary tradition, Khan barters a place in history for her gendered queer brown bodies.

In more recent scholarly history, with the rise of Islamic studies, Mughal gardens have been interpreted as symbols of the Islamic ideals of Paradise.[578] The logic behind these readings is that Islam visualizes Paradise as a garden, and the qur'anic term used for Paradise is *al-Janna*: the garden par excellence. Thus, Mughal gardens are considered an archetype of the Garden of Eden or a celestial paradise.[579] Even using the normative interpretation of gardens as referents of celestial Paradise or the Garden of Eden, Khan's women relaxing in gardens propose a significant subversion. According to a famous Islamic Hadith, "There will be more women in hell than men." The interpretation of the Hadith connotates that the reason more women will go to hell is due to their disobedience to their men. It is excessively used as an argument against the notion of feminism in a religious context in Muslim-dominated countries by Islamists, men and

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[575]James Dickie (Yaqub Zaki), "The Mughal Garden: Gateway to Paradise," *Muqarnas* 3 (1985): 129.

[576] Mika Natif, "The Generative Garden: Sensuality, Male Intimacy, and Eternity in Govardhan's Illustration of Saʿdī's Gulistān," in *Eros and Sexuality in Islamic Art,* ed. Francesca Leoni and Mika Natif (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013), 46.

[577] Mika Natif, "Renaissance Painting and Expressions of Male Intimacy in a Seventeenth-Century Illustration from Mughal India," *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* (2015): 43–45.

[578] The concept of Mughal Gardens as symbolic references to celestial paradise can be found at James L. Wescoat and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, eds., *Mughal Gardens: Sources, Places, Representations, and Prospects* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), 227; and Dickie, "The Mughal Garden: Gateway to Paradise," 131; and Wescoat, "Gardens of Invention and Exile," 106.

[579] Dickie, "The Mughal Garden: Gateway to Paradise," 131

women alike, to demonstrate that a women's place within Islam is in male submission. A profound and detailed debate around the authenticity and validity of this Hadith is attached below.[580] However, avoiding the debate around the validity of the Hadith and contrary to popular interpretation, one could conclude that in Khan's imagined Garden of Eden, *Hawas* (Eves) are indeed in a winning majority.

During her interview, Khan describes her methodological approach: Before "creating these figures, I questioned what is considered ugly in the mainstream contemporary visual media and aesthetics regarding women and came up with the answer: old age and [being] overweight." Like a child's dressing game, she started adorning her "ugly" figures with whatever is universally considered desirable and pretty, such as beautiful nightgowns, bralettes, undergarments, and designer shoes (Figure 86). Doing so, she highlights the universal and somewhat disturbing pedophilic obsession with youth, for example, through Victoria's Secret's extremely infantile designs such as candy, stars, circles, frills, and bows on sexually provocative female accessories.[581]

Ironically, the public display of lingerie also comes from a very regional urban phenomenon. During the interview, Khan explained her inspiration from the regional urban context. Even though Pakistan is known for its religiosity and fundamental Islamist ideals, if one walks into a lower-class/middle-class commercial area (like Ichara bazaar in Lahore or Sadar bazaar in Karachi), one sees sultry, lacey, and colourful (sometimes second-hand designer) undergarments hung publicly outside the small shops, worn by mannequins and sold by men. Relocating these sensual and sexually provocative articles to her old, nonreproductive femininities in monochromatic works, she finds their private place.

I would like to clarify here that, according to Khan, her work does not explicitly create female homoerotic imagery, but her women are depicted with a diverse range of emotions, from love and longing to lust, envy, desire, and anger. Khan turns emotions into a political agency that no Western media or religious-nationalist can fit in their respective boxes of oppression or piety.

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[580] A feminist counter argument regrading the popular Hadith can trace to:
Ulrike Mitter, "The majority of the dwellers of hell-fire are women," The *Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2011) doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004206786_022
[581] Maria Khan, Online Interview (Second) with the Author (Toronto-Montreal, December 2021).

These contradictions and complexities in vernacular urban postcolonial cultures need to be highlighted and discussed to break the cycle of essentialist readings and single narratives circulated through Western and nationalist media. In the following case study, Amra Khan's works further complicate the existence of gendered entities by foregrounding their queerness as subjects of the colonial past.

6.2. Amra Khan: Queering Urban Brown Bodies

Amra Khan was born in Rawalpindi. She graduated from the National College of Arts in 2012. She is an interdisciplinary artist who works in various organic and nonorganic mediums. Her practice ranges from video installation (discussed in the second chapter) to photography, archival art, performances, and hair and animal skin sculptural installations. Amra Khan can be described as one of the most subversive artists in Pakistan. Her melancholic and bizarre artworks continuously examine inconsistencies and contradictions surrounding the politics of gender within popular religious paradigms and colonial legacies. Her reliefs, made of goat nipples, photographs of burqa-clad women holding synthetic penises (dildos), and jewelry and brassieres created from human hair weave, worn by soft male sculptures in white *shalwars*, all present a dark and queer imaginary (Figure 87).[582]Amra Khan explores the worlds of forbidden sexuality and fetishes by subverting popular urban public cultural/religious imagery. In Amra Khan's artistic world, everything is feminized. Her works in the exhibition *River in an Ocean* (2018) encompass small-sized pink bejewelled mosques titled *Zanana Masjid* (2018) (feminine/female mosque) (Figure 88). By queering the image of the mosque, Khan presents a robust political critique of the very structure of religious patriarchy in Pakistan.[583]

Her latest exhibition at O art space in Lahore, titled *Kacha Gohst* (Raw meat) (2020), explores homoerotic figurative works of seminude muscular men with eyebrows plucked, standing against flowery backgrounds. They have flowers tucked in their hair. Amra Khan's art world explores the complexity of human sexuality, our fantasies, fetishes, and phobias and

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[582] In her interview Amra Khan explained that when she sends her work to galleries around the world, the first question curators ask her is how she manages to get away with such images in Pakistan; laughing, she joked, "Maybe I am trying to get a *fatwah* on myself." Amra Khan, Recorded Interview with the Author (Cantt., Lahore, March 2018). A fatwā is a nonbinding legal opinion on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified jurist in response to an objection posed by a private individual, judge, or government.

[583] Amra endearingly pointed towards the secularization of religious aesthetics due to the neoliberal market by sharing her documentation of repurposed Chinese manufactured Christmas decorations in the streets of middle-class Mohallas during Eid milad-u-nabi (Birthday of Prophet Mohammad) celebration. Amra Khan, Recorded Interview with the Author (Cantt, Lahore, March 2018).

confronts her viewers with their deepest and darkest secrets. According to Amra Khan, human sexuality and subjectivity are complex, and she just tries to convert these complexities into images. The visualization of these sexualized hybrid men and women disrupts the nationalistic discourses of unsullied, pious female bodies and heteronormative men and posits a problem regarding Muslim bodies and internationalist discourses of a single narrative (Figure 89).

Amra Khan's images of hybrid textile patrons as background to the sexually abstruse bodies are theoretically contextualized through Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity, which negates the colonizer's assumption and desire for the economy of the identity of the colonized subject: to fix and control indigenous cultures by creating the illusion of cultural isolation or purity.[584] Amra's paintings attempt to provide a space for the existence of a queer presence within Pakistan but also point towards the queerness in all brown bodies as survivors/victims of historical colonization and contemporary neo-colonization, as, per Bhabha, "The very nature of humanity becomes estranged in colonial conditions."[585]

Amra Khan is an accomplished oil colorist, and this chapter frames Khan's earlier oil colours within colonial/postcolonial queer discourse. Her intriguing small-scale oil paintings depicting queer, androgynous figures are framed in thick gilded frames with acanthus leaf patterns, a mimicry of antique wooden gilded Victorian frames. She explains the subjects as hybrid humans, as the word androgynous suggests, having both male and female qualities. She further elucidated that this pronounced depiction of the male within females and vice versa in her paintings is her way of showing how human sexuality is complex while it is normatively put in distinct gender identities. Apart from her methodological approach, specifically, her three artworks from 2013 exhibited at Canvas Art Gallery, Karachi (2013), are visually analyzed at length. The three paintings titled *Alice* (2013), *Finished with my Wife* (2013), and *Behind the Wall of Sleep* (2013) are each approximately 38×46 cm, painted in oil on board and have many similar elements (Figure 90, Figure 91, and Figure 92).

Alice depicts a frontal of a brown, hairless feminized nude with sagging breasts. They sit in the corner of a room on an upholstered monochromatic green patterned armchair with their feet resting on an ottoman, both their arms resting on the armrests. A cat is sitting on their naked lap, which merges with the brown tone of their skin, turning into a ghostlike feature, a comic

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584 Bhabha, *Location of Culture,* 83.
585 Ibid., 59.

twist to the commonly used vernacular term for female genitalia, "pussy." The green monochromatic darker leaf pattern wallpaper seems to have grown on their forehead. Listlessly staring right at their viewer with their large hollow hazel eyes, these figures seem to be part of the furniture.

In *Behind the Wall of Sleep,* Khan paints a brown-nude androgynous figure that seems to have an upper torso of a male, as it does not have any breasts. They rest their folded right leg on their left thigh, wearing a pink block-heel shoe; through the posture, they expose female genitalia. The third painting is of two nude figures (with male torsos) in an intimate embrace; they are both wearing pink block heels. The figure on the left has their leg lodged on their partner's lap. Painted patterned upholstery and wallpaper surround their naked bodies.

All these figures are presented with almost identical features; they have deep dark circles around their large, deep-set almond-shaped eyes, indicating a lack of sleep; their skulls are hairless, and their faces have sharp contours with exaggeratedly high cheekbones and sharp jawlines. All figures have very delicate, manicured hands, and their lips are curled into a pout and tinted with a shade of pink. They have thinly plucked eyebrows or no eyebrows at all. There is much sexual energy around these figures. The paintings create a flat lighting effect—one of the light effects used by photographers during photo sessions when the light source is facing directly in front of the subject. It is as if these queer subjectivities are posing/performing in front of a camera.

They sit on a loveseat/armchair in the corner of a domestic space, with a wall behind them. The sofas and the walls are covered with earthy monochromatic tones of Victorian-style baroque damask pattern encapsulating the figures. It seems as if their nudity is complemented or compensated by using fabric and textile designs surrounding their naked bodies. The wallpaper, the chair, and the rug are heavily adorned with monochromatic patterns in subtle colours, like hues of green and earthy tones of rust. Amra Khan explores the hybridity of urban postcolonialism while using these designs as a background to the sexually marginalized nude bodies. In doing so, she creates a direct link between human beings and inanimate objects as marked subjects of the colonial past and the neocolonial present. Khan attributes the use of these extremely problematic designs to the imperialist colonial legacy in the Subcontinent.

Amra Khan's work provides us with a very sincere, rather brutally honest visual vocabulary from contemporary urban South Asia. She leaves the viewer with many challenges;

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this is especially true of her global audience, who cannot locate any local or authentic regional flavour in this particular artwork series, such as Islamic geometrical designs or a reference to Islamic imagery. All the characters in the painting point to Western art traditions. The damask textile pattern, the medium oil on board, and gilded Victorian frames seemingly inspired by Western art history are laden with colonial residues in a postcolonial context. However, for her domestic audience, Victorian frames and Damask designs are recognizable vernacular aesthetics ingrained in postcolonial urbanity.

Amra points to the difficulties that arise when an ethnic artist does not use overt ethnic elements in their work. Though well-known regionally, she had her share of difficulties obtaining international exhibitions and access to international art markets. She has often been advised discreetly to utilize more ethnic flavour in her art to explore the international art market.[586] In her interview, Farida Batool also mentions this phenomenon of global censorship in the name of ethnic vocabulary. Farida describes how an art gallery in New York rejected her artwork, *Lines of Control* (2004)—which embodies a close-up of a nude couple in an embrace— on the pretext that it does not represent the Muslim ethnic culture. The particular art piece is a highly charged political commentary. The contours of the female body created through the embrace signify struggle/imbalance between genders and also stand as a metaphor for geographical elements such as mountains and plain that separate countries, signifying aggression between bordering states, especially India and Pakistan. But annoyed with the gallery's objection, her response was only partially serious. She recounted, "I replied to them: 'Why? You think Muslim women do not have sex?'"[587] This is a classic example of how many Western art galleries are invested in projecting specific images from certain regions and are unwilling to see beyond the superficial imagery. Such curatorial productions, instead of celebrating differences in diversity, create "others" for mass appeal.

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[586] Amra Khan, Recorded Interview with the Author (Cantt, Lahore, March 2018).

[587] Farida Batool, Recorded Interview with the Author (National College of Arts, Lahore, 2018). According to Batool, these censorships were deployed more rigorously during the first fifteen year after the incident of 9/11. Artist, art academic, art historian, and curator Salima Hashmi also pointed to this phenomenon. She insisted that western art discourses, especially in North America, desire specific imagery from regions that they are acquainted with through their media, especially war media. Western art discourses prefer images that are decipherable to their audience, with overtly identifiable markers such as blood, violence, or female oppression in the case of Pakistan (due to its affiliation with the War on Terror) and Islamic geometrical patterns in the case of Muslim art. Salima Hashmi, Recorded Interview with the Author (at Beaconhouse University, Lahore , 2018).

Rasheed Araeen, in "Art and Postcolonial Society," argues that it is not just the art market that coerces ethnic artists to legitimize their works through their culture. He argues that postmodernism and contemporary currents do recognize and embrace, to an extent, art from the so-called periphery. However, an invisible "apartheid" seems to exist that separates artists of colour from white artists. The white artists are not obligated to carry any identity sign of religion or culture, whereas the artists of colour must carry an aesthetic "identity card" attesting to their origin. Araeen further argues that the issues artists of colour face are more systemic and should be dealt with in their historical context:[588]

> In a liberal democratic society, it should be one's basic right to express oneself in whatever way one chooses, with or without one's cultural baggage … The philosophical discourse which justified and legitimated the centrality of Europe in Modernism has collapsed and has no validity today. These discourses are still being used … by art institutions, art historians and critics because of the global power of the West; they continue to look at the world and define it in the same old colonial way.[589]

Rey Chow frames the same observation in *The Protestant Ethnic,* noting that when white critics, artists, and academics identify themselves or get inspiration from other cultures, they remain relevant to their white identity.[590] It is common contemporary knowledge that many European artists who shaped the Western canon were significantly influenced and inspired by so-called periphery cultures (primitivism).[591] These influences are generally explained with the efficient rhetoric of universal aesthetics. However, suppose an ethnic subject does not perform the fixed ethnicity that has been allocated to her by Western discourses. In that case, she is considered a "turncoat" or "alienated from their culture."[592]

Culture signifiers are artists' visual currency, and through this currency, they express themselves; but as mentioned earlier, cultures are not fixed and are in a constant state of flux.

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[588] Araeen, "Art and Postcolonial Society," 373.

[589] Ibid.

[590] Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic,* 116–18.

[591] The Royal Congo Museum forms a site of vital and unexplored connections between the modernist artists of art nouveau and their distinctive national culture of imperial Belgium. In 2005 the Tervuren Museum mounted an exhibition, *La mémoire du Congo, le temps colonial,* that attempted to confront for the very first time the brutal history of Belgium in the Congo. The exhibition explored the influence of Congolese aesthetics on modern art and architecture movement.
 Debora L. Silverman, "Art Nouveau, Art of Darkness: African Lineages of Belgian Modernism, Part I." *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18, no. 2 (2011): 150–63.

[592] Ibid.

The visual and cultural imageries are not always obligated to be straightforward, overtly visible, or even fixed. In fact, there is so much more, especially in popular culture in postcolonial societies, than just visible signifiers of authenticity and ethnic visual tropes.

Hence, I hypothesize that Amra Khan's paintings are deeply rooted in South Asia's colonial past and present popular urban culture, which is a significant part of the regional urban visual vocabulary and cannot be erased in the name of authenticity legitimizing ethnic and artistic expression. This methodology subtly applied has been variable throughout this dissertation. Amra's work engages directly with the local audience, that is, urban Pakistan, which seems to be her real interlocutor. Instead of overt ethnic visual imagery, her language is embedded in complex overlapping urban/colonial visual markers, making her paintings complex and laced with colonial and postcolonial anxieties. Hence, I argue that Khan's work demands an informed audience.

During the interview, commenting on the use of a Victorian damask pattern around her figures, Khan responded in her usual nonchalant way that she grew up in an upper/middle-class urban home, where these designs were excessively used as part of a modernist décor. Western cultural aesthetics and an internalized belief in the superiority of colonial legacies made the damask tapestry a sign of ultimate sophistication for the Pakistani urban bourgeoisie. The availability of cheap knockoffs of this tapestry and wallpaper types made them available to middle-class and working-class urban homes alike and a popular "sophisticated" and modern choice, especially in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Because "Western" was considered sophisticated, any person who grew up during the first fifty years of Pakistan can relate to that. After all, Pakistan was a young country recovering from two hundred fifty years of colonial domination in the name of civilization.

Khan explains that these Victorian designs are part of her childhood, and she appropriates them as part of the larger South Asian heritage and cultural legacy. Bhabha argues that postcolonial agency emerges as a politics of relocation and reinscription that rejoices in "representational un-decidability."[593] Amra's work highlights the dilemma that most postcolonial

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[593] Bhabha problematizes cultural identity universally by questioning the essential "Otherness." His theory of hybridity has a special appeal for South Asian readers. Bhabha argues that neocolonial and postcolonial cultures are hybrid due to the cultural collisions and interchanges that resulted from being colonized. This theory of cultural hybridity, as a result of colonization, negates the colonizer's assumption and desire for the economy of the identity of the colonized subject by attempting to fix and control indigenous cultures by creating the illusion of cultural isolation or purity. In simpler words, Bhabha destabilizes the colonial representation of the colonizer's

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societies face, as they feel compelled to shun colonial histories and return to their roots in order to decolonize, which can be a very violent process.[594] Whereas in white cultures, the ethnic aesthetic influences are consumed and veiled (pun intended) under the rhetoric of universal aesthetics. In Amra's work, the process of decolonization lies in exploring the roots of hybrid aesthetic discourses instead of shunning them. In her interview, she defends her choice rather convincingly: "How long does a design need to be in my culture before I can own it? Are three hundred years not long enough?"[595] However, while researching the origin of damask within colonial textile history in the Subcontinent, it appeared that damask had been part of the Indian textile discourse for more than three hundred years.

Damask fabric was explicitly introduced to the Subcontinent by the East India Company as a part of their global textile trade route. Hence, it is ingrained in a long history of colonial domination, exploitation of colonial labour, and as an epitome of superior taste. These textile patterns are readily available in the market in Pakistan, but the origins of their designs are often hybrid, just like the gender of these beings in Amra's paintings. Damask designs are commonly considered archetypes of European, especially French, designs. However, the authenticity of contemporary damask as European can be questioned through the historical accounts of the "Indian damask" within the logbooks of colonial trade. Nevertheless, first, in order to fully explore the significance of Amra's use of damask as a backdrop in her paintings, we will explore the enormous influence of Indian textile design on Victorian textiles. The exchange of aesthetics during colonization, between white colonial and brown world encounters, has not always been highlighted but has always been reciprocal.

6.2.1. Indian Textile Influence on Victorian Designs

In most written records and archival research, the influence of Indian design on British textiles is attributed to the Great Exhibition (1851). There are several accounts of how Indian textiles and

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subjectivity by identifying the inherent evolutionary nature of colonized identity. Bhabha, *Location of Culture,* 23, 42, 51.

[594] A very contemporary example of shunning the past and reinventing a pristine historical narrative can be seen unfolding in India. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) espouses Hindu nationalism or Hindutva—a fascist ideology that advocates Hindu supremacy, especially over Muslims. As part of their ideology, they seek to reinvent Hindu pasts within the Subcontinent, which is coupled with a toxic cocktail of harsh methods—including displacement, violence, and lies—and has resulted in a notable degree of influence over the narrative of Indian history. Audrey Truschke, "Hindutva's Dangerous Rewriting of History," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 24/25 (2020), 1–4.

[595] Amra Khan, Recorded Interview with the Author (Cantt, Lahore, Marcg 2018).

Mughal textile designs bewildered Victorian aesthetics and how these discourses of aesthetics were also absorbed in Victorian design cultures through industrial reproductions and pattern cataloging.[596]

The Great Exhibition, sometimes referred to as the Crystal Palace Exhibition—referring to the temporary assembly of massive glass structures that was erected on a week's notice, in which it was held—was an international exhibition that took place in Hyde Park, London, from 1 May to 15 October 1851. The Great Exhibition introduced colonial design aesthetics to the larger London public on an unprecedented scale. The Victorian art reformer Owen Jones, in *The Grammar of Ornament*, a book which is considered the precursor of style manuals of today, writes that India's textile industry demonstrated "instinct and perfection in the arena of design that could help elevate the quality of workmanship in Britain as well as aesthetic standards of the British public."[597]

Victoria and Albert Museum archives mention how the British royal family wore South Asian textiles on state occasions and at less formal events even before the Great Exhibition. They further provide information on how Indian design was appropriated for British aesthetic and artistic sensibilities. Artists and photographers were among the first to appreciate Indian fabrics before they became widely available; they were worn in artistic circles and often used as studio props.

> The dyer and printer Thomas Wardle (1831–1909) collaborated with William Morris in producing designs such as Indian Diaper and Indian Chintz. He also assisted [the merchant Arthur Lasenby] Liberty in translating Indian designs for British markets and used designs taken from woodblocks in the India Museum at South Kensington for a range of silks produced for Liberty in 1881.[598]

However, the Great Exhibition initiated a cosmopolitan design movement in Victorian Britain and resulted in the formation of the Kensington Museum. The land was purchased from the profit generated by the Great Exhibition, which was based on the extreme exploitation of local artisans and artists from the colonies. This ethnographic museum that was inaugurated in 1857

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[596] Philip Crang and Sonia Ashmore, "The Transnational Spaces of Things: South Asian Textiles in Britain and *The Grammar of Ornament*," *European Review of History—Revue européenne d'histoire* 16, no. 5 (2009): 656.

[597] As quoted by Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2007), 18.

[598] Victoria and Albert Museum, "Consuming South Asian Textiles," http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/consuming-south-asian-textiles/ .

held art and artifacts from thirty colonies acquired from the exhibition's inventory. Kensington Museum was renamed Victoria and Albert in 1899.[599]

   This museum served as a repository for specimens through which designers and artists in Victorian times moved towards a cosmopolitan design discourse.[600] The most significant example is the book of the catalogue created by Victorian art and design reformer Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856).

> In its 1856 imprint it was composed of 100 chromolithographic plates, representing ornamental patterns "distant: in time and space and organised according to twenty categorical distinctions: "savage tribes", "Egyptian", "Arabian", "Chinese", "Mediaeval" and of course "Indian" included; the twentieth, for reasons we shall come to, devoted to "nature."[601]

Hence, in a classic colonial mentality and sense of entitlement, while the book provided empirical knowledge of design elements from colonies, Victorian designers appropriated these elements in the name of inspiration from nature. In his review of the Great Exhibition, the painter and design reformer William Dyce declared that art from the Indian Subcontinent was based on universal principles of good design and should be used as an inspiration for the cosmopolitan impulse towards universal abstraction within contemporary British design.[602]

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[599] Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum,* (London: Routledge, 2012), 1.

[600] Ibid., 12–13. While the empire was collecting and categorizing Indian design and reproducing the industrial cheaper versions, they were conveniently also making the handmade textile industry in the Subcontinent extinct. Ibid., 123. The establishment of art and crafts collages back in the Subcontinent provided a free supply of artifacts and art produced from colleges which recruited the top artisans in Punjab. Also, to understand the real colonial strategy towards local fine arts, see Whiles, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan.* For local crafts and textile and the making of Mayo School of Arts, see Tarar, *"Official" Chronicle of Mayo School of Art.*
Knighted in 1881, George Birdwood, a writer and a curator declared Indian artistic traditions "the monstrous shapes of Puranic deities unsuitable for highest form of artistic expression and this is probably why sculpture and painting is unknown, as fine arts in India." George Christopher Molesworth Birdwood, The Industrial Arts of India, vol. 3. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1884): 125.
These condescending literary propaganda towards Indian arts and crafts, helped British create a dichotomy between fine arts and crafts. By declaring Indian fine arts as craft, the empire could easily import Indian art.

[601] "Jones acknowledged that the section on Indian Ornament drew heavily on objects shown in the Exhibitions of 1851 and 1855." Crang and Ashmore. "The Transnational Spaces of Things," 658.

[602] Stacey Sloboda, "*The Grammar of Ornament*: Cosmopolitanism and Reform in British Design." *Journal of Design History* 21, no. 3 (2008): 229.

6.2.2. Indian Textile Influence in Europe before the Great Exhibition and the Mystery of Indian Damask

More recent empirical archival research shows that the British obsession with Indian textiles and the international trade of these articles started much earlier than the Great Exhibition of 1851. Before the encounters of the Mughal Empire with the East India Company (*Company Bhadur*), the Indian textile industry was ancient and was already trading with China, Africa, Persia, and the Middle East.[603] The East India Company's arrival in the Subcontinent from the sixteenth to the early seventeenth century was intrinsically linked with the international textile trade. As it grew more powerful in the Subcontinent by the early eighteenth century, the East India Company monopolized the entire maritime transportation of textiles goods from the Subcontinent to Europe.[604] The French so cherished Indian textiles that the French state feared the destruction of its own textile industry; hence France temporarily banned the import of patterned Indian cloth in 1681, which resulted in "a highly volatile culture of smuggling Indian cloth in France."[605]

Between 1664 and 1678, the English East India Company's total trade comprised between 60 and 70 percent of textile imports; in 1684, more than one million pieces were imported.[606] Indian textiles, commonly referred to as chintz and calico, with their exquisite designs influenced by flowers, birds, and other animals, took over the design production for the interiors of British homes.[607] Elizabeth Gaskell's novel, *North and South* (1849–50), portrayed "Indian shawls and scarfs" as highly desired items for the English bourgeois trousseau.[608] Kashmiri shawls were as valued in France as they were in Britain, and "Napoleon's wedding gifts to Marie-Louise, his second wife, included seventeen Kashmiri shawls, and a painting of the guests at their 1810 wedding showed many of the women with 'a cashmere shawl carefully folded over one arm.'"[609]

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[603] For a more detailed account of Indian influence on world textile trade, see Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy, *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles*, 1500–1850 (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

[604] Maskiell, "Consuming Kashmir," 36. For a comprehensive account of colonial encounters in the Subcontinent, see Majumdar, et al., *An Advanced History of India*.

[605] Felicia Gottmann. *Global Trade, Smuggling, and the Making of Economic Liberalism: Asian Textiles in France 1680–1760* (Berlin: Springer, 2016), 8.

[606] Beverly Lemire, "Domesticating the Exotic: Floral Culture and the East India Calico Trade with England, c. 1600–1800." *Textile* 1, no. 1 (2003): 68.

[607] Ibid.

[608] Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (1849–50); reprint (London: Penguin Classics, 1989), 7, 299.

[609] Maskiell. "Consuming Kashmir," 39.

Hence, the evidence suggests that even before the more organized assimilation of Indian textile designs within Victorian designs, the authenticity of European textile designs from the early sixteenth century had already been diluted by Indian textiles. An archival research project, *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500–1800,* includes research essays on the "golden age" of European maritime navigation and the global textile trade.[610] The book, which was published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, edited by Amelia Peck, was part of the exhibition curated at the Met, titled *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade* 1500–1800 (September 2013 to January 2014).

In the book essay "'Indian Chints' and 'China Taffaty': East India Company Textiles for the North American Market," Amelia Peck creates an inventory of Indian and Chinese textile articles shipped by the East India Company to North American colonies from the accounts found in port books from the 1930s. Within the logbooks, the textile articles are identified with the places they originate from. One particular item that puzzles the writer is that wherever there is mention of silk damask, it is repeatedly archived as Indian damask. According to the writer, "There is no evidence that these damasks were woven in India."[611] She attributes this mistake to one of two possibilities: one, the North American companies selling the products knew the demand for Indian materials in the market and wanted to associate as many products of Indian origin as possible, or two, there was genuine ignorance on their part, as the few damask dresses that survived and were displayed at the MET exhibition seem to "reveal their Chinese roots, while others are straightforward copies of European silks."[612]

Arguably an alternative hypothesis can be proposed. Firstly, out of thousands of textile articles that were imported to North America, only a handful of articles that survived cannot erase the possibility of hybrid Chinese/Indian/French damask designs. According to the author herself, on another occasion, patterned hand-painted and block-printed Indian calico designs were already popular in Europe by the 1600s. As there is no study on the conceptual synthesis of damask patterns and designs created during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there is a

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[610] This academic research project was part of the most ambitious exhibition that took place in 2014 at the Met. Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500–1800" Exhibition Overview. Sept. 16, 2013–Jan. 5, 2014. https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2013/interwoven-globe/ .

[611] Amelia Peck, "'Indian Chints' and 'China Taffaty': East India Company Textiles for the North American Market," in *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800,* ed. Amelia Peck (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2013), 91.

[612] Ibid., 111.

possibility of the evolution of hybrid European designs. A more recent study, "The American Market for Indian Textiles, 1785–1820: In the Twilight of Traditional Cloth Manufacture," mentions that the companies of North American importers were highly knowledgeable in identifying Indian textiles. The researcher draws on "newspaper advertisements in issues of the *Salem Gazette* in the years around 1800"[613] and points to the evidence that silk cloth for home decor was being exported from India by the eighteenth century.[614]

Hence, the discussion above firstly leaves a possibility of hybridity in European design, and, at the very least, destabilizes the authenticity of French designs that were copied in China.[615] Secondly, and more optimistically, it can be proposed that "silk damasks" that were shipped to North American colonies were actually manufactured in India to take advantage of cheaper labour, resulting in hybrid damask designs. This hypothesis further becomes viable in the light that contemporary India is one of the world's largest producers of silk damask.[616]

As evaluated, Amra Khan's use of damask patterns as a backdrop became historically relevant to the European design tradition that absorbed Indian textile influences and probably was already a hybrid even before they were reproduced in India. This extremely complicated and confusing textile design history makes visible the hybridity of postcolonial and colonial societies that were a part of a larger globalized world well before the term globalization was invented. These contacts with colonialism, the Western world, and vice versa have made the regions what they are today. Hence, the use of damask patterns in Amra's work can be conceptualized using two possibilities: Either damask patterns were localized, adding regional flavour in India, or they were reproduced under colonial impositions. Either way, the damask patterns have become part of more than five hundred years of Indian Subcontinent textile history.

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[613] Susan S. Bean, "The American Market for Indian Textiles, 1785–1820: In the Twilight of Traditional Cloth Manufacture," *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings,* 1990, 45.

[614] Ibid.

[615] Another very interesting academic source, locating grotesque in a French context, mentions "Turkish Damask" when this information is connected to the fact that the Subcontinent was ruled by the Mamluk Dynasty (1206 to 1290) who were Turk slave soldiers who introduced their own cultural elements to the Subcontinent. In the light of this, "Turkish Damask" becomes overtly relevant in a Subcontinent context. Barasch, *Grotesque: A Study in Meanings*, 32.

[616] Sewport Support Team, "What is Damask Fabric: Properties, How its Made and Where." May 10, 2022. https://sewport.com/fabrics-directory/damask-fabric/.

6.2.3. Queering the Postcolonial

While we have already analyzed the context of the traditional Western medium and textile references as a cynical allegory for colonialism and its massive and often violent influence on the artistic, visual, and cultural discourse in the Subcontinent, Amra's queer subjectivities need more attention. Amra creates a genealogy of postcolonial history by subverting gender and sexuality in her otherwise nineteenth-century Western-inspired painting style. By doing this, she denaturalizes the construction of the social norms in contemporary Pakistani society and makes her audience see themselves as products of colonial discourse.

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault lays down the rules to explore and trace the genealogy of history by distancing oneself from history. He instructs us to look for the roots of our identity not in historical continuity but in its dissipation and discontinuity and to break down illusionary defences by dissolving the unity of its subject through subversion and destruction. Foucault further explains:

> The role of genealogy is to record its history: the history of morals, ideal, and metaphysical concepts, the history of the concept of liberty or of the ascetic life; as they stand for the emergence of different interpretations, they must be made to appear as events on the stage of a historical process.[617]

Foucault's genealogy aims to make us see history as an "unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers . . . 'injustice or instability in the minds of certain men . . . numberless logical inaccuracies, hasty conclusions, and superficiality.'"[618] The concept of genealogy as revisiting colonial history through a critical lens has been explored by postcolonial/feminist theorists. Spivak revisits colonial as well as revisionist regional history to explore the absence of an ethical representation of the gendered subaltern in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Religious nationalism as a reactionary politics, according to Dabashi, is a direct response of postcolonial societies to deal with colonial anxieties. Dabashi criticizes the Islamic revolution of Iran (1978) as a "claim to ideological purity having at its epistemic and emotive center a colonial conception of 'the West' as its principal interlocutor." And hence it ended up replicating the colonial power structure.[619]

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[617] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 86.

[618] Ibid., 82.

[619] Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism,* 175.

The use of Amra's overemphasized feminized homoerotic visual narratives within colonial design backdrops demands a mandatory response from Amra's audience and "requires spectators, who play the role of active interpreters, to develop their own translation in order to appropriate the 'story' and make it their own."[620]

Through queering the traditional Western technique in her paintings, she explores the trail of imperial and phallogocentric Western discourse within the Indian Subcontinent. She traces the physical, intellectual, and visual colonization of the non-Western subjects. This phenomenon persists even in contemporary times as the Western perspective holds authority over how periphery regions are perceived. The contemporary visuality of homoerotic imagery in Pakistan has an extremely violent recent history. Referring to four controversial paintings (the name of the artist is censored for their safety) that appeared in the art journal *Sohobat* in 2012.[621] The journal was published by the Research and Publication Department, National College of Arts, Lahore, an institution long regarded as the defender of diverse liberal thought in Pakistan by the local intellectuals. Somebody from the department reported the alleged objectionable content of the painting. The painting's depiction of strong homoerotic narratives within visual religious traditions triggered a "visual panic." There was a series of violent threats by Islamic extremist elements, and the paintings were also heavily accused of promoting homosexuality in society. In the face of these threats, the college not only had to shut down the journal, pulling all issues from bookstores but also dissolved its editorial department. The college's decision to cave into hardliner Islamist pressure indicates how space for progressive thought is shrinking in Pakistan and how society is being reconstructed by Islamist hard-liners who are enforcing their interpretation of Islam on the masses. [622]

Amra's constructs of hybrid feminized, nonreproductive subjects generate a postcolonial queer language by theatricalizing the codes of masculinity within precolonial India and intrigue their audience with the query: where is the profound anxiety and contempt towards femininity and female sexuality, outside the reproductive cycle, in contemporary society generated? Were

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[620] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2007), 22.

[621] Sohobat literally means company in Urdu but has connotations of a sexual rendezvous in a vernacular urban context.

[622] It strongly suggests that artists creating subversive images are constantly at the risk of being discovered or of coming under the radar of extremists.

European colonial conceptions of masculinity, manhood, sexual/textual authority, and theorizing of sex, what Foucault calls *Scientia Sexualis,* responsible for this transition?[623]

Historically speaking, the use of jewelry and henna decoration on hands was common among Mughal men and Hindu rajas in the Subcontinent, as, significantly, Subcontinent aristocrats were very comfortable with the feminine side of their sexuality depicted by visual illustrations from the era (Figure 93).

Amra uses distinctive queer language by engaging with the stigma attached to male femininity in contemporary misogynistic Pakistani society. She uses the very stigma of femininity as the locus of desire. Her feminized male subjects look directly into the eyes of the audience. This critical reappropriation can be described as returning the homophobic gaze into an erotic appropriation, the stigmatization itself treated as the modality of desire, threatening the stigmatizer as much as the stigmatized.[624]

Homoerotic encounters were envisaged commonly in visual narratives within Persian and Indo-Persian miniatures pertaining to Sufism within Islamic traditions. Sufism is an esoteric ideology and practice—a culture sub-Islamic—a rich field of performative piety in which mystical aspirations are dependent upon the power-based relations between the *pir* (master/beloved) and *murid* (disciple/lover). The concept of Sufis procuring ecstatic experience through *zikir* (inner discipline and repetition) can be interpreted as an equivalent to Foucault's conception of the "ascesis."[625]

A Sufi disciple is spiritually motivated to seek an intimate relationship with God through his master's agency that mirrors divine love. Islamic medieval poetry was inspired by Sufi ideology, and its practice includes a subtext of love (*ishq*) and arousal between the lover (*murid*) and beloved (*pir*): "the *pir-murid* requisite was visually established in pictorial traditions from Iran and Central Asia from the 14th century and remained constant in related cultures and particularly in Mughal India where Sufism thrived."[626] With the Mughal invasion of the

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[623] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New Yok: Vintage, 1990), 59.

[624] Norman Bryson, "Todd Haynes's *Poison* and Queer Cinema," *An Electronic Journal for Visual Studies* (1999), http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/issue1/bryson/ .

[625] David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1997), 76.

[626] Afshan Bokhari. "Ars Erotica: 'Visualizing' Sufism in Mughal Paintings and the Mystical Memoirs of Jahan Ara Begam (1614–81),"(*Marg Art Journal,* 10 March 2012); 3.
https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Ars+erotica%3A+%22visualizing%22+Sufism+in+Mughal+paintings+and+the...-a0287767675/ .

Subcontinent in the sixteenth century, the Sufi visual tradition in the form of Indo-Persian miniature painting flourished, especially under the patronage of Humayun, the second emperor of the Mughal Empire.[627]

Even now, the shrines of these Sufi poets and mystics serve as heterotopias for non-conforming sexualities and subcultures within Pakistan and are frequently targeted by hardline Islamists. The worst attack of this nature was carried out on Abdullah Shah Ghazi's *mazaar* (shrine) in Karachi in 2010.[628] The bizarre, feminized homoerotism overemphasized in Amra's paintings seems to be a mutated inspiration from homoerotic visual narratives within Persian and Indo-Persian miniature tradition, traumatized and stigmatized, representing a Pakistani urban hidden subculture.

During the contemporary wave of religious nationalism in the Subcontinent and the Middle East, these traditions are being stigmatized and erased strategically. However, during European colonization in the nineteenth century, censorship of the Persian homoerotic Sufi tradition started. As discussed by Joseph A. Boone in "Vacation Cruises; or, the Homoerotics of Orientalism," the translation of the Sufi poems into English came with a disclaimer: "the readers of John Hindley's English translation of Persian lyrics, for instance, are informed that the disgusting objects (male) of love poems were feminized, for reasons too obvious to need any formal apology."[629]

The censorship was not aimed only at Western demographics. In 1860, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, based on Judeo-Christian law, criminalized homosexuality in the Subcontinent. According to one source, it was directed against not only homosexuality but rather, in its vagueness, targeted any sex outside the purpose of procreation:

> There appears to be a profound lack of conceptual and analytical clarity that
> plagues the meanings of the words "sodomy" and "carnal intercourse
> against the order of nature" that inhere in the text of Section 377 when it
> was first written into the books in 1861 by a British lawmaker by the name
> of Thomas Babington Macaulay.[630]

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[627] Ijaz ul-Hassan, *Painting in Pakistan*, 19.

[628] As stated in Chapter 2.

[629] Joseph A. Boone, "Vacation Cruises; or, the Homoerotics of Orientalism," *PMLA* 110, no. 1 (1995): 92.

[630] Pawan Deep Singh, "Mediating the Optics of Privacy: LGBTQ Rights, Public Subjecthood and the Law in India" (PhD diss., UC San Diego, 2015), 89.

The law had a massive effect on women, prostitutes, homosexuals, and the Hijra community in the Subcontinent. Over time, it robbed any shred of agency that these communities exercised.[631]

It is only through the conceptualization of damask as a signifier of Victorian morality and scrutinizing the "introduction of its guilty inhibitions about sex into societies previously much better sexually adjusted than perhaps any in the West"[632] that Amra's paintings become an allegory for a colonial imperialistic discourse that throughout history blindly imposed culturally specific understanding of individual rights and normative sexual identities to its non-Western subjects. As Boone notes in *The Homoerotics of Orientalism,*

> One might take as an example the harsh rhetoric condemning homosexuality sounded by contemporary Arab nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists. For four hundred years, it was the uptight Christian West that accused the debauched Muslim East of harbouring what it euphemistically called the "male vice"; more recently, Islamic conservatives level the same charge at the decadent West in the name of nation-building and cultural authenticity.[633] (Figure 94)

These bizarre-feminized erotic nudes with queer bodies in this light remind the West's closeted phallogocentric empirical visual discourse concealed under the guise of civilization and modernism. According to M. Melissa Elston, the discursive strategies within European traditions of disrobing the female body, against orientalized setting or attire, as in Gérôme's *The Slave Market* (1867), was a physiological tactic to simultaneously eroticize both female and non-Western bodies, suppressing their agency, and visually colonizing them through a European gaze. The colonial "others" were often visually treated as feminized in imperialistic discourse and thus placed as inherently inferior.[634] Hence, misogyny and interiorizing of the feminine have long been part of the Western modern colonial tradition.

Though Amra's work can be described as queer, it is associated with strong postcolonial concerns and hence can be seen as postcolonial queer art. Her art both criticizes and makes her

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[631] Ibtisam Ahmed. "The British Empire's Homophobic Legacy Could Finally be Overturned in India," *The Conversation,* Sept. 1, 2017. https://theconversation.com/the-british-empires-homophobic-legacy-could-finally-be-overturned-in-india-81284/ .

[632] Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1990), 3.

[633] Joseph A. Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2014), 18.

[634] Melissa Elston, "Subverting Visual Discourses of Gender and Geography: Kent Monkman's Revised Iconography of the American West," *The Journal of American Culture* 35, no. 2 (2012): 184.

audience realize how the Western canon has constantly influenced and blindly imposed its values, morality, and aesthetic standards on periphery subjects throughout history.

In *The History of Sexuality,* Foucault argues:

> If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom.[635]

It is not the presence of homosexuality in Pakistani society that is the source of homophobia, but it is the speaking of this presence that triggers homophobia. By giving this presence a voice, Amra completes the transaction between the speaker and the listener, as according to Spivak, speaking and listening complete the process of ethical dialogue.

6.3. Visualizing Alternative Feminine Sexuality: *I am a Creation of Allah*

This chapter's third and last case study focuses on an interregional feminist community art project by Fearless Collective. This collective was founded in 2012 by the Bangalore-based artist (India) Shilo Shiv Suleman. It was formed during the powerful protests that shook India in response to the "Nirbhaya" tragedy in Delhi.[636] Since then, Fearless Collective has worked in over ten countries, creating thirty-eight murals, reclaiming public spaces for gendered subjectivities, and providing spaces for periphery sexualities and identities whose lives are

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[635] Foucault, *History of Sexuality,* 6.

[636] In Delhi, a 23-year-old physiotherapy student boarded an off-duty bus at around 20:30 local time on 16 December 2012 with a male friend. They were returning home after watching a film at an upscale mall. Six men who were already on board attacked the couple, taking turns to rape the woman, before brutally assaulting her with an iron rod. Her friend was also beaten and they were thrown off the bus. Public outrage over the crime mounted again in 2015 when the BBC broadcast a documentary called "India's Daughter," which included an interview with one of the convicts who blamed the victim for what happened to her for being in public late at night. BBC News, "Nirbhaya Case: Four Indian Men Executed for 2012 Delhi Bus Rape and Murder," Updated Mar. 20, 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-51969961/ .

The convict, in a 12-hour interview, justified the rape by saying, "A decent girl won't roam around at nine o'clock at night. . . . A girl is far more responsible for rape than a boy. Housework and housekeeping is for girls, not roaming in discos and bars at night doing wrong things, wearing wrong clothes." Even the lawyers of the six convicts took the same stance that the woman, not the men, were to blame for what happened that night: "In our society, we never allow our girls to come out from the house after 6:30 or 7:30 or 8:30 in the evening with any unknown person," attorney M.L. Sharma said. "You are talking about man and woman as friends. Sorry, that doesn't have any place in our society. We have the best culture. In our culture, there is no place for a woman outside." Terrence McCoy, "The Chilling Reason the Delhi Bus Gang-Rapist Blames His Victim," *Washington Post,* Mar. 3, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/03/03/the-chilling-reason-the-new-delhi-bus-gang-rapist-blames-his-victim/ . The press gave the girl the pseudonym (equivalent to Jane Doe) Nirbhaya, which in Hindi means the fearless one, as she could not be named under Indian law as a victim of sexual assault. Hence the name Fearless Collective.

demonized and excluded from nationalistic discourses. Through community support, Fearless Collective helps marginalized communities and sexualities reclaim public spaces through art while keeping them part of the artistic process and deciding how they wish to be represented publicly.[637] In collaboration with local art colleges and the Fearless team, this community narrative-based collective produced four murals in the four major cities of Pakistan.

This section focuses on one such project, a twenty-foot mural of trans activist Bubbly Malik (*Khawaja Sara*) in Rawalpindi titled *Hum Hain Takhleeq-e-Khuda,* as a result of the Fearless Collective's collaboration with the National College II (Rawalpindi Campus) 2014 (Figure 95).[638] To foreground her narrative, the following sections draw heavily from my interview with Malik in Urdu, which has been translated and paraphrased for the purposes of textual fluidity. However, before this section delves into the analysis of the mural as well as the circumstances leading up to it, it is imperative to briefly frame trans communities within the larger historical, colonial, and contemporary South Asian cultural dynamics.

6.3.1. Contextualizing Khawaja Sara Historically

The *Hijra (*Hindi) and *Khawaja Sara* (both classified under the term eunuchs by the British) history in the Subcontinent is as complex as it is ancient. However, from the Mughal rule onwards, a more structured record can be traced through history as well as contemporary writings.

There are two versions of the origin of Khawaja Sara (masculine) or Khawaja Sara (feminine). Faris Khan, in "Translucent Citizenship: Khwaja Sira Activism and Alternatives to Dissent in Pakistan," traces their origin to castrated slaves who served as attendants in *zenana* quarters and acted as go-betweens for *zenana* and *mardana* (masculine) spaces.[639] Hinchy, on the other hand, describes them as "eunuch slaves" that were hired and employed to serve as administrators in elite Mughal and North Indian homes.[640] Both sources trace back to the writing of Lal and Chatterjee while describing how *Khawaja Sara* held high positions as tutors of

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[637] Shilo Shiv Suleman, Fearless Collective website, https://fearlesscollective.org/about-us/ .

[638] National College of Arts Rawalpindi is the second campus of NCA Lahore. The second campus was established in 2005.

[639] Faris A Khan, "Translucent Citizenship: Khwaja Sira Activism and Alternatives to Dissent in Pakistan," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 20 (2019), 7.

[640] Jessica Hinchy, *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India: The Hijra, c. 1850–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2019), 167.

princes and confidants of queens and ultimately could rise to important state positions as state advisors and even generals in the military.[641]

Hijra, according to Hinchy, are "generally male-born persons who describe themselves as emasculates or 'eunuchs from birth,' wear feminine clothing, usually adopt feminine names and have a socio-cultural role as performers at the time of births."[642] The community has broadly been divided into three groups: Intersexual or hermaphrodite, men/impotent, and men/deliberate/transsexuals—who can either be eunuchs or castrated males (*nibran*) or male cross-dressers (*haqwa*). In most cases, these subjectivities identify themselves with a feminine spirit (*ruh*) but have heterogeneous and fluid sexualities.[643]

Even though Khawaja Sara enjoyed a much higher social status than Hijras, especially under the Mughals, both subcultures had similarities regarding the nonbiological-familial structures such as *guru-chela* (teacher-disciple) and guru-led, community-based homes. [644]

The status Khawaja Sara enjoyed under Mughals declined as the power of British imperialism grew within the Subcontinent, especially after the failure of the so-called Indian Mutiny (1857–59), after which the Indian Subcontinent officially came under the complete control of the British Raj. Due to the sexuality of Khawaja Sara, the British considered them politically corrupt and inappropriate administrators and prohibited them from any state positions.[645] Eventually, the community lost its influence and was slowly but surely absorbed into the Hijra *c*ommunity.

It was not only the Khawaja Sara community that was immensely affected by the colonial impositions. Though the Hijra community lived on the margins, they were nonetheless considered an essential part of society as entertainers, singers, and theatre performers in the Subcontinent. Hindu mythology and folklore contained several references to sexually fluid males. Furthermore, within Sufism, the Sufi poets commonly used female pronouns in their

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[641] See also Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (New Delhi: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 195–96, and Indrani Chatterjee, "A Slave's Quest for Selfhood in Eighteenth-Century Hindustan," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 37, no. 1 (2000): 64–65.

[642] Hinchy, *Governing Gender and Sexuality, 124.*

[643] Khan, "Translucent Citizenship," 8–9; see also, Anila Mithani and Fateh Muhammad Burfat, "Hijra: The Sex in Between," *Journal of Independent Studies and Research-Management, Social Sciences and Economics* 1 (2003).

[644] Khan, "Translucent Citizenship," 7.

[645] Hinchy, *Governing Gender and Sexuality,* 170–77.

spiritual poems and prose. Hence, the concept of sexual fluidity within Hindu and Muslim traditions in the Subcontinent, though not normative, was not considered alien or abhorrent.

Under the British, Hijras were said to pose a "threat of moral and sexual contagion to apparently deviant Indian males due to the perceived link between performance and prostitution. . . . 'Because the dancing in public of eunuchs in female clothing afterwards leads to sodomy, therefore it should be prohibited.'"[646] Especially after Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was adopted, homosexuality was criminalized in the Subcontinent. It turned hijras into default criminals due to the inherent nature of their sexual orientations.

From 2009 onwards, the Khawaja Sara emancipation rights movement took hold in the Subcontinent. This movement, initiated by the immense struggles of the community activists, is supported and endorsed by rhizomatic feminist projects and more organized feminist activist movements such as Shirkat Gah and Khwateen Majlis-e-Amal (The activist-based feminist movement discussed in Chapter Three).

6.3.2. Hijras in Contemporarily Pakistan and the Road to Citizenship

As a result of almost two centuries of demonization under colonial rule, Hijras have turned into the most marginalized community in contemporary Pakistani society. [647] As they were directly isolated from organized financial opportunities, their livelihood depended on periphery activities such as begging, dancing at weddings and childbirths, and sex work. Since the state did not account for their lives, they were susceptible to constant and extreme violence and even murders.[648]

The term *Khawaja Sara* was revived as an umbrella term in the twenty-first century by a group of activists from within the community in order to regain the respectability associated with the term *Khawaja Sara* historically and to disassociate from the criminality linked to the term *Hijra*.

As a result of years of struggle and activism, in 2012, a landmark judgment was passed by the Pakistan Supreme Court, acknowledging the state's negligence and prejudice towards the

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[646] Letter from Secretary, NWP, to Inspector-General of Police, 9 June (1865), in BL/IOR/P 428/6 as cited by Jessica Hinchy, "Obscenity, Moral Contagion and Masculinity: *Hijras* in Public Space in Colonial North India," *Asian Studies Review* 38, no. 2 (2014): 280. Hinchy gives a detailed account of demonization and criminalization of Hijras and Khawaja Sara under the British, who considered their lifestyles abhorrent and morally corrupt.

[647] Khan, "Translucent Citizenship," 4.

[648] Ibid. Though they are also associated with curses and blessings during weddings and childbirths, which often come from the place of fear of their nonreproductive femininity.

community. As a result, for the first time in Pakistan's history, Khawaja Sara persons were issued ID cards and enrolled to full citizenship status, registered as the "third gender." In 2018, a Transgender Persons Act was passed that made it mandatory for the estranged families of these persons to include them in family inheritance. Article 25A further protects their rights not to be discriminated against in educational institutions and workplaces. There is an ongoing negotiation around replacing "third gender" with their perceived identity status on their ID cards, though; this judgment will not automatically erase the prejudices and biases towards the community. It contains many flaws and hidden clauses, as is discussed by Malik, but led to many work opportunities that opened for these persons and also ensured at least the minimum level of security for the community.

6.3.3. Bubbly Malik: *Hum Hain Tahleeq-e-Khuda,* 2014 (I am a Creation of Allah)

The mural *Hum Hain Tahleeq-e-Khuda* was painted in 2014 and measured approximately twenty feet in height. It is an illustrative mural where Malik is shown riding a yellow bike from a side pose. She is shown in her full feminine glory, her long black hair let loose, wearing a pink kameez and a blue shalwar, her head tilted while she looks towards her viewers. There is a speech bubble next to her face with the title of the painting written. The word *fearless* is composed at the bottom of the mural, which is surrounded by pink and red flowers.

The size of the mural serves as a metaphor for a larger-than-life image of a community that has been subjected to invisibility and silence over the centuries. In the regional context of this complete social and state neglect of the community, the size understandably suggests an awakening and visibility of the community. However, its location at Ghafaar Kiani Road, next to Sadar, Rawalpindi, on a private property wall that also serves as a background for a modest carwash facility in an obscure corner, does not coincide with the concept behind the project: the hypervisibility of the invisible. In an interview, Malik described the events that led to creating the mural and its ultimate placement. Malik disclosed that the original placement of the mural was meant for a much more mainstream venue, close to the busiest urban highway that joins Rawalpindi to Murree—the most famous highland holiday spot in Punjab.

In the historical context of systemic silencing of the Khawaja Sara community, this section, consciously, instead of focusing on the artistic team and their perspective, give a voice to Malik. As the interview was conducted in the Urdu language, the account of the events was transcribed, translated into English, and paraphrased in what follows.

In 2009 a petition was filed by the pioneer trans activist Almas Bobby with the help of her lawyer Aslam Khaki to recognize trans rights as full citizens of Pakistan. Later, the historic law passed by the government of Pakistan in 2012, issuing ID cards to the members of the Khawaja Sara community, opened avenues for more mainstream work options.[649]

Bubbly Malik has been working as an activist for the rights of the Khawaja Sara community in Pakistan for the last 20 years. She recalled how, initially, she was used as a prop in local conferences and events just to be displayed, recalling how nobody was interested in asking her what her issues were. She recalls that she started asserting herself in later years, claiming her space, and even speaking uninvited. She said she had been subjected to hostility and even violence at the hands of police and governmental organizations, as society expects the trans community to be silent.

In 2015 she registered the first organization for the welfare of the trans community in Pakistan, Wajood and has been working for the cause of the right to gender identification.[650] In 2014 Dr. Nadeem Omer Tarar, then the director of the National College of Arts II (Rawalpindi campus), offered Malik (a resident of Rawalpindi) and other community members a contract to run the NCA canteen. The project was meant to rehabilitate and provide alternative work opportunities to Khawaja Sara community persons who were forced to work as beggars and sex workers in the past. This was the first entrepreneur project given to trans persons in Pakistan, primarily affiliated with an academic institution. The news received a lot of national and international coverage. On an invitation from Nida Mushtaq (co-organizer of Aurat March), Shio Shiv Suleman's Fearless team was already visiting Pakistan and working on a mural in Karachi. The team flew over to Rawalpindi and met Dr. Tarar, and Suleman suggested her idea of a twenty-foot public mural of Malik. Malik remembers how fascinated she was to meet Suleman, a confident and humble young girl from India. The NCA team (third- and fourth-year fine arts

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[649] This initiated a long debate regarding determining the gender identity of Khawaja Sara.

[650] Malik talked about the long and arduous debate around gender identification of Khawaja Saras. He explained how initially it was ruled that the gender will be marked as Khawaja Sara male or Khawaja Sara female. But the activists and speakers educated the lawmakers that Khawaja Sara was a community and not a sexuality; why would you mention that on anyone's ID? Afterwards, the term *third gender* was proposed, and finally *transgender*. However, the current debate is around the trans person's right to be identified by their own perceived identity. Against this, it is argued that this would lead to everyone declaring their own gender. To this objection Malik recalled she told the doctor on the team, "No man, unless their *ruh* (soul) is female, would choose this unbearably difficult life; Sir, would you like to go out on the street with lipstick and red shalwar kameez on, with me?." Bubbly Malik, Online Interview with the Author (Rawalpindi-Montreal, 2021).

students) and the Fearless team worked together to compose the mural, but it was Malik who was given the right to decide how she wanted to be represented publicly. Malik said she very consciously decided that she wanted a positive and joyful visual. As she said, whenever the trans community gets a platform to be visible, they are always shown as victims and oppressed. "I wanted the mural to project a side of us . . . that we wish to be our future—free and joyful and returning the gaze of our audience with a smile. We do not need sympathy. We need our basic human rights." From this perspective, Malik turned the mural into a trans-futuristic visual narrative.

The mural concept was to give as much visibility to the representative of the Khawaja Sara community as possible through size and venue. Hence, the venue for the mural needed to have two qualities, as the team wanted the mural to be mega-sized. It needed a large wall as a canvas; secondly, they wanted the mural to reach as many people as physically possible. So, after long consideration, they selected a building that had a wall big enough for the project, located at Faizabad, on Murree Road, the busiest road in Rawalpindi. The road leads to Murree, a favourite highland in Punjab. As it serves as the closest highland recreation spot for the two provinces, it receives traffic from visitors from all parts of Punjab and Sind.

However, that very ambitious plan could not be materialized; the local religious bodies did not allow the use of the building for a visual they deemed inappropriate and against the teachings of religion—a joyful transwoman free from societal prejudices riding a bike. Later a wall that belongs to the Gordon College, on an intersection of Liaqat-Bagh, another bustling street in Rawalpindi, was selected. However, the College administration refused to let their wall be used for this specific purpose.

These were very disappointing developments, but both teams were determined to execute their plan. When they visited her home, Malik recalled how the NCA team identified a large wall big enough to hold the mural close to Malik's house. They asked Malik if they could talk to the owner of the building. Malik said, "It was my own *mohalla*,[651] I talked to my neighbour, and he was more than happy to oblige." Hence, the NCA team of artists and the Fearless team, with Suleman as a design coordinator, worked on the mural, which took a few days to finish (Figure 96). According to Malik, though the project faced rejection due to the prejudice prevalent in

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[651] Mohalla is Urdu for a small well-knit neighborhood that usually contains inhabitants who have been dwelling there for at least a generation.

society, there were many who put their heart and soul into this project. Here we can trace the subalternity in Spivak's nuanced urban subjectivity.

Malik endearingly narrates how children in her *mohalla*, whenever they see her next to the mural, chant her name "*Bubbly Aunty, Bubbly Aunty, aap ki photo kharaab ho gai hai, is ko theek karao*" (Your picture is damaged; you need to get it repaired).[652]

The mural is almost seven years old now. Due to weather conditions, especially extreme heat, it is considerably damaged. It lies forgotten in an obscure corner that serves as a carwash of a working-class *mohalla* in Rawalpindi. Nevertheless, once in a while, one can still read a newspaper story about the Fearless team and how it shone the light on a community that has been forgotten within the mainstream national narrative for centuries.

6.4. Conclusion of the Chapter

The Westernized rhetoric of oppressed brown Muslim bodies associated with overt religious signifiers such as veil, burqa, niqab, or hijab was a product of the war on media discourse that made these images hyper-visible to serve an ideological purpose and imperial cause. The regional religious-nationalist patriarchal response to the war warranted the same images of homogenized subjugated women in the name of religious piety. In order to manipulate urban women into the idealized version of this religiously pious framework, the "Westernized" rhetoric is used against any rebellious feminist visual discourses by intentionally overlooking or disregarding the regional historical precedents of feminist/feminine resistance against patriarchy. The case studies in this chapter help us make a few observations for the benefit of our study. The focused case studies in this chapter do not directly engage with War on Terror gender politics, but the artworks manifest the latent impact the war and its propaganda around Muslim bodies had on the lives of urban Pakistani women.

The artists under discussion in this chapter move beyond gender and urban public occupation thematic; however, the visual schemes and strategies they applied to their imagery are profoundly connected to the case studies discussed in Chapters Four and Five. Like our previous focused artists, the works of Amra and Martia Khan also use hybrid and composite popular cultural signifiers embedded in colonial and postcolonial aesthetics to elucidate the history of colonial impositions. These artists successfully create a genealogy of feminine sexual

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[652] Bubbly Malik, Online Interview with the Author (Rawalpindi-Montreal, 2020).

agency within regional and domestic religious, cultural and literary traditions. The analysis of case studies further aimed to clarify that colonial discourses historically reinforced the taboos attached to the expression of female/feminized sexuality in the name of so-called civilization.

Amra Khan's work interestingly explores the recent religious-nationalist reaction and total banishment of Western influences when it comes to female liberation while the Pakistani society, in the course of three hundred years under British colonialism, absorbed numerous colonial cultural and visual influences. In Amara Khan's work, damask stands for colonial iconography and its absorption in Pakistani society and highlights how we are a product of a composite culture that includes colonial influences. However, it also points to the unexplored and uncredited influences of ethnic and colonized material culture-shaping Western cultural and artistic discourses.

In the last section, the chapter further explored the postcolonial strategies to avoid creating "subservient knowledge," to use Dabashi's term in *Post-Orientalism*. Dabashi proposes that the only way to resist and overcome the hegemonic Eurocentric normative power is to "cultivate regional sites of cross-cultural conversation removed from presumed centers of cosmopolitan power."[653] This collaborative project between artists from India and Pakistan addressed many concerns central to this study. Due to ethnic and cultural similarities, especially in Subcontinent, the interregional projects accelerate rebellious knowledge production and assert self-representations without compromising the cultural, religious, and historical complexities and ambivalences. Therefore, the last section of this chapter explored the conception and execution of a highly significant interregional mural project, Hum Hain Tahleeq-e-Khuda (I am a Creation of Allah) (2014), in a culturally specific visual language of complex silenced identities.

Due to its subject position, the project also highlights the limitations and recurrent hurdles that feminine sexualities face during self-representation, also explored in the works of Amra Khan and Maria Khan. The three case studies combined bring to the foreground the mainstream religious and nationalist gender visual formations that only allow the projection of homogenized repetitive feminine images—heteronormative, pure-modest, pious, invisible, and silent women. Hence, the transgression of these brown bodies, impurity, or any form of so-called nonconformity induces a moral crisis among regional religious moralists. Hence, the sexual

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[653] Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism,* 150.

hybridity in all three case studies can be located within Bhabha's *Third Space,* strategically positioned as antidotes to essentialism and fixed identities, just like the rest of the focused artists who manipulate cultural hybridity to create a *Third Space* to challenge essentialist oppressed vs pious binary.

Moreover, the case studies and the historical and cultural contexts demonstrate that the female/feminine/non-conforming sexualities and their nuanced autonomy have always been present in the region irrespective of religious and cultural constraints and will continue to exist within subcultures—under the quilt, in secretive gardens, in the dark corners of domestic spaces, or on an obscure corner of a *mohalla* wall.

Conclusion

This dissertation examined how the gender politics around 9/11 and the War on Terror created a chain of events within Pakistan, warranting organic urban feminist resurgences in the art and larger Pakistani urban discourse. The dissertation focused on the artistic evolution of urban gendered subjectivities, paired with feminist activist initiatives after 2001, not in chronological order but arranged according to conceptual formations.[654]

The initial years framed the war as a civilizing mission against extremist Islam to liberate Muslim women from the evil Taliban regime. Though the liberation of women oppressed under the Taliban started as a region-based narrative, it created a single visual field. The projected religiously oppressed narrative soon conflated Muslim women universally under one identity within the Euro-American context.[655] The Western visual discourse, throughout history, has represented women as generic, idealized, sexualized, symbolic and objectified nudes.[656] Historically, orientalist representations under colonialism have at the same time eroticized and victimized brown female bodies as an ideological weapon for colonial justification.[657] Many media studies (as discussed in Chapter One) argue that propaganda during the War on Terror was the beginning of neo-orientalism around gendered Muslim brown bodies.

Further, many feminists and social theorists have recently looked into the effects of this propaganda on Pakistani society and have argued that it resulted in the emergence of political Islam in Pakistan. In The *Rise of Political Islam in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: The Case of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA),* the author writes that due to the US invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11, anti-American sentiment increased dramatically, which further created an opportunity for the MMA (United Action Front) to gain more votes, excessively using West-versus-Islam rhetoric:

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[654] In December 2020, new research by Rubina Saigol emerged that, though not directly linking the War on Terror with feminist resurgence in Pakistan, discusses new waves of female urban occupation in contemporary Pakistan, especially the Aurat March (2018, 2019, 2020). Saigol, and Chaudhary, *Contradictions and Ambiguities of Feminism in Pakistan.*

[655] As already discussed in the first chapter, during the early 2000s, urban Pakistan was introduced to global information such as the Internet, cheap 24-hour satellite TV, and the 24-hour NewsChannel. The focus is on Pakistani women due to Pakistan's location and its involvement as a facilitator as well as the target of the War on Terror.

[656] Griselda Pollock, "The Grace of Time: Narrativity, Sexuality and a Visual Encounter in the Virtual Feminist Museum." *Art History* 26, no. 2 (2003).

[657] Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem,* trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1987). See also Linda Nochlin. "The Imaginary Orient," *Art in America* 71, no. 5 (1983): 118–31.

> [The] God gifted opportunity was very clearly manifested by Islamist—
> [they] acted wisely and got closer and thus achieved sympathies and
> support inside the masses for the upcoming elections. In this way, the
> religious political parties came to common terms and formed MMA
> (Muttahida Majlis Amal or United Action Front) contested 2002 elections
> and secured [a] high mandate and formed their government in KPK and
> Baluchistan.[658]

Though the emergence of political Islam did challenge neocolonial and imperialistic atrocities by the United States and allied forces in the region, it did not evolve as a "counter-hegemonic force, as it seeks to replace one oppressive political system with another."[659] As Dabashi states: The "claim to ideological purity having at its epistemic and emotive center a colonial conception of 'the West' as its principal interlocutor . . . falls squarely into the trap of replicating the European sovereign subject."[660]

According to Pakistani secular feminist writer Afia Zia, after 9/11, the United States veiled its imperialistic designs under the pretext of women's liberation through massive propaganda. US propaganda was further manipulated by the local religiopolitical right-wing, who projected female liberation as a Western scheme. Zia writes:

> Feminism, in particular, has become a suspect handmaiden in the post 9/11
> era that is dominated by the analytic framing of all Muslim-related matters
> through the lens of Islamophobia, and especially when it challenges Islamic
> laws, patriarchy or male norms in a Muslim context.[661]

She further argues that this narrative, combined with the loss of thousands of civilian lives during the war, created immense hostility toward women's emancipation from local patriarchal abuse and accuses Muslim liberal feminists of being an accomplice to imperialist powers.

Social theorist and subalternist historian Mubarak Ali articulate that the politics of religious piety to control female presence in public is not very effective in rural areas. The fabric of agrarian society depends on cooperation and physical labour. Both men and women work in the fields, and hence the concept of idealized pious veiled women is not viable in a rural context.

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[658] Khan, "The Rise of Political Islam in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," 2–3.

[659] Brohi, *The MMA Offensive,* 125.

[660] Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism*, 175. Islam is what Muslims actively imagine and institutionalize it to be. And the current face of Islam is indeed a reaction to imperialistic US policies, just like socialism or any other ideology. Ibid., 234. Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* and Afia Zia in "Faith and Feminism," 184, make the same observations.

[661] Zia, "Faith and Feminism," 44.

Besides, rural women occupy traditional public spaces such as fields, tending to the animals and bringing food; in many regions, they fetch water from wells miles away or relieve themselves at night in open fields due to the lack of toilets. Hence the control over their presence in rural public areas is irrelevant. The populist religious-nationalist campaign primarily funded by Islamist groups necessarily focused on the visibility of urban women. As urban educated women are part of new modernization, their presence in urban spaces is more recent and not ingrained in society historically. These women within urbanity are dealing with the challenges of modern life and often seek emancipation. As their visual presence can be termed westernized, they create an ideal target to be demonized as Western agents. These accusations served Islamists' political agenda and further strengthened the Islam-versus-West rhetoric discussed at length in Chapter One.

Women who did not adhere to visible religious signifiers or associate themselves with Islamist piety politics are considered westernized. Rubina Saigol further argues that transnational gender politics combined with the politics of location led some "to perceive Pakistani feminists [inclusive-secular] as siding with the racist imperialism and hegemonic feminism of Western countries." As a result, only faith-based feminism is considered a viable alternative and homegrown or indigenous to the region. This politics also generated visual signifiers such as the hijab or black abaya as a symbol of Muslim identity and the only resistance against Western imperialism, hence, burdening Muslim women with the responsibility of being the face of Islam.[662] Ayesha Khan, in *The Women's Movement in Pakistan: Activism, Islam and Democracy*, argues:

> Women's experience of Islam is rich and varied, its expression and articulation [defy] generalization or over-simplification. One of the main goals of fundamentalism in Pakistan is to gloss over forms of diversity and impose a monolithic and single variant of Islam upon the population.[663]

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[662]There have been numerous attacks on religious minorities and their places of worships. A list of all the temples that were desecrated in 2020 and 2021 appears at https://www.opindia.com/2021/08/list-of-hindu-temples-attacked-in-pakistan-since-2020-details/ . As this research only focuses on the emergence of feminist visuality in Pakistan, it will not go deeply into that topic. Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan,* 33–34. As mentioned before, Saigol argues that the concept of hijab and abaya is not indigenous to South Asia and was a result of globalization and a newly affluent class that returned after working in the Middle East.

[663] Ayesha Khan, *The Women's Movement in Pakistan: Activism, Islam and Democracy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019): 297.

Leila Ahmed notes in her text on the discourse of the veil that arguments about apparel differences between women have historically distracted attention from more serious political, social, and economic challenges they face under patriarchy. This visual trajectory and politics of piety around female bodies further incited Pakistan's already patriarchal fabric and helped Islamists gain a political edge.[664]

These populists' Islam-versus-West campaigns are resulting in the literal erasure of images of women from public spaces by so-called Islamic moralists, along with intense propaganda on social media on the values of veiling and pitting veiled women against unveiled women. This campaign was followed by some very high-profile cases of violence against well-known women, as discussed in Chapter One.[665]

The most visible outcome of this intense propaganda dispersed in the society is a form of populist religious-nationalist mentality that became visible during the Aurat March, discussed in Chapter Five; it is the topic of Rubina Saigol's new book. Apart from minor support, women participating in the Aurat March, veiled or unveiled, were declared westernized on popular social media sites. They also became the hottest topic of criticism on Pakistani private news channels for the mere reason of coming out in public and showing their strength.[666] To avoid the "Western agent and Western-funded" rhetoric, Aurat March organizers announce before every event that, as a principal policy, the Aurat March Foundation funds itself with local resources such as

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[664]It has been argued by Afia Zia. Khan, "The Rise of Political Islam in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa."

[665] Nazish Brohi argues that though right-wing politics was always a powerful factor in deciding the trajectory of elected governments, it wasn't until the War on Terror that it came to power as a political force through coalition. They use women as morality markers and proclaim themselves as authority over women. Educated urban women were deemed "sold out," damned to burn in hell, and a "fitnah." Though MMA rule was only limited to two provinces, the effects of them demonizing urban women resonated with the whole country. Examples are given in the chapter One.

[666] Another very relevant example is Malala Yousafzai and the hatred of Pakistani masses against her. In 2015 the All-Pakistan Private Schools Federation (APPSF) launched a rebuttal to Malala Yousafzai's novel, *I am Malala,* by releasing a book titled, *I am not Malala, I am a Muslim, I am a Pakistani,* at the National Press Club in Islamabad. "The book is written with the aim to reveal the truth and counter anti-Islamic propaganda and expose the nefarious designs of anti-Islam forces," said the author of the book, Mirza Kashif Ali, president of APPSF. The author aggressively defended his book by calling Malala a western agent, while himself dressed in a black three-piece suit with a bow tie around his neck. The event got massive coverage from all significant newspapers in Pakistan: https://nation.com.pk/11-Nov-2015/i-am-not-malala-launched/ ; https://tribune.com.pk/story/989876/i-am-not-malala-launched/ . This incident is complimented by this *New York Times* report from 2021, datelined Karachi: "Provincial police in Pakistan this week raided bookshops and seized copies of an elementary school social studies textbook that includes a picture of the education rights activist Malala Yousafzai, a polarizing figure in the country. The picture of Ms. Yousafzai, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014, appeared in a chapter on national heroes, alongside Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah." Ur-Rehman, Zia, and Emily Schmall, "Textbooks Featuring Malala Yousafzai Are Removed from Bookstores in Pakistan," *New York Times,* July 16, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/16/world/asia/malala-pakistan-textbooks.html/ .

donations and not with any international donor agency funding. In this context, in an interventionist interview during the 2021 Aurat March, Rubina Saigol points out the country's hypocrisy in that it runs on loans from the International Monetary Fund and foreign donations. Spivak's term "a violent aporia" can best explain this situation.[667]

Saigol further argues that religious-nationalist piety politics is strategically diverted only towards urban women. She contends that progressive and even secular values require urgent re-articulation and justification. Pakistani urban men who adhere to Western values, wear Western clothes, and take part in Western-oriented business and labour are not expected to demonstrate any visual signifiers to declare their religious convictions. MMA and other Islamic political groups in the country are increasingly conflating culture with their interpretation of Islam (Wahabism). They are supported by international Islamist groups that emerged as reactionary politics to Western imperialism and are political movements.[668]

> The danger of infusing this politicized Islamic rhetoric with greater cultural authenticity is apparent at many levels. Western donor agencies are turning to fund faith-based organizations, thereby sidelining and disempowering those NGOs that refuse to engage in religious discourse to legitimize their work. Academics, based largely in the West, are reacting to the growing Islamophobia in their environment through questioning the relevance and authenticity of liberal secular feminism in countries like Pakistan and imbuing the Islamist women's groups with an unmerited and dangerous authenticity that gives legitimacy to their exclusionary ideology. Secular, rights-based activists, and feminists, thus, find themselves left with few allies.[669]

In "Can the Subaltern Speak," Spivak argues that a colonial subject (read neocolonial) cannot define the metanarrative. Further, the ideological construction of genders in societies keeps women's voices doubly silent: in the colonial (neocolonial) narrative and the revisionist narrative. Spivak calls it the "doubly effaced itinerary" of the female subaltern.[670] As a forced ally in the war, the War on Terror brought many challenges to Pakistan, but it had a doubly negative long-term impact on the lives of urban women. The logical progression to this gender politics was a demonizing of educated urban women who are not part of the piety politics/faith-

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[667] Saigol, interview with Zainab Najeeb, "Dismantling Myths about Feminism and Aurat March through a Historical Lens."
[668] Khan, *Women's Movement in Pakistan*, 306.
[669] Ibid. Also, Afia Zia makes the same argument in: Zia "Faith and Feminism," 23.
[670] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?,"287.

based politics and fight for inclusive, equal rights, not just for Muslim home-based women or women situated within a family system.[671] According to Ayesha Khan, it is time to disregard Western societies as the sole custodians of progressive and inclusive politics and acknowledge that every region has its legacy.[672]

The use of female bodies as spectacles and as a prop for phallocentric patriotism, nationalism, and ideologies has been a part of Western history and lore. The first chapter examined the spectacle of brown Muslim bodies as an extension of that mentality and discourse through auto-ethnic accounts, media studies, and visual analysis. The chapter looked into how Pakistan was impacted by the construction of a homogenized Muslim gendered identity narrative after 9/11 and the War on Terror. Based on an analysis of media studies, the research demonstrated how US imperial policy and regional religious nationalism made Muslim women scapegoats for their political agendas, using their bodies as a field of contestation. Regionally, urban women are held responsible for the visual personification of an imagined and somewhat homogenous passive/pious entity in contemporary Pakistani media discourse. The dissertation argues that the formation of these generic pious gendered bodies as a reaction to the US propaganda ended up replicating the US media's creation of homogenized Muslim bodies. The two visual formations are two sides of the same coin, imposing the same image upon women only through opposing ideological frameworks.

The dissertation hypothesizes that Pakistani urban women were effectively "othered" due to these gender politics. While I was writing this conclusion, three high-profile murders of urban women by men in their families or close acquaintances were reported within ten days.[673] Noor Mukadam's murder (2021) by her ex-boyfriend was declared on social media and many media channels as the result of urban women's disconnect from Islam.[674] Somehow, violence towards especially urban women and minorities is morally justified by using religion as a shield. At the

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[671] Unlike General Zia's enforced extremist values, after the War on Terror religious nationalism took a reactionary mentality that originated within a popular nationalist discourse.

[672] Khan, *Women's Movement in Pakistan*, 306.

[673] Rafia Zakaria, "Noor of Our Nation," *Dawn,* July 28, 2021, https://www.dawn.com/news/1637330/noor-of-our-nation/ .

[674] Alia Waheed, "Envoy's Daughter 'Beheaded by Boyfriend' in Pakistan after Leaving Him," *The Times,* July 29, 2021, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/envoys-daughter-beheaded-by-boyfriend-in-pakistan-after-leaving-him-xhfnpsl75/ .

same time, sexual exploitation of children by clergy, rampant domestic violence, and other rural violence against women are considered individual acts or schemes to incriminate Muslim men.

Focusing on the visibility of female subjectivities, especially the representations of Pakistani urban women, the literature review in the Introduction identifies the art-historical, academic, and interdisciplinary research that emerged after 2001.

The effects of extensive media propaganda around brown Muslim bodies in a Western context within Western academia and curatorial practices are identified in Chapters One and Two. The proliferation of veil images as principal signifiers of Muslim gendered subjectivity in academic and artistic formations during the early 2000s created a double ethnocentricity. The images of veils consumed art galleries and museums worldwide, and the artwork and scholarship explored the representation and meaning of the veil in contemporary visual practice. The use of the veil as a predefined signifier turned Pakistani women into apolitical social actors without any subject status, creating a "worlding." Iranian Canadian academic and social theorist Haideh Moghissi's observation resonates with the phenomena. She writes:

> Anti-orienatlism and postmodernism may have opened new possibilities for the cultural inquiry, but in their [North American academia] rush to give voice to those constructed as Others [historically], they have entrapped themselves in the headlong pursuit of the 'exotic' and 'native.' If the orientalist created an illusionary, shimmery image of oriental Muslim women, postmodernist confronts them by turning the genre on its head. In the progress of validation of 'Muslim women's experience, the harsh edges of fundamentalism are softened; and the image that fundamentalists transmit of Muslim women as emblematic of cultural revival, integrity and authenticity is validated.[675]

Chapter two identified the proliferation of veiled images within contemporary Pakistani art and the transnational reception of these veiled images. Rey Chow's concept of coercive mimetics conceptually framed this proliferation of veiled images in Pakistan. It further looked at the first-generation response from within Pakistan to the hype mentioned above.[676] Chapters First and

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[675] Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic fundamentalism: The limits of postmodern analysis* (London: Zed Books, 2002), 8.

[676] I would not claim that veiled images are not being conceptualized or reinterpreted by contemporary artists; however, in general, within the main art discourse, these images have somewhat disappeared. To take the example of the latest publication by Salima Hashmi, *The Eye Still Seeks,* one witnesses a conscious effort to eliminate previous artworks containing veiled images. An investigation of this phenomena remains outside the limits of my study but is open for new researchers.

Two are carefully construed to highlight how female bodies in male expressions are constructed as tropes against which male subjectivity is conceptualized.

As this dissertation progressed, the central aim evolved into an effort to break the cycle of reproduction of the rhetorical visual binary of oppressed versus pious veiled Muslim subjectivities within art and academic scholarship. Through Homi Bhabha's concept of flux, the dissertation argued that societies are living and breathing entities that do not exist in binaries. In order to contest this oppressed versus empowered and pious Muslim dichotomy, the research contended that Pakistani urban women are active social actors and not passive agents, as projected by popular transactional or local patriarchal narratives. In order to demonstrate the validity of this argument, the study focused on the works of women artists whose works challenged the Western gaze and addressed populist reactionary politics at home. These artists create urban female protagonists with nuanced and irresolute lives, negating the US propaganda towards Pakistani women as passive recipients of religious oppression and the reactionary religiopolitical narrative that framed them as a homogenized pious entity empowered only through religious subjugation.

Since 9/11, Muslim subjectivities have often been analyzed through a single lens of religiosity. This dissertation avoided replicating the single narrative by using multiple lenses to examine artworks that may or may not contain a veiled image; it did so by treating religion and Islam as only one of the arsenals of cultural vocabulary. Chapter Four focused on the works of artists who were the first to disengage themselves from the veil image while responding to the Islam vs. West gender politics, such as Batool's playing girl and Naiza's marching Hanna Women. The chapter also dwelled on a debate between secular and Islamic feminism.[677] It concludes that even though religion plays an integral part in people's lives in Pakistan, Islamic feminism (as part of the larger Islamist polity) creates an exclusionary tangent that negates and ignores South Asia's historical evolution, its approximately eleven million minority population, and sexualities on the spectrum. Therefore, this research historicizes religion as a political/cultural process rather than a fixed set of beliefs (imagery) across all regions and times. Negating Islamic exceptionalism by referencing various sources, the study repeatedly

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[677] According to Rubina Saigol "secularism has never been defined in Pakistan and there is a little research on the genesis and development of the concept. As a consequence, most conservatives critics define it as the total absence of religion from life that would usher immorality." *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan,* 36.

emphasized that Islam, like all other religions, acquires multiple forms and is differently involved in constructing subjectivities under diverse circumstances.[678] Hence, it stressed the need to localize the artistic imagery through South Asia's varied and multilayered heritage, including colonial influences. By doing so, the study automatically disengaged from the generalized and homogenized narratives and also embraced the presence of almost four million minority ethnic, gendered subjectivities in Pakistan who do not follow Islam as their principal religion.[679]

Chapters Four and Five investigated what strategies the women artists apply to create resistance against racism and religious extremism while demystifying their existence by ingraining their resistance in history. Questions around the politics of urban and private spaces and the public and private women dichotomy were discussed in detail, using three major cities as areas of interest. Chapter Six, which focused on the visibility of queer subjectivity in art, furthered the hypothesis that there is an effort to develop alliances across the spectrum of subalternity and create a broader coalition. It is further evident in the Aurat March Foundation's support for Student March and Khawajsara's equality rights movements.[680]

Further, these artworks with feminist undertones, creating gendered protagonists, are amalgamated with Pakistan's somewhat sporadic feminist movements. The study consolidates art and feminist activism to make multiple visible narratives that acknowledge and appreciate Pakistani women's struggle for a heterogeneous existence.[681] Feminist artistic expressions, feminist advocacy, and activism have always made a happy marriage in recent history. This merger of the two have roots in Western feminist tradition, and Guerilla Girls are an example of artists who pursued the feminist advocacy route. Regionally, it has its profound historical precedent in South Asian Urdu literature.[682] In more recent history, precisely thirty-two years

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[678] Jamal, "Transnational Feminism as Critical Practice," 64.

[679] Total population of Pakistan is 220 million. It has 5% religious minority such as Ahmadiyya, Christian, Hindu, and Parse. 5% of 220 is approx. eleven million lives. See: Ahmar Moonis, "Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan," 19.

[680] Imran Gabol, et al., "Student Solidarity March Held Countrywide to Demand Restoration of Unions, Better Education Facilities," *Dawn,* Nov. 29, 2019, https://www.dawn.com/news/1519531/student-solidarity-march-held-countrywide-to-demand-restoration-of-unions-better-education-facilities/ .

[681] The Parliamentary Women's Caucus and the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Women work closely and tirelessly with women's advocacy groups, and together they have achieved many accomplishments for protecting women's rights. For more details, see Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan*, 57–82.

[682] Feminist writers from South Asia have a longstanding tradition in Urdu literature and poetry. Writers such as Ismat Chughtai, Manto, Qurratulain Hyder, Amrita Pritam enormously contributed on feminist issues, partition, and South Asian culture in general.

ago, on February 12, 1990, courageous women, including artists, activists (Women's Action Forum or WAF) and poets, collaborated with the women of the Pakistan Women Lawyers' Association (PWLA) and took to the streets against the misogynist policies of General Zia. In Chapter Five, the dissertation touched on Lala Rukh as an artist, academic, and feminist advocacy activist and her role in the resistance movement during General Zia's regime. The Chapter also discussed the exhibition *River in an Ocean* (2018), commemorating Lala's work and her role as an artist-activist.

Further, it was argued. The performative occupation of public spaces and hybrid cultural iconography in art was not a return to traditions to claim an identity. Instead, it is a well-thought-out strategy to develop resistance against the monolithic, oppressed-versus-pious identity and to negotiate with the nuances of agency and subalternity, which are part and parcel of their urban identity. Using visual language based on a diverse cultural montage helped female artists and activists reimagine possibilities of looking at their existence with the multiple frameworks of cultural diversity and fashion a visual language to control narratives surrounding their bodies. This intervention helps women artists locate themselves in an ambivalent *Third Space*. According to Bhabha:

> Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.[683]

Each chapter linked the selected artworks to an urban feminist advocacy project. These ventures, such as Aurat March, Girls@Dhaba, and Fearless Projects, also focused on the occupation of urban spaces through exploring regional discourses. This amalgamation of art and activism helped the thesis connect the feminist turn in the art world after 2001 to the vernacular feminist struggle. In the spirit of this merger of art and feminist activism, I introduced a final artwork, a public collage during the Aurat March, that efficiently combines all three allies: artists, activists, and the judiciary.

In Chapter Five, visual production and public reactions to feminist imagery during the Aurat March were selectively discussed. In March 2020, a series of eight public black-and-white readymade collage/murals appeared during the Aurat March in Islamabad, the twin city of

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[683] Bhabha, Location of Culture, 55.

Rawalpindi. Aurat March Rawalpindi/Islamabad organizer Nida Mushtaq explained that painting feminist imagery in public spaces incited unwarranted attention, commotion, and altercations with the religious right. Especially after the march organizers' altercation with the religious right while creating a public mural: *Do akali Larkian*(Two alone girls), the committee decided to switch to readymade collages in the Aurat 2020. These murals are incredibly relevant and productive to the conclusion of this research.

As a concluding example, I will discuss at length one such collage. According to Mushtaq, for the mural/collage series, the team had photoshoots of girls and women from neighbouring universities.[684] The black-and-white image portrays a law student wearing her lawyer attire: white *shalwar kameez*, white *dupatta*, and black jacket (Figure 97 and Figure 98). Her long loose hair envelops her face, and her large fierce, focused eyes are filled with *kajal.* She seems to have the fierceness of the Hindu goddess Kali. The girl rests her hands on an image of an archaic game board juxtaposed vertically in front of her, serving as a podium. She seems to be in the midst of an argument and displays intense emotions even under the mask she wears.[685]

As children, we were all familiar with the board game Snakes and Ladders (called *sanp or serdhi* in the Urdu version introduced locally). The game of Snakes and Ladders historically originated in South Asia and was imported and reintroduced to the South Asian market by Milton Bradley in 1943. The game was first familiarised with Victorian England in the late 19th century by G.R. Dampier, an assistant magistrate at Saharanpur, India.[686] Its original form is documented to have been designed by the famous Tibetan scholar-monk Saskya Pandit around 1182–1251, based on a much older Indian Nepali game called *naga pasa* (snake/trap and dice).[687]

Known as *gyan chauper* (a game of wisdom), during 18th- and 19th- century India, these board games were painted delicately on cloth and paper, inlaid in wood, or were embroidered textiles.[688] This game's three main versions and variations were prevalent in South Asia: Jain, Hindu, and Sufi Muslim derived during the Mughal period. Some hybrid multilingual versions

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[684] Nida Mushtaq, Online Interview with the Author (Islamabad-Montreal, 2021).

[685] The mask serves two purposes: mutual protection in the Covid-19 pandemic and obscuring her identity.

[686] Andrew Topsfield, "Snakes and Ladders in India: Some Further Discoveries." *Artibus Asia* 66, no. 1 (2006): 144.

[687]Philippe Bornet and Maya Burger, eds. *Religions in Play: Games, Rituals, and Virtual Worlds,* vol. 2 (Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2012), 94.

[688] Topsfield, "Snakes and Ladders in India," 143.

(Hindu and Urdu) are also preserved. Nevertheless, due to the ephemerality of materials, most of the articles have been lost forever. Each sectarian version worked with a different number of squares painted with floral patterns or figures of gods and men.[689] For example, the Muslim version had a hundred squares, whereas the Hindu version had seventy-two. In the general theme, the snakes represented worldly desires and human follies that deter the soul from its upward journey away from hell and towards ultimate liberation (or j*anat*/heaven or *mukti*). Each snake square marks a distinct human weakness, such as lust, lack of insight, or pride.[690]

The board game image in the collage represents the Jain version from the early eighteenth century, with 84 squares in a 9×9-inch square grid, enclosed by an architectural structure resembling a palace or temple (Figure 99).[691] It has illustrated images of male figures sitting inside architectural features on the top and side margins.

The entire mural is black and white except for the superimposed snakes, stencilled in red in a way that their forms seem to jump out of the image of the board game. On the top of the board game, written in red, is the date of the Aurat March in Urdu numerals (٨:٣: ٢١). On the girl's white shirt is a handwritten phrase in Urdu, "We will snatch our freedom."

This black-and-white mural with splashes of red snakes makes us revisit the themes we have discussed throughout the chapters. The first noticeable similarity consistent with the other artworks discussed in this dissertation is the situatedness of the mural in an urban public setting. The mural is placed on the wall in the vicinity of the makeshift district courts in F 8- Islamabad. The girl's persona has an undeniable aspect of animated performativity, and she seems to be in a confrontational, emotional state.

Further, the choice of the game board as a prop is interesting; instead of using the reproduction of the Muslim variation of this game or the more popular Western Snake and Ladder, the more archaic Jain version is used. The repetition of the theme of going back to antiquity as a conscious choice highlights South Asia's rhizomatic religious and cultural presence. However, it has to be kept in mind that the game's goal in every sectarian version is to reach liberation, subverted here and not used in its normative/religious sense. Used metaphorically, the snakes do not represent metaphysical hurdles but worldly hurdles women

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[689] Ibid., 203.
[690] Ibid., 207.
[691] This version has been documented in Topsfield, "Snakes and Ladders in India," 207.

face in seeking to reach their potential or liberation. It also hints at the arduous journey of female liberation movements in Pakistan, where men sit on decorated thrones on the top, creating an obvious power relation.

The mural deploys features that have been addressed throughout the dissertation as a thought-out strategy by contemporary feminist discourse. The study of this mural also reinforced that what seem to be sporadic urban feminist initiatives create similar visual and strategical themes in their approach to resistance. Hence, the study concludes that, in their initial stages, these feminist initiatives indicate the rise of a cohesive secular feminist movement ingrained in a shared visuality.

Although art matriarchs such as Salima Hashmi and Naasih Attaullah are a visible part of the Aurat March, they do not hold an active role. Unlike the feminist movement of the 1980s and 90s, which had well-known artist Lala Rukh as a resident artist and active participant in feminist advocacy groups, no renowned artist is currently working with the Aurat March. However, some artist-activists are increasingly gaining popularity due to their brilliant feminist activist body of works; they include Bibi Hajra and Shanze Malik (artist and graphic designer who created posters for the Lahore Aurat March 2020, mentioned in Chapter Four), to name two.

This dissertation consolidates the repeated patterns of female representation in the selected works with numerous overlapping factors and concerns. All the artworks represent urban women in public spaces physically, symbolically, or metaphorically. The artists apply diverse, hybrid rhizomatic cultural iconography and pop-cultural tropes not to assert their cultural identity but as a strategy to resist homogeneity. Three consistent themes emerge from this strategy.

1. Animated theatrical public performativity and repetition as a disruptive strategy.
2. Continuity with or revisiting historic gendered connections.
3. South Asian indigenous and ambivalent vernacular pop-cultural iconography and residual colonial visuality.

These applied visual signifiers in the selected artworks effectively serve fundamental purposes:

- Reclaiming urban spaces.
- Using heterogeneity as a metaphor for nuanced urban women's lives in Pakistan.

- Applying regional cultural and traditional signifiers as a strategy to avoid the westernized urban woman rhetoric while at the same time fashioning regional feminist semiotics.
- Addressing regional concerns that speak to an informed audience.

The use of public performance as a disruptive strategy has been a consistent theme and has formed a common link with all selected artistic creations. The raison d'être behind the repeated pattern of occupying public places is to counter the erasure of women from public places, as discussed in Chapter One. Chapters Four, Five, and Six demonstrated how urban women felt the need to show their presence by claiming urban spaces.

Going back to the diverse religious, cultural, and even colonial visuality within urban spaces is another theme seen repeatedly in all the artworks under discussion. This diverse cultural and religious visuality was not simply a ploy to claim cultural identity but a thought-out resistance strategy. Islamists want to project Pakistani women through idealized piety by negating and cancelling the various ways the urban culture has evolved within Pakistan. As a response, these artists do not intend to reinforce or romanticize traditions but manipulate and subvert them to make visible historical struggles, contradictions, inconsistencies, overlapping complexities of gendered lives, and a need to evolve past single narratives.[692]

This strategy also helped the artists to avoid falling into the West-versus-Islam binary trap that is often used to demonize urban women who stand up for their right to exist in a mutually conducive urban society. Hence using hybrid culturality that had its roots in South Asia, they are performing a more organic and familiar feminist visual language, avoiding the Western model of feminist resistance. The regionally diverse visual language also creates an inclusive semiotic and reaches out to the various minority cultures in Pakistan.

Lastly, by changing their interlocutor from transitional to regional, they created artworks that are embedded in regional politics and concerns but are globally informed. Using complex visual signifiers, they moved past the simplified visual tropes with which Western audiences are

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[692] This is based on the concept articulated by Dabashi that the only way to break the cycle of self-coloniality is to change our interlocutor from a Western audience to regional concerns, while being globally informed. This would produce knowledge that doesn't simplify and infantilize its language in hopes of being endorsed and validated by the ill-informed white audience. Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism*, 271–281.

familiar, avoiding the trap of coercive mimeticism. This fact separates them from the first-generation artistic responses to 9/11 that directly addressed an international audience.

By joining visual themes of art and activism, this study reinforced its hypothesis that post-2001 urban women, in general, felt the need to assert their presence in public through regionality. It further strengthened the argument that the feminist trajectories after 2001 within art discourse were not an anomaly or entirely disjointed phenomena; instead, it indicated an emergence of a larger consciousness against phallogocentric gender politics hidden under the guise of religious nationalism. Nonetheless, looking at the chronology, it can be stated with certainty that the artists were the first to discern this phenomenon and felt the need to respond.

The artworks by Naiza Khan and Farida Batool discussed in Chapter Four directly respond to the War on Terror. These artists almost presciently sensed the effects of the War on Terror on gendered urban subjectivities regionally. They were the first to create the female protagonist occupying urban spaces, utilizing regional/urban pop-cultural visuality to make political statements. Their predictionary works can only be fully comprehended now, two decades later. The push-and-pull politics between urban gendered subjectivities to reclaim their cities and the religious nationalists escalated in the second decade of the twenty-first century, making the consequences of War-on-Terror gender politics visible. These initial artworks discussed in Chapter Four are also among the earliest works after 2001 that decolonized women's figures from confined spaces and gallery settings into open urban settings. This shift influenced the semiotics of future art performances, as discussed in Chapter Five; but the occupation of urban spaces also became a visible trajectory within feminist activist projects such as Girls at Dhabas and Aurat March, discussed in Chapters Four and Five. Insofar as these feminist projects creating hypervisibility of urban women in public continue, they will have an immensely positive impact on the lives of urban women. The acceptance of the gendered presence in urban public spaces, irrespective of class, will perhaps benefit working-class women the most. Working-class women, owing to financial constraints, must navigate public transportation for work every day, facing harassment in a society that demonstrates a general disdain for women in public spaces.

Further, the significance of this research lies in relatability and relevance to transnational as well as regional sensibilities within the art world. This research was curated to be regionally relevant in all its cultural and political complexities but remain internationally informed, like the artwork it focuses on. The selected artists and their artworks do not represent the entire ever-

growing and diverse art discourse in Pakistan. The selected expressions only belong to selected artists and a specific trajectory that this dissertation focuses on. Hence these artworks cannot be understood entirely or comprehended unless seen against the political, cultural, and religious milieu. The initiatives combined with feminist interventions further highlight the significance of the feminist visual niche these artists created.

In the dissertation claims to have documented a cohesive, visually performative feminist movement in Pakistan in its initial stages. Though most initiatives started as independent projects, they converged into other initiatives through networking. For example, in her interview, Nida Mushtaq (co-organizer of Aurat March Rawalpindi/Islamabad) narrated how she admired Shilo Shiv Suleman's fearless project (Mumbai, India) and sent her an invite to initiate such a project in Pakistan with the help of local art college students. That resulted in many collaborative public art projects, one of which is discussed in detail in Chapter Six, *Hum sab khuda ki takhleek hain*: a twenty-foot-high public mural of trans activist Bubbly Malik. Likewise, Sadia Khatri, the founder of Girls@Dhaba, is also a co-organizer of the Aurat March (Karachi).

In 2018 thousands of women from all over Pakistan mobilized over the death of Asma Jahangir, the iconic feminist activist and human rights advocate. Respecting her last wish, for the first time in Pakistan's history, women accompanied the janaza (funeral procession) and namaz-e jinaza (funeral prayer) alongside men in public. As most interpretations of Islam in South Asia forbid women to accompany the janaza and participate in namaz-e-janaza, which is held in public, the procession received some serious threats from religious groups that deemed this practice un-Islamic. Hence, thousands of men and women performed namaz-e-janaza surrounded by the military, risking their lives to memorialize their beloved leader, and I had the privilege of being among them.

More affirmative feminist alliances such as WAF, in collaboration with female legislators, are working to counter legal loopholes against women and transwomen. The following bills can measure their successes: Honor Killing Bill in March 2015; the sexual harassment bill in 2010; the Domestic Violence Bill in 2013; and the Acid Control and Attack bills in 2010 and 2011, respectively. Regarding social media as a virtual public space, and due to the recent acceleration of social media crimes against women, in 2012, the young feminist lawyer Nighat Dad set up the Digital Rights Foundation. She educates Pakistani Internet users,

particularly women, to protect themselves from online harassment. Her initiative later turned into the Harassment Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (2016).

This dissertation focused on the visual and performative aspects of feminist initiatives, seen in their entirety, especially the informs of a consolidated resistance. As these gendered rebellious acts are often projected as individual anomalies, they are rarely discussed in their entirety on transnational as well as regional platforms; this study claims its much warranted academic peripheral-gendered space within art historical authorship transnationally as well as regionally.

Transnationally, the dissertation highlights the double ethnocentricity towards gendered Muslim subjectivities within Euro-American visual discourse. It touches on the occurrences of social, political, and cultural erasure of ethnic complexities in exchange for exposure and assimilation within the larger world art market. On the other hand, this dissertation proposes an alternative model to imagine Muslim gendered ethnicities, arguing that achieving an ethical exchange of knowledge between ethnic peripheral gendered subjectivities and center is only possible with a deeper understanding and acceptance of their diversity within art academia curatorial practices. The process of inclusion and diversity I propose should be delicate, keeping in view that without creating associations with periphery gendered subjectivities, even well-meaning gendered diversity often creates "others." The #MeToo movement is a brilliant example of creating associations through nuanced gendered experiences within a Euro-American context. Regionally, the newly emerging visually engaged non-Western feminist activism in Pakistan, such as public murals, graffiti, and placards, specially created during the Aurat March, should be systemically digitally archived and analyzed into consolidated themes, recognizing a potential for promising new research

For further inquiries in a transnational context, a comprehensive study based on the colonial visual representations of Muslim women in South Asia is highly warranted. Historically this niche within the more extensive study of orientalism has long been neglected. There have been many types of research on the colonial representations of Middle Eastern Muslim and South Asian Hindu gendered subjectivities. However, the study of the gendered Muslim South Asian aspect has been neglected. Highlighting the imperial agenda, colonial expressions depicting South Asian women based on their religious specifications could offer an exciting opportunity for scholarship.

Regionally, in the context of reactionary War on Terror religious-nationalist gender politics, this dissertation contributes to an art historical scholarship that identifies and consolidates through extensive research and analysis the re-emergence of an urban visual feminist discourse in Pakistan at its initial stages. It also foregrounds Pakistan's current Islamist movement as a political strategy to use the US imperialist presence in the region as an excuse to gain power. The very ability of these artists and activists to draw back from history and challenge social and political issues domestically against the ever-growing violent intolerance and discrimination towards urban gendered subjectivities has all the making of a consolidated secular feminist movement.

The challenging aspect of this study was to reassess dominant patriarchal nationalist narratives and bring forth alternative interpretations from an empathic postcolonial/non-Western feminist lens. The research warrants academic peripheral-gendered space within art historical authorship transnationally and regionally, much like the artist group that is the focus of this study fighting to represent a nuanced gendered space by challenging and destabilizing monolithic representations. This dissertation aims explicitly to negate dichotomies to give credence to cultural, historical, and even individual complexities to periphery art discourse and propose productive and ethical ways of knowledge sharing. The selected artworks by women artists effectively fashion a genealogy of cultural continuity in Pakistan, highlighting its inherent postcolonial condition without romanticizing the past; in doing so, they formulate a familiar regional feminist language for posterity. This dissertation aspired to unpack these images that entail thousands of years of ancestral wisdom, migratory anxieties, intergenerational struggles, defiant ideologies, and colonial residues and concludes that it is time the world sees Pakistan through the eyes of its alleged "sinful women."

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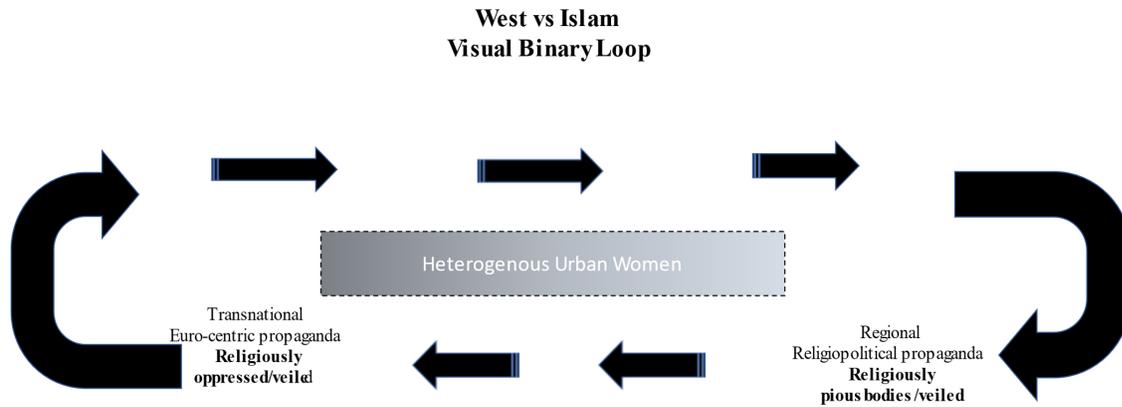
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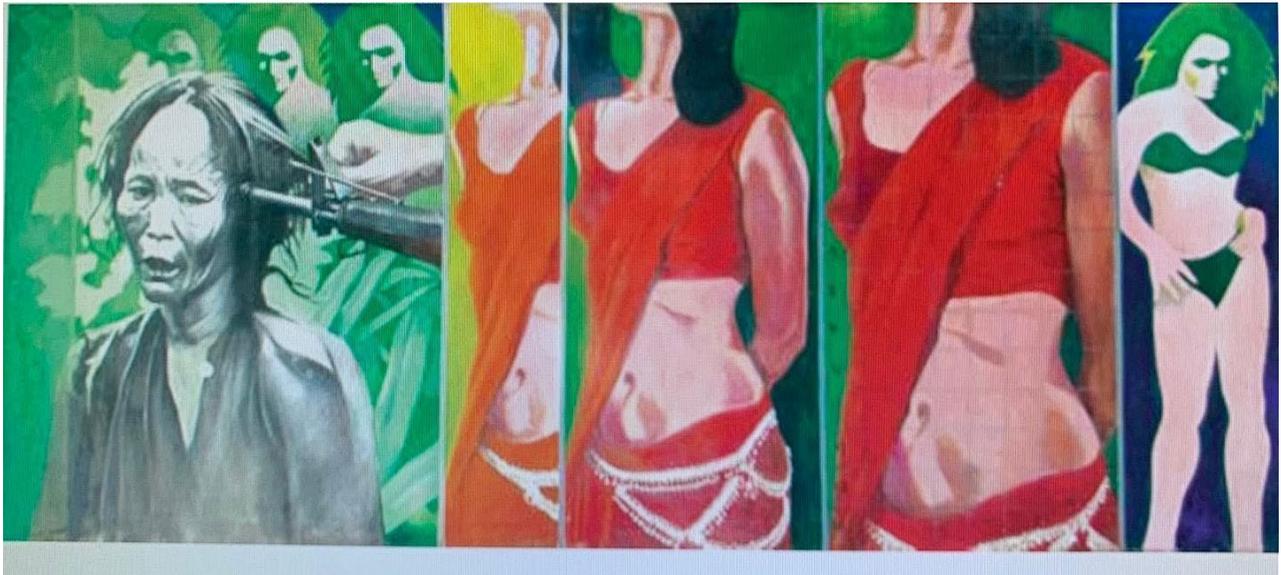
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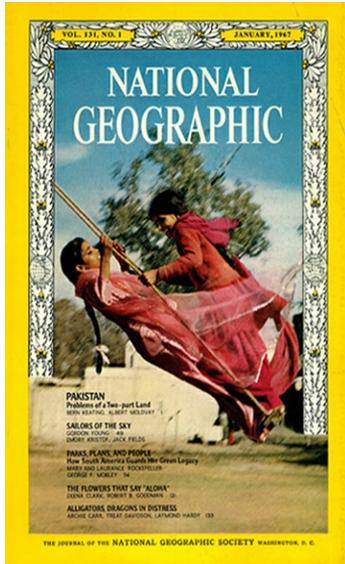
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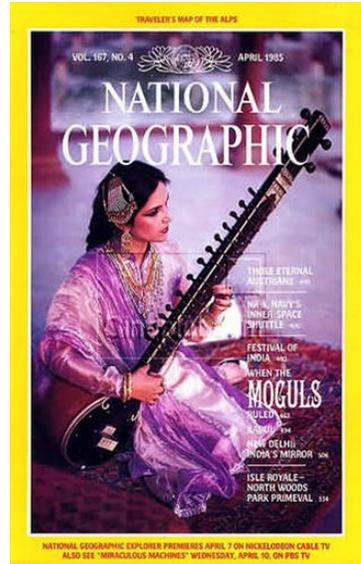
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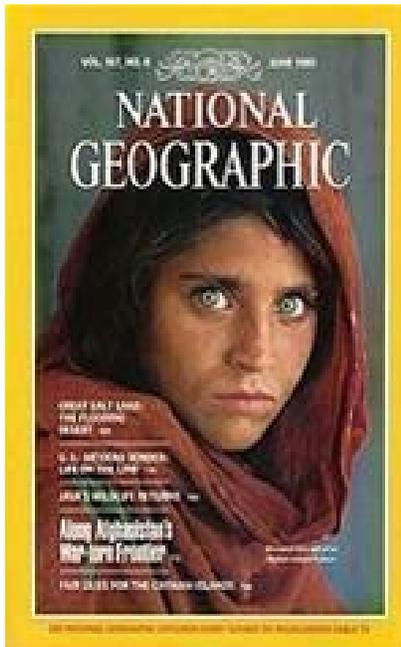
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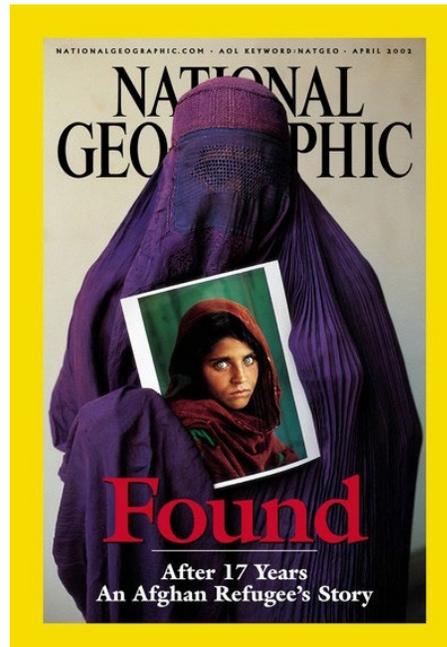
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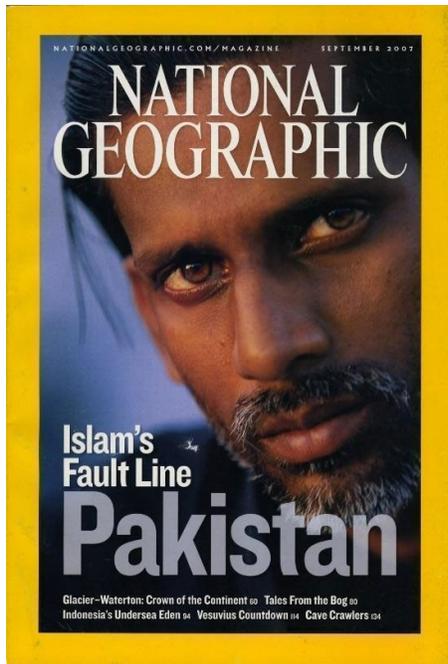
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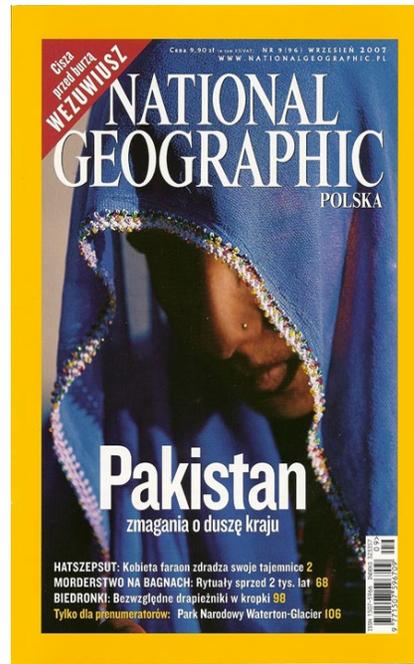
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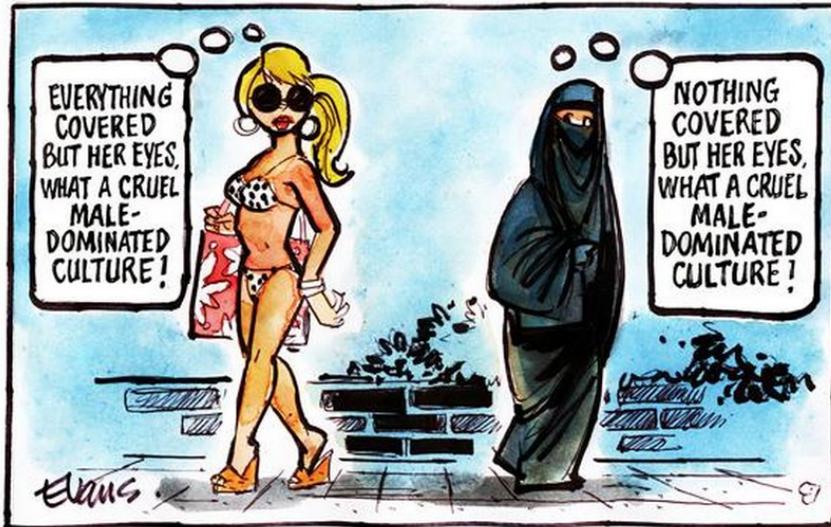
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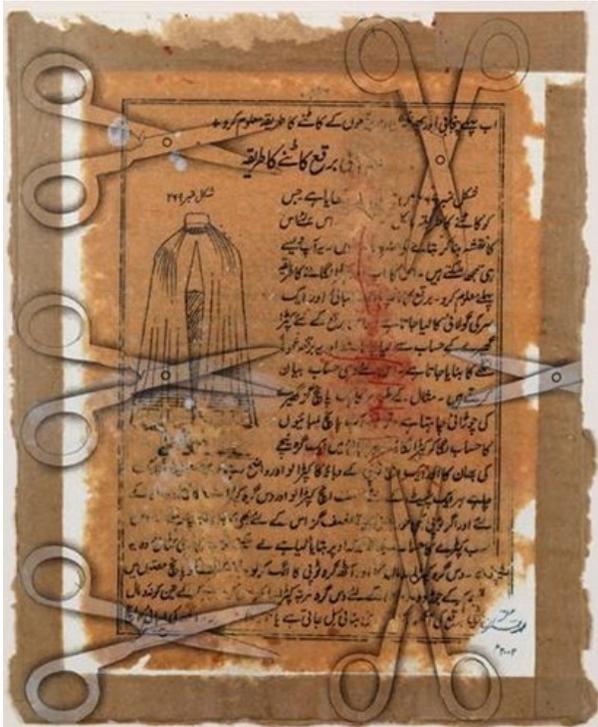
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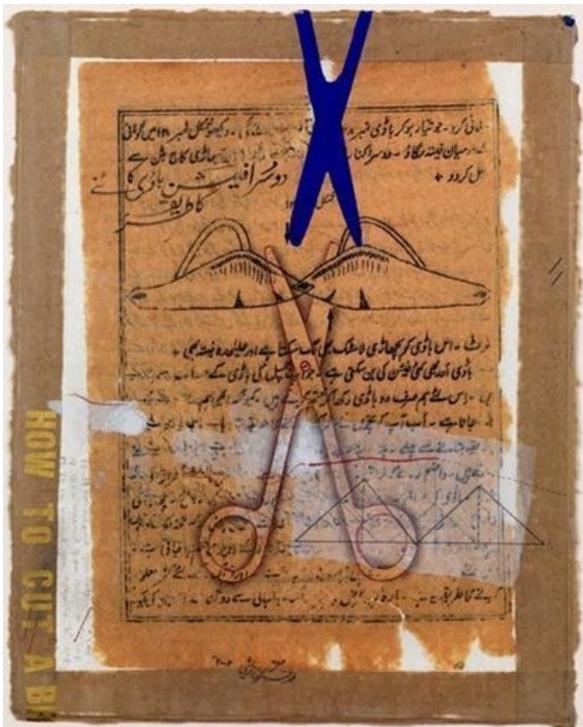
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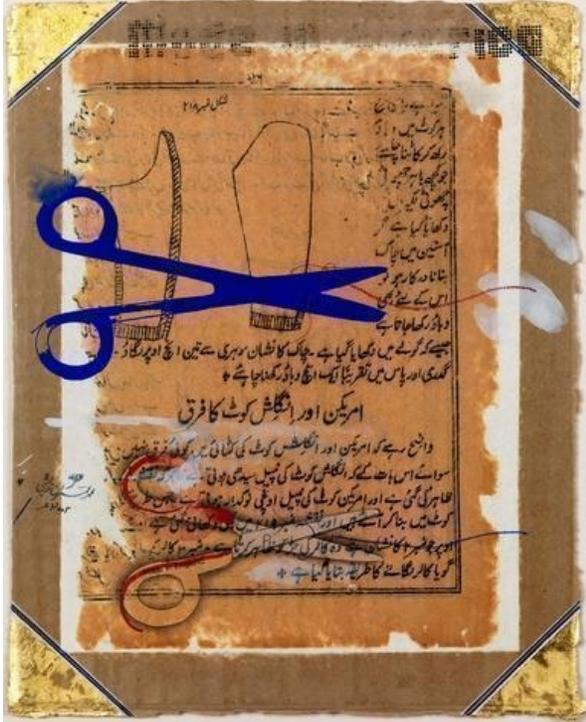
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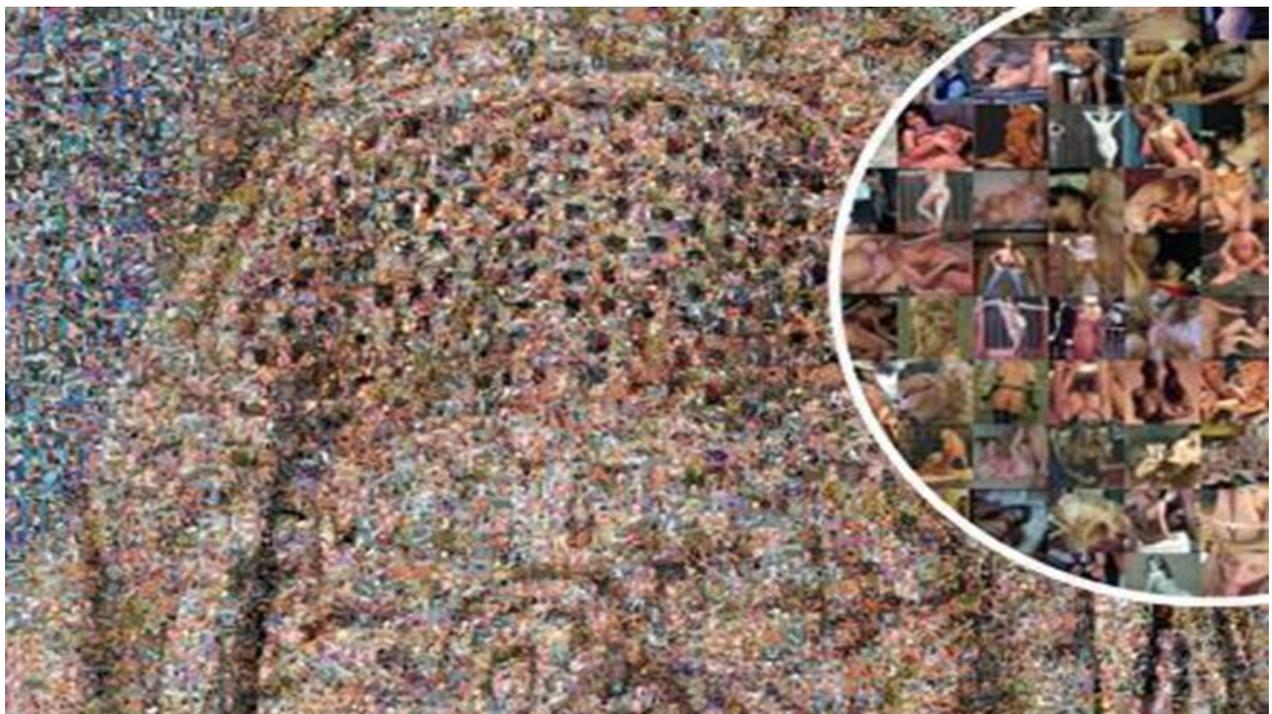
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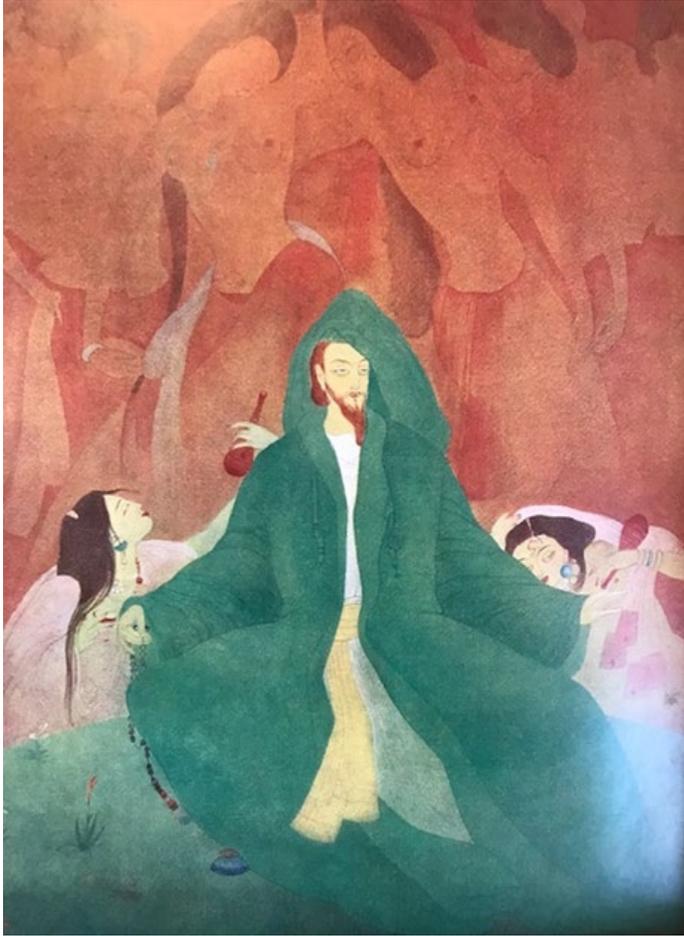
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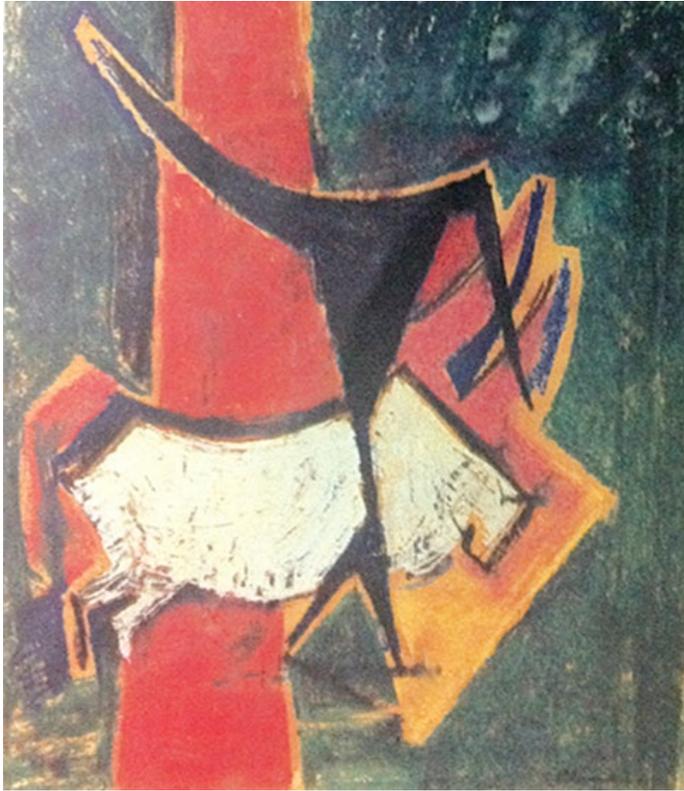
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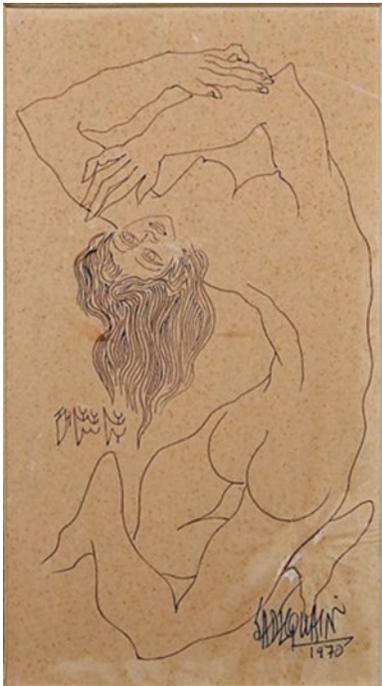
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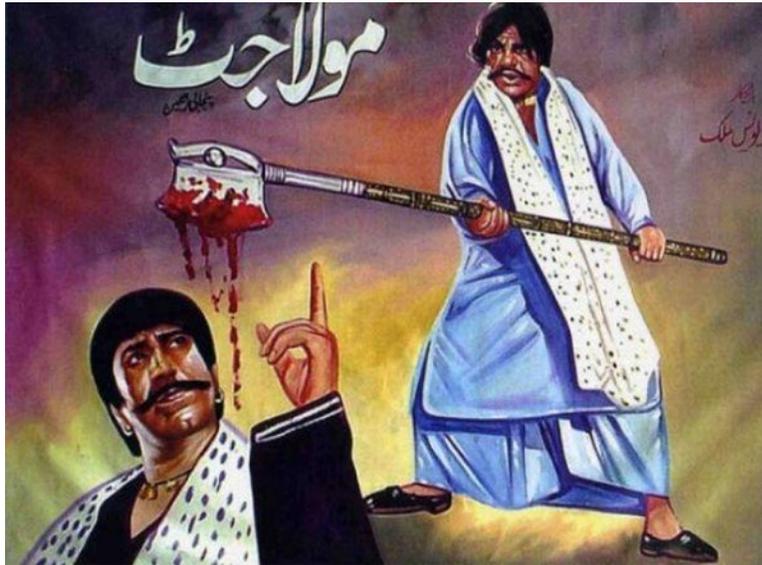
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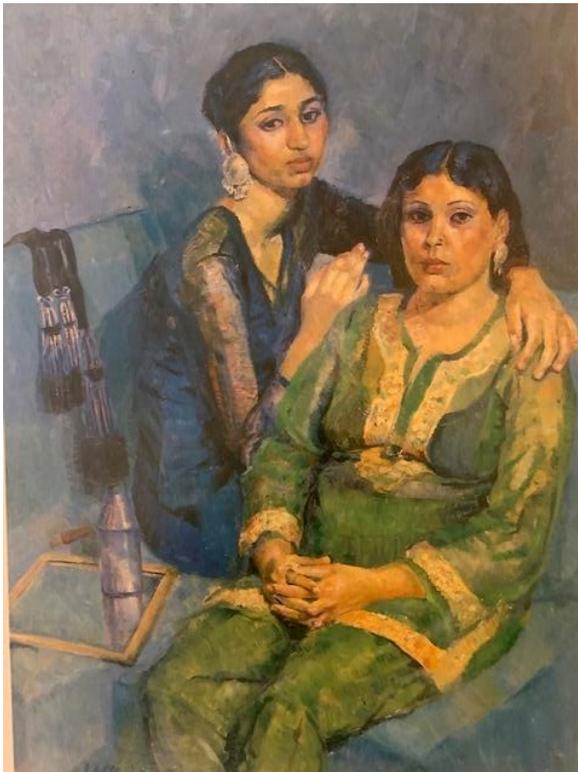
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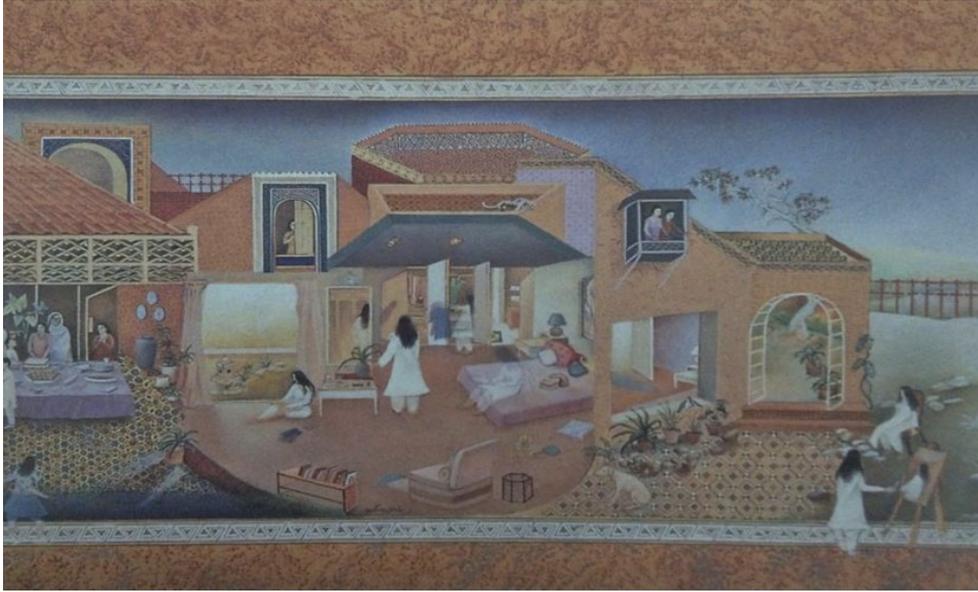
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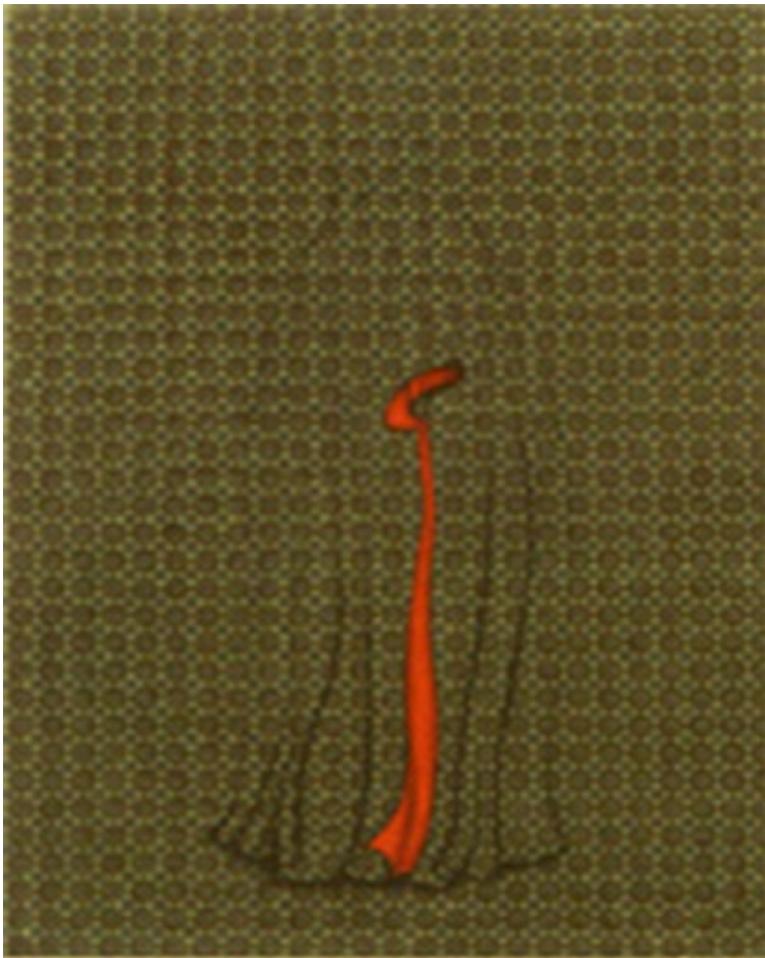
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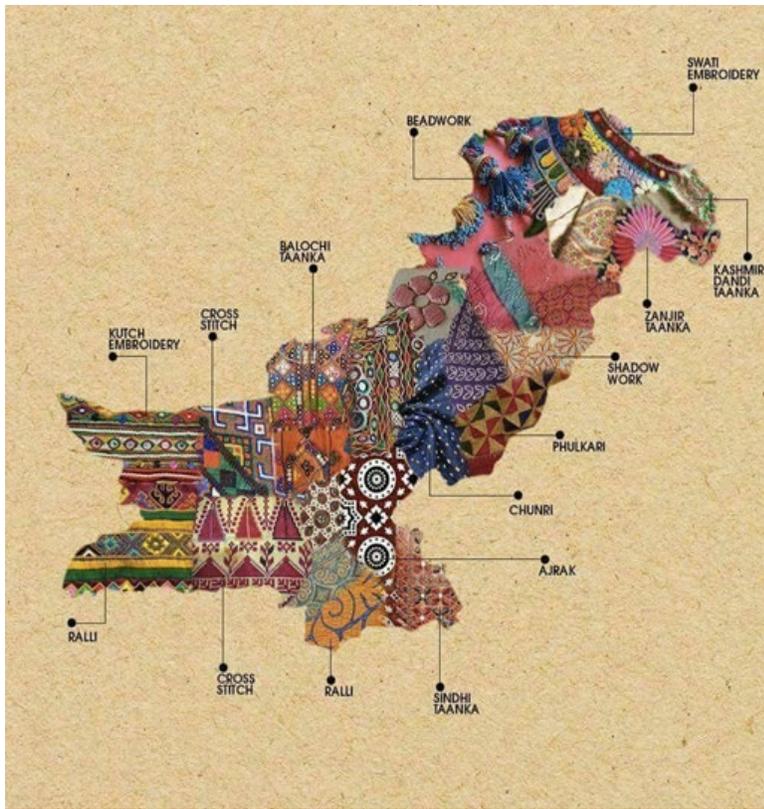
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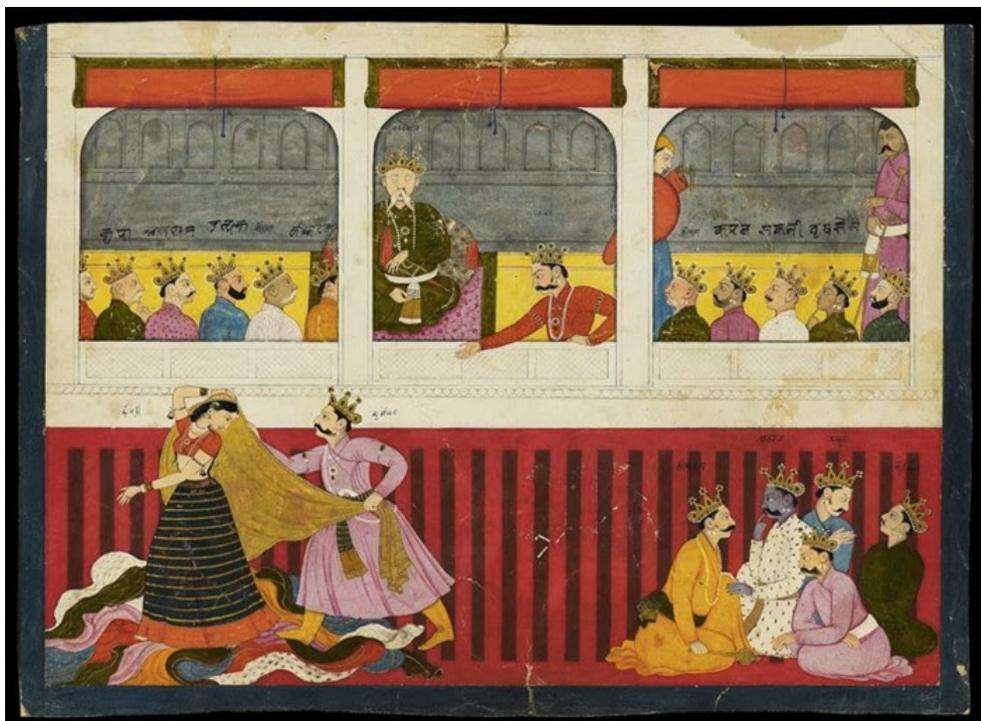
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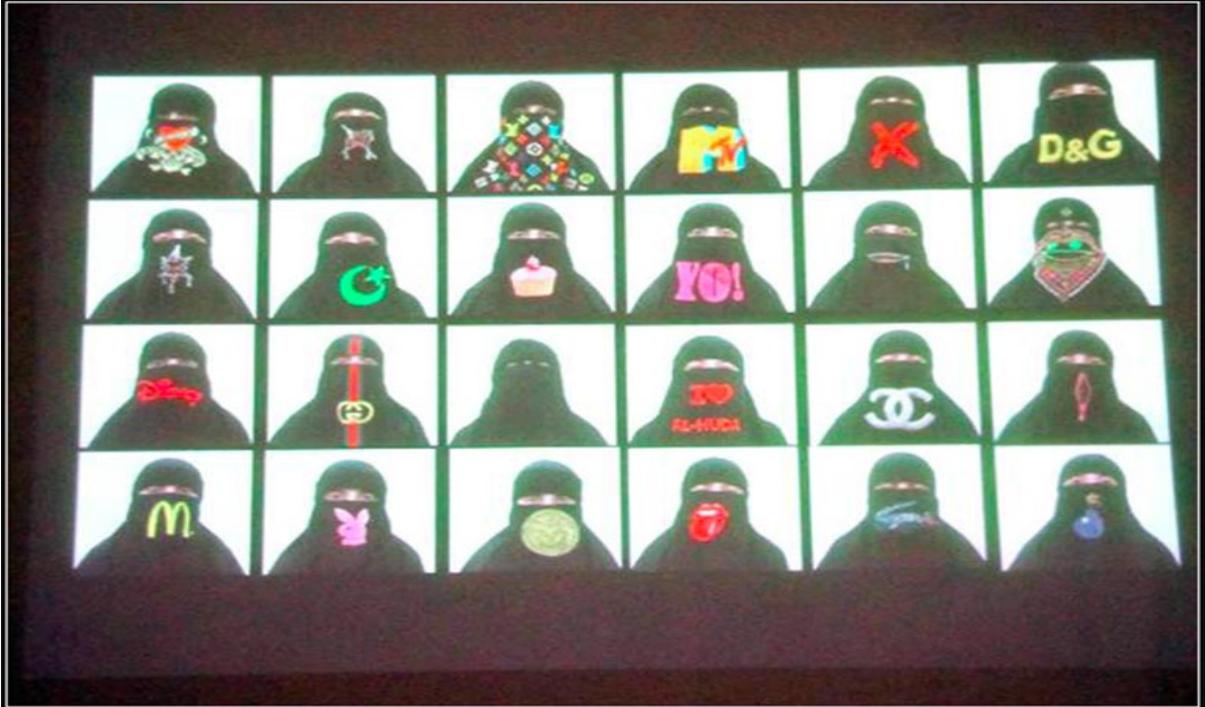
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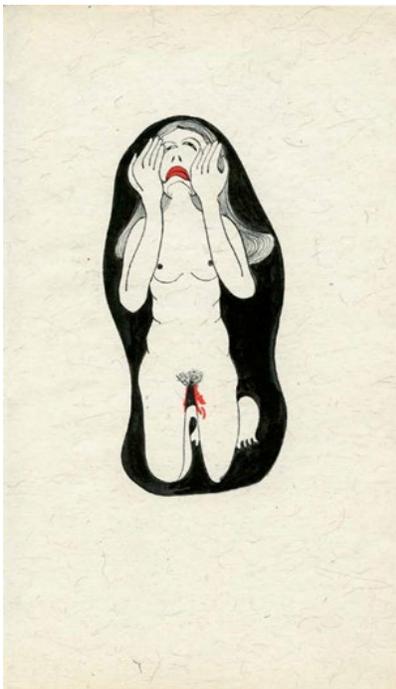
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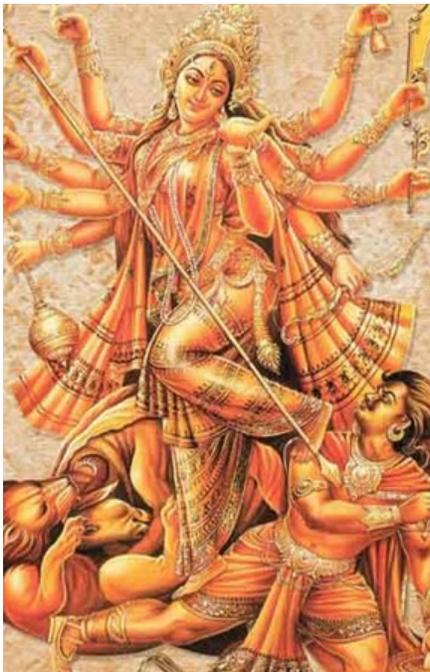
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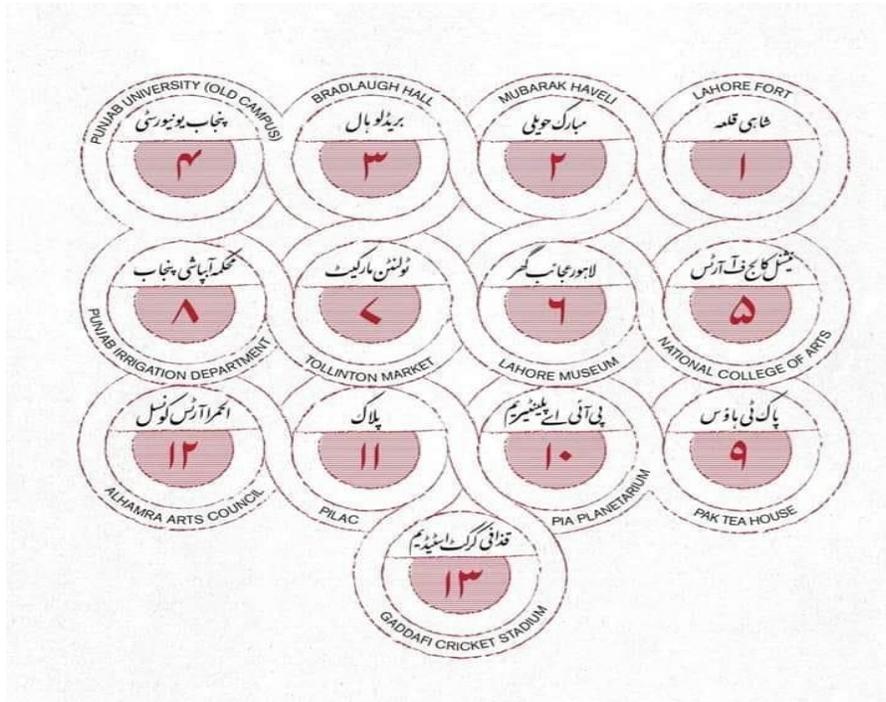
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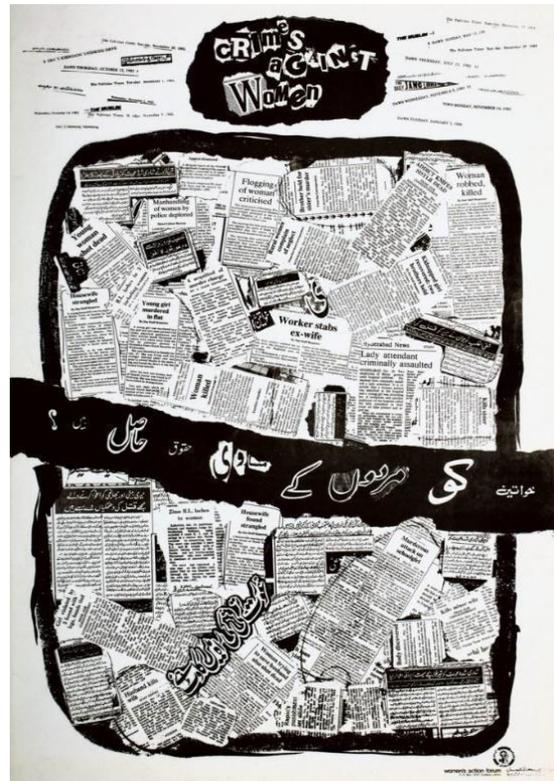
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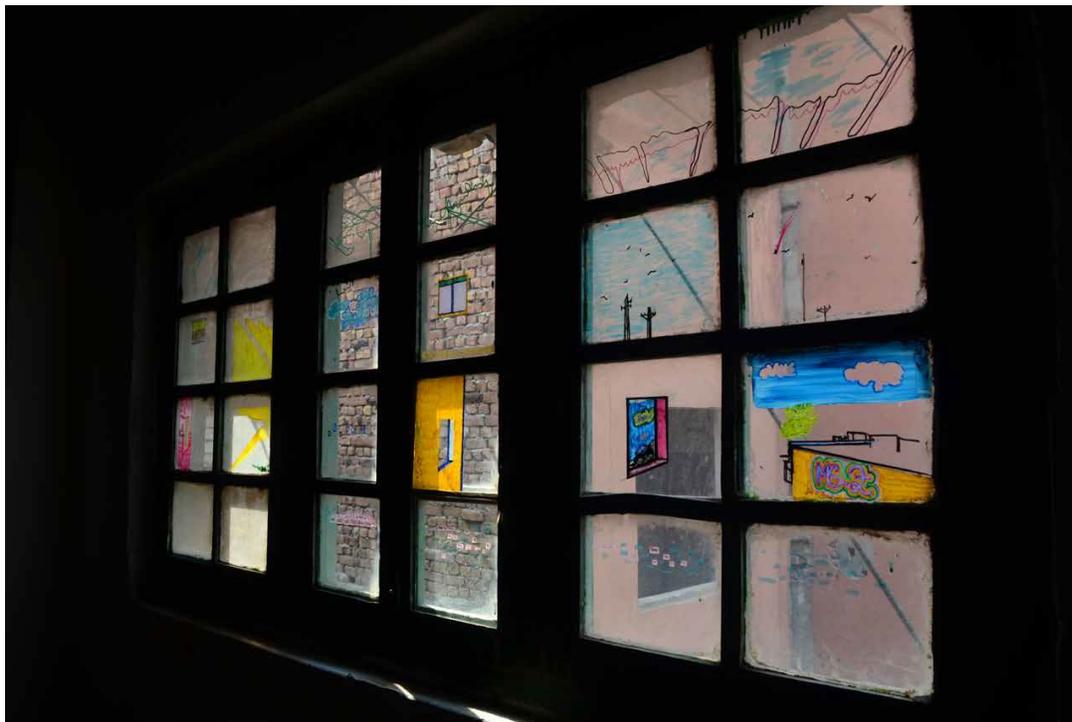

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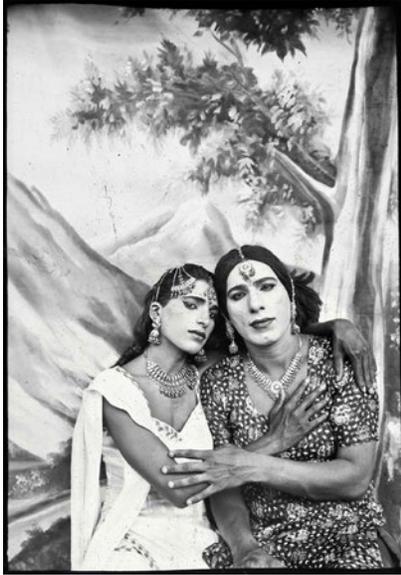
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Figure 73. Natasha Jozi, *The Working Cytology of Performance* (4 hours), long durational performance. Source: Courtesy of the curator.

Figure 74. Noor us Sabah Saeed, *I Can Draw Here, but I Cannot Sit Here,* 2017, drawing and film installation. Dimensions variable. Source: Courtesy of the curator.

Figure 75. Noor us Sabah Saeed, *I Can Draw Here but I Cannot Sit Here,* 2017, a scene from the short film. Installation, dimensions variable. Source: Courtesy of the curator.

Figure 76. Anushka Rustomji and Zara Asgher, executed by Hammas Wali, ایک نرالا شہر , شہر کے اندر نہر , نہر کے بیچ میں آگ (2018) 3 minutes 51 seconds (video). Source: Courtesy of the curator.

Figure 77. Anushka Rustomji and Zara Asgher, executed by Hammas Wali, ایک نرالا شہر , شہر کے اندر نہر , نہر کے بیچ میں آگ (2018) photograph. Source: Courtesy of the curator.
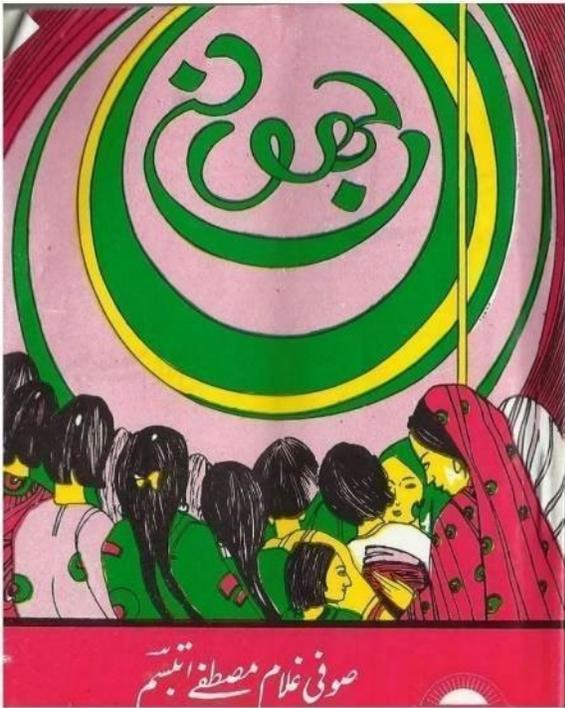

Figure 78. Sufi Tabassum, Book cover *Johoolnay* (c. 1946). Source: https://www.slideshare.net/nabeelsahab/jhoolnay-sufi-ghulam-mustafa-tabasum/ . (Accessed March 14, 2018).
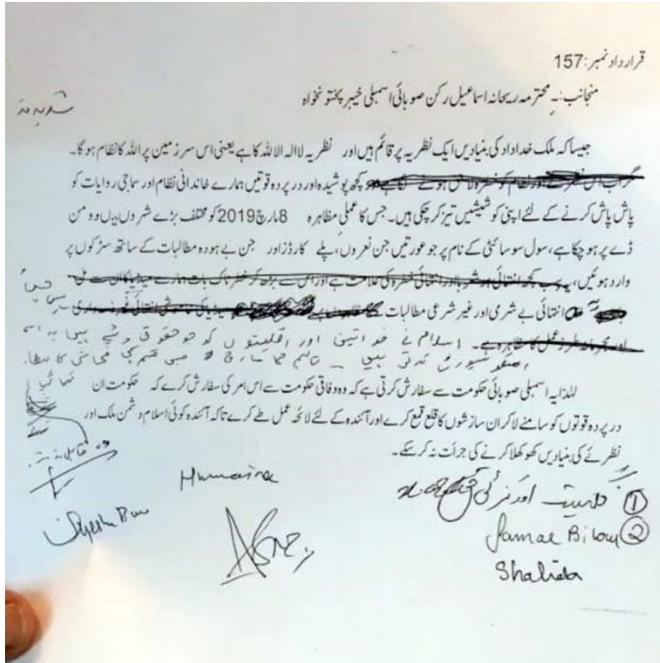
Figure 79. Copy of the resolution against Aurat March, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. Source: https://www.dawn.com/news/1470834/ . (Accessed October 18, 2021).

Figure 80. Vandalized Aurat March Posters. Lahore, 2020. Source: https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/624737-how-dare-they/ . (Accessed October 18, 2021).

Figure 81. Shanze Malik., The main poster for Aurat March 2020. Source: http://www.shehzil.com/free-downloads/ .(Accessed October 18, 2021).

Chapter Six

Figure 82 Maria Khan, *Curse the Fig Tree,* 2017, charcoal and pastels on canvas. 91.4×152.4 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 83. Maria Khan, *Ruby Woo,* 2017, charcoal and pastels on canvas. 106.6×152.4 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 84. Maria Khan. *Women of the Night,* 2017, charcoal and pastels on canvas. 152.4×182.8 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 85. Maria Khan. *Grape Wine,* 2017, charcoal and pastels on canvas. 121.9×152.4 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 86. Maria Khan. *Will you Remember,* 2017, charcoal and pastels on canvas, 91.4×137.1 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 87. Amra Khan, *Untitled,* 2017, hair, cloth (soft sculptures). Size variable. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 88. Amra Khan, *Zanana Mosque,* 2018, found objects. 20×20 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 89. Amra Khan, *Hik phul Motiya da,* 2018, oil on board. 60.96×60.96 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 90. Amra Khan, *Alice,* 2013, oil on board, 36x41 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.
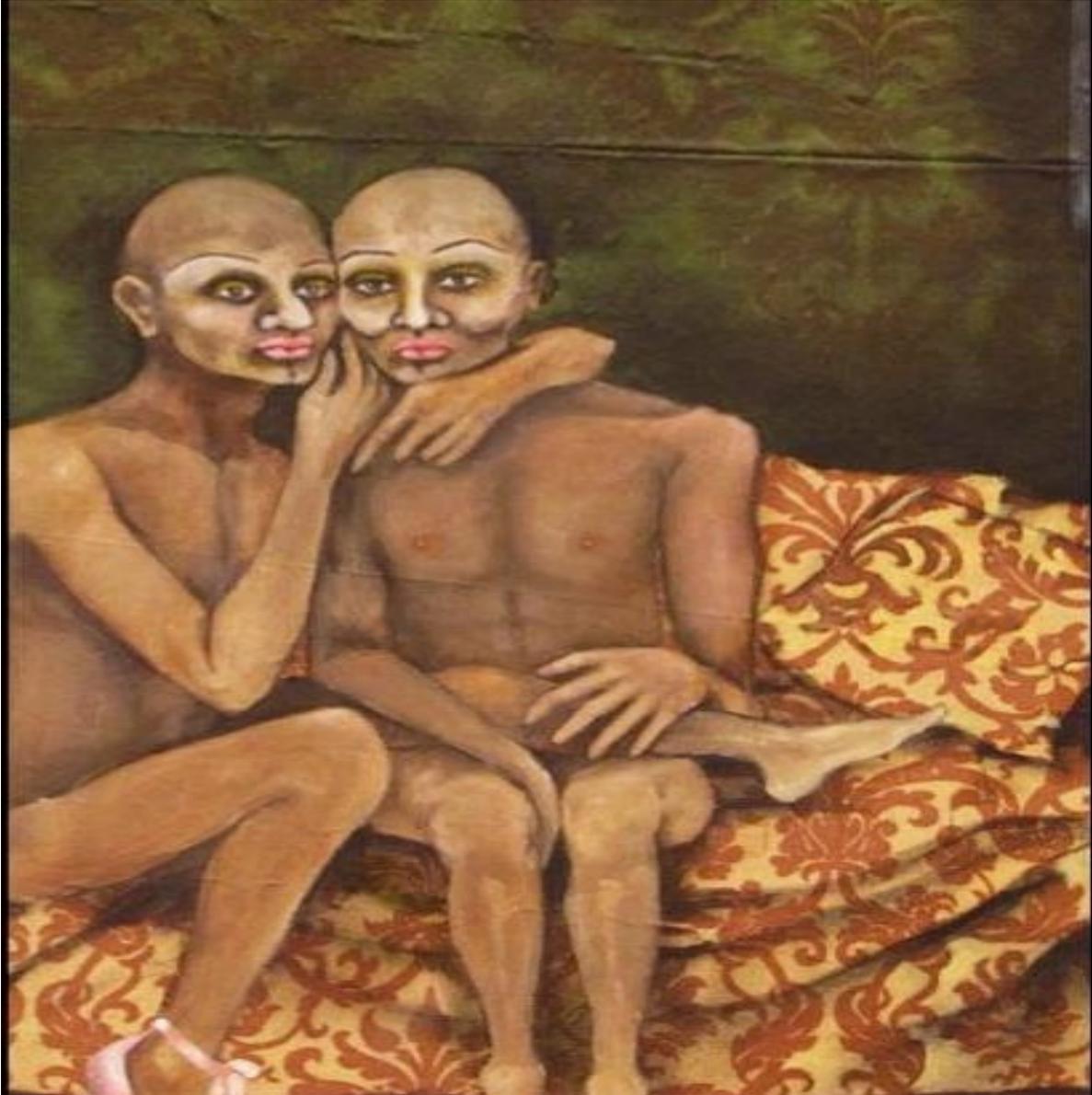
Figure 91. Amra Khan, *Finished with my Wife,* 2013, oil on board, 38×46 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 92. Amra Khan, *Behind the Wall of Sleep,* 2013, oil on board. Approx. 38×46 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.
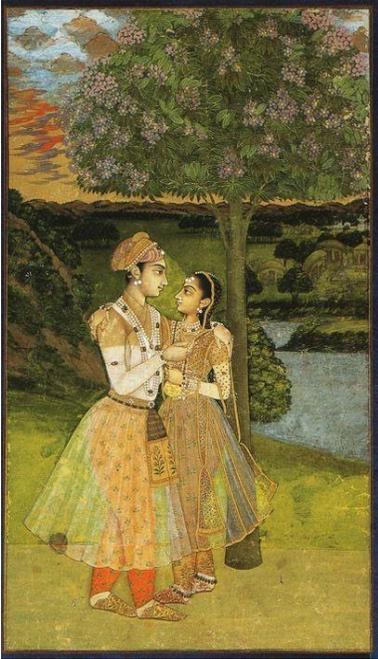
Figure 93. Mughal Miniature, *Prince Offering Wine to his Mistress,* c.1740–45. Source: http://www-personal.umich.edu/~pomorski/mm7.jpg/ . (Accessed May 21, 2022).

Figure 94. Kasim-i-Envar, *The Kiss* (detail), c. 1455–57. Source: Joseph Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2014), 327.

Figure 95. Fearless Project, *Hum Hain Takhleeq-e-Khuda,* 2014, paint on the wall. Source: https://fearlesscollective.org/project/rawalpindi-pakistan/ . (Accessed May 20, 2021).

Figure 96. Fearless Project, *Hum Hain Takhleeq-e-Khuda,* 2014, mural under creation. Source : https://fearlesscollective.org/project/rawalpindi-pakistan/ . (Accessed May 20, 2021).

Conclusion

Figure 97. Poster, Aurat March 2020, black and white paper collage on the wall. Source: Nida Javeed (organizer of Aurat March, Rawalpindi).

Figure 98. Poster, Aurat March 2020, black and white paper collage on the wall. Source: Nida Javeed (organizer of Aurat March, Rawalpindi).
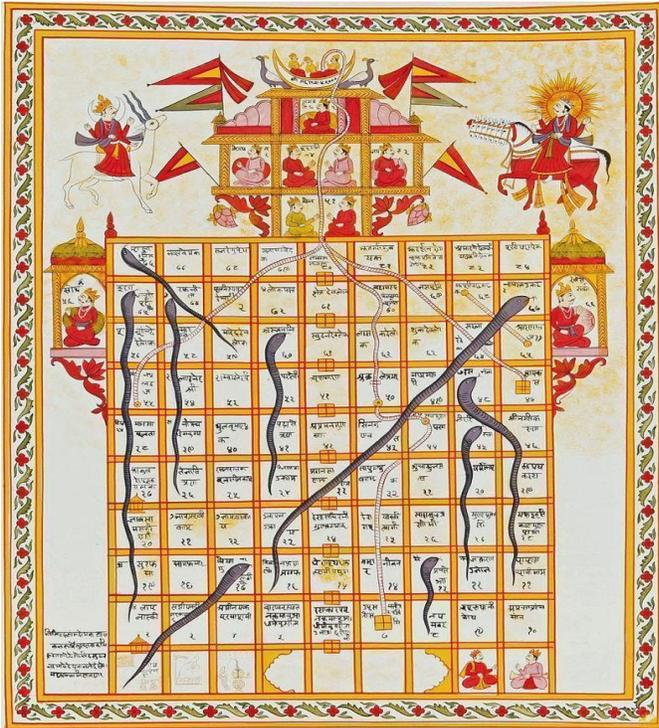
Figure 99. Gyan Chaupar board, 84-square (Jain), late 9th century. Gujarat or Southern Rajasthan. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O59776/gyanbazi-game-unknown/ . (Accessed March 14, 2021).

Appendix 1

Artists and Artworks Focused On

Chapter 4

Naiza Khan (b.1968) *Henna Hands* (2002)	**Farida Batool (b.1971)** *Nai Reesan Shehr Lahore Diya* (2006)
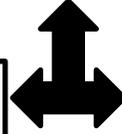
Chapter 5
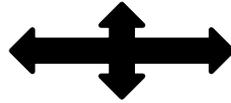
Sarah Mumtaz (b. 1982) *Mend me one stitch at a time* (2018)	**Natasha Jozi** (b. 1985) *The Working Cytology of Performance* (2018)	**Noor us Sabah Saeed** (b.1985) *I Can Draw Here, but I Cannot Sit Here* (2018)

Anushka Rustomji and Zara Asgher

ایک نرالا شہر , شہر کے اندر نہر , نہر کے بیچ میں آگ (2018)

Chapter 6

Maria Khan (b.1986) *Curse the Fig Tree, Ruby Woo, Women of the Night, Grape Wine, Will you Remember (*2017)	**Amra Khan (b.1985)** *Finished with my Wife, Alice, Behind the Wall of Sleep (*2013)
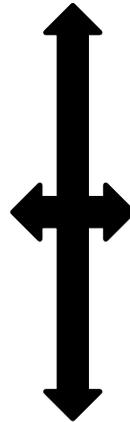
Fearless Collective Project

Hum Hain Takhleeq-e-Khuda (2014)