

**An Aesthetics of Resistance:
Rasheed Araeen, Bani Abidi, and Hamra Abbas**

BY

KAREN GREENWALT
MA, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011
BA, Lawrence University, 2004

THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art History
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2020

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:

Catherine Becker, Chair and Advisor
Elise Archias, Art History
Rama Mantena, History
Esra Akcan, Cornell University
Nora Taylor, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Karin Zitzewitz, Michigan State University

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank Catherine Becker for her unwavering support throughout my graduate career. This dissertation is indebted to her advice, encouragement, and mentorship. I also owe a great deal to Esra Akcan and Karin Zitzewitz. Dr. Akcan's teaching and scholarship on translation, architecture, and global art have been particularly influential and I am grateful for her support of this project. Dr. Zitzewitz has been a critical sounding board for this project and has provided guidance in thinking about the landscape of contemporary art in Pakistan. Thank you also to the other members of my committee: Elise Archias, Rama Mantena, and Nora Taylor. They each brought their skills and knowledge to this dissertation, and I am so grateful to have had their advice throughout the project's tenure.

I owe many thanks to the institutions that have supported this project along the way, in particular the American Institute of Pakistan Studies, from whom I received a junior fellowship during a critical stage of my research. I have also received support from the University of Illinois at Chicago in innumerable ways, including funding and support from the Department of Art History, the Graduate College Dean's Scholar Fellowship and Chancellor's Award, and writing retreats through the Institute for the Humanities and the Institution for Research on Race and Public Policy.

Finally, I would like to extend thanks to my friends and family, who have provided encouragement, escape, and love throughout this process.

KLG

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
SUMMARY	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
Global Politics, Art History, and Islam	9
What is the meaning of Pakistan? La ilaha ilallah—There is no God but God	14
Resisting the Canon	19
CHAPTER ONE: RASHEED ARAEEN	53
A Phoenix from the Ashes	60
Alternative Spaces	74
Rediscovering Minimalism: The 1980s	81
The Golden Verses	88
Conclusion	92
CHAPTER TWO: BANI ABIDI	109
National Identities and the Making of Histories	116
Performing Power	129
Visualizing Migration	140
Conclusion	147
CHAPTER THREE: HAMRA ABBAS	170
Art History's Narratives	178
Narratives of Contemporary Political Discourse	196
Conclusion	204
CONCLUSION	223
CITED LITERATURE	233
VITA	244

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Number	Page
<u>Introduction</u>	
0.1.....The Arabian Street Artists, “Homeland is Racist,” 2015	45
0.2.....Actors walk past “Homeland is Racist,” 2015	45
0.3.....The Arabian Street Artists, “The situation is not to be trusted” and “This show does not represent the views of the artists,” 2015	45
0.4.....Rasheed Araeen, <i>The Golden Verses</i> , 1990	46
0.5.....Rasheed Araeen, <i>Paki Bastard</i> , 1977	46
0.6.....Mona Hatoum, <i>Measures of Distance</i> , 1988 (still)	47
0.7.....Zarina Hashmi, <i>Home</i> , from <i>Home Is a Foreign Place</i> , 1999.....	47
0.8.....Bani Abidi, <i>The Boy Who Got Tired of Posing</i> , 2006	48
0.9.....The Atlas Group/Walid Raad, <i>Let’s Be Honest, the Weather Helped (Finland, Germany, Greece, Egypt, Belgium)</i> , 1998	48
0.10.....Emily Jacir, <i>Where We Come From (Abier)</i> , 2003	49
0.11.....Hiwa K, <i>This Lemon Tastes of Apple</i> , 2011 (still)	49
0.12.....Hamra Abbas, <i>Read</i> , 2007	50
0.13.....Shadi Ghadirian, <i>Untitled</i> from <i>The Qajar Series</i> , 1998	50
0.14.....Lalla Essaydi, <i>Les Femmes du Maroc: La Grand Odalisque</i> , 2008	51
0.15.....Shahzia Sikander, <i>The Scroll</i> , 1989–90	51
0.16.....Nusra Latif Qureshi, <i>Reasonable Acts of Compliance I</i> , 2005	52
0.17.....Aisha Khalid, <i>Gul-e-lalah</i> , 2004	52

LIST OF FIGURES (continued)

Chapter One

1.1.....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>My First Sculpture</i> , 1959/1975	96
1.2.....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>Burning Bicycle Tyres</i> , 1959/1975	96
1.3.....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>Sculpture No. 2</i> , 1965	97
1.4.....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>First Structure</i> , 1966–67	97
1.5.....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>Punj Neelay (Five Blues)</i> , 1970	98
1.6.....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>Zero to Infinity</i> , 1968/2007.....	98
1.7.....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>Chakras</i> , 1969–70	99
1.8.....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>Chakras V (Disks in Jheel Park, Karachi)</i> , 1974	99
1.9.....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>For Oluwale</i> , 1971–73	100
1.10....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>For Oluwale</i> , 1971–73 (detail)	100
1.11....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>Fire!</i> , 1975	101
1.12....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>Burning Ties</i> , 1976/79	101
1.13....	Promotional poster for <i>Paki Bastard</i> , 1977	102
1.14....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>Paki Bastard</i> , 1977	102
1.15....	Vito Acconci, <i>Claim Excerpts</i> , 1971 (still)	103
1.16....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>How Could One Paint a Self-Portrait!</i> , 1978	103
1.17....	Carrie Mae Weems, <i>Mirror, Mirror</i> , from the <i>Ain't Jokin'</i> series, 1987	104
1.18....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>Ethnic Drawings</i> , 1982	105
1.19....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>Green Painting</i> , 1985–86	106
1.20....	Rasheed Araeen, <i>Bismullah</i> , 1988	106
1.21....	The Holy Qur'an, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali	107

LIST OF FIGURES (continued)

1.22....Rasheed Araeen, <i>The Golden Verses</i> , 1990	107
1.23....Rasheed Araeen, <i>Guftugu I (A discussion between Al Barundi and Ibn Sina about Aristotle)</i> , 2014	108
1.24....Rasheed Araeen, <i>Shamiyaana—Food for Thought: Thought for Change</i> , 2016–17	108

Chapter Two

2.1.....Bani Abidi, <i>Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner</i> , 2004 (still)	150
2.2.....Bani Abidi, <i>Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner</i> , 2004 (still)	150
2.3.....Bani Abidi, <i>Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner</i> , 2004 (still)	150
2.4.....Bani Abidi, <i>Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner</i> , 2004 (still)	151
2.5.....Bani Abidi, <i>Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner</i> , 2004 (still)	151
2.6.....Bani Abidi, <i>This Video is a Re-enactment</i> , 2006 (still)	151
2.7.....Bani Abidi, <i>The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim</i> , 2006	152
2.8.....Bani Abidi, <i>The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim</i> , 2006	152
2.9.....Bani Abidi, <i>The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim</i> , 2006	152
2.10....Bani Abidi, <i>The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim</i> , 2006	152
2.11....Bani Abidi, <i>The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim</i> , 2006	153
2.12....Bani Abidi, <i>The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim</i> , 2006	153
2.13....Bani Abidi, <i>The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim</i> , 2006	153
2.14....Bani Abidi, <i>The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim</i> , 2006	153
2.15....Bani Abidi, <i>Jerry Fernandez, 7:45pm, 21 August, 2008, Ramadan, Karachi, 2009</i>	154
2.16....Bani Abidi, <i>Chandra Acharya, 7:50pm, 30th August, 2008, Ramadan, Karachi, 2009</i>	154

LIST OF FIGURES (continued)

2.17....Bani Abidi, <i>Pari Wania</i> , 7:44pm, 22 August, 2008, <i>Ramadan, Karachi</i> , 2009	154
2.18....Bani Abidi, <i>Ken De Souza</i> , 7:42pm, 25 August, 2008, <i>Ramadan, Karachi</i> , 2009	155
2.19....Bani Abidi, <i>Ashish Sharma</i> , 7:44pm, 23 August, 2008, <i>Ramadan, Karachi</i> , 2009	155
2.20....Bani Abidi, <i>Jacky Mirza</i> , 7:45pm, 26 August, 2008, <i>Ramadan, Karachi</i> , 2009	155
2.21....Bani Abidi, <i>Reserved</i> , 2006 (still)	156
2.22....Bani Abidi, <i>Reserved</i> , 2006 (still)	156
2.23....Bani Abidi, <i>Reserved</i> , 2006 (still)	156
2.24....Bani Abidi, <i>Reserved</i> , 2006 (still)	157
2.25....Bani Abidi, <i>Reserved</i> , 2006 (still)	157
2.26....Bani Abidi, <i>Reserved</i> , 2006 (still)	157
2.27....Bani Abidi, <i>Reserved</i> , 2006 (still)	157
2.28....Bani Abidi, <i>The Address</i> , 2007	158
2.29....Bani Abidi, <i>The Address</i> , 2007	158
2.30....Bani Abidi, <i>The Address</i> , 2007	158
2.31....Bani Abidi, <i>The Address</i> , 2007	158
2.32....Bani Abidi, <i>The Address</i> , 2007	158
2.33....Bani Abidi, <i>The Address</i> , 2007	158
2.34....Bani Abidi, <i>Security Barriers, Type A</i> , 2008	159
2.35....Bani Abidi, <i>Security Barriers, Type B</i> , 2008	159
2.36....Bani Abidi, <i>Security Barriers, Type C</i> , 2008	159

LIST OF FIGURES (continued)

2.37....Bani Abidi, <i>Security Barriers, Type D</i> , 2008	159
2.38....Bani Abidi, <i>Security Barriers, Type E</i> , 2008	159
2.39....Bani Abidi, <i>Security Barriers, Type F</i> , 2008	159
2.40....Bani Abidi, <i>Security Barriers, Type G</i> , 2008	160
2.41....Bani Abidi, <i>Security Barriers, Type H</i> , 2008	160
2.42....Bani Abidi, <i>Security Barriers, Type I</i> , 2008	160
2.43....Bani Abidi, <i>Security Barriers, Type J</i> , 2008	160
2.44....Bani Abidi, <i>Security Barriers, Type K</i> , 2008	160
2.45....Bani Abidi, <i>Security Barriers, Type L</i> , 2008	160
2.46....Bani Abidi, <i>Intercommunication Devices</i> , 2008	161
2.47....Bani Abidi, <i>The Distance From Here</i> , 2010 (still)	162
2.48....Bani Abidi, <i>The Distance From Here</i> , 2010 (still)	162
2.49....Bani Abidi, <i>The Distance From Here</i> , 2010 (still)	163
2.50....Bani Abidi, <i>The Distance From Here</i> , 2010 (still)	163
2.51....Bani Abidi, <i>The Distance From Here</i> , 2010 (still)	164
2.52....Bani Abidi, <i>Untitled</i> , 2010	164
2.53....Bani Abidi, <i>Untitled</i> , 2010 (Installation view at Baltic+, 2011)	165
2.54....Bani Abidi, <i>Exercise in Redirecting Lines</i> , 2010	165
2.55....Bani Abidi, <i>Exercise in Redirecting Lines</i> , 2010 (Installation view at Baltic+, 2011)	166
2.56....Bani Abidi, <i>Two of Two</i> , 2010	166
2.57....Bani Abidi, <i>Two of Two</i> , 2010	167
2.58 Bani Abidi, <i>Two of Two</i> , 2010	167

LIST OF FIGURES (continued)

2.59....Bani Abidi, <i>A Table Wide Country</i> , 2012	168
2.60....Bani Abidi, <i>A Table Wide Country</i> , 2012	168
2.61....Bani Abidi, <i>A Table Wide Country</i> , 2012	169
 <u>Chapter Three</u>	
3.1.....Hamra Abbas, <i>God Grows on Trees</i> , 2008 (installation view)	208
3.2.....Hamra Abbas, <i>God Grows on Trees</i> , 2008 (detail)	208
3.3.....Hamra Abbas, <i>God Grows on Trees</i> , 2008 (detail)	209
3.4.....Hamra Abbas, <i>All Rights Reserved</i> , 2004	210
3.5.....Hamra Abbas, <i>All Rights Reserved</i> , 2004 (detail)	210
3.6..... <i>The delivery of presents for Prince Dara-Shikoh's Wedding</i> from the <i>Padshahnama</i>	211
3.7.....Catalogue cover for <i>King of the World: a Mughal Manuscript</i> from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle	211
3.8.....Hamra Abbas, <i>Battle Scenes</i> , 2006	212
3.9..... <i>Victory of the Imperial Mughal Army over Sultan Adam</i> from the <i>Akbarnama</i>	213
3.10....Hamra Abbas, <i>Paradise Bath</i> , 2009	214
3.11....Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, <i>La Grande Odalisque</i> , 1814	215
3.12....Jean-Léon Gérôme, <i>Moorish Bath</i> , 1870	215
3.13....Jean-Léon Gérôme, <i>The Snake Charmer</i> , 1870	216
3.14....Students of Jamia Hafsa madrassa protesting	216
3.15....Hamra Abbas, <i>The Woman in Black</i> , 2008	217
3.16....Hamra Abbas, <i>Adventures of the Woman in Black</i> , 2008	217
3.17....Hamra Abbas, <i>Read</i> , 2007	218

LIST OF FIGURES (continued)

3.18....Hamra Abbas, <i>In this is a sign for those who reflect</i> , 2009	219
3.19....Hamra Abbas, <i>In this is a sign for those who reflect</i> , 2009	219
3.20....Hamra Abbas, <i>Cityscapes</i> , 2010	220
3.21....Hamra Abbas, <i>Cityscapes</i> , 2010	220
3.22....Hamra Abbas, <i>Please Do Not Step 1</i> , 2004	220
3.23....Hamra Abbas, <i>Please Do Not Step 1</i> , 2004	221
3.24....Hamra Abbas, <i>Please Do Not Step 1</i> , 2004	221
3.25....Hamra Abbas, <i>Please Do Not Step 2</i> , 2008	222

Conclusion

4.1.....Identity Evropa poster, 2016	232
--	-----

SUMMARY

An Aesthetics of Resistance: Rasheed Araeen, Bani Abidi, and Hamra Abbas explores how constructions of national and Islamic identities, as well as other monolithic categories such as modernism, erase—or disallow—difference. Through the work of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas, I argue that we might begin to complicate canonical views of art history. While current art historical categories separate the world into fixed identities that assume self-contained histories, the artists examined in this project disrupt conventions of categorization, collection, and display in order to counteract grand narratives that assume a teleological history.

Through a variety of media and approaches, the artists in *An Aesthetics of Resistance* resist, and in some cases refuse, easy consumption. Chapter one explores the work of Rasheed Araeen who—as the historical anchor of this project—assumes a central and critical role in exploring how artists navigate the post-colonial, globalized world. His diverse body of work—which spans from sculptures to photography, public installations to performances—exploits static categories of identity that define the world. Araeen’s work developed at a time when the migrant body and questions of the Islamic became intertwined as part of the public discourse in a way that it previously had not and—as such—portends the generation of artists to emerge after September 11. While the work of Araeen expresses and confronts the experiences and violence of racism, the work of Bani Abidi and Hamra Abbas point to the systemic structures that inform neo-colonial thinking and practice. Their work considers not just the burden of art historical representation but exposes the conditions that have made representation impossible. Abidi’s photographs and films are the subject of chapter two. Her work exists in the lacuna between fact and fiction, and is an

SUMMARY (continued)

incisive and ongoing investigation of nationhood, history, and political power. Abidi confronts the failed promises of globalization by speaking to the realities that surround those excluded from a global citizenship. In a diverse practice that includes miniature painting, photography, and sculpture, Abbas explores and replicates Islamic mythologies, reinterpreting both iconic and everyday images of Islam, and—like Abidi—much of her career has been invested with a process of unmasking myths. Chapter three considers her queries into how identity continues to structure the world, she deconstructs and challenges assumptions about Islam.

In an attempt to destabilize the traditionally Eurocentric field, *An Aesthetics of Resistance* looks to outside models in order to approach a more inclusive history of art. Theories that emerge out of feminist, postcolonial, and postnational scholarship all acknowledge the problem of representation and—emerging from this body of scholarship my dissertation advances discussions of contemporary art by seeking out a vocabulary that is capable of writing an expanded history that engages with the cross-cultural flows of the contemporary, global world.

INTRODUCTION

In a 2015 episode of the television series *Homeland*, Carrie Mathison—the ex-CIA intelligence officer at the center of the show—visits the fictional General Alladia Refugee Camp on the Lebanese/Syrian border. As she walks through a makeshift village teeming with people—some military, some refugees—the camera reveals, among other things, the Arabic graffiti that sporadically covers the walls of the camp. A collective of three artists, under the moniker of the Arabian Street Artists, was hired by *Homeland* to give the fictional camp an air of authenticity. Unbeknownst to the makers of *Homeland*, however, the artists used this opportunity to critique the hit television show. In truth, the Arabic graffiti conveyed such messages as: “Homeland is racist,” “The Situation is not to be trusted,” and “This show does not represent the views of the artists” (figs. 0.1–0.3).¹ Although initially undetected by many, Arabic speaking viewers noticed this act of resistance, and the artists released a statement acknowledging their subversive action after the show aired. As the artists indicated, “We think the show perpetuates dangerous stereotypes by diminishing an entire region into a farce through the gross misrepresentations that feed into a narrative of political propaganda. It is clear they don’t know the region they are attempting to represent. And yet, we suffer the consequences of such shallow and misguided representation.”² To the makers of *Homeland*, the Arabic script was nothing more than decoration. In other words, the graffiti served to reinforce ideas of the inscrutable Oriental, an idea perpetuated since colonialism through paintings, literature, and more. As the artists stated: “In their eyes, Arabic

¹ Marilyn DeLaure and Moritz Fink, eds., *Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 5.

² Claire Phipps, “‘Homeland Is Racist’: Artists Sneak Subversive Graffiti on to TV Show,” *The Guardian*, October 15, 2015, sec. Television & radio, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/oct/15/homeland-is-racist-artists-subversive-graffiti-tv-show>.

script is merely a supplementary visual that completes the horror-fantasy of the Middle East.”³ This act of resistance challenged the show’s message and actively rejected contemporary framings of Muslims as violent, extremist terrorists. Moreover, their act reclaimed one space of popular image and identity formation. In so doing, they reflect the plurality of sites where images construct meaning in everyday life.

The graffiti of the Arabian Street Artists might be understood within the framework of everyday resistance, first theorized by James Scott in 1985.⁴ Everyday resistance, according to Scott, is neither dramatic nor overt like rebellions, riots, or revolutions. Instead, it is quiet, disguised, or seemingly invisible, and is a common form of resistance among subaltern groups. Scott writes “Generally, then, *such resistance is virtually always a stratagem deployed by a weaker party in thwarting the claims of an institutional or class opponent who dominates the public exercise of power.*”⁵ He further writes, “most forms of everyday resistance are, after all, deployed precisely to thwart some appropriation by superior classes and/or the state. If the resistance succeeds at all, it of course confers a material benefit on the resister.”⁶ These acts of everyday resistance are, according to Scott, strategies employed to both endure and challenge exploitative practices.⁷

This dissertation explores the strategies of resistance the artists Rasheed Araeen, Bani Abidi, and Hamra Abbas employ in response to institutions that exert power in myriad circumstances: the state, the custodians of the art historical status quo, white supremacy, and

³ Caroline Framke, “Graffiti Artists Wrote ‘Homeland Is Racist’ in Arabic on the Show’s Set. Nobody Noticed,” Vox, October 15, 2015, <https://www.vox.com/2015/10/15/9547525/homeland-arabic-graffiti-explainer>.

⁴ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁵ James C. Scott, “Everyday Forms of Resistance,” *Copenhagen Papers in East and Southeast Asian Studies* 4 (1989): 52. Emphasis in original.

⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁷ Ibid.

countless other forms of hegemonic power. While Scott writes about resistance among largely powerless groups that emerge in class struggle—actions such as foot-dragging, desertion, smuggling, sabotage, and more—the subaltern as a category refers to different groups depending on the context and is easily extended beyond economic struggles. Emerging from this, I argue that in their actions—resisting traditional modes of consumption, challenging art historical narratives, and disrupting contemporary framings of the Islamic—the artists in this dissertation enact their own form of everyday resistance. Like the Arabian Street Artists, Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas reject the demands placed on them and their work that ultimately serve the interests of the group in power. Moreover, their work similarly exists in a range of locations beyond galleries and museums, challenging the spaces where images construct meaning. *An Aesthetics of Resistance: Rasheed Araeen, Bani Abidi, and Hamra Abbas* explores how the work of these artists resist and challenge modern conceptions of the nation, monolithic ideas of Islamic identity, and art historical categories.

This project emerged out of an early interest in Rasheed Araeen's 1990 billboard project, *The Golden Verses*. Similar to the work done by the Arabian Street Artists on the set of *Homeland*, *The Golden Verses*—a series of billboards scattered throughout the streets of London and beyond—existed in the public and sought to challenge narratives of identity and categorization. Each identical billboard consisted of an Oriental rug with Urdu script across the center. When translated it read: "White people are very good people. They have very white and soft skin. Their hair is golden and their eyes are blue. Their civilization is the best civilization. In their countries they live life with love and affection. And there is no racial discrimination whatsoever. White people are very good people." The work was met with violent results: in London, the National Front vandalized it, writing, "What's It All About, Bongo?" and in Middlesbrough, it was

graffitied and burnt by the PLO (fig. 0.4). Elsewhere, it was attacked with metal instruments, defaced with a swastika, and graffitied in Urdu, saying, “White people are bastards.” Through his use of Urdu, Araeen denied Western viewers the full experience of this artwork and they were, consequently, called on to identify with the marginalized other. In other words, passers-by were made to feel *outside*, to feel *other*.

These billboards—traditionally sites of capitalism—resisted easy consumption. In many ways, the reactions, and the viewers themselves, can be understood as completing the artwork. Many of those who defaced the billboards were unable to understand its content and reacted only to the imagery of otherness, thereby underscoring the satire within the text. To the smaller Urdu-speaking audience of London, however, the very discourse that served to oppress the marginalized other was reified in their own language—the words recalling the devices and rhetoric of colonialism. Because this work was a public installation, Araeen allowed the meaning to be determined by its audience—there is no gallery representative or wall label there to help explain the object. In this way, the audience becomes an integral component of the work itself, enabling *The Golden Verses* to exist as a key site where Araeen’s otherness was both instantiated and explored.

Upon my earliest encounter with the project, I found that *The Golden Verses* spoke to our contemporary socio-political moment in ways that felt prescient, and the work has therefore acted as something of a foundation to this dissertation. *The Golden Verses* was created in response to the publishing of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, and the ensuing fatwā issued by the Ayatollah Khomeini—due to the book’s allegedly disrespectful representation of the prophet Muhammad. The publishing of the book caused a controversy throughout the Muslim world, and the Rushdie Affair—as it would come to be known—marked a moment when an attention to and

focus on questions around Islam became public in a way that it had not before.⁸ Going forward, particularly following 9/11 and the 7/7 Tube Bombings, Islam became a “problem” for the Western world.

Moreover, a return to white nationalist discourse today evokes the rhetoric that Araeen was responding to throughout much of his career. Indeed, racism emerging from nationalism is as potent a force as ever in the wake of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump. As Syrian refugees migrate to Europe in numbers not seen since World War II, fundamental questions about migration and identity arguably have greater weight than in recent memory. Referring to the incoming population of Syrian refugees as a “swarm” in 2015, former British Prime Minister David Cameron’s rhetoric revealed a pervasive anxiety about difference.⁹ Moreover, his statements evoked the words of his predecessor Margaret Thatcher, who spoke of Britain being swamped by other cultures in 1978.¹⁰ And—reflecting a sentiment shared by many US citizens—Donald Trump’s immigration platform as a 2016 presidential candidate was little more than ‘they have to go.’ Trump was simultaneously calling for a ban on Muslims entering the United States, a move precipitated by—among other factors—refugees of the Syrian Civil War seeking asylum.¹¹

Not only does *The Golden Verses* act as something of a fulcrum for this project, we should also view 1989 as a pivotal year for our contemporary socio-political moment. While the year is

⁸ In a recent panel discussion on Rasheed Araeen, Iftikhar Dadi noted that this was a turning point in the relationship between the West and Islam. After the Rushdie Affair, he noted, the “question of Islam” became public in a way it was not prior. Iftikhar Dadi, “Aicon Conversations: Kate Fowle, Nick Aikens and Prajit Dutta discuss the work of Rasheed Araeen,” Aicon Gallery, May 7, 2020.

⁹ “Cameron: ‘Swarm’ of Migrants Crossing Sea,” BBC News, July 30, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-politics-33714282/david-cameron-swarm-of-migrants-crossing-mediterranean>.

¹⁰ Gordon Burns and Margaret Thatcher, “TV Interview for Granada World in Action (‘rather Swamped’)” *Granada TV* (January 27, 1978), <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485>.

¹¹ “Trump on Deportation: ‘They’re Here Illegally... They Have To Go,’ ‘It’s Not Mean Spirited, It Is Business’ | Video | RealClearPolitics,” November 13, 2015, https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2015/11/13/trump_theyre_here_illegally_they_have_to_go_its_not_mean_spirited_it_is_business.html.

Jeremy Diamond, “Donald Trump: Ban All Muslim Travel to U.S. - CNNPolitics,” CNN, December 8, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/12/07/politics/donald-trump-muslim-ban-immigration/index.html>.

often marked because of the fall of the Berlin Wall,¹² critically 1989 is the year *The Satanic Verses* was published. In the void left by the end of Cold War politics, Islam—rather than communism—became the new global enemy. In this way, 1989 should be understood as an important year for not only thinking about the emergence of a global contemporary art, but moreover in laying the groundwork for considering the role Islam would play in global politics for much of the 21st century. As the historical anchor of this project, Rasheed Araeen (b. 1935, Pakistan) therefore assumes a central and critical role in exploring the Islamic within an emergent global contemporary art discourse. His diverse body of work—which spans from photography to painting, public installations to performances—probes how constructions of identity define the world. Araeen’s longstanding aim of participating in the discourse of modernism—in other words, his attempts to redress the Eurocentric hierarchies of modernism—are important for considering an emerging global contemporary art.

While Araeen’s work—and chapter one—considers the burden of art historical representation in the post-colonial world, the artists in the following chapters pick up this narrative and consider the ways globalization re-produces and re-enacts colonial practices. The work of Bani Abidi and Hamra Abbas—discussed over chapters two and three—consider not just the burden of art historical representation but expose the conditions that have made representation impossible. Bani Abidi (b. 1971, Pakistan) works largely in video and photography to investigate and unpack the performative aspects of the nation and the construction of historical narratives. Existing in the space between fact and fiction, she unmask objects and histories that appear benign, but are in

¹² Indeed, in his recent book, David Joselit writes, “the watershed year of 1989 witnessed both the collapse of the Cold War’s Manichean pretension of dividing the world into two distinct geopolitical zones and the consolidation of a new mode of political power [neoliberalism], which had been gaining ground throughout the 1980s.” This moment ushered in a global form of control through debt, a sort of “economic recolonization.” David Joselit, *Heritage and Debt: Art in Globalization* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2020), 1.

fact mechanisms of the hegemonic power. Like Abidi, much of Hamra Abbas's (b. 1976, Kuwait) work is invested in unmasking myths. Her diverse practice—which includes miniature painting, photography, and sculpture—explores and replicates Islamic mythologies, reinterpreting both iconic and everyday images of Islam. In her queries into how identity continues to structure the world, she deconstructs and challenges assumptions about Islam.

Through the work of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas, *An Aesthetics of Resistance* interrogates three intertwined ideas that are developed over the course of three chapters. First, my dissertation explores the many framings of the Islamic, and considers how Islamic identity has been manipulated and controlled by outside forces—including imperialist and xenophobic stereotypes that inform flat understandings of Islam in the West, as well as legacies of colonialism and militant violence that contribute to constructions of Muslim self-identity. Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas do not merely re-present Islamic frameworks, but instead dismantle socially constructed aspects of Islamic identity. The use of Islam informs and infiltrates the everyday in a number of ways—it does not merely inform Pakistani identity, for example, but is also a tool against which whiteness is defined. As such, the work of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas engages with how the Islamic is framed: broadly speaking, as a construction of identity, an art historical classification, a religious category, and a political tool.

Second, the artists in this dissertation explore questions of national identity—from the exclusionary rhetoric of xenophobic nationalism, to the illusory performances that define nations, to the geographic boundaries that inform narratives of non-Western art. By focusing on three artists from Pakistan—a particularly unstable example among modern conceptions of the nation-state—I examine how artists probe and challenge the alienating language of national identity. Moreover, like the art historical category of Islam, the discipline of art history—particularly narratives of

non-Western art—is overdetermined by national and geographically defined frameworks. As contemporary artists that participate in a number of global conversations, Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas move—both physically and intellectually—between Pakistan and other parts of the world. This positions them to destabilize, reconsider, and challenge narratives of national identity, as well as investigate the uneasy role of the migrant in the global world.

Third, and finally, this dissertation considers the ways that art history is itself a product of larger Eurocentric forces, which have resulted in the use of nationalism, Islam, modernism, and other monolithic categories that erase—or disallow—difference. It is through the work of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas that I argue we might begin to challenge the hegemony of Western art historical discourse and complicate canonical views of art history. While current art historical categories—such as Western and Islamic, or those designated by national boundaries—separate the world into fixed identities that assume self-contained histories, the artists examined in this project disrupt conventions of categorization, collection, and display in order to counteract grand narratives that assume a teleological history.

As this dissertation neared its completion, it became clear that this project could have taken multiple forms. I have chosen to focus each chapter on one artist, but these chapters could have overlapped, discussing the three in tandem, or this project could have expanded to include a number of artists from Pakistan and beyond. As artists who work in transitional moments in terms of global framings of the Islamic, focusing on just three artists has allowed for a close examination of their work, while also considering the ways in which their individual practices continue to develop and intersect over time. Looking at a number of artists alongside one another would not allow for an exploration of the ways their work changes over time, the way—in other words—that they continue to experiment and refine their approach throughout their career. As such, their

individual responses allow me to construct an argument about the ways Islam has been framed, and further facilitates an engagement with contemporary art that situates the many framings of Islam at its center. Moreover, I am aware of the contradiction in focusing on three artists from Pakistan, while simultaneously attempting to deconstruct the use of the nation as a framing device in art history. My argument in this dissertation is not dependent on the identity of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas as Pakistani, but uses the history of this nation-state to explore the problematic use of national identity and other geographical markers as a determining factor in art historical narratives, as well as constructions of the Islamic. By simultaneously deploying frames of reference that are Western, non-Western, traditional, contemporary, and Islamic, their work enables me to reconsider art historical categories and definitions that seeks to delimit these artists.

Global Politics, Art History, and Islam

An Aesthetics of Resistance is interested in the work of three artists who interrogate the ways the Islamic has been framed and coopted by myriad forces. Araeen investigates the ways in which the migrant body and Muslim identity became inextricably bound in the late 20th century, while Abidi explores political machinations and nationalist rhetoric informed by constructions of Muslim identity, and Abbas interrogates the art historical and cultural definitions of Muslim identity. Altogether, their work contemplates the social constructions of the Islamic and unpacks its many meanings. By closely examining the work of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas, this dissertation charts new understandings of the Islamic within a contemporary global art discourse.

Indeed, there is no one way to understand Islam or Muslim identity, and any attempt to define it in monolithic terms is often driven by outside forces. In the introduction to his book *Muslim Identities*, Aaron W. Hughes writes:

Today, the various sides in the struggle to interpret the *real* Islam—increasingly one of the theaters of the cultural wars in America and Europe—selectively pick and choose their data and subsequently filter these data through the prism of the Islam they desire to create. Liberal Muslims construct a liberal Islam; persons highly critical of Islam create an Islam at odds with the West; individuals who seek a pluralistic America or Europe construct an Islam that fits effortlessly into their agenda; and those who reject such pluralism find no problem imagining an Islam that both is opposed to and seeks to undermine the values of the West.¹³

The construction of any sort of uniform Islamic identity serves socio-political, cultural, religious, and intellectual ends. In light of this, the work of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas is frequently skeptical of any such attempt to paint a monolithic or authoritative understanding of Islam. Instead they engage with Islam and its multiple histories and meanings.

Monolithic understandings of Islamic culture that are used to justify political interventions by the Western world are by no means a new phenomenon. In 1978, Edward Said published his seminal text *Orientalism* in which he explored how power was constructed through culture, and not just through economic or military strength. Because the “Orient” is inherently ‘other,’ it is a world that must be controlled—for while it is exotic and mysterious, it is simultaneously dangerous and unknown. Through a process of becoming *Orientalized*, the East is marked as other and therefore as the domain of the scholar to be studied and controlled. Drawing on Foucault, Said argues that the primary way that the Orient was handled was through discourse. The long tradition of Orientalist discourse has been an effective process that enabled the Western world to first produce and then manage the Orient. Said insists, “all things in history, and history itself, are made by men.”¹⁴ Without the Orientalist, there would be no Orient to be studied, for it was a manufactured world. Through discourse, the Orient is identified and managed; the Orient becomes absorbed, understood, and ultimately dominated. For power to remain successful, however, Said

¹³ Aaron W. Hughes, *Muslim Identities: An Introduction to Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 2.

¹⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 54.

argues—like Foucault—that it is imperative the means of control remain both hidden and seemingly disinterested. Discourse facilitates power by appearing neutral. Orientalism appears merely as the academic study of another part of the world, uninterested in anything but amassing knowledge about another culture. It is this very disinterested, neutral quality that enables the control of the Orient to remain imperceptible and ultimately successful.

More recently, reductive texts on Islamic life and culture—such as Bernard Lewis’s *What Went Wrong*, Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations*, and the renewed interest in Raphael Patai’s 1973 *The Arab Mind*—have been used to justify wars on foreign lands and the treatment of Muslims.¹⁵ These views of Islamic identity have served as the rationalization for neo-imperial activities in the same ways that Orientalist authors justified colonial expansion in the nineteenth century. As Edward Said wrote of Lewis’s book, “It fills a need felt by many Americans: to have it confirmed for them why ‘Islam’ attacked them so violently and so wantonly on September 11, and why what is ‘wrong’ with Islam deserves unrelieved opprobrium and revulsion.”¹⁶ Whether justifying colonial intervention in the nineteenth century or neo-imperialism in the twenty-first century, the sentiment has changed little. However, Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas are, themselves, deeply knowledgeable about and invested in imaging the violent legacies of colonialism and its ongoing impact in the globalized world. In turn, their work requires viewers to acknowledge the systems that inform our perceptions of the world—it is difficult to merely gloss over the violent

¹⁵ A 2004 article in *The New Yorker* reported that it was the description of Arab vulnerability to sexual perversion in *The Arab Mind* that was used to justify the sexual abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison. See: Seymour M. Hersh, “The Gray Zone,” *The New Yorker*, May 17, 2004, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/05/24/the-gray-zone>.

Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003); Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind*, Revised Edition (New York: Hatherleigh Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Edward Said, “Impossible Histories: Why the Many Islams Cannot Be Simplified,” *Harper’s Magazine*, July 2002, 70.

imperialist legacies while viewing their work. In other words, they make it nearly impossible to discuss their art without simultaneously discussing the histories and conditions that have led to the exclusionary practices in art history and beyond.

Art history is intimately bound to political discourse, as art historian Finbarr Barry Flood argues:

The attribution of the death of Islamic art (and the cultures that it represents metonymically) to the inappropriate or incompetent reception of European ‘influence’ follows a trajectory from the narratives of nineteenth-century colonial historians down to their present-day successors. With the rise of neoconservative discourses emphasizing the failure of Muslims to make the transition to Euro-American modernity, this paradigm has once again gained currency.¹⁷

Flood goes on to say that art history—along with other cultural studies—have been used as a means of explaining the attacks of September 11 as well as justifying the US-led response: “historians of Islamic art have come under increasing pressure to provide a cogent perspective on these struggles [between the Arab world and the West]. In particular, the idea that Islamic art and art history can ‘bridge the cultural divide’ between the Islamic world and ‘the West’ has been mooted with increasing frequency.”¹⁸ He concludes by noting that we are, however, confronted by a paradox: “a sub-field of art history marked by the eschewal of any engagement with the problems of modernity and their political ramifications is increasingly situated within contemporary Euro-American debates about the nature of Islam.”¹⁹ That is to say, Islamic art history as a category rarely deals with the contemporary world and, as such, is too-often ill equipped to engage with the realities of the contemporary socio-political world. The effects of September 11 and ongoing terrorist conflicts have only exacerbated the all-too-often flat understanding of Islamic cultures.

¹⁷ Finbarr Barry Flood, “From the Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art,” in *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions*, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (London: Routledge, 2007), 38.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 44

Moreover, the subfield of Islamic art history comes out of the west and became an area of study during colonialism. The category is today impossibly complicated—covering a variety of artistic practices that span nearly 1400 years and multiple continents and is stuck between both a religious and cultural identification.²⁰ It is a category defined by colonialism and one that continues to be shaped by neo-colonial thinking. At the same time, Islamic Art is a potent signifier used to forge a global Muslim identity through such organizations as the Aga Khan Museum.²¹ In his discussion about the political mobilization of Islamic art, Flood writes, “A common trope in these attempts to press the objects of Islamic art into the service of the state or super-regional ideological projects is an emphasis (manifest or latent) on the ability of medieval artifacts to bolster or construct a ‘true’ notion of Islamic faith and culture.”²² Such varied uses underscore the ways Islamic Art and culture have been coopted by outside powers.

The work of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas explores how Muslim identity has historically been and continues to be framed and defined by outside forces. Discussed in greater detail below, definitions of Islam have been integral to Pakistani national identity since its inception. Moreover, ideas of the Islamic have been critical in global politics and art historical categorization. The artists considered throughout this dissertation investigate the many external forces that seek to control definitions of Muslim identity and in turn, ask such questions as: How is the nation performed? How is identity constructed? And who is allowed to speak for Islam? From their explorations of

²⁰ Ibid., 32.

²¹ For example, the website states, “The aim of the Aga Khan Museum will be to offer unique insights and new perspectives into Islamic civilizations and the cultural threads that weave through history binding us all together.” Moreover, the Aga Khan Foundation has—among other things—long promoted Islamic cultural heritage, which is often described as being at risk. Their website states: “The notion of culture as an asset rather than a luxury is still a contested issue in many parts of the world. As a result, a significant part of the world’s cultural heritage – much of it in the Muslim world – is at risk, as other needs are considered priorities.”

²² Flood, “From the Prophet to Postmodernism?,” 42. See, for example, the Saudi sponsorship of 2004–05 National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC exhibition, *Palace and Mosque*; the intro to the catalogue *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600*; or discussion around the Louvre’s 2002 formation of a department of Islamic art, as discussed by Flood (40–42).

Islamic identity as an exclusionary tool in modernism's narrative, to national histories constructed around Islamic mythologies, and to sensationalized portrayals of madrassas, Araeen Abidi and Abbas interrogate the many ways that the Islamic has been named, defined, and controlled.

What is the meaning of Pakistan? *La ilaha ilallah*—There is no God but God

An Aesthetics of Resistance focuses on artists from Pakistan because it is a country that, itself, considers how we understand the nation and exposes the fault lines of our traditional understandings. As art historian Iftikhar Dadi writes,

Since the publication of Benedict Anderson's influential *Imagined Communities* in 1983, scholarship on nationalism has explored the distinctively imagined character of the idea of a nation. Pakistan offers both an especially vivid example and a pointed counterexample in this regard. It openly betrays the constructed and contingent nature of the "national" even as it disputes many of Anderson's theses, especially his contention that the modern nation is a universal, secularized formation.²³

While Pakistan is exemplary of the socially constructed communities that define nations, at the same time it de-naturalizes many of Anderson's conceptions of the nation. In fact, many of Anderson's apparatuses for imagining are incomplete or entirely absent in Pakistan: a unified, national language; a national novel; a map that demonstrates a historic and circumscribed territory; and a national museum.²⁴ While Anderson's *Imagined Communities* has had a profound impact on scholarship of the nation, nationalists nevertheless argue that the nation is organic and historical. But because Pakistan's national identity is so tenuous, it illustrates the instability of all such

²³ Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 30–31.
Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

performances. Pakistan, in other words, exposes the performativity at the heart of all displays of the nation.²⁵

While there are many expansive and thorough texts that document the emergence of a Pakistani state,²⁶ it is worthwhile briefly sketching out Pakistan's origins and history as an Islamic state in order to highlight the complexity and instability of Pakistani national identity. In 1947, Pakistan was created out of the partition of the Indian subcontinent at the end of British colonial rule. Originally established with the idea that there should be a separate nation for India's Muslims, Pakistan today has a majority ninety-six percent Muslim population.²⁷ From the beginning, Pakistan's identity has been colored by militarism, a complex economy, frequently complicated global interactions, and terrorism. Although the nation-state is today just seventy-three years old, Pakistan's identity is fractured by its ancient history, its legacy of colonial intervention, the modern dilemmas of nation building, and ongoing divisions in religion, class, and language.

²⁵ The realization that identities are a series of socially constructed performances can be deeply unsettling for viewers and might be contextualized by Judith Butler's seminal text on the performativity of gender. In *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, Butler writes, "the body is understood to be an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities." (Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 [December 1988]: 521.) There is nothing about gender that is expressive of an interiority, but instead, gender is created through social discourse. Through the repetition of acts that are, over time, revitalized, amended, and, strengthened, the performance of gender is naturalized, and thus continues as a successful project. Gender identity is a performative act that is bound by society's rules and regulations. (Ibid., 520.) In the same way, national identity is a series of performances that reflects nothing interior but is in part constructed by the repetition of acts such as singing the national anthem, flag waving, parades, and more. Butler argues that while "the sight of a transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause . . . the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence." (Ibid., 527.) In the theater, where a transvestite appears on stage, one recognizes the act. But because it is *supposed* to be an act, the viewer can decontextualize it as such. In everyday life, however, one does not have the comfort of assigning this to the purely imaginary creation of the theater; there is nothing that separates *this* act from reality. The realization that any display of gender is a performance is unsettling; it forces a reassessment of entire belief systems about gender and disrupts one's sense of being and reality.

²⁶ See, for example Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, Reprint edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Ayesha Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014); Iftikhar Haider Malik, *The History of Pakistan* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008).

²⁷ "POPULATION BY RELIGION | Pakistan Bureau of Statistics," accessed May 21, 2019, <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/population-religion>.

Pakistan's history is intimately bound with India and the colonial history of the subcontinent. Great Britain had a colonial presence in the Indian subcontinent for centuries, but after the first War for Independence in 1857—or Indian Rebellion of 1857 as it was known in Great Britain—the British solidified power and transferred control from the British East India Company to the Crown. The British saw India's population in terms of religious communities and much of their colonial strategy rested in policies of divide and rule—cultural and economic differences were intensified in order to discourage any unified opposition among South Asian populations. Muslims were overwhelmingly a minority in India and were scattered across the subcontinent, sharing cultural and linguistic ties with Sikhs and Hindus.²⁸ That is to say, there was nothing about India's Muslims that made them innately united. In fact, while not entirely without friction, different religions had lived alongside each other for centuries in the Indian subcontinent. And while division among Hindus and Muslims was not inevitable, by the time of India's partition, animosity was so entrenched—in large part because of Britain's divide and rule policies—that it was thought impossible for the two groups to live peaceably.

The desire for a Muslim nation emerged as a result of anxieties over equal representation and treatment. Many, including Muhammad Ali Jinnah—the future Governor General of Pakistan and *Qaid-i-Azam*, or Great Leader—argued that Hinduism and Islam constituted two separate nations; an argument that helped articulate the position that Indian Muslims were a nation and not just a minority within India. Muslims were indeed a minority that would never be able to gain power, but the assertion of a Muslim nation ensured they would be given coequal power. Iftikhar Dadi articulates this history, writing, “unlike nationalist struggles in which the nation was coherently imagined, the pressure toward minoritization of South Asian Muslims and their

²⁸ Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 11.

increasing perception of powerlessness in the face of Indian and Hindu nationalism led them to occupy political positions that were divided and unstable.”²⁹

In the end, the creation of two nations—Hindustan and Pakistan—was rejected by India. According to the Indian National Congress, acceptance of partition meant that Pakistan was “contracting out” from the “Union of India.”³⁰ This characterization of partition meant that Indians viewed Pakistan as seceding from the nation, and thus tearing apart Mother India. At its birth, Pakistan’s history was one of violence and displacement—the Partition of India was followed by the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs as millions crossed this newly created boundary line separating these two postcolonial states.

In its brief existence as a country, Pakistan’s history has consisted of long periods of military rule, dictatorships, two wars with India, and a civil war between East and West Pakistan (which resulted in the secession of East Pakistan and the subsequent establishment of the state of Bangladesh), not to mention the years of social and economic discord that have plagued the country. Within just a year of its creation, Pakistan fought its first war with India over the region of Kashmir and by 1958 Pakistan underwent its first period of military rule. Since that time, Pakistan has had four periods of military rule, which have lasted through the majority of its existence. Indian-Pakistani relationships have remained volatile and were further complicated as first India and then Pakistan developed nuclear capabilities in the 1990s.

In an ongoing and concerted effort to validate its existence as a country, religion has been fundamentally important throughout Pakistan’s history; Islam has become the *raison d’être* for Pakistan. In reality, of course, religion was never of particular importance to Jinnah, but was a political maneuver. He used religion to conceal the many splinters that divided India’s Muslims;

²⁹ Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 28.

³⁰ Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, 39.

it was a means of rallying a group of people who were deeply divided by politics, class, and region.³¹ These numerous divisions—which were highlighted by the bloody 1971 civil war—illuminate the fact that the idea of a united national identity among India’s Muslims was illusory and exaggerated for political gain. In 1956, just nine years after being established, an amendment to the constitution declared Pakistan an Islamic Republic.

In the wake of Pakistan’s birth, sayings like *Pakistan Zindabad* (Long live Pakistan) helped provide a level of patriotic zeal among its citizens. These sentiments reflect a celebration of Pakistan as homeland, as the “land of opportunity.”³² Over time, however, these sayings became increasingly ideological: “What is the meaning of Pakistan? *La ilaha ilallah*—there is no God but God.”³³ These slogans functioned as a legitimating device for a country that was trying to define itself in terms of an Islamic identity and history. Indeed, without religion to unite the nation, it is possible to question the very basis on which the state was founded. Pakistan today is no less complicated. As noted above, its relationship with India continues to be volatile, and relations with the so-called Western world are increasingly perilous, particularly after September 11. There is, moreover, ongoing sectarian conflict within the country as Pakistan continues to grapple with its ideological, cultural, and political Islamic identities.

While a brief discussion of Pakistan and its history is an important prelude to my dissertation, my argument in *An Aesthetics of Resistance* does not revolve around the identity of Araeen, Abbas, and Abidi as Pakistani, but rather uses the history of this nation to explore the problematic use of national identity—from its exclusionary rhetoric in socio-political discourse to its use, alongside other similar geographic designations like South Asian, as a determining factor

³¹ Ibid. 17.

³² Ibid., 44–45.

³³ Ibid.

in art historical narratives. This dissertation is not, therefore, about creating a history of Pakistani art, but instead engages with the history of this fraught and fragile country to explore a constellation of intertwined ideas: colonialism and its legacies, globalization, modern formations and perceptions of the nation-state, Islamic identity, and migration.

Resisting the Canon

The global turn in art has made it clear that the discipline can no longer remain committed to, or limited by, its Eurocentric frames of reference. As scholar Aruna D'Souza writes: "For art historians and art history departments in North America, there seems a particular urgency to 'deal with' the reality that the twenty-first-century world seems much bigger than the one our discipline has imagined for itself since its formation in European universities at the turn of the last century."³⁴ Art history developed in the nineteenth century, alongside the growth of the modern nation-state and, as such, has traditionally and historically been bound by national frameworks.³⁵ And while many certainly acknowledge the problems of art history and its use of the nation as a means of classification, the discipline nevertheless continues to struggle with expanding the narrative and discussing art in a global context. Consequently, a discussion of artistic production beyond the West often remains bound to geographic identities. As David Joselit writes in his recent book *Heritage and Debt: Art in Globalization*:

Most accounts of global contemporary art adopt one of two forms: either the in-depth study of nations or regions in the global South whose particular practices of modernity have been overlooked; or the broad survey, whose anodyne multiculturalism assembles art from around the world without sufficiently

³⁴ Aruna D'Souza, "Introduction," in *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, eds. Aruna D'Souza and Jill Casid, (Williamstown, Massachusetts: Clark Art Institute, 2014), viii.

³⁵ James Elkins, Zhivka Valiavicharska, and Alice Kim, eds., *Art and Globalization*, The Stone Art Theory Institutes, v. 1 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 39.

acknowledging, let alone redressing, the histories of conquest and dispossession that precede their appearance in a contemporaneous moment.³⁶

In other words, art from the global South is either removed from the larger art historical narrative and discussed only in terms of national or regional origins, or art is included in broad surveys that foreclose the possibility of addressing and exploring the conditions that led to its exclusion from art historical narratives in the first place.

The art of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas offers one strategy for resisting this bind by occupying multiple frames of reference. Because their work relies on a number of traditions and historical moments, it facilitates an expansive and broad conversation across time, region, style, and more. This allows for an art historical approach that neither reduces nor essentializes their work. For example, Rasheed Araeen's work necessitates a conversation about minimalism, Islamic traditions, modern art movements, and systemic racism. While Bani Abidi's work facilitates a dialogue about nation-building, Pakistani history, contemporary modes of image making, and documentary practices, to name a few. And the work of Hamra Abbas requires a discussion about miniature painting, global framings of Islam, art historical collecting practices, colonialism, and more. In this way, they require viewers to both discuss their work within the context of larger art historical narratives, while simultaneously acknowledging the socio-political histories that inform their work.

Many artists and art historians have considered how to address the silences and disparities in art historical narratives. Art historians continue to grapple with the limits of a discipline that emerged during the apogee of colonialist rhetoric. Our narratives are limited by teleological thinking that imagines art history as a series of self-contained categories and has historically excluded the voice of the other. To challenge the traditionally Eurocentric discipline, it is essential

³⁶ David Joselit, *Heritage and Debt: Art in Globalization* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2020), xix.

to look to theoretical models drawn from a range of disciplines in order to approach a more global, inclusive art history.³⁷ Scholar Saidiya Hartman has proposed critical fabulation as one strategy for addressing the silences in the historical record. What she describes as a “double gesture,” critical fabulation can be understood as both “straining against the limits of the archive . . . and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of [representation].”³⁸ Hartman goes on to say, that “by playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view,” critical fabulation “[attempts] to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done.”³⁹ Hartman’s work directly confronts the inadequacy of history, and is an attempt to strain against a historical record that has actively erased the voices of the enslaved. She draws our attention to the lives deemed unworthy of historical memory, and in so doing, underscores the very construction of history. Similarly, Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas strain against historical and art historical narratives. We might describe their art as a sort of metafictional art history—their work draws our attention to the constructed nature of historical and art historical narratives. Whether it is Rasheed Araeen’s focus on the epistemic violence of art historical categories, Bani Abidi’s emphasis on the fallacy of

³⁷ It should be noted that there is an ongoing debate about what a global art history is or could be. Some scholars see global art as a productive distinction from world art. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, for example, sees global art as a project to reveal the connections between places. Whereas world art, he argues, merely attempts to discuss all parts of the world evenly, it is nothing more than an expansion of the narrative. (James Elkins, Zhivka Valiavicharska, and Alice Kim, eds., *Art and Globalization*, The Stone Art Theory Institutes, v. 1 [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010], 38.) For others, however, global art history is another supposedly universal category that continues to maintain categorical separation. The global can often seem to be merely a placeholder for non-Western. As James Elkins writes in the introduction to *Is Art History Global?*, “It is a not-so-harmless truism that art historians’ interests have traditionally been driven by their senses of what visual art in their own cultures seem most important. . . . Senses of nationalism or ethnicity have been the sometimes explicit impetus behind art historical research from its origins The current interest in transnationality, multiculturalism, and postcolonial theory has not altered that basic impetus but only obscured it by making it appear that art historians are now free to consider themes that embrace various cultures or all cultures in general.” (James Elkins, ed., *Is Art History Global?*, Art Seminar, v. 3 [New York: Routledge, 2007], 9.)

³⁸ Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (July 17, 2008): 11.

³⁹ Ibid.

nationalist myths, or Hamra Abbas's attention to art historiography, their work confronts the authority of historical records. Their work, in other words, makes viewers aware of the structural inequalities that underwrite art's history.

Throughout *An Aesthetics of Resistance*, I endeavor to upend traditional art historical methodologies and engage with the intertwined histories of a global art. I call attention to the ways in which Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas employ a range of strategies to challenge and resist the inequalities and power structures that led to—and preserve—asymmetries that define the world, as well as the discourse of art history. By compressing time, methods, and styles; blurring the lines between fact and fiction; and questioning the difference between history and narrative; the artists in this dissertation require their viewers to address the structural inequalities that inform the discipline and the world more broadly. In other words, to engage with their work is to engage with the construction of art history, and—borrowing the words of Hartman—to “make visible the production of disposable lives” in art's history.⁴⁰

It is integral that we continue to underscore the problems of representation inherent to art history, because the very discourse of the academy is the hegemonic voice. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that representation of the subaltern—a term that describes disenfranchised populations with little to no social, economic, and political power—is not possible under current frames of reference. She contends that we cannot hear the “other” within the language of the hegemony. While it is important to acknowledge that the other *should* be represented, she argues that representation must always be problematized—or deferred—until existing frames of reference

⁴⁰ Ibid.

are deconstructed.⁴¹ Because of the implausibility of ever truly deconstructing our language, it is imperative to continually point to the inequalities that have led the unevenness in the discipline.

This dissertation operates under the belief that—while recognizing the incommensurability of the discipline—it is important to seek out vocabulary and theoretical models that allow us to engage with the entwined histories of global art. *An Aesthetics of Resistance* is not about rejecting art history, but finding strategies under existing paradigms to move away from the hegemony of a Eurocentric discourse. Throughout *An Aesthetics of Resistance*, I highlight the instability of categories, the limits of teleological thinking, supposed standards of artistic value, and other methods of control that define art history. Moreover, this dissertation looks at a group of artists whose practice is one of resistance. Their work employs a number of strategies to challenge art historical narratives—to draw attention to the discipline’s history of epistemic violence, its omissions, and orientalist legacies.

Postcolonial theory has been instrumental in moving beyond dominant systems and ideologies in order to consider cultures across differences of race, class, gender, and nationality. Among the most influential—and controversial—postcolonial thinkers is Homi Bhabha, whose scholarship has contributed a lexicon of concepts that art historians have turned to time and again.⁴² While Bhabha has roundly been criticized for impenetrable writing, he is giving voice to ideas both unique and multifarious. As Bhabha himself responded to such criticisms:

I also feel that the more difficult bits of my work are in many cases the places where I am trying to think hardest, and in a futuristic kind of way—not always, I’m afraid, there may be many examples of simple stylistic failure, but generally I find that the passages pointed out to me as difficult are places where I am trying to fight a battle with myself. That moment of obscurity contains, in some enigmatic way, the limit of what I have thought, the horizon that has not as yet been reached, yet it brings

⁴¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

⁴² For example, mimicry, ambivalence, cultural difference, and hybridity among others. See: Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2004).

with it an emergent move in the development of a concept that must be marked, even if it can't be elegantly or adequately realized.⁴³

This is, indeed, a critical point to consider. While Bhabha acknowledges the difficulties of his writing, he also points to the limits of our language, of our disciplinary thinking. In this way, we might begin to conceptualize Bhabha's language as both pointing to the inadequacy in our language to represent the other, but also an effort to deconstruct our frames of reference and imagine a possible language beyond hegemonic norms. Similar to Bhabha, the work of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas highlight the shortcomings of art history's attempts to absorb the voice of the 'other.' But while our language may be inadequate, imagery is able to occupy spaces that language cannot—it can, as noted above, conjure different temporal, geographic, and cultural histories. While images can certainly serve hegemonic thinking, they have the ability to exist outside hegemonic structures in ways that language simply cannot. While the language we use to discuss art is inextricably bound to colonial and imperialist legacies, art can exist outside of those structures and, in this way, images have the capacity to be global and reject hegemonic thinking.

Bhabha spent the early part of his career in Great Britain, obtaining his PhD from Oxford University and teaching for approximately a decade at the University of Sussex. Many of his most famous essays—those included in *The Location of Culture*—were written between 1985–1992, during his time in the UK. Many of his earliest ideas—including mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity, difference, and more—emerged at the same time as Araeen's most overtly political work, when he was also working through the enduring effects of colonialism. As such, Araeen and Bhabha should be understood as two historical figures working in tandem and in dialogue at the same time;

⁴³ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Translator Translated: Interview with Cultural Theorist Homi Bhabha," *Artforum* 33, no. 7 (March 1995): 81–82.

both invested in exposing the systems that govern society. Like Bhabha, Araeen's work of this period is an incisive investigation of how identity is defined by place and time.

Art historian W.J.T. Mitchell has described Bhabha's work thusly: "His concepts . . . have made it clear that cultures must be understood as complex intersections of multiple places, historical temporalities, and subject positions."⁴⁴ Bhabha argues throughout his collection of essays in *The Location of Culture* that people are defined and determined by their colonial relationships. In the introduction, he writes:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.⁴⁵

These liminal moments provide the landscape for elaborating strategies of selfhood. Identities cannot be defined in terms of absolutes, but instead involve a constant exchange of cultural performances. Human beings are always negotiating between their identities, including race, gender, religion, and nationality; it is the spaces in between, Bhabha argues, that are witness to the production of cultural meaning.

Among Bhabha's most influential ideas are—arguably—the dual concepts of hybridity and the third space. A term widely misused, the hybrid, as defined by Bhabha, speaks to the dialogue of the different, which works to disrupt power relationships. In "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817," Bhabha uses the example of a Bible that has been translated into a native language. For Bhabha, the English book is a sign of colonial power and "figures those ideological correlatives of the Western sign—

⁴⁴ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.

empiricism, idealism, mimeticism, monoculturalism (to use Edward Said's term)—that sustain a tradition of English 'cultural' authority."⁴⁶ However, the book is simultaneously a sign of "colonial ambivalence" that points to the inherent limitations of colonial authority, revealing its vulnerability to "mimetic" subversion. The English Bible, for all intents and purposes, is a symbol of fixed and wide-ranging colonial power, but is also vulnerable to mimicry, which exposes the artificiality of such expressions of power. The Bible's translation speaks to the book's "split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference."⁴⁷ The translation involves a change, a subversion of the original that for Bhabha reveals how spaces of authority can be transformed into spaces of rebellion. The colonial subjects can only understand the message of the Bible through their own culture—their belief system comingles with Christianity. To further explain hybridity, Bhabha uses the metaphor of the stairwell in the introduction to *Location of Culture*. The stairwell, he argues, is a liminal space that constructs difference by asking that you go up and down in perpetual motion. Bhabha argues that this back-and-forth prevents either identity from settling into a fixed place. He goes on to say: "This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy."⁴⁸ For Bhabha, moments of hybridity escape traditional hierarchies through a constant negotiation between both identities, opening up a third space.

Bhabha's work is an important precedent for this dissertation's exploration of a group of artists that move beyond dominant paradigms and exist in liminal spaces of cultural difference.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 150.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 153.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 5

Bhabha's theory of hybridity is intimately bound with translation theory.⁴⁹ The study of translation is easily allied with the postcolonial project due to its role in contributing to the power and supremacy of Western colonial powers.⁵⁰ Critically, theories of translation acknowledge that exchange is not absent geopolitical realities and implications. As Esra Akcan writes in her book *Architecture in Translation*, "These are zones of exchange; but they are zones filled with uneven relations, geopolitical hierarchies, tensions and anxieties, which in turn foreclose translations' potential to be a prerequisite for a cosmopolitan ethics."⁵¹ Akcan contends that the pervasive movement of people, capital, ideas, technologies, information, and images renders any concept of the purely local or global as illusory. "Rather," Akcan argues, "the diverse types of continuous translations have shaped and are still shaping history, perpetually mutating definitions of the local

⁴⁹ Translation—an integral component to human communication and interaction—is, at its most basic, about cross-cultural exchange and understanding. (Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet, "Introduction," in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.) A central component to theories of translation is the idea that this act is a source of cultural understanding and enrichment. While the primary goal of linguistic translation is to preserve the original text, approaches and understandings of how to do this differ. Linguist theorists Wilhelm von Humboldt and Arthur Schopenhauer, for example, argue that what is necessary is fidelity to the overall text, and not just the individual parts. Schopenhauer notes that words will not always have a one-to-one equivalent in another language and, therefore, it is the larger concepts that must remain the priority when translating. (Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Language and Words," in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, trans. Peter Mollenhauer, eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992], 32.) Alternatively, Vladimir Nabokov argues that a literal, word-for-word translation is the most useful and will yield a translation the most faithful to the author's original words and meaning. (Vladimir Nabokov, "Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English," in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992], 127.) To translate another's text, the person's only goal should be to replicate the original with "absolute exactitude." Anything other than this "literal translation" is nothing more than an imitation of the original text according to Nabokov. (Ibid., 134.) The two sides of this debate are succinctly summed up by the words of Friedrich Schleiermacher in *On the Different Methods of Translating*: "Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader." (Friedrich Schleiermacher, "From 'On the Different Methods of Translating,'" in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, trans. Waltrand Bartscht, eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992], 42.) Should the translator remain faithful to the author's original words, regardless of any potential difficulty comprehending in the foreign language? Or should the translator give only an impression of the original words in order to convey the overall text in the foreign language?

⁵⁰ See: Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999); Douglas Robinson, *Translation and Empire: Postcolonial Approaches Explained* (Booklands: St. Jerome, 1997).

⁵¹ Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 17.

and the foreign.”⁵² Avoiding notions of original and copy, translation allows for the conception of a place modifying and enriching its politics and culture through opening itself to the foreign.⁵³ Using theories of translation as a way to understand the visual arts underscores the way that exchange is dependent on systems of power that define globalism.⁵⁴

The idea of unqualified translation may result in a universalism, eradicating any cultural difference across the world. But the belief in the inability to translate—to communicate—safeguards borders, resulting in protectionist attitudes. Akcan writes, “On the one hand, the premise of absolute translatability may trigger the total assimilation of one place in another. On the other hand, the belief in untranslatability may draw sharp and fixed borders around places.”⁵⁵ This dilemma highlights the inherent contradictions of globalism. While Akcan has used translation as a way to understand the movement—and adaptation—of modern architectural design from Germany to Turkey, her scholarship lays an important foundation for expanding the conversation to fields of visual art. Akcan’s deployment of translation to show the way people, goods, and ideas circulate the world and involve a constant process of negotiation provides a useful tool for thinking about the disparities in art history. Moreover, the use of the term “translation” demonstrates how we might use other disciplinary frameworks to discuss the production of art history without ignoring the socio-economic factors that define the discipline.

An important antecedent to this dissertation is Iftikhar Dadi’s groundbreaking *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*. Among recent texts that seek to challenge the center/periphery

⁵² Ibid., 3.

⁵³ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁴ See Karen Greenwalt and Katja Rivera, eds., *Traduttore, Traditore* (Chicago: Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2017).

⁵⁵ Akcan, *Architecture in Translation*, 17.

model of traditional art historical narratives, Dadi's book is an integral contribution in its discussion of the modern and contemporary art of Pakistan.⁵⁶ My dissertation, like *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, is similarly compelled by the incommensurability of art historical categories, especially as it relates to the art of Pakistan. In four chapters on seven artists, Dadi explores the emergence of modern South Asian subjectivity through a series of interrelated terms—nationalism, modernism, cosmopolitanism, and tradition. While the title refers to South Asian Muslim identities, Dadi only discusses Pakistani art throughout the text—or, more accurately, West and East Pakistan (what is today Pakistan and Bangladesh). His text ignores the many Indian Muslim artists, such as MF Husain or Zarina Hashmi.⁵⁷ Throughout *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, the nation-state serves as a framing device for Dadi's analysis of an emergent modern artistic self. Indeed, while Dadi contends that modern South Asian Muslim subjectivity has a complex lineage—including Persianate humanism, Hindu and Buddhist mythology, colonial rule, and more—modernism nevertheless “arrived suddenly in Pakistani art, immediately after the country's formation.”⁵⁸ Dadi investigates the ways in which modernism emerged alongside the Pakistani nation-state, but unlike Indian artists, he argues, Pakistani artists did not work out an artistic program in response to and alongside an emerging nationalism, but rather in opposition to it.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ While contemporary Pakistani art has been garnering increased attention in recent years (particularly in exhibitions), Dadi's book is singular in his work to de-center narratives of modernism. More common are texts on individual artists. For other books on modern and contemporary Pakistani art, see: Yashodhara Dalmia and Salima Hashmi, *Memory, Metaphor, Mutations: Contemporary Art of India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007); Anita Dawood and Hammad Nasar, eds., *Beyond the Page: Contemporary Art from Pakistan* (London: Asia House, Green Cardamom, Manchester Art Gallery and Shisha, 2006); Salima Hashmi, ed., *Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art From Pakistan* (New York: Asia Society Museum, 2009); Virginia Whiles, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan: Cultural Politics and Tradition in Contemporary Miniature Painting* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010); Simone Wille, *Modern Art in Pakistan: History, Tradition, Place* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2015).

⁵⁷ See Atreyee Gupta, “Review: Cosmopolitan Modernism and a Politics of the Self in Muslim South Asia,” *Art Journal* 71, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 117–119.

⁵⁸ Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 2, 93.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

Dadi is committed to de-centering the universalizing project of modernism and showing how art history could become a global discipline. Throughout *An Aesthetics of Resistance*—instead of decentering narratives—I highlight how categories are restrictive, but I also strive to expose the power structures that have created them. The artists throughout this dissertation explore how universalizing concepts—such as national and Islamic identity—are, in fact, exclusionary and sometimes violent categories. Modernism is, itself, a universalizing term that has often been used as a means of exclusion. The unifying rhetoric of art historical concepts like modernism belies their exclusionary and violent underpinnings. For example, it is through Rasheed Araeen’s work that it becomes apparent that narratives of modernism are a construction of the hegemonic power that disallows representation of the other.

While continuing to draw attention to these fundamental inequalities, how might we use alternative theoretical models that both resist and upend our current frames of reference? Scholar Aruna D’Souza asks:

What would it mean to understand art history’s global turn as something that does not merely expand, but potentially explodes the borders between fields and even the discipline itself? What models might scholars turn to in order to deal with the radical difference, unevenness, and even untranslatability that emerge when one attempts to bring into conversation fundamentally different instances of cultural production?⁶⁰

An Aesthetics of Resistance situates the work of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas as one way to expand on and reconsider theoretical models such as hybridity and translation in order to rethink how our histories are written. These concepts highlight the incommensurability of the discipline by articulating the power structures that have defined it from the beginning. *An Aesthetics of Resistance* therefore asks what it might look like to write an art that not only problematizes art historical frameworks, but also—in looking at artists who rely on multiple traditions, media,

⁶⁰ D’Souza, “Introduction,” vii.

narratives, and histories—questions how we might begin to dismantle the foundations of our discipline.

This dissertation is not based on research in Pakistan, but rather research principally done in London and the United States. This is because *An Aesthetics of Resistance* is primarily interested in exploring constructions of Islamic identity in a post-Rushdie world, a moment that marked a global attention towards framings of the Islamic. While this dissertation is written from a vantage point of the global North, an important future project will be to more closely engage with how these artists were received and exhibited in Pakistan. To be sure, the legacies of colonialism, Islamic nationalism, and globalization have meant for a very complex art historical and exhibition history that should not be discounted, but it is the work of a future project. This dissertation is interested in centering framings of Islamic art in a discourse of global contemporary art. For this reason, my research reflects on a temporal moment marked by several key art historical and socio-political moments. As outlined above, 1989 marks a watershed year because of the collapse of the Soviet Union alongside emerging forms of neocolonialism, and it critically marks the moment when Islam becomes a global “problem,” a problem that would only grow after September 11.

Araeen’s recent embrace of being a Pakistani/Muslim artist seems to have emerged from his own critical reflection on the ways the discipline of art history inherently reinforces hierarchical categories. He wrote in 2020:

I have now no hesitation to say that I’m not only what the Tate said in 2007 about me, ‘a pioneer of minimalist sculpture’, but also a Pakistani/Muslim artist. If this connection between modernism and I being a Muslim artist is a problem for the Western art theorists, art critics and art historians, it is entirely their problem. They would have to themselves resolve it, in recognition of a truth of history, which they cannot do unless the role of Islamic history is recognised within the centre of modernism.⁶¹

⁶¹ Rasheed Araeen, “How and Why I Became a ‘Muslim’ Artist?,” May 2020.

Araeen describes the ways in which art historical discourse have rendered modernism and Islam incompatible. His career was, frequently, defined by his identity rather than his art and, as such, he was always a Muslim artist, not a modern artist. But Araeen's embrace of being both a Pakistani and a Muslim artist reflects an assertion that modernism and Islamic art are coeval. It is an acknowledgement of the ways in which the system conspires to silence the voices of the other, but also an emphatic declaration that these histories are intimately bound.

By exploring a group of so-called Pakistani-Muslim artists who chart a path from the modern to contemporary, this dissertation is an attempt to recognize a global contemporary art that situates the Islamic at its center. Iftikhar Dadi, in fact, defines Islamic art as a catachresis—

the works placed under its name are neither properly 'Islamic' (not iconic or sacral), nor properly 'art' (being mostly 'applied arts' or 'decorative arts' and thus not fully aligned with hegemonic notions of 'fine art'). Moreover, the term 'Islamic art' has been circumscribed numerous problematic ways: it omitted Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, was unable to reckon with the onset of modernity, and focused only on a limited set of objects and mediums that corresponded with European assumptions.⁶²

Given the foundations and limitations of this art historical category, how might we discuss a global contemporary Islamic art discourse? The artists considered throughout this dissertation—skeptical of any monolithic or authoritative understanding of Islam that is driven by outside forces to serve socio-political, cultural, religious, or intellectual ends—engage instead with Islam and its multiple meanings and histories.

The first chapter of this dissertation situates Rasheed Araeen and his work as an important antecedent to today's generation of contemporary artists and the concerns that occupy their practice. Araeen emerged in the 1960s with minimalist structures that sought to challenge the hierarchical nature of modernist art. While much of Araeen's career has sought to re-write

⁶² Iftikhar Dadi, "Foreword," in *Cinema in Muslim Societies*, ed. Ali Nobil Ahmad (Routledge, 2017), xi.

modernism's narrative, his work underscores the epistemic violence that accompanies such "universal" ideas and categories as modernism. Araeen's work from approximately 1970–90—the focus of chapter one—is a rejoinder to art historical categories that draw strict definitional borders that exclude the voice of the other in ways that are normalized. Of the three chapters in *An Aesthetics of Resistance*, the first is the only one written chronologically, because it allows for an engagement with the ways in which Araeen's encounters with the art establishment and London civil society determined the direction of his subsequent work. His 1960s minimalist structures—for which he is most well-known—rested on notions of symmetry as democratic. But just 20 years later, Araeen created *The Golden Verses*, a public installation that seemed to reinforce society's uneven and hierarchical order. What had happened in the intervening years that led to this challenging and confrontational work? Moreover, given his recent embrace of being a Muslim artist, it is critical to reflect on his body of work with an attention towards this recent development. This dissertation therefore opens by tracing the career of an artist who, like many during this time, began to make identity central to their work. Araeen came to embrace being a Muslim artist (when he long rejected this category), and he was compelled to respond to global attitudes towards Islam. His career might be said to chart the emergence of a global contemporary art.

Araeen's diverse body of work during that twenty-year period exploits static categories of identity that define the world. For example, in 1977, Araeen performed *Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person)*—a work that consisted of the artist gagged, wearing sunglasses, and holding a broom (fig. 0.5). Blind, mute, and in a position of servility, Araeen performed his subjugation. *Paki Bastard* was among the earliest works in which Araeen sought to directly confront the racism he and many others experienced as an outsider—that is, a person of color—living in London. In such works, Araeen explores the complexity of representing yourself when

your identity has been pre-determined and asks how you reconcile your perceptions of your own identity with those that are attached to you as “other.” In the words of Frantz Fanon, he is “overdetermined from the outside.”⁶³

In chapter one, I argue that Rasheed Araeen importantly straddles modernism and the contemporary in a way that facilitates a consideration for an emergent global contemporary art. Moreover, his work develops at a time when the migrant body and questions of the Islamic become intertwined as part of the public discourse in a way that it previously had not and—as such—portends the generation of artists to emerge after September 11. As an artist, curator, and writer, his work is critical to understanding this transitional moment. Indeed, occupying these roles positioned Araeen to confront the system from a variety of perspectives. Moreover, his prolific writing facilitates the analysis of his evolution in a way that is not possible for many artists. But while Araeen is by no means a composite of his time or a standard of his peers, he is, however, exemplary of the moment in a number of critical ways. We can see similar explorations in a group of artists that work alongside Araeen in the decades prior to September 11. For example, artists such as Mona Hatoum (b. 1952, Lebanon) and Zarina Hashmi (1937–2020, India)—like Araeen—frequently make use of language as a means of exploring alterity. While not considered in this dissertation, it is worth here identifying the ways in which Araeen—as well as Abidi and Abbas—are part of a larger group of artists who confront the legacies of colonialism in their work. Araeen, Hatoum, and Hashmi all emigrated early in their careers and work in the same historical moment. They are part of a generation that directly confronted the racism of the post-colonial world, alongside the experiences and traumas of living in the diaspora.

⁶³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 95.

Further uniting their practices is an engagement with Western art historical traditions that are fused with their own identity and experiences. Hatoum, born in Beirut to a Palestinian family, went to London to study and was forced to stay after Civil War broke out in Lebanon. Describing the work of Hatoum, T.J. Demos writes that it “demonstrate[s] a powerful intertwining of the social and political facts of dislocation with the aesthetics of exile.”⁶⁴ In works such as *Measures of Distance* (1988), Hatoum explores her exile and separation from her family. In an intimate video depicting her mother showering, Arabic from handwritten letters exchanged between mother and daughter cover the screen (fig. 0.6). The voiceover layers the phone conversations of mother and daughter in Arabic with Hatoum’s English translation of the letters. The video is a personal expression of trauma and loss. Zarina—the artist used only her first name—was born to a Muslim family in India and her work often responded to the violent partition of the subcontinent. Zarina lived much of her life in New York, and her loss is therefore doubled because her family migrated from India to Pakistan in the 1950s, shortly after she left India.⁶⁵ Zarina worked largely on paper in a minimalist vernacular that is then annotated with Urdu. In images such as *Home*, from the portfolio *Home is a Foreign Place* (1999), the artist examines memories of her home and draws our attention to the impermanent, fleeting nature of memory (fig. 0.7).⁶⁶ The Urdu inscription provides another layer of impenetrability for a non-Urdu speaking audience. Altogether, the work of Araeen, Hatoum, and Zarina unpacks ideas of colonialism, exile, migration, and identity.

Araeen’s work is representative of a generation of post-colonial artists working through the burden of art historical representation. Araeen’s work sought to both express and confront the

⁶⁴ T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 5.

⁶⁵ Aamir R. Mufti, “Zarina Hashmi and the Arts of Dispossession,” in *The Migrant’s Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora*, ed. Saloni Mathur (Williamstown, Mass: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2011), 188–189.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 186–187.

realities of being a Black body in post-colonial London. Indeed, as Araeen writes, “I had to use images to express not only experiences of reality in Britain but also to confront it.”⁶⁷ While the work of Araeen expresses and confronts the experiences and violence of racism, the work of Abidi and Abbas points to the systemic structures that inform neo-colonial thinking and practice.

Chapter two explores Bani Abidi (b. 1971), whose work questions and challenges relationships between performance, nationalism, and machinations of power. Abidi draws our attention to the ways that national identity and the power of the state are performed. Her films and photographs are staged in such a way that fiction reads like truth and her work can be likened to what TJ Demos has referred to in *The Migrant Image* as “documentary fictions.” “No doubt,” as Demos goes on to say:

[O]ur time of disaster and emergency—including globalization’s uneven developments and the general failures of neoliberal capitalism, the pervasiveness of poverty and suffering, economic imperialism, endless wars and political crises, the predicaments of migration and refugees, terrorism and insecurity, and religious confrontations—has placed post-Enlightenment paradigms of truth in crisis, and in turn brought new investments in the potential political use-value of the documentary.⁶⁸

But while Demos is interested in the ways artists have used practices of documentary to explore migration, exile, refugeeism, and other forms of movement, Abidi relies on the slippage between fact and fiction to deconstruct national mythologies. Her work uses modes of documentary to not only question the authority of the historical record and draw our attention to its silences, but also to question the ways such forms of image making—documentaries, photographs, and more—serve to legitimate histories and hegemonic institutions.

Abidi’s work relies on modes of documentary to question the production and performance of national identities and bureaucratic power. Nations are built on histories that have become

⁶⁷ Rasheed Araeen, “How and Why I Became a ‘Muslim’ Artist?,” May 2020.

⁶⁸ Demos, *The Migrant Image*, xvi.

mythologized and there is an inherent balance between truth and fiction in the construction of national histories, which Abidi exploits in her work. Her 2006 series *The Boy Who Got Tired of Posing*, for example, combines photography and video together in ways that blur the line between documentary and narrative fiction. Relying on the eighth-century historical figure of Muhammad bin Qasim, Abidi questions the figure's role within Pakistan's history of nation building. Bin Qasim was an Arab general who led a successful campaign into India and conquered Sindh in the year 712 CE and is, therefore, identified as the first citizen of Pakistan. All together, Abidi's series is a potent critique of the construction of such national histories. *The Boy Who Got Tired of Posing*, for example, re-enacts the 1980s trend of parents having their sons photographed as bin Qasim, and articulates how these nationalist narratives becomes absorbed and reified in everyday life (fig. 0.8). The series draws our attention to how history is staged in the first place and, throughout, Abidi unmask and re-appropriates this invented history.

While questions about the Islamic have intensified in public discourse in the global North since the Rushdie Affair, chapter two considers the ways the framing of the Islamic have been a contested part of the national and public discourse in Pakistan since its inception. Indeed, artists from the so-called Islamic world have—like Abidi—been invested in the process of exploring the political histories and the myths created to sustain national identities. Artists such as Walid Raad (b. 1967, Lebanon), Emily Jacir (b. 1973, Bethlehem), and Hiwa K (b. 1975, Iraq) investigate the role of memory, history, and fiction in sustaining nationalist narratives. Moreover, these artists investigate the often violent and exclusionary narratives of national identities.

Walid Raad's work, for example, addresses memory and narratives of conflict in the Arab world, particularly in response to the legacy of the 15-year civil war in Lebanon. His ongoing project *The Atlas Group* (founded 1999) has created an archive comprised of photographs, videos,

notes, and more that challenge the notions of fact and fiction (fig. 4.4).⁶⁹ Raad's interest closely mirrors Abidi's; he interrogates the veracity of history and the archive by questioning what constitutes fact and fiction. In the words of art historian Vytas Narusevicius, Raad "addresses the political power and authority of the archive...his concern [is] not only with representations of history that are often excluded from archives, but with the larger process of creating history as an object of analysis itself."⁷⁰ For example, in a series titled *Let's be honest, the weather helped*, the photographs document streets riddled with bullets, each color dots in the photograph documents the country that supplied the bullets (fig. 0.9). Individuals from those countries are therefore implicated when viewing these photographs.⁷¹ This project is perhaps most easily discussed as parafiction, an idea coined by art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty to describe when the "fictional hangs on the factual."⁷² Documenting a war that has no clear-cut start or end date, his project challenges narratives of history and memory. Raad is interested in exploring the histories that are forgotten, the stories that are untold.

Like Abidi, other artists explore the ways that national identity define and control movement. Emily Jacir, a Palestinian artist, confronts the realities of movement in a globalized world, particularly as it relates to Israel-Palestine. For example, in *Where We Come From* (2002–03) Jacir asks the question, "If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" (fig. 0.10).⁷³ Jacir, as a US passport holder is able to perform those tasks for Palestinians who face severe Israeli travel restrictions within the country. The wishes number 30 in total and range from lighting candles at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, to visiting a mother's grave, to taking

⁶⁹ Ibid., 191.

⁷⁰ Vytas Narusevicius, "Walid Raad's Double Bind: The Atlas Group Project, 1989-2004," *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 39, no. 2 (2014): 44.

⁷¹ Emily Wroczyński, "Walid Raad and the Atlas Group Mapping Catastrophe and the Architecture of Destruction," *Third Text* 25, no. 6 (November 2011): 765–66.

⁷² Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," *October* 129 (Summer 2009): 78.

⁷³ T. J. Demos, "Desire in Diaspora: Emily Jacir," *Art Journal* 62, no. 4 (2003): 69.

a Palestinian girl on a date. Jacir's enactment of these requests—documented in photograph and text—highlights the reality of travel for many in the world.

Hiwa K—a Kurdish-Iraqi artist who fled Iraq on foot and today lives and works in Germany—explores the realities of globalism based on his own personal experiences, addressing issues of migration and colonialism in his work. In *This Lemon Tastes of Apple* (2011), for example, Hiwa K documents his participation in a march in the Iraqi Kurdistan city of Sulaymaniyah (fig. 0.11). While marching, he plays the theme song from the spaghetti western *Once upon a Time in the West* on harmonica, as a lemon gets passed throughout the crowd to soothe the burning effects of tear gas. The film documents a protest during the Arab Spring that received little attention internationally, in which the marchers called for the right to participate politically.⁷⁴ The audience is immersed in the protest, but in choosing to keep the video un-translated, Hiwa K simultaneously keeps a majority of his audience at a remove.

Abidi, like her peers, is working in a moment when images are ubiquitous and persuasive. Never before have we lived in such an image-saturated world. Abidi's investigation into how images are mobilized provides a framework for thinking through the way many artists of her generation grapple with the legacy of images being used as a persuasive tool that reinforces historical narratives and hegemonic power. While narrative remains a vital element in Abidi's work, the allusion to documentary and, thus history, is meant to disrupt our senses and question the fluid space between truth and fiction. Her work is a keen and penetrating exploration of nations, history, and political power.

The third and final chapter of this dissertation explores the work of Hamra Abbas (b. 1976), whose diverse practice deploys traditional metonyms of Islamic culture in order to challenge

⁷⁴ Adam Szymczyk, "Hiwa K," *Documenta14*, 2017, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13528/hiwa-k>.

misconceptions of Islam. Her work is a rejoinder to the ways that Islam has been claimed and positioned by a variety of forces, from sensationalist portrayals in the global media, to reactionary politicians, and Islamic fundamentalists. Abbas is invested in exploring how Pakistani and Islamic identity have been manipulated and controlled—from the political uses of Islam to an Orientalist legacy that has persisted in art and politics, her diverse body of work questions who gets to determine what it means to be Muslim.

In *Read* (2007), for example, a minimalist, wooden, maze-like structure is suspended from the ceiling (fig. 0.12). As viewers walk through the space, they hear the sounds of children reciting the Qur'an as they memorize its verses. While the sounds emphasize the standardization of religious content through rote memorization, the multiplicity of children's voices disrupts any notion of order. As viewers navigate through the labyrinth-like structure, they get an immersive experience of a site where outsiders are not allowed access. In a manner of speaking, Abbas brings her viewers into Pakistan's madrassas enabling an experience that avoids sensationalism. Indeed, Abbas has compared the contemporary fascination with and sensationalized portrayals of madrassas to what she sees as its colonial counterpart, the harem. In this way, her exploration of madrassas challenges long histories of "othering" Islamic culture.

Chapter three considers the fraught history of visual representations of the Islamic in political and art historical discourse. Hamra Abbas is among a group of contemporary artists whose work explores the ways that images of Islam have come to function in contemporary art and politics. Shadi Ghadirian (b. 1974, Iran), Lalla Essaydi (b. 1964, Morocco), and a number of artists who work within the Persian miniature tradition, including Shazia Sikander (b. 1969, Pakistan), Aisha Khaled (b. 1972, Pakistan), and Nusra Latif Qureshi (b. 1973, Pakistan), engage with and dismantle traditions of Islamic art and culture. Indeed, as David Joselit writes in *Heritage and*

Debt, “Art’s globalization . . . has the potential to redress Western modernism’s cultural dispossession of the global South. . . Global contemporary art has confronted this history of dispossession in its counterappropriation of cultural heritage as a *contemporary* resource.”⁷⁵ These artists mine their art historical past, considering the use of images to define Islamic identity in contemporary art historical and socio-political discourse. From media and governmental stereotypes, as well as discourses of Islamic art history created in the West—their work explores the weight of representing Islamic identity.

Ghadirian’s *Qajar Series* conflates the past and the present to explore the status of women in Iranian society, as well as to deconstruct the false binary of modernity and tradition and understandings of Islamic art (fig. 0.13). In the series, Ghadirian stages photographs with painted backdrops and vintage clothing that evokes the late nineteenth century Qajar era studio portraiture.⁷⁶ She inserts modern elements into the portraits—such as a Pepsi can or vacuum cleaner—and these out-of-place, anachronistic details draw viewers’ attention to the staging and writing of history. Moreover, these images consider representations of women in a global context, both historically and contemporaneously. Lalla Essaydi, meanwhile, uses the history of Orientalist painting to explore not only constructions of identity in the Western world, but how those modes of representation have impacted self-identity.⁷⁷ In *Les Femmes Du Maroc: La Grande Odalisque*, for example, Essaydi makes clear reference to Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres’ *Grande Odalisque* (fig. 0.14). She writes about such images: “These historical images also continue to influence the

⁷⁵ Joselit, *Heritage and Debt*, xvii.

⁷⁶ For more information about Qajar era portraiture and studio photography, see David Roxburgh, “Troubles with Perspective: Case Studies in Picture-Making from Qajar Iran,” in *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, ed. Jill Casid and Aruna D’Souza, Clark Studies in the Visual Arts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 107–125; Mohammadreza Tahmasbpour, “Photography During the Qajar Era, 1842–1925,” in *The Indigenous Lens: Early Photography in the near and Middle East*, ed. Markus Ritter and Staci G. Scheiwiller, trans. Reza Sheikh (Berlin: De Gruyter, Inc., 2017), 57–76.

⁷⁷ Lalla Essaydi, “Gender, Power, and Tradition” in *Islamic Art: Past, Present, Future*, ed. Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019), 89.

ways in which contemporary artists like myself construct our own identities—sometimes working in strict opposition to reductive stereotypes, sometimes appropriating Orientalist imagery in order to subvert subtle, yet deeply held, cultural expectations.”⁷⁸ The image combines the practice of henna and calligraphic writing—calligraphy, a sacred art form that was historically performed by men, and henna, a time-intensive practice of adornment done to coincide with major celebration's in a woman's life. She describes her practice as feminist, because of the ways she contradicts misunderstandings of Arab women in the Western world.⁷⁹ Moreover, her figure appears in a confined space, thereby connecting the psychological confinement of women to their historical physical confinement.

Shahzia Sikander is among the first artists to ‘reinvent’ the miniature tradition in Pakistan. While the National College of Arts, Lahore had taught miniature painting as a celebration of the past, Sikander broke away from this with her BFA thesis project, *The Scroll* (fig. 0.15). The work retains important elements of the miniature tradition—including material, technique, the high horizon, and border; but combines those with a progressive spirit, depicting herself multiple times throughout the uncharacteristically large scroll, revealing a typical family setting in Pakistan. Sikander has said of this project, “I was not interested in glorifying the past with nostalgic reconstruction, so I kept the focus on creating *The Scroll* as a forward-looking work.”⁸⁰ A number of artists have continued Sikander’s aim of reinventing miniature painting, including Hamra Abbas, Nusra Latif Qureshi, and Aisha Khaled, who all use the history and language of miniature painting to interrogate art history and contemporary politics. The work of Latif Qureshi, for

⁷⁸ Ibid., 87–88.

⁷⁹ Lalla A. Essaydi, “Disrupting the Odalisque,” *World Literature Today* 87, no. 2 (2013): 62.

⁸⁰ Shahzia Sikander, “Reclaiming Indo-Persian Miniature Painting. Reclaiming History: A Feminist Story,” in *Islamic Art: Past, Present, Future*, ed. Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 127.

example, explores Pakistan's layered histories and the idea of historical truth in images such as *Reasonable Acts of Compliance I* (2005) (fig. 0.16). Meanwhile, in works like *Gul-e-lalah* (2004), Aisha Khalid combines the decorative style of miniature painting to confront controversial socio-political topics, in particular the oppression of women in Pakistan (fig. 0.17).

In this dissertation, focusing on the work of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas, I explore the ways in which they resist easy absorption into the art historical canon and complicate narratives that privilege the hierarchy of Western art history. In so doing, they map a way of challenging the hegemony of a Eurocentric discourse and instead enable the engagement with the intertwined histories of a global art. Moreover, their work facilitates a deconstruction of framings of the Islamic not only in art history, but popular culture, national discourses, political thinking, and much more. However, broadening the inquiry in a future project to consider artists of the so-called Islamic world will allow me to more deeply engage with framings of the Islamic. This group of artists facilitates the exploration of how the Islamic is framed in an era defined by global conflict as well as how artists question the promises and failures of nation-states.

The artists in *An Aesthetics of Resistance* resist and, in some cases, refuse easy consumption and categorization. This dissertation is not an exhaustive account of the careers of each artist, it is instead a focused look at select works from their careers that question and resist mechanisms of hegemonic power. By drawing our attention to such issues as the political motivations of categories like Islamic art history and modernism, the myths that create nations, or the performances of identity, Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas de-naturalize socially constructed identities and frames of reference. Moreover, because their work draws on multiple art historical categories and traditions, they both exist within *and* explode those definitional categories. While it may be nearly impossible to imagine what a truly radical, deconstructed version of art history

would look like—it is through the work of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas employs diverse strategies—sometimes bold and at other times subtle—which in turn demand the viewer to resist, challenge, and subvert the hegemony of Western art historical narratives.



Fig. 0.1
The Arabian Street Artists (Heba Y. Amin,
Caram Kapp and Stone)
“Homeland is racist”



Fig. 0.2
Actors walk past “Homeland is racist”
Season 5, episode 2: “The Tradition of
Hospitality,” 2015



Fig. 0.3
The Arabian Street Artists (Heba Y. Amin, Caram Kapp and Stone)
“The situation is not to be trusted” and “This show does not represent the
views of the artists”



Fig. 0.4
 Rasheed Araeen
The Golden Verses, 1990
 Multicolor commercial print, 118 x 236 in.
 Artangel billboard project, Cleveland Middlesbrough



Fig. 0.5
 Rasheed Araeen
Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person), 1977
 Performance with slide projection and sound



Fig. 0.6
 Mona Hatoum
Measures of Distance, 1988 (still)
 Video, 15:26 min.



Fig. 0.7
 Zarina Hashmi
Home, from *Home Is a Foreign Place*, 1999
 Portfolio of 36 woodcuts and letterpress, mounted on paper

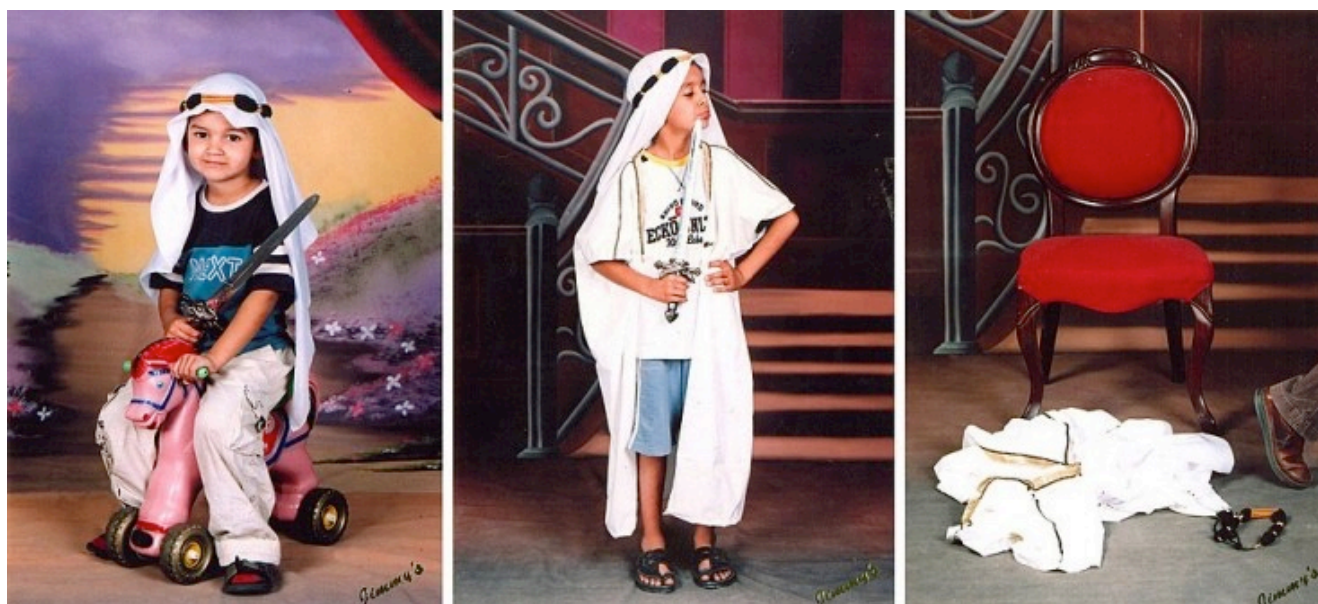


Fig. 0.8
 Bani Abidi
The Boy Who Got Tired of Posing, 2006
 C-prints, 30 x 20 in., each.

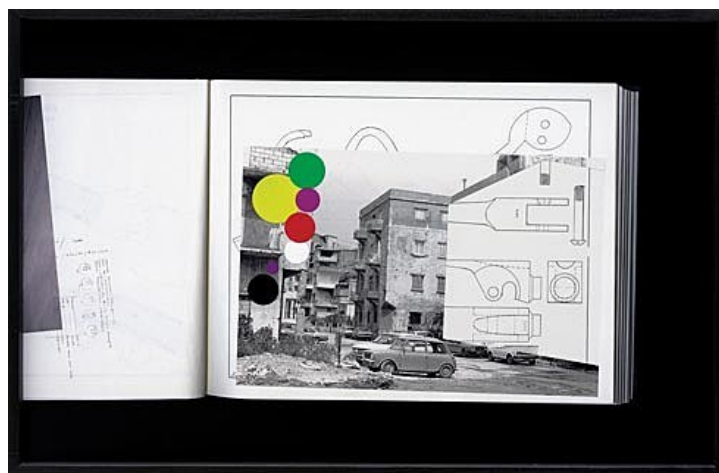


Fig. 0.9
 The Atlas Group/Walid Raad
Let's Be Honest, the Weather Helped (Finland, Germany, Greece, Egypt, Belgium), 1998
 Five inkjet prints, 18 1/4 x 28 1/4 inches (46.4 x 71.8 cm) each



Fig. 0.10
 Emily Jacir
Where We Come From (Abier), 2003
 Chromogenic print and laser print mounted on board, dimensions variable



Fig. 0.11
 Hiwa K
This Lemon Tastes of Apple, 2011 (still)
 Video, 6:15 min.



Fig. 0.12
Hamra Abbas
Read, 2007
Mixed media installation: sound, wood, jute, speakers
132 in. (outer diameter), 59 in. (inner diameter), 24 in. (walking passage)



Fig. 0.13
Shadi Ghadirian
Untitled from *The Qajar Series*, 1998
Gelatin-silver bromide prints, 9.6 x 6.4 in.



Fig. 0.14
Lalla Essaydi
Les Femmes du Maroc: La Grand Odalisque, 2008
Chromogenic dye coupler print mounted to aluminum, 30 x 40 in.



Fig. 0.15
Shahzia Sikander
The Scroll, 1989–90
Vegetable color, dry pigment, watercolor, and tea on hand-prepared wasli paper, 13 x 60 in.



Fig. 0.16
 Nusra Latif Qureshi
Reasonable Acts of Compliance I, 2005
 Gouache and acrylic on wasli, 11 x 8.25 in.

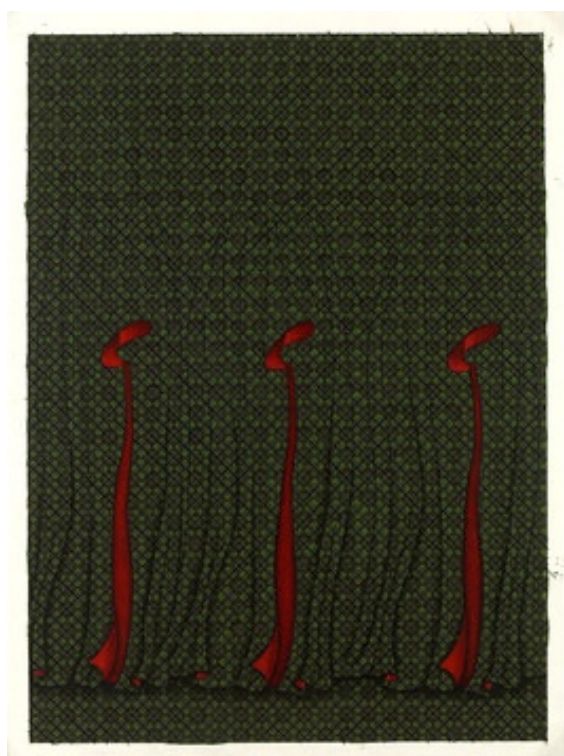


Fig. 0.17
 Aisha Khalid
Gul-e-lalah, 2004
 Opaque watercolour on paper, 20 x 15 in.

CHAPTER ONE: RASHEED ARAEEN

In the introduction to his 1952 groundbreaking book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon writes: “Running the risk of angering my black brothers, I shall say that a Black is not a man.”⁸¹ With this provocative statement, Fanon sets the course for his text by articulating that—in a racist society—Black people will never be considered human, rather they are always defined as “other.” Blackness, he argues, is a social construct that is meant to debase and control. As a Pakistani artist living and working in London beginning in the 1960s, Rasheed Araeen was consistently defined by his otherness—his Blackness, nationality, or Islamic identity—and, as such, was excluded from Western art historical narratives. As an artist, writer, curator, and founding editor of the influential journal *Third Text*, much of Araeen’s career has responded to the conditions and experiences of his exclusion from a culture dominated and defined by the Western world. A survey of Araeen’s career highlights the problems endemic to the language and structure of art history. The canon was, after all, constructed *by* and *for* white men and is, therefore, unavoidably exclusionary by gender and race. Araeen, however, counteracts grand narratives that assume a teleological history because his work is not easily categorized—he exploits and resists narratives of the west and non-west alike. In this way, Araeen’s work problematizes representation of the other within Western art historical discourse. His lifelong struggles to exist and create within an oppressive system highlight the epistemic violence tied to the academy.⁸²

While much of Araeen’s career has been—and remains—committed to reclaiming modernism’s narrative,⁸³ I argue that his work from approximately 1970–90 contested neo-

⁸¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xii.

⁸² For further discussion on epistemic violence, see Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak.”

⁸³ It is important to note that while Araeen’s career is—art historically speaking—coterminous with the contemporary art movement, Araeen consistently refers to his art, curatorial work, and scholarship as intervening in

colonial ideology by directly confronting the racism he experienced as an outsider living in London. This chapter will provide a brief survey of Araeen's expansive career, but it focuses on the twenty year period when his work became increasingly political as a result of his overt frustration with an art establishment and nation that was unwelcoming—and at times, vitriolic—towards a figure of otherness. Throughout this period, Araeen increasingly uses his audience as a way to explore questions of identity and difference, in turn, urging viewers to consider complex intersections of identity in the globalized world.

Born in Karachi in 1935, Araeen was just twelve years old at the time of the 1947 partition of India and was, therefore, among the last generation to experience colonialism, partition, and the ensuing nationalistic campaigns that accompanied the emergence of the Pakistani state. Araeen's earliest inclination was to be an architect, but—because there was no school of architecture in Karachi, and his family did not have the money for him to study abroad—he studied civil engineering and graduated from the University of Karachi in 1962.⁸⁴ Throughout this time in Karachi, Araeen began experimenting with art—producing abstract paintings, landscapes, and portraits. In 1959, Araeen found the twisted metal of a burnt bicycle tire and—in a Duchampian gesture—titled this piece *My First Sculpture* (fig. 1.1).⁸⁵ It was this sculpture that facilitated a re-imagining of what art could be for Araeen and prompted his first performance, *Burning Bicycle Tyres* (1959/1975) (fig. 1.2). In 1964, Araeen left Pakistan—where it was difficult for him to continue to be “innovative”—and, after a brief stay in Paris, moved to London to continue his

in modernism. See, for example: Rasheed Araeen, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* (London: South Bank Centre, 1989); Rasheed Araeen, “The Artist as a Post-Colonial Subject and This Individual's Journey towards ‘the Centre,’” in *Art and Its Histories—Views of Difference: Different Views of Art*, ed. Catherine King (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 231–255.

⁸⁴ Araeen, “The Artist as a Post-Colonial Subject,” 234.

⁸⁵ Michael Newman, “Equality, Resistance, Hospitality: Abstraction and Universality in the Work of Rasheed Araeen,” in *Rasheed Araeen*, ed. Nick Aikens, (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2017), 67.

exploration of art.⁸⁶ Araeen, however, would continue to work as an engineering assistant with British Petroleum through the end of the decade, not pursuing art full time until the 1970s. In post-independent Pakistan, becoming an engineer was the responsible career; it was a gesture that pointed towards modernist hope in the newly emerging country. To become a full-time artist was—to be sure—a bold gesture for a post-colonial citizen. Gieve Patel writes of this predicament in his essay “To Pick up a Brush” when he quotes modern Indian artist Tyeb Mehta, who said “To pick up a brush, to make a stroke on the canvas—I consider these acts of courage, in this country.”⁸⁷ Patel writes that there was no place for the modern, urban artist in post-independent India; it was a luxury to be an artist.⁸⁸

In London, Araeen found himself drawn to the art scene and was eager to create something that he has described as ‘new’ and ‘different.’⁸⁹ That something came about from his experience as a civil engineer, and by 1965 Araeen was producing minimalist structures that challenged the concept of traditional modernist sculpture, which he described as “compositional, pictorial, and hierarchical.”⁹⁰ Calling his works structures rather than sculptures—which detached them from traditional art historical discourse—his first works were symmetrically arranged steel girders (fig. 1.3). Following this, he began creating lattice structures that were evocative of bracing struts common to engineering (figs. 1.4–5). As opposed to the factory-like precision of minimalist

⁸⁶ Araeen, “The Artist as a Post-Colonial Subject,” 238. In fact, Araeen has described the art scene in Pakistan as parochial and derivative, saying, “I did these and subsequent works [ex: his early performance *Burning Bicycle Tyres*, 1959] in a cultural milieu that was dominated by the emerging post-colonial middle class that took pride in imitating whatever it could get from the West. This milieu also provided the basis for the development of modernism in Pakistan. The work of European artists working in the twentieth century, such as Picasso, Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, Marc Chagall, and Paul Klee, was the inspiration for most of my contemporaries in Karachi and also provided the criteria by which modern art in Pakistan was and is still being evaluated. Abstract expressionism, for example, came to Karachi in 1959 and immediately had its imitators, who are still working as successful artists.” (Araeen, “The Artist as a Post-Colonial Subject,” 238.)

⁸⁷ Gieve Patel, “To Pick up a Brush,” *Third Text* 31, no. 2–3 (2017): 290.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Araeen, “The Artist as a Post-Colonial Subject,” 238.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 240.

sculptors such as Donald Judd, Araeen's wooden modules were hand-assembled and never quite perfect. Araeen's philosophy behind these works rested in their symmetrical nature, believing symmetry to be democratic. Even his earliest work, though lacking any overtly political content, suggested a belief in the political possibility of art. According to Araeen:

My own work . . . was conceived around an idea of symmetry, which thus rejected and challenged the idea of the hierarchical view of things . . . Underlying this was a philosophical proposition according to which things can and should be arranged symmetrically in order to recognize their equal status, with an implication that *human society should be reorganized at its structural level on the basis of the equality of its members.*⁹¹

While Araeen would largely abandon his minimalist vernacular in the coming decade, the lattice structures played an important role throughout his career, appearing frequently in both his performances and installations.

Symmetry plays an important role in the history of Islamic art and, while Araeen has stated he only became conscious of it after attending an exhibition in London in 1972,⁹² the overlap is nevertheless striking. While Islamic art understands symmetry to be a representation of God's perfection, Araeen views symmetry as being anti-capitalist. Symmetry to Araeen, in short, makes equal the disparities inherent to a capitalist society.⁹³ At the same time, both Araeen and Islamic artists saw value in disrupting that symmetry. Islamic artists—such as carpet weavers—included small flaws so as not to emulate God's perfection. Araeen, similarly, disrupts absolute symmetry because he sees it as an expression of “absolute power.”⁹⁴ In his structures, for example, he disrupts their uniformity through the diagonal struts.

⁹¹ Ibid., 240. Emphasis added.

⁹² Marcus du Sautoy, “The Politics of Symmetry,” in *Rasheed Araeen*, ed. Nick Aikens, (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2017), 75.

⁹³ Ibid., 77.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 78, 80.

Another important element of Araeen's career emerges in some of these early works via their participatory nature.⁹⁵ For example, in *Zero to Infinity* (fig. 1.6), conceived of in 1968, but not realized until 2004, the individual cubes that comprise the sculpture—each around 1.5 feet square—are meant to be handled by the audience: to be stacked, or grouped together, placed in a pattern, or any other configuration possible. The public, in other words, are co-producers in the display of the work; they ultimately complete the sculpture each time it is handled.⁹⁶ In another work, *Chakras* (1969–70) (figs. 1.7–8), Araeen invited the public to throw 16 brightly red painted discs into St. Katherine's Docks, near his studio at the time.⁹⁷ The discs floated arbitrarily throughout the man-made docks and, although they did not make it, had the potential to float into the Thames. According to Araeen: “with *Zero to Infinity* and *Chakras*, the underlying idea is the same: to break symmetry. For example, in *Chakras* . . . when you threw [the discs] onto the water, their symmetrical structure was broken and they created their own movement.”⁹⁸ The final arrangement was not just a result of the people throwing the disks, but the environment as well—the disks marked the environment, but were also shaped by it. *Chakras* signifies an important foray into public art for Araeen, but—along with *Zero to Infinity*—also highlights the way participation was an integral and emerging part of his art.

By the late 1960s, however, Araeen has stated that he felt completely immersed in and confronted by the institutional racism he experienced in the art world.⁹⁹ Throughout his career,

⁹⁵ Play and participation were an important part of Latin American artists in the 1960s, including Jesús Rafael Soto, Lygia Clark, and Hélio Oiticica, among others. In 1965, Oiticica and Clark participated in a group show at Signals gallery, which Araeen has discussed visiting often. Moreover, many of these artists were in London in the 1960s and 70s, and it is possible that they might have overlapped with Araeen. More research needs to be done, but it is worth considering what—if any—influence the two groups had on each other.

⁹⁶ Stephanie Bailey, “Rasheed Araeen: A Man of History,” *Art Asia Pacific*, no. 89 (August 2014): 64.

⁹⁷ *Chakras* was performed several times after its initial performance at St. Katherine's Docks, including other performances in London at Hammersmith and Blackheath, as well as in Paris and Karachi.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 65

⁹⁹ Araeen, “The Artist as a Post-Colonial Subject,” 255.

Araeen has been a vocal critic of art institutions that are unwilling—or unable—to accept a person from outside Western culture intervening in and challenging prevailing norms, saying:

The problem is due to the fact that art institutions in the West . . . have not yet abandoned the concept of art history and its ‘Grand Narrative.’ . . . Within this model, I had no place as a free agent but only as the ‘other’, whose role was to provide the European ‘self’ with an affirmation of his or her central role in (modern) history.¹⁰⁰

The lack of significant recognition Araeen received for his minimalist sculptures left the artist feeling dejected, and at the start of the 1970s, Araeen stopped making art for a brief period, joining the British arm of the Black Panthers and, over time, becoming increasingly politically radicalized.¹⁰¹

Araeen’s 1960s minimalist art acts as a counterpoint to the work under discussion throughout the remainder of this chapter. I am not interested in cataloguing his contribution to minimalism, which has been much discussed elsewhere.¹⁰² But this moment in his career is important to contextualize because of the reception Araeen received from the British art world,

¹⁰⁰ Araeen, “The Artist as a Post-Colonial Subject,” 242.

¹⁰¹ In a 2018 interview with *Afterall*, Araeen stated that he did not see racism in the art world until he went looking for Gallery representation in 1971 and—much like when he sought an apartment in London—had all the doors closed in his face. This is the experience that precipitated quitting art. It should also be acknowledged, however, that while Araeen’s narrative often focuses on the lack of attention he received from the art establishment, this work was largely not available to the public until the late 1960s. In a 2008 interview with Richard Dyer at *Wasafari*, Araeen states that he was making this early minimalist art in near isolation, saying “between 1965 and 1968 I had worked in almost total isolation, without discussing my interest in sculpture or what I was doing with any artist.” By 1969, he goes on to win the John Moores Biennial exhibition prize with *Boo/69*—an exhibition intended to “support artists and to bring to Liverpool the best contemporary painting from across the UK.” Furthermore, he does get included in some important shows at this time. So while it is inarguably true that it is not until recently that his contribution to the history of minimalism has been recognized by the art establishment, the narrative that he was completely ignored throughout the 1960s is complicated by the fact that he did not allow those works to be seen in public until 1968. (Nick Aikens, “In Conversation with Rasheed Araeen,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 45 (March 1, 2018): 82–3; Richard Dyer, “Rasheed Araeen in Conversation,” *Wasafari* 23, no. 1 (March 2008): 23.)

¹⁰² See, for example: Nick Aikens, ed., *Rasheed Araeen* (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2017); Rasheed Araeen, Angela Kingston, and Antonia Payne, eds., *From Modernism to Postmodernism: A Retrospective: 1959-1987* (Birmingham, England: Ikon Gallery, 1987); Rasheed Araeen, “The Artist as a Post-Colonial Subject and This Individual’s Journey towards ‘the Centre,’” in *Art and Its Histories—Views of Difference: Different Views of Art*, ed. Catherine King (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 231–255; Courtney Martin, “‘Non-Compositional and Non-Hierarchical’: Rasheed Araeen’s Search for the Conceptual and the Political in British Sculpture,” in *Anglo-American Exchange in Postwar Sculpture, 1945–1975* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 122–132.

which arguably helped propel the next twenty years of his career. The ways Araeen articulates his contribution to minimalism—as challenging the “prevailing concept of modernist sculpture” that remained “compositional, pictorial, and hierarchical”¹⁰³—alongside his subsequent exclusion from the canon enable me to contextualize his later work as an artist and theorist. Not only does the reception of his work from the 1960s structure his career from the 1970s forward, it also structures my argument. Indeed, the rejection he felt as an artist mirrors the rejection the Black citizen subject—the migrant—experienced in London. It is this rejection as both citizen and artist that propels Araeen’s career as well as my narrative in this chapter.

A driving objective of Araeen’s career has been to locate, or recover, his place in history. Araeen sees history and the art historical canon as something that can be expanded and therefore enhanced by including the voice of the “other.” As he writes, “Would it be possible to inscribe this story [of otherness] within the master narrative of modern art history?”¹⁰⁴ I argue, however, that his work from approximately 1970 through 1990 can be understood as a response to the normalization of art historical categories with strict definitional boundaries, which inherently and unconditionally exclude the voice of the other. In this way, I will contextualize how the work of this twenty-year period—a period that, in hindsight, Araeen describes as often being too political¹⁰⁵—disrupts art historical conventions of categorization and is not easily absorbed into canonical narratives. As art historian Griselda Pollock argues throughout her seminal text *Differencing the Canon*, the simple addition of names does nothing to deconstruct the Euro- and

¹⁰³ Araeen, “The Artist as a Post-Colonial Subject,” 240.

¹⁰⁴ Araeen, *The Other Story*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Nick Aikens, “In Conversation: Nick Aikens and Rasheed Araeen,” in *Rasheed Araeen*, ed. Nick Aikens, (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2017), 81. Indeed, in an important retrospective at Sharjah Art Foundation curiously left out many of his most political works. (Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, “The Revolution Will Be Beautiful,” in *Rasheed Araeen*, ed., Nick Aikens, [Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2017], 388.)

phallogocentric field.¹⁰⁶ Rather, it is important to unpack the way the canon is constructed, and not merely include through assimilation. Araeen's work from this period helps to unpack and challenge the way the canon is constructed. Emerging from this, a productive conflict can be felt throughout his work between assimilation and refusal; or between his minimalist work of the 1960s that is a part of his project to become a subject of history, and his overtly political work beginning in the 1970s that directly confronts the power of historical narratives. An examination of his work underscores how art history is itself a product of larger Eurocentric forces that disallow difference and reveals the epistemic violence that accompanies supposedly universal ideas and categories of art history.

A Phoenix from the Ashes

For those people from Great Britain's former colonies, the experience of living in London was radically different than what they had imagined it would be. Balraj Khanna—an Indian artist of Araeen's generation—recalls being greeted by signs bearing the warning 'No Blacks, No Indians' when he migrated to London in 1962.¹⁰⁷ Over the decades, migrants would face greater regulations and increased scrutiny and the 1970s would prove to be some of the most turbulent years for Great Britain's minority populations. M.P. Enoch Powell and his infamous 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech, which criticized Commonwealth immigration and anti-discrimination legislation, ushered in the decade.¹⁰⁸ It can be argued that Powellism created an opening for the

¹⁰⁶ Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminism and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁰⁷ Richard Cork, "Buried Treasures: An art world that makes you feel an outsider" *The Listener*, December 7, 1989, p. 38.

¹⁰⁸ Powell's speech was delivered to a Conservative Association meeting in Birmingham on April 20 1968, and takes its name from a line in Virgil's *Aeneid*, which he quoted toward the end of his speech: "As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood.'" Powell began his speech by recounting a meeting with a constituent who lamented his lack of funds and ability to leave the UK because he believed that "in this country in 15 or 20 years' time the black man will have the whip hand over the

racist politics that would dominate British political discourse for years, contributing to the emergence of the National Front—a far right pseudo political party of whites only, that was (and is) opposed to non-white immigration. As art historian Courtney Martin writes: “Powell’s remarks framed that year for Britain and set in motion a complex discourse of violence, prohibitive legislation, and xenophobia that would be inextricable from immigration for at least another decade.”¹⁰⁹ A financial crisis throughout the 1970s that caused serious inflation and unemployment only heightened the anti-immigrant sentiment across Britain. Civil unrest followed, with riots that involved labor unions as well as racial and ethnic clashes across the country.¹¹⁰ Migrants—many of whom were from the former colonies of Great Britain—were a scapegoat for the country’s fears about its economy and position in the global world. Araeen felt keenly the pressure of the time, writing: “how could one shut one’s eyes and mind to such brutality and be an ‘artist’? How could one think only of ‘art’ when one is surrounded by so much racist filth and violence?”¹¹¹ Responding to the violence and anti-immigrant rhetoric that surrounded him, Araeen’s work of the 1970s was more blatantly political than it would be at any other time in his career.

There were, however, two main events in 1971 that marked a turning point for Araeen: his discovery of Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; English translation, 1963) and the racially motivated death of young Nigerian immigrant David Oluwale at the hands of the Leeds city police.¹¹² *The Wretched of the Earth*—a touchstone for many in its analysis of the

white man.” Powell went on to compare the minority populations coming from the commonwealth, to “watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre.” Migrants, he claimed, had already made the native-born population “strangers in their own country.” Powell’s proposal in the speech, therefore, was to end virtually all immigration, and offer financial incentives to encourage current migrant populations to return home. To read the full speech: “Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ Speech,” November 6, 2007, sec. Comment, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>.

¹⁰⁹ Courtney J. Martin, “Rasheed Araeen, Live Art, and Radical Politics in Britain,” *Getty Research Journal* 2 (2010): 107.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹¹¹ Rasheed Araeen, “Swamped? An Art Statement/Editorial,” *Black Phoenix* no. 2 (Summer 1978), 2.

¹¹² Rasheed Araeen, *The Essential Black Art* (London: Chisenhale Gallery, 1988), 12.

dehumanizing effects of colonialism—is one that Araeen has described as initiating his own politicization.¹¹³ Oluwale, although perhaps a name unknown to many today, has a story that is all too familiar to many migrants in Britain and beyond. As a young man, Oluwale came to London in 1949 with the hope of being an engineer. But a series of arrests, hospitalizations, and ongoing police harassment—which ultimately led to his death in 1969—soon made brutally clear the reality of life for immigrants living in London. In Oluwale, Araeen saw a reflection of his own experiences in Britain, particularly his experience as always being perceived an outsider in Western art.¹¹⁴

It was David Oluwale's death that eventually prompted Araeen's return to art making—one of the first works he made after his brief hiatus was *For Oluwale* (1971–73/75) (fig. 1.9). This text-based piece included clippings from newspapers like *Black People's News Service* (the weekly newsletter of the Black Panthers in London) and various photocopies pasted on boards.¹¹⁵ The attached documents detailed the 1969 death of Oluwale and the subsequent national investigation of the Leeds police.¹¹⁶ Other documents included articles that chronicled incidents of police violence, flyers that called for the end of the British-Portuguese alliance, and a chart outlining British financial interests in Angola, Guinea, Mozambique, and Portugal (fig. 1.10). Courtney Martin argues that the placement of documents on each of the four boards—discrete and not entirely lined up vertically or horizontally, while those that do line up contain headlines such as “Police Terror Must Stop” and an image of a raised Black power fist—results in the installation not merely being “commemorative,” but moves the installation “towards one of active engagement with the audience.”¹¹⁷ *For Oluwale* underscored the always-present reality of discrimination and

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Guy Brett, “Abstract Activist” *Art In America* (February 1998), 83.

¹¹⁵ Courtney J. Martin, “Sculptor, Performer, Critic: Rasheed Araeen, Circa 1970,” in *Rasheed Araeen*, ed. Nick Aikens, (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2017), 179.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 182

violence for Britain's Black populations. Since the end of World War II, one of the most significant events in British history has arguably been the arrival of millions of migrants, many of them from Britain's former colonies. Their experiences as an oppressed citizenry underscored the deep-seated Eurocentrism and racism endemic to mainstream British culture.

In several of Araeen's earliest works of the 1970s, fire would play an important role. In this way, he evokes the idea of rebirth through his objects and performances. Indeed, the title of his short-lived journal, *Black Phoenix*, conjures the mythological creature that bursts into flame, only to be born again from its ashes. It is telling that much of Araeen's narrative in the 1970s can be described as one of rebirth. For it is at this time that—due to a lack of recognition he received from the art establishment—he describes himself as losing the urge to create art. But after only a short period, he re-emerges as an artist that engages with politics outright.¹¹⁸ He states:

The realization that I was seen to be outside history was shattering for me. For some time, I lost all my self-confidence and the urge to create. I became a political activist with a belief that radical political activity was more effective than art in dealing with such a situation. Although my aim was to bring together art and politics, I soon realized that politics had its own rules and limitations, and seldom understood the complexity of an artistic endeavour and its importance. So I returned to artistic activity, realizing that there was an important struggle to be waged within art... Although my early work, that is minimalist structures, was my important achievement and it also challenged the status quo, I felt unable at the time to deal with the multiplicity of my experiences in the United Kingdom within these structures. So I had to move on to something else.¹¹⁹

This something else came about in the 1970s when the reality of being a Black citizen and artist in London had instigated a reinvention of his artistic self. Indeed, Araeen's work of the 1970s marks a decisive shift, a moment when his art undergoes, as Courtney Martin writes, "a break in

¹¹⁸ Araeen has stated that he stopped making art in the early 1970s—but this is not quite so straightforward. He begins doing performances in 1969 and was making his minimalist structures until at least 1971. While *For Oluwale* was not realized until 1973, he conceived of the project in 1971. The narrative that he abandoned art is slightly complicated by this timeline and begs the question of whether he did, indeed, abandon art, or whether his narrative about quitting art instead speaks to his (temporary) abandonment of the minimalist vernacular and the project of Modernism.

¹¹⁹ Araeen, "The Artist as a Post-Colonial Subject," 242, 245.

medium (sculpture) and a departure from what he called modernism (abstraction and geometry).” She goes on to say, “Araeen conceived of modernism as the proposition of the self as artist over the public . . . In its most reduced and personal form, modernism to Araeen meant London, specifically, its art world . . . In his anti-modernist turn, a space that he sometimes called the postmodern, he declared himself black in both person and politics, and he demarcated his space of production the ‘Third World.’”¹²⁰ While Araeen has always voiced a desire to express a lived experience through art—for example, his minimalist structures were not entirely devoid of the body, identity, or vulnerability as opposed to the more “traditionally” minimalist artists like Donald Judd or Robert Morris—it would seem that at this moment Araeen felt the need to more fully engage with his identity and the world around him. The minimalist vernacular was discarded because, as quoted above, Araeen did not feel he could be a “free agent” within the institutions of art. Perhaps we can understand this shift in his art practice as his way of making art that did not “provide the European ‘self’ with an affirmation of his or her central role in (modern) history.”¹²¹ Instead, Araeen confronts that history by pursuing a new artistic language—one that included performance, conceptualism, writing, and curating—in order to confront the circumstances he faced as someone visibly other in London civil society.

Araeen was a vocal critic of the American war in Vietnam and his 1975 photo series, *Fire!*, coincided with his joining Artists for Democracy (AFD). AFD was a short-lived organization that supported liberation movements around the world and protesting the Vietnam War—another layer of Western imperialism—was one of the actions around which the group was formed.¹²² In *Fire!*, 24 black and white photographs chronicle the creation and destruction of an American flag (fig.

¹²⁰ Martin, “Rasheed Araeen, Live Art, and Radical Politics in Britain,” 110–111.

¹²¹ Araeen, “The Artist as a Post-Colonial Subject,” 242.

¹²² Bailey, “Rasheed Araeen: A Man of History,” 65.

1.11). Starting with a nearly blank rectangular page—five fighter jets appear in the upper left corner—the image is slowly filled over the course of seven images to reveal a reproduction of the US flag. The second image shows that—instead of 50 stars—there are 52 fighter jets and the letter B. This is an obvious reference to the B52 fighter jets, which were the foremost heavy bomber of the American military, often involved in carpet bombings. While the Vietnam War was near its end when Araeen completed this work, just three years before, the US had undertaken the largest heavy bomber strike in Vietnam, killing more than 1600 civilians.

With the basic structure of the flag completed, in the seventh image the words “American Imperialism” appear in block letters on the lower half of the flag and, in the next image, Araeen has scrawled “Down with” at the top. Combined to read “Down with American Imperialism,” the sentiment of *Fire!* becomes clear. Midway through the series—in the ninth image—Araeen enters holding a photograph of Ho Chi Minh in his left hand and a lit match in his right. In the next frame, he lights the flag on fire. Although Araeen’s body only appears for a brief moment in *Fire!*, this would be the first in a series of works from the 1970s in which he relies on his own body as performer and subject. The remaining photographs document the destruction of the flag, which ultimately burns to reveal a star containing a photo of Viet Cong soldiers, with the barely discernable words “The Indochinese Family.” In its transformation, it has revealed the flag of the National Liberation Front, or Viet Cong. His disembodied hand holds another five-pointed star painted on what appears to be a sponge in front of the flag. The red star is a symbol of socialism and perhaps represents Araeen’s commitment to that ideology.

Flag burning is by no means a unique act of political protest. But there is something distinctive in Araeen’s action because the flag is ultimately reborn as a symbol of support for the Viet Cong soldiers—the very people fighting against the South Vietnamese and US military in the

war. The flag exists as the American symbol of freedom and democracy, but depending on the viewer, also exists as a symbol of imperialism. Such symbols of identity and nationality carry weight for a country's citizens and non-citizens alike; they both bind and unbind.¹²³ The flag is symbolic for those united under the nation as well as those banished by the nation. Araeen's action is in line with the political aesthetics of protest at this moment, in which anti-war, anti-imperialist, and anti-racist causes overlap. *Fire!* speaks to his support of socialism and the Viet Cong soldiers. Araeen is demonstrating his resistance to Western imperialism and advocating alternatives to Western models that control and define the world.

Burning Ties, a series of eight color photographs done in 1976, documents Araeen burning five variously patterned, red ties, which comprised part of his uniform as a civil engineer (fig. 1.12). In the first image, Araeen is barely visible behind the vertical ties, which appear almost like the bars of a cage in front of him. The ties have already been lit, but this is hardly discernable until the second image in which two ties are completely engulfed in flame. As the ties burn, Araeen becomes increasingly visible as does the presence of one of his red minimalist structures situated behind him. His choice to include one of his structures unites his language of minimalism to his language of activism—a goal that Araeen continues to pursue throughout his career. The red of his ties, his structure, and the fire surround Araeen who is clad in a plain, black turtleneck. The “ties” that Araeen burns is a double entendre, for not only is physically burning ties, but he is symbolically severing ties with his previous life as a civil engineer.

¹²³ Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (London: Seagull Books, 2007), 3–4.

Moreover, the act of burning ties—perhaps an evocation of bra burning¹²⁴—could be understood to symbolize the rejection of Western, conformist, capitalist ideals of masculine identity, a lifestyle that young men had increasingly been rejecting throughout the 1960s. By evoking the history of burning or rejecting elements of clothing that define one's status in society, Araeen rejects these norms of masculinity. It can be argued that, at this moment, Araeen has rejected his former identity as a civil engineer and all the expectations of an identity driven by capitalism. He is recognizing and grappling with his position as an outsider. Significantly, he does so in these early works by claiming an identity that had long been associated with Beatnik culture, thus aligning himself with the existing counterculture rather than communicating or exploring his otherness with non-Western clothing, the way many Black Americans had been doing since the 1960s.

As the rhetoric around him in the UK became more vitriolic towards migrant others, Araeen's work similarly shifts his work becomes increasingly pointed, political, and acerbic. Addressing the nation in 1978, the soon-to-be-elected British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher gave a speech that spoke to the country's fears of being overrun by an immigrant population. "I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture," she said. "The British character has done so much for democracy, for law, and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped, then people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in."¹²⁵ For migrants coming

¹²⁴ Bra burning, however, is largely a myth—presumably a historical conflation between burning draft cards and women throwing their bras in the garbage. Nevertheless, this mythology speaks to a rejection of societal constraints around women not unlike Araeen's rejection of norms of masculine identity.

¹²⁵ Burns and Thatcher, "TV Interview for Granada World in Action ('rather Swamped')", <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485>.

from the British Commonwealth—in short, individuals whose countries were until very recently under colonial rule—the speech displayed in no uncertain terms the government’s anti-immigrant attitude and agenda. As colonies, they were taught to respect and admire European peoples and their culture. But now that they were in Britain, the contradictions between sentimental ideas of the civilized “mother country” and the contemporary reality they faced in British society were all too clear.

Araeen responded to Thatcher’s speech in the introduction to the second issue of his short-lived journal *Black Phoenix*, writing: “To say that ‘this country might be swamped by people of a different culture’, at a time when the whole world is being viciously dominated by the west, is to perpetuate imperialist lies; lies which must be exposed and denounced.”¹²⁶ As a visual artist, Araeen further responded to such attitudes with his 1977 performance *Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person)* (figs. 1.13–14). The artist performs a story of subjugation for the audience as a slide show behind him simultaneously tells the story of a Black artist leaving his country to live in the “hostile and aggressive environment of Western cities” and continues to narrate a story of migration, labor, and violence.¹²⁷ The performance occurs in three parts: first, Araeen performs menial labor by sweeping the floor; second, he is a victim as a slide narrates incidents of street violence and Araeen mimes getting beat; and third he dies.

Araeen’s transition from immigrant worker to victim is realized in front of 36 projected slides, whose scenes include London’s East End—traditionally home to an immigrant population and the location of London’s first mosque; a café in Brick Lane—the heart of the city’s

¹²⁶ Araeen, “Swamped? An Art Statement/Editorial,” 3.

¹²⁷ Rasheed Araeen, “Paki Bastard,” *Black Phoenix* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1978): 15. Araeen performed *Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person)* several times in London. In the second issue of his journal *Black Phoenix*, Araeen also documented *Paki Bastard*, including photographs from the performance and adding new text to narrate the performance.

Bangladeshi-Sylheti community; imagery from the Grunwick Strike—a two-year strike begun in 1976 largely in response to the unfair treatment of its mainly South-Asian workforce; and Araeen’s family in Pakistan.¹²⁸ The title references an insult hurled at one of the Grunwick strikers by a police officer.¹²⁹ But also evokes the activity of “Paki bashing,” which became rather ubiquitous in London during this time.¹³⁰ At other times, the projector showed his early minimalist sculptures, and when projected onto him they take on the appearance of a cage-like structure (fig. 0.1). He is confined by both his earlier work as well as Eurocentric art historical narratives. Perhaps most critically, he is confined by his identity as a Black person, which marks him as an immigrant and “other” living in London.

During the first part of the performance, Araeen also sat gagged, wearing sunglasses, and holding a broom—he is blind, mute, and in a position of servility. It is, perhaps, productive to compare *Paki Bastard* to Vito Acconci’s *Claim Excerpts* (1971), in which the artist recorded himself seated at the end of a flight of basement stairs; he is blindfolded and brandishes a metal pipe and crowbar, threatening anyone who comes near (fig. 1.15). But this is where the similarities end. To be sure, racial identity affects both of their pieces. But whereas much of Acconci’s oeuvre seems to be a demonstration of white, male privilege, Araeen performs his subjugation.¹³¹ Acconci is largely in control—while he is blindfolded, he is menacing with his weapons; whereas Araeen is subordinate—he performs the violence subjected both mentally and physically on bodies that look like his. The position of servility that Araeen takes is two-fold: it is the role he is forced to take as an outsider living in the west, but also how the west must see and understand “the other”

¹²⁸ Martin, “Rasheed Araeen, Live Art, and Radical Politics in Britain,” 112.

¹²⁹ John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2001), p. 195–196.

¹³⁰ Richard Dyer, “Rasheed Araeen in Conversation,” *Wasafiri* 23, no. 1 (March 2008): 28.

¹³¹ For example, in *Following Piece* (1969) Acconci follows people on the streets of New York and in *Seedbed* (1972) he masturbates under the gallery’s floorboards, a microphone broadcasting his activities to those in the space. The political implications of these pieces would be markedly different if it was a Black body doing these actions.

in order to alleviate their inherent threat. The juxtaposition of Araeen sweeping with that of him restricted serves to create a Marxist connection between labor and subjugation.¹³² Finally, the work culminates with Araeen seated and cutting the broom into small pieces, while one of his structures is projected behind him. By destroying the broom—the tool used to symbolize immigrant labor—Araeen can be read as destroying the tool of his subjugation. The structure projected behind him remains as a sign of his own historical struggle to be a subject of history.

The performance further incorporated a sound element. At its first performance at AFD, this simply consisted of Araeen—untrained—playing the flute. But he later changed this to be a series of unconnected sound clips: Handel's *Messiah*, a song from an Indian film, one from an Asian folk singer, a voice saying "Paki go home," and, finally, a speech of a union leader complaining about the lack of support for the Grunwick strike. The myriad noises reflect a busy London street, but one which has been altered by the presence of migrant voices.¹³³ The sounds liven the images, replicating what one might hear in any one of the depicted scenes.

The end result was a powerful condemnation of the many forms of violence subjected onto the Black body in postcolonial London. The performance was said to be awkward by some—owing perhaps to Araeen's inexperience with performance or difficulties he had coordinating the slide and sound elements.¹³⁴ But this awkwardness, Courtney Martin argues, made the performance more effective:

The awkwardness that was cited in the live performance is the misfit of art and politics. Araeen's seeming inability to create a seamless performance reflected his attempt to craft a space where radicalism would be obvious, rather than implied or stated. Had the performance been more successful it would have been less effective, less political, and less radical. Crudeness became an aesthetic choice, rooted in its political intent.¹³⁵

¹³² Martin, "Rasheed Araeen, Live Art, and Radical Politics in Britain," 113.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 114, 122–123.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 116.

In the performance we can see Araeen working through his aesthetic response to the politics of 1970s London. *Paki Bastard* seems to be his answer to the question he asked in *Black Phoenix*, detailed above: “how could one shut one’s eyes and mind to such brutality and be an ‘artist’? How could one think only of ‘art’ when one is surrounded by so much racist filth and violence?”¹³⁶

Paki Bastard was among the handful of works in which the artist directly confronted the racism he experienced as an outsider living in London. Moreover, the work importantly contends with an image of otherness in Western society, investigating how identity is affected and altered by location. The work had clear parallels to Araeen’s own history. However, beyond simply being autobiographical—of which Araeen states that it is so only loosely—*Paki Bastard* reflects on the experiences of being a Black body in London. This work speaks to his attempt to reconcile what it means to be *both* an artist and a Black person in London. Critical to this “portrait” then is Araeen’s position as that of a so-called Black person. As Courtney Martin articulates:

Central to this issue for Araeen was the positioning of all nonwhite Britons under the term *black*. By subsuming the ethnic or national boundaries of its former colonies in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and elsewhere into a catchall phrase, the term did not function solely as a racial category. Rather, *black* encompassed a nationalist binary: *black* was, simply, the opposite of English, which was white.¹³⁷

Through the umbrella term of blackness, Britain erased any ethnic or national identities—Black Britons were seen as immigrants, as other. In *Paki Bastard*, Araeen then *performs* this identity—one that has been irrevocably attached to him.

In 1978, the artist continues this exploration of identity by painting a self-portrait whose title exclaims the question: “How could one paint a self-portrait!” (fig. 1.16). Araeen confronts the difficulty of reconciling disparate notions of identity—your own perceptions of identity with those

¹³⁶ Araeen, “Swamped? An Art Statement/Editorial,” 2.

¹³⁷ Martin, “Rasheed Araeen, Live Art, and Radical Politics in Britain,” 110.

that are attached to you as “other.” The portrait is a drawing based on a publicity photo of Araeen looking pensive—his head is lowered, with eyes downcast (fig. 1.13). His clothing reads as typically “Western”—a turtleneck and jacket, altogether unremarkable clothing evocative of the period in which this image was produced. Signs of difference exist only in Araeen’s body, which in 1970s Britain marked you as an outsider and, therefore, target of street harassment and police violence. Covering his visage is graffiti-like text enumerating the racist rhetoric he and others experienced as migrants living in London. Phrases such as “Paki go home”, “blacks out” and “kill the reds” are scrawled across his face and give him a clown-like appearance. Alongside these phrases are the ‘signatures’ of some of the perpetrators of this harassment and violence—NF, signature of the National Front, and a swastika, indicating the Neo-Nazis.

By employing a publicity photo for the self-portrait, Araeen is ostensibly revealing how he sees himself; how he, as an artist, wants to be presented. Above all, he seems thoughtful, reflective. Juxtaposed with that image, however, is how he has been positioned—as a Paki or a Black man; as an other. Araeen describes these self-portraits, saying:

I use my own face in these works to question and critique the idea of self-portraiture representing the self. The idea of representing oneself in the form of self-portraiture comes from the iconographic tradition of Western art, representing the power of the narcissistic self, which was denied the colonized self; *it is this colonized self you see in these so-called ‘self portraits’*.¹³⁸

In spite of how he views himself, he is perceived only through an identity of otherness. Araeen’s exclamatory question points to the complexity of representing yourself when your identity is always pre-determined. You *cannot* represent yourself. You have already been defined.

Araeen wrestles with an identity that perhaps can never fully be his own, because it is one that is always defined by his status as an outsider, as other. Kobena Mercer argues that “African-

¹³⁸ Aikens, “In Conversation: Nick Aikens and Rasheed Araeen,” 204. Emphasis added.

American art history shows the many contradictory strategies undertaken to find lines of flight out of the dilemma of how one can posit a full and sufficient black self in a culture where blackness serves as the sign of absence, negativity and lack.”¹³⁹ He goes on to argue that self-portraiture—as defined by art history—is an impossible genre for the Black artist to inhabit because—in the words of Franz Fanon—the “colonized is forever in combat with his own image.”¹⁴⁰ The Black subject’s identity is forever incompatible with their identity and position as a colonized subject. I argue that in *How Could One Paint a Self Portrait!*, we see Araeen very personally reconciling with his identity as a migrant other. Araeen strives to come to terms with an interiority that is forever in opposition to a socially constructed role of the migrant “other.” Araeen’s identity as he articulated it would always be in opposition to that which was placed on him. As Fanon describes: “I’m not given a second chance. I am overdetermined from the outside. I am a slave not to the ‘idea’ others have of me, but to my appearance.”¹⁴¹

We might further reflect on Araeen’s work by analyzing *Mirror, Mirror* by Carrie Mae Weems (1987), in which a Black woman looks into a mirror, the text below stating: *Looking into the mirror, the black woman asked, ‘Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the finest of them all?’ The mirror says, ‘Snow white you black bitch, and don’t you forget it.’* (fig. 1.17). Mercer argues that because the Black subject does not have the opportunity to form a self, Weem’s piece contemplates the “(de)formative” condition of the Black subject’s mirror phase.¹⁴² In other words, Lacan’s mirror phase is never fully realized for the Black subject because of the cultural image that is always reflected back. Similarly, Araeen’s painting depicts himself, with the image of otherness

¹³⁹ Kobena Mercer, “Busy In the Ruins of Wretched Phantasia,” in *Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1995), 27.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 28

¹⁴¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 95.

¹⁴² Mercer, “Busy In the Ruins of Wretched Phantasia,” 29.

that is reflected onto him. While the mirror is absent in Araeen's image, the words that cover his visage are the identity that society mirrors back to him. His 'mirrored' reflection is that of society's articulation of Blackness. *How Could One Paint a Self Portrait!* expresses the bind Araeen faces as an artist: he can never be just an artist; he is always a *Black* artist.

Alternative Spaces

The 1970s are an important junction in Araeen's career not only because of the transformation within his art, but also because of the myriad ways he challenges the system at this time. The exclusion of Black British artists—or Afro-Asian artists, as Araeen often referred to this community of people united by their common experience of marginality¹⁴³—from traditional art historical narratives and spaces led Araeen to seek out and indeed, often create, alternative spaces to exhibit, write about, and reflect on art. Araeen's interventions not only challenged the way institutions approached art history, but further reveal how Araeen sought to combat neo-colonial ideology and confront the racist attitudes he experienced living in London.

This is also where we see the contradictions in Araeen's career most clearly emerge. A through-line of his practice is the critique that the system is Eurocentric and fraught with racism that excludes other voices. In this moment, however, we see how, on the one hand, he is both active in groups and makes art that reject the system and wants to explode its borders. On the other hand, his curatorial projects of this moment reveal a commitment to working within the system and correcting its oversights with the inclusion of more voices. We might understand this as a contradiction between assimilation and refusal, between wanting to be a part of the system and wanting to upend the system.

¹⁴³ See Araeen, *The Other Story*. While Araeen's use of Afro-Asian gained some traction, Black art and Black Arts Movement are much more commonly used in Great Britain.

The 1970s began with Araeen joining the Brixton Black Panthers for a brief period in 1972 and, in 1975, joining Artists for Democracy (AFD)—a group of progressive and experimental artists. As mentioned earlier, AFD organized to push for artist involvement in anti-imperial struggles through a variety of events, including festivals, exhibitions, lectures, concerts, dance, poetry readings, and much more. Among the international conflicts that were of particular interest to group activities was the fascist junta in Chile, as well as anti-imperialist struggles in both Vietnam and Africa.¹⁴⁴ AFD was, however, short-lived—and had split within three years. According to artist and founding member David Medalla, a significant problem was a lack of cohesion—while some members were artists with little understanding of politics, others were political activists that had little knowledge or care for art.¹⁴⁵ In addition, according to Araeen, another weakness was “its failure to address the ideological issue of cultural imperialism—the cultural relationship between the Third World and the West.”¹⁴⁶ It is, perhaps, this lack of dialogue on cultural imperialism that compelled Araeen to begin engaging the system in other ways where he would have more control: not just as an artist or activist, but also as a writer, and—later—curator.

In 1978, Araeen produced the short-lived journal *Black Phoenix* (which presaged the later, more successful journal *Third Text*, launched in 1986). It was in the first issue that Araeen published “Preliminary Notes for a Black Manifesto,” an anti-colonial treatise largely focused on the issue of cultural imperialism. It was likely his frustration with the lack of attention this issue received in AFD that prompted Araeen to pen this manifesto.¹⁴⁷ In it, Araeen explored not just

¹⁴⁴ Rasheed Araeen, *The Essential Black Art* (London: Chisenhale Gallery, 1988), p. 12

¹⁴⁵ John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2001), 124.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Indeed, in a chronology written for his exhibition *The Essential Black Art*, Araeen states that in 1975, “Ideological differences emerge within AFD and the group splits up. Araeen begins to write ‘Black Manifesto’, which is completed in the following year.” Although given that AFD remains active for several years after this date, 1975 is more likely the period where Araeen simply leaves AFD. (Araeen, *The Essential Black Art*, 14.)

how ‘third world’ people sought to enter into modernity, but also create their own history. For Araeen, third world subjects meant those living in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as non-European peoples (Black people) living in Western countries.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, he opens the essay stating, “the problems of contemporary art in the Third World today are part of its socio-economic and political predicaments, resulting from colonialism and its present relationship with the West.”¹⁴⁹ Araeen saw sociopolitical issues as inextricably linked to the art world and he unequivocally asserts the need for a critical assessment of contemporary third world art in “Black Manifesto.”

Araeen further pushed for a critical assessment of Black art by curating in the late 1980s, creating exhibitions that sought to consider the contribution of Black artists to the narrative of British art history. With *The Essential Black Art* at Chisenhale Gallery in 1988, Araeen complicated the prevailing idea that Black art was any art being done by non-white persons. This, he argued, was merely a label of convenience. Indeed, art created by a Black person does not inherently equal Black art according to Araeen. Instead, he proposed Black art must be understood as that which has emerged from the efforts of Britain’s Asian, African, and Caribbean populations in response to the racism and struggles they have experienced.¹⁵⁰ He goes on to define his understanding of Black art, saying:

It specifically deals with and expresses a human condition, the condition of AfroAsian people resulting from their existence or predicament in a racist society or/and, in global terms, from Western cultural imperialism. The condition of diaspora, the feeling of being uprooted and not belonging to the white/Western society one finds oneself living in (by the fact of being placed outside the mainstream of contemporary culture), and subsequently one’s commitments to or participation in black struggle, are some of the determining factors of this

¹⁴⁸ Rasheed Araeen, “Preliminary Notes for a Black Manifesto,” *Black Phoenix* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1978): 3.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Araeen, *The Essential Black Art*, 5.

development in art, which I describe as black consciousness and which emerged in Britain in the early Seventies.¹⁵¹

The purpose of *The Essential Black Art* was to contextualize work that he articulated as Black art and to consider its marginalization throughout history.

While *The Essential Black Art* sought to consider what constituted Black art, Araeen's next major exhibition was instead about modernism. After ten years of petitioning the Arts Council for funding, in 1989 Araeen curated the tellingly titled exhibition *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* at London's Hayward Gallery. Artists were not included because their work expressed a Black consciousness, but because they constituted the "other" voices that contributed to modernism's narrative. In addition to curating, Araeen also wrote the majority of the catalogue. The show sought to consider the contribution of Afro-Asian artists to the narrative of post-war art in Britain, telling the story of those who defied their "otherness" by entering the modern artistic space that has historically been closed to the non-Western artist. The exhibition included 24 artists, divided into four sub-sections: "In the Citadel of Modernism," "Taking the Bull by the Horns," "Confronting the System," and "Recovering Cultural Metaphors." The largest of the sections, "In the Citadel of Modernism," explored an all-male roster of modern artists—including, among others, Frank Bowling, F.N. Souza, and Aubrey Williams—whose goal was self-expression in a style that broke with tradition. While this grouping included the earliest artworks in the exhibition, the works included in "In the Citadel of Modernism" continued through the 1980s, suggesting that modernism was an ongoing enterprise. "Taking the Bull by the Horns" included four male artists—Iqbal Geoffrey, David Medalla, Li Yuan Chia, and Rasheed Araeen—who challenged the aforementioned understanding of modernism and the idea of art as an "alienated product of a

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

bourgeois society.”¹⁵² “Confronting the System” included a group of artists such as Mona Hatoum, Eddie Chambers, and Keith Piper that experienced and sought to come to terms with their feelings of displacement. Finally, “Recovering Cultural Metaphors” included artists whose work includes themes of cultural difference, such as Anwar Jalal Shemza and Sonia Boyce.¹⁵³

Araeen makes clear throughout the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue that the absence of these artists from modernism’s narrative is due to racial discrimination.¹⁵⁴ In *The Other Story* Araeen wanted to challenge the Eurocentricity of the canon by inserting the contributions of Black artists to modernism’s narrative; he sought to recover their place in history. As Eddie Chambers describes in *Black Artists in British Art*, the problem of invisibility that Britain’s Black artists face is but an extension of the invisibility of the Black body within history.¹⁵⁵ By contextualizing these artists within the same framework as traditional narratives of British art history, Araeen asserted that that their voices are a critical component of the narrative.¹⁵⁶

One line of critique that emerged in response to the exhibition was that it segregated Black art from the larger conversation of modern and contemporary British art. Indeed, several high profile artists, including Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary, Dhruva Mistry, Kim Lim, and Veronica Ryan did not accept the invitation to participate in the show, fearing that to do so would pigeonhole them along racial or ethnic lines.¹⁵⁷ An important point of contextualization for the exhibition might be the 1976 show *200 Years of Black American Art* at the Los Angeles County

¹⁵² Rasheed Araeen, *The Other Story*, 51.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 9–104.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 9–15.

¹⁵⁵ Eddie Chambers, *Black Artists in British Art: A History Since the 1950s* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2014), 1–2.

¹⁵⁶ To finish this inquiry, Araeen’s long discussed follow-up project *The Whole Story: Art in Postwar Britain* proposes to “undertake research into what has been produced as art by all artists, irrespective of their cultural or racial origins and ignoring all those presumptions and preconceptions with are associated with particular races or cultures.” (Kate Fowle, “Missing History,” in *Rasheed Araeen*, ed., Nick Aikens, [Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2017], 296).

¹⁵⁷ Chambers, *Black Artists in British Art*, 125.

Museum of Art. Mounted just two years before Araeen would first propose *The Other Story*, the exhibition had a similar goal: to reassess the contributions of Black artists to the history of US art. Curated by art historian David Driskell, the exhibition received similar critiques, namely, that there is no such thing as Black art and to create an exhibition curated around such a premise amounted to nothing more than a social history.¹⁵⁸ To such critiques, Driskell countered: “I think [black art is] a sociological concept. I don’t think it’s anything stylistic. We don’t go around saying white art, but I think it’s very important for us to keep saying black art until it becomes recognized as American art.”¹⁵⁹ Because mainstream art institutions would not acknowledge the contributions of Black artists, he argues that we have to keep telling that story until it becomes a part of the larger narrative. Continuing to reference “Black art”—even if it removes it from the larger narrative—highlights the inadequacies of current frames of reference. Araeen’s exhibition exists within a similar context: on one hand, he is criticized for isolating a group of Black artists from the mainstream narrative, on the other, the mainstream narrative refuses to acknowledge the contributions of these artists.

Another more potent critique of *The Other Story* was its lack of recognition for women artists, particularly South Asian women and those of the older generation.¹⁶⁰ Araeen’s relationship to women has been complicated throughout his curatorial career. Indeed, it would seem that he anticipated this critique of the exhibition, as he wrote in a postscript to the catalogue: “The issue of equal gender representation remains unresolved here. We have included only four women artists, which is regrettable. But this must be understood in terms of socio-historical factors, rather

¹⁵⁸ For example, in his review in the *New York Times*, Harold Kramer wrote “If there is something that can legitimately be described as a ‘black esthetic’ in the visual arts in this country, Prof. Driskell has yet to tell us or show us what it is.” (Hilton Kramer, “Black Art or Merely Social History?,” *The New York Times*, June 26, 1977, sec. Art View.)

¹⁵⁹ C. Gerald Fraser, “‘Black Art’ Label Disputed by Curator,” *The New York Times*, June 29, 1977, sec. Archives.

¹⁶⁰ Chambers, *Black Artists in British Art*, 125.

than through a continually repeated rhetoric of ‘blackwomen artists’ who have been ignored.”¹⁶¹ The artists he did include were from a younger generation of artists only because, Araeen argued, women of the 1950s/60s returned to their home country upon completion of their education.¹⁶² Artist Sutapa Biswas (not included in the exhibition) critiqued Araeen for his ongoing conflation of modernism and masculinity. *The Other Story* reflects Araeen’s critique of modernism—principally, the exclusion of AfroAsian artists from its historical narrative. His curatorial premise, however, maintains the sexism that has driven much of the modernist narrative.¹⁶³ While Araeen is critical of modernism’s exclusion of one group of artists, he perpetuates the exclusion of another. Indeed, as Eddie Chambers argues, while representation became a prominent issue throughout the 1980s, there was a failure by Black male artists, critics, and curators to acknowledge the existence and contribution of Black women artists.¹⁶⁴

How do we reconcile the very real contribution Araeen has made to documenting and understanding Black identity with some of these more complicated realities? Perhaps the contradictions emerge because of Araeen’s seeming commitment to the art historical canon. His fundamental issue is the lack of Black artists within the canon; with their position outside the historical narrative. His additions serve to create a more diverse narrative, but fail to problematize the frames of reference, the discourse. Araeen does not question the progression of art history and indeed continues using modernism and postmodernism as universals.¹⁶⁵ This commitment to the categories of art history is perhaps evidenced by his lack of inclusion of women in *The Other Story*—the story of modernism remains male. Araeen continues to work within the traditional art

¹⁶¹ Araeen, *The Other Story*, 106.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Sutapa Biswas, “The Wrong Story” *New Statesman* (15 December 1989): p. 42.

¹⁶⁴ Chambers, *Black Artists in British Art*, 137.

¹⁶⁵ Carole Enahore, “The Other Story—Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain,” 27, from unpublished review (?), accessed at the Hayward Gallery archives.

historical frames of reference; he includes artists through assimilation. While Araeen critiques Western frames of reference, he nevertheless wants to be included in them. We can see how he does not want to explode art historical categories, but rather he wants to open them up instead. These contradictions are important to highlight because they underscore the tension between assimilation and refusal that is apparent throughout his work and career. Araeen's efforts to insert his voice into the art historical narrative have resulted in an ongoing frustration over his inability to be a subject of history.

Rediscovering Minimalism: The 1980s

Araeen's work again shifts in the 1980s—maintaining its political aspirations but becoming less overt and returning to a language of minimalism. Moreover, his work of this period returns to his earlier work in another significant way, by allowing the audience to increasingly be a critical component of the work's content. An important bridge from his work of the 1970s is *4 Ethnic Drawings* (1982), in which Araeen returns to his earlier promotional photograph discussed above (fig. 1.13). However, rather than using the original photograph, the portraits are drawn and filled over with text. In each of the four portraits, Araeen's physical features are visible to greater or lesser extent depending on the text that occupies the surrounding space (fig. 1.18).

The Urdu text in the images reads from left to right, while the English words scattered throughout read right to left—this makes the intended direction for viewing the works unclear. Further complicating the directionality of the four images is that Araeen has numbered them, from left to right, one through four. Several English words are written across the panels: BL begins on the first panel on the left, and ACK is carried onto the next panel, other words written in English are CO-LORED, BR-OWN, and PA-KI. If reading the Urdu, however, a viewer might naturally

begin with the image on the right; the ‘first’ image in this direction (number four) contains the alphabet, but scattered within Araeen’s head are the solitary words in Urdu: kiss (*chumo*), lick (*chato*), dance (*nacho*), and my love (*meri jan*).¹⁶⁶ The juxtaposition of the Urdu words with their sexual undertones and the English words of racial identity are perhaps meant to address the way Black and brown bodies are sexualized as a means of subjugation. In the first image on the left (number one), Araeen’s facial features are visible—as they are in number four—but are similarly covered in the same Urdu words.¹⁶⁷ In panel number two, the sexual words are again repeated, but Araeen’s facial features have been replaced by the verses that, when translated, read, “White people are very good people. They have very white and soft skin. Their hair is golden and their eyes are blue. Their civilization is the best civilization. In their countries they live life with love and affection. And there is no racial discrimination whatsoever. White people are very good people.”¹⁶⁸ That text is again repeated at the bottom of the next image on the right. That image—the third—also repeats the sexually charged words in Urdu and in English excerpts the phrase: “yes sir yes sir one bag full” from the nursery rhyme *Baa Baa Black Sheep*. The controversial rhyme has been criticized for being racially charged—through its use of the black sheep, as well as evoking a colonized or enslaved body with the language ‘my master.’ But, as Itkikhar Dadi notes in his book *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, the black sheep also recalls the odd man out—here, perhaps the Black artist unable to participate in the canon.¹⁶⁹ Throughout these images, Araeen recalls his earlier work, *How Could One Paint a Self Portrait!*, by covering his face—the same portrait, in fact—in language that works to underscore the complexity of being “other” in Great Britain.

¹⁶⁶ Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 190.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 192

¹⁶⁸ As translated in Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 192.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

Art critic Guy Brett noted that in *4 Ethnic Drawings*, Araeen had two audiences in mind: those who could read the Urdu and those could not. In this work, Araeen began exploring the mutability of narratives made possible through language. In *4 Ethnic Drawings*, Araeen has allowed for multiple interpretations: the Western viewer sees the Urdu as mere decoration, underscoring the idea of mysterious Oriental. For those that could read the Urdu, the text speaks to the violence and rhetoric that is aimed at figures of otherness.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, it is likely that the Urdu-reader could comprehend both languages, allowing a deeper engagement with the work than was available to the an English-speaking audience. In the 1980s, Araeen begins to take a more nuanced approach in his work, which no longer has the overtly political content that it did throughout the 1970s. Rather, reading these works is a multivalent process allowing for multiple interpretations. For Araeen, audience increasingly became a critical space where his “otherness” was explored.

In a series of grid works that date from the mid 1980s to early 1990s, Araeen continued to confront the legacy of his minimalist art, his situation as a migrant artist, and his identity in post-colonial British society. Reflecting on these works, Araeen recently said: “The nine-panel works of the eighties also have this symmetry, but their symmetrical order is broken and has become divided by two conflicting realities. Let me go back to what I said earlier, that I was caught between aesthetic sensibility and political awareness . . . However, in this work, I managed to bring together both of my concerns: aesthetics and the political.”¹⁷¹ It is in these works that we see many of Araeen’s key preoccupations of the decade take shape—no longer is he relying on the body as a means to explore identity, but instead relies on signifiers of otherness. Exploring tropes of identity

¹⁷⁰ Brett, “Abstract Activist,” 83.

¹⁷¹ Aikens, “In Conversation with Rasheed Araeen,” 85.

alongside his ongoing investigation of the minimalist language, Araeen confronts the tension between minimalist abstraction with that of image-based, identity-driven narratives. This period marks another important juncture in his career, in which he strikes a balance of sorts, between assimilation and refusal, and begins to challenge the system from within. Indeed, as Zöe Sutherland writes about his 1980s work, “a central question of Araeen’s career thus became how to make art that is politically radical and conscious, *within and against* the institutional spaces of the art world, such that those spaces might be transformed.”¹⁷²

Among the earliest in this series of ruptured minimalist spaces is *Green Painting* (1985–86) (fig. 1.19). The series of grid paintings all begin the same way: with four green, minimalist canvases—a color associated with ideas of nature and newness,¹⁷³ but which also have particular significance in Islam as well as being the color of the Pakistani flag, which is underscored in this work by including the Pakistani flag in the top, center image. The four canvases are separated and comprise the corner of each of his grid works. Araeen then fills the empty cruciform with a series of photographs. In *Green Painting*, Araeen has polluted the clean, minimalist canvases with the images of a blood-splattered ground. At its most basic, Araeen juxtaposes a color associated with rebirth and renewal with imagery of violence.

The images making up the central cruciform are photographs from the ritual slaughter of animals during Eid-ul-Adha (the festival that observes Abraham’s sacrifice of his son Isaac through the ritual killing of cloven hoofed animals).¹⁷⁴ The role of animal slaughter in Islamic religious ceremonies has played a role in Araeen’s work before. In 1980, the artist proposed ritually

¹⁷² Zöe Sutherland, “Dialectics of Modernity and Counter-Modernity: Rasheed Araeen’s Cruciform Works,” in *Rasheed Araeen*, ed., Nick Aikens (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2017), 191.

¹⁷³ “Rasheed Araeen interview with Helena Pivec,” M’ARS, Ljubljana, Slovenia, July 1994; as quoted in Paul Overy, *The New Works of Rasheed Araeen* (London: South London Gallery, 1994), 17.

¹⁷⁴ John Roberts, “Postmodernism and the Critique of Ethnicity: the recent work of Rasheed Araeen,” in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Rasheed Araeen, a retrospective: 1959 – 1987*, Antonia Payne & Angela Kingston, eds. (Birmingham, England: IKON Gallery, 1988), 21.

slaughtering a sheep for an exhibition at Ikon Gallery in London. The exhibition's concept was described to Araeen by the show's curator as "a large thematic exhibition . . . which would include a number of artists working in all media whose work is linked by a determination to push art beyond the usual boundaries of discretion and acceptability. A common factor that lies in much of the work will almost certainly be a preoccupation with linking art to such areas as custom [sic] and ritual"¹⁷⁵ Araeen's provisionally titled *Black Sheep* would have shown the artist slaughtering, skinning, cooking, and consuming a sheep in the gallery space, with the bones of the animal and the video of the performance remaining through the remainder of the exhibition. However, after initially being included in the exhibition, Araeen was ultimately rejected because of—as the curator put it—"a clear reaction [from the other artists] that the piece you propose does not fit with their work."¹⁷⁶ He goes on to describe a feeling that the proximity of his work to their work would "change both theirs and yours, to the worse."¹⁷⁷ Araeen astutely responded:

Obviously, my work contains elements of my own culture, and I'm not really surprised that these artists see my work different from their own. What I find objectionable is that they have used this difference in order to categorise my work, and by implication dismiss it as other than an artistic manifestation. I find it extremely disturbing that you should let some artists get away with the notion that the source of their own work is "deep within the imagination" (all artistic activity is to do with imagination) and that other people, of a different cultural background, have only some weird reasons to indulge in what they look down upon as "normal occurrence."¹⁷⁸

Araeen rightly acknowledges the way his work is marked as "other" because of his position as an outsider in London. It is the same rationale historically used to explain the difference between

¹⁷⁵ Christian Kravagna and Kunsthau Bregenz, eds., *The Museum as Arena: Artists on Institutional Critique* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1999), 65.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 66–67.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 67.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 68.

Western and non-Western art—that Western art is derived from imagination and artistic impulse, while ‘non-Western’ art is inherently ethnographic.

Perhaps it was in response that Araeen returned to minimalism, reimagining it and polluting the grid with a voice of otherness. His work of so-called “normal occurrence”—that of animal slaughter—collides with the purity of Western art that emerges from “deep within the imagination.” By titling it *Green Painting*, Araeen seemingly draws focus to the minimalist qualities of the work; the green canvases ostensibly take priority. Or perhaps Araeen is calling attention to that which he is rupturing, which he is destroying. Araeen’s four green paintings—emblematic of the purity of minimalism and art that is ‘imaginative’ and ‘driven by artistic impulse’—are, quite literally, destroyed and polluted with a voice of otherness. Moreover, green is an important and sacred color in Islam because it was the color of Prophet Muhammad’s standard and the interior of his mausoleum, and also evokes the green and white flags of his descendants.¹⁷⁹ It is for these reasons that Pakistan’s flag is green; it is a visual expression of the country’s Muslim identity.

Furthermore, Araeen’s use of collaged newspaper clippings at the bottom of each photograph adds an additional layer of information. The clippings are political in content and mostly refer to Pakistan—with frequent mentions of Zia ul Haq and at times Benazir Bhutto, while others situate the country in relation to its Russian and Afghan neighbors, or its US allies. Of course, to recognize any of this one has to first be able to read and understand Urdu. For this audience, the text has blatant references to Pakistan’s violent history. General Zia-ul-Haq became president in 1978 after leading a coup, which overthrew Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and imposed the third period of military rule in Pakistan. Under his presidency, Pakistan attempted to

¹⁷⁹ Ayesha Jalal, “Beyond the Symbolic to the Significant,” in *Mazaar, Bazaar: Design & Visual Culture in Pakistan*, ed. Saima Zaidi, Reprint edition (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 184.

create an official history, one that was centered on the process of Islamization. This process is directly linked to partition's legacy—founded as an Islamic state, it has—as outlined in the introduction—become the reason for Pakistan's existence.

However, beyond simply a narrative of the clash between Western and non-Western art, the photographs take on a pointed reference when one considers not just the violence the Black body faces in Western society, but also the violence that is so wedded to Pakistan's history. Perhaps coincidentally, the central image of blood spatter takes on the shape of India. The image of blood, combined with the flag of Pakistan in the topmost photograph, also calls to mind the country's history of violence and the blood shed as a result. It is against this history that Araeen spent his formative years growing up in Pakistan. The conflation of the Pakistani flag and images of splattered blood—particularly one in the shape of India—call to mind memories of the country's violent history and contentious present. Moreover, the image divided into four quadrants recalls the flag of England (which informs part of the Union Jack, the flag of Great Britain)—like England's flag, the painting is divided by a red cross, but here it is one made of blood. This evocation is a reminder of England's role in the history of Pakistan and their culpability in the violence of partition. Perhaps Araeen's *Green Painting* is intended to be a sort of alternate flag, one that combines Pakistan's many histories and identities.

In another painting from the series, *Bismullah* (1988), Araeen added gold paint to the four green minimalist canvases (fig. 1.20). The design on these panels evokes Islamic patterning, suggestive of the decoration one might see on Persian rugs or on the walls of mosques, and moreover looks like the cover of one of the most prominent English translations of the Quran (fig. 1.21). Into the empty cruciform space, Araeen has inserted photographs of candles at the four points. In the very center of the cruciform is once again an image of a floor splattered with blood.

On its surface, *Bismullah* has clear religious imagery—the candles allude to religious ceremonies within Islam and Christianity, as well as other religions. The title of the piece comes from the Arabic ‘Bismi’llah’, which means ‘in the name of Allah,’ but Araeen has changed the spelling so it instead reads ‘in the name of the priest.’ Through this linguistic change, Araeen speaks to the interventions between man and his god.¹⁸⁰ The pool of blood in the center of the grid once more calls to mind the role of sacrifice in Islamic religious festivals. Furthermore, this image situates Pakistan’s history of violence as a series of relationships: Araeen conflates common Islamic motifs, with images of blood splatter, and lit candles, evoking a history of religion, tradition, and violence that is fundamental to Pakistani history.

In these images, Araeen confronts Western ideas of the primitive through imagery of sacrifice and juxtaposes that with clean, modernist spaces. His conflation of these two is a pointed criticism of not just the art industry, but Western neo-imperialism. By relying on these tropes, Araeen calls into question markers of identity such as Western and “Other” and asks his viewers to define their relationship(s) to these identities and histories. Araeen critiques the supposed division between modernism and Islam, fusing the two in his grid paintings. The art historical canon has long failed to recognize Islam’s contribution to modernism and abstraction and moreover, often fails to recognize contemporary Islamic art. Araeen reconciles these histories in his grid paintings.

The Golden Verses

When Araeen erected his series of billboards across Britain in 1990, the work was met with violence: it was vandalized, graffitied, and defaced (figs. 0.4, 1.22). Each identical billboard

¹⁸⁰ Elizabeth Manchester, “Rasheed Araeen, ‘Bismullah’ 1988,” Tate, May 2000, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/araeen-bismullah-t06986/text-summary>.

consisted of an Oriental rug with Urdu script across the center that uses the same text from *Ethnic Drawings*.¹⁸¹ Titled *The Golden Verses*, this public art project—commissioned by Artangel, a London-based contemporary arts organization—functioned as a provocation. Scattered throughout the streets of London and beyond, these billboards—traditionally sites of capitalism—resisted easy consumption. Through his use of Urdu, Araeen forecloses a certain level of participation from his Western viewers. In so doing, they were made to feel *outside* the work, to feel *other*.

As detailed in the introduction, we should see the reactions to the billboards—and the viewers themselves—as integral components to the work. British, presumably white viewers who defaced the billboards were unable to understand the full meaning of the work and reacted only to the imagery of otherness, affirming the satire conveyed in the text. Put another way, the vandalism worked to negate the very illusion that Araeen acerbically describes on the billboards. In contrast, to a much smaller Urdu-speaking audience, the very rhetoric that was used to oppress the other was mirrored in their own language—the words recalling the discursive tools of colonialism. Because the artwork is installed publicly, Araeen has allowed the meaning of *The Golden Verses* to be determined by the individual—there is no spokesperson or wall text to explain the work. In this way, the audience becomes a critical component of the work, enabling *The Golden Verses* to exist as a key site where Araeen's otherness was both embodied and explored.

In September 1988 Salman Rushdie published his fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses*, which almost immediately caused controversy in the Islamic world due to its allegedly disrespectful representation of the prophet Muhammad. On February 14, 1989, following a violent riot in Pakistan, the Ayatollah Khomeini—Supreme Leader of Iran and a Shi'a Muslim scholar—called

¹⁸¹ When translated, the text reads: "White people are very good people. They have very white and soft skin. Their hair is golden and their eyes are blue. Their civilization is the best civilization. In their countries they live life with love and affection. And there is no racial discrimination whatsoever. White people are very good people."

the book blasphemous against Islam and issued a fatwā calling on Muslims to kill Rushdie and his publishers. A bounty was offered for Rushdie's death, and—as a result—he lived under police protection for years. The fatwā initiated worldwide violence: bookstores were firebombed, Muslim communities across Europe and the US held book burnings, many were injured and died in riots, and individuals involved with the translation and publishing of the book were attacked, injured, and even killed.

The Rushdie Affair marks the pivotal moment when Islam became a problem for the Western world. Described as the issue that irrevocably divided Muslims from Westerners along a fault line, the ensuing controversy served to reify stereotypical representations of Muslim identity as violent and intolerant religious extremists.¹⁸² *The Golden Verses* was created in response to the Rushdie controversy, and in it, Araeen deployed similar tropes of identity—such as the Oriental rug, calligraphic script, and idea of the civilized white man. The exotic, inscrutable oriental is thus contrasted with the morality of the white man—a juxtaposition that has underscored imperialist ideology for centuries. In so doing, Araeen confronted the illusory nature of these tropes of identity, thereby questioning the implications of these assumed social hierarchies.

Upon closer inspection, however, the billboards were revealed to have an English translation of the Urdu text subtly winding around its border. To be sure, as with any translation, the complications are many. The Urdu text—read from right to left, and its English translation—which winds around the border—creates uncertainty. Is this definitively a translation? If so, what is translated where? And moreover, no translation is a one-to-one, there are always questions of authenticity—and Araeen is addressing the misunderstandings that occur during such processes of exchange. *The Golden Verses* compelled viewers to go back and forth between translations,

¹⁸² Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and Its Aftermath* (Brooklyn: Melville House Pub, 2009), x.

between knowing and unknowing. It could be argued that in these moments, viewers oscillated between occupying positions of the self and the other—this back and forth destabilizing previously fixed notions of identity.¹⁸³

This back and forth challenged static constructions of identity. As described in the introduction, Homi Bhabha uses the metaphor of the stairwell to elucidate his meaning of the third space.¹⁸⁴ Inherently liminal, the stairwell constructs difference by asking the body to go up and down in perpetual motion. He argues that this back and forth prevents any identity from obstinately settling into a fixed place. For Bhabha, this liminal space creates a powerful moment of hybridity that escapes traditional hierarchies through a constant negotiation between both identities, thereby opening up a third space that challenges the conditions of both originals.¹⁸⁵ Like Bhabha's stairwell, *The Golden Verses* contains the same “hither and thither” that the stairwell produces.¹⁸⁶ The back and forth of the stairwell—or the translation in the billboards—prevents either identity from obstinately settling into fixity. This moment of hybridity escapes traditional hierarchies because viewers themselves are caught in between both identities. In this way, *The Golden Verses* succeeds in destabilizing previously fixed notions of identity.

This moment of being stuck in between identities, of performing the other while simultaneously performing yourself, reveals that identity represents nothing interior, but is instead created through social discourse. *The Golden Verses*, however, does something singular—it instigates a performance on the level of the viewer. It does not present the viewer with oppressive practices, only asking them to *imagine* otherness. I argue that instead viewers are made to internalize an experience of otherness, to embody alterity. Confronted in the street, the

¹⁸³ See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1–9.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

performance became internalized and compelled reactions of fear, rage, and in many cases violence. Because it is the viewer that experiences the performance, experiences feelings of dispossession—it is not so easily dismissed as artifice. In this moment of alterity, viewers experience the truth that their identity is only real to the degree at which it is performed. Through our relationship to the “other,” we define who we are and our place in society—when the line between performance and reality becomes blurred, the line between the self and the other is similarly blurred. In this way, Araeen forces viewers to confront their relationship to the other, and to their illusions of identity. By internalizing the experiences of marginalization, Araeen underscores the performance that lies at the heart of all identity.

Conclusion

Beginning in the 1990s Araeen’s work largely returned to a minimalist vernacular—creating outdoor sculptures and revisiting his lattice works of the 1960s. By the late 1990s, he largely stopped producing art altogether. In recent interviews, Araeen has expressed his desire to leave behind his more overtly political work of the 1970s and instead focus on his legacy as a minimalist artist. Indeed, in a 2014 article about Araeen, the first line he is quoted saying is, “When you write about me, talk about my art, not my politics.”¹⁸⁷ His focus on this legacy reflects his larger desire to recover—or assert—his place in the art historical narrative of modernism. This is further demonstrated by his recent statement, “How and why I became a ‘Muslim’ artist?” In this statement, he reflects his own growing awareness that he is not only a “pioneer of minimalist sculpture,” but also a “Pakistani/Muslim artist.”¹⁸⁸ He goes on to articulate the central role that Islamic art has in the history of modernism, and the need for art theorists, critics, and historians to

¹⁸⁷ Bailey, “Rasheed Araeen: A Man of History,” 60.

¹⁸⁸ Araeen, “How and Why I Became a ‘Muslim’ Artist?”

recognize the “role of Islamic history . . . within the centre of modernism.”¹⁸⁹ Araeen’s work from approximately 1970–1990 is important for the ways he begins to embrace and center Islamic narratives and histories within his art.

Araeen began making art again in the late 2000s by reasserting the importance of geometry and symmetry, but within a specifically Islamic framework.¹⁹⁰ Araeen has been increasingly interested in exploring Islamic art and, in 2010 published “Preliminary Notes for the Understanding of the Historical Significance of Geometry in Arab/Islamic Thought, and its Suppressed Role in the Genealogy of World History.”¹⁹¹ Simultaneously, Araeen began producing a body of work that is clearly an extension of his grid works of the 1980s. The *Homecoming* series similarly employ geometric patterns in a limited palette of bold colors (fig. 1.23). Rather than pure geometry, the patterns are flattened and abstracted Arabic letters depicting the names of important Muslim thinkers from the Abbasid era.¹⁹² Araeen’s aspirations in these works evoke his earliest minimalist structures and his equating symmetry with democracy: “I’m trying to connect this forgotten history, which is not the history of Islam alone but the history of humanity, how geometric thinking allows us to perceive the world in terms of equality for all.”¹⁹³ Araeen explores Islamic identity through a language of minimalism, an endeavor begun in his grid works.

Connected to Araeen’s works of the 1970s and 1980s that sought to combine the language of minimalism with a language of activism, Araeen’s 2017 Documenta installation in Athens, Greece confronted the country’s ongoing immigration and economic crises. In *Shamiyaana* —

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Iftikhar Dadi, “Rasheed Araeen’s Homecoming,” in *Essay for Exhibition Catalogue at VM Gallery, Karachi*, 2014, https://www.academia.edu/10615738/Rasheed_Araeens_Homecoming_catalog_essay.

¹⁹¹ Rasheed Araeen, “Preliminary Notes for the Understanding of the Historical Significance of Geometry in Arab/Islamic Thought, and Its Suppressed Role in the Genealogy of World History,” *Third Text* 24, no. 5 (September 1, 2010): 509–19.

¹⁹² Wilson-Goldie, “The Revolution Will Be Beautiful,” 386.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 387.

Food for Thought: Thought for Change, Araeen set up a tent sewn by local women—the patterns based on his art—in which food was served daily (fig. 1.24). The work brought together Syrian refugees, Athenians, and contemporary art goers as they shared meals together. Similar to *The Golden Verses*, those who participated in *Shamiyaana*—who ate a meal under its tent or had a conversation with someone they might otherwise not—were a vital component to the work; they altered and completed its meaning. An important component of the work was the potential to bring together people with a previously contentious relationship: Athenian citizens and Syrian refugees. In this way, the work acts in a similar way to *The Golden Verses*—but, while that work exposed the animus that existed between groups of people, *Shamiyaana* had the potential to bring them face-to-face and build relationships. Moreover, this work continued Araeen’s project, begun in the 1960s, of the audience being a critical component of his work. Araeen stated about *Shamiyaana*: “There’s a gap, a hierarchical gap, between what artists do and what ordinary people do in terms of expressing their own creativity. Artistic expression is seen as something higher, something precious. I want to demolish that gap . . . I want to bring these things together, so that people can express their own creativity through what I can initiate.”¹⁹⁴ Without the contribution of the public—both those who made the tents and food, as well as those who sat in the tents eating food—the work was incomplete.

Throughout Araeen’s career, a tension can be felt between his desire to recover his place in the narrative of modernism and his desire to dismantle art historical narratives. An analysis of his career makes apparent that art history is a product of Eurocentric powers that prohibit voices of the other. Not being able to participate in the system as a “free agent” pushed Araeen to produce art that challenged art historical categories with strict definitional boundaries. In a 2018 interview,

¹⁹⁴ Aikens, “In Conversation: Nick Aikens and Rasheed Araeen,” 207–208.

Araeen stated that throughout the period under discussion in this chapter, he became “trapped between [his] artistic sensibility and political consciousness.” He goes on to say, “Sometimes I became very political, but without losing my artistic sensibility. Other times my artistic sensibility suffered from my politics. My art became confrontational—explicitly confrontational towards the system that then became an obstacle in my pursuit of beauty in art.”¹⁹⁵ The period under consideration in this chapter, a period of “explicit confrontation”—which in hindsight Araeen has articulated as unsuccessful—makes visible the epistemic violence of art historical categories. He is, however, reluctant to be seen as a disruptive figure and instead wants to be absorbed into canonical narratives. While Araeen has felt consistently constrained by the system and trapped by art history’s frames of reference, Bani Abidi and Hamra Abbas exploit and confront them in ways that continue to challenge art historical paradigms. While a driving goal throughout Araeen’s career has been to recuperate his place in history, the work of Abidi and Abbas points to the governing structures that inherently foreclose the possibility of hearing the voice of the other. In other words, whereas Araeen has consistently struggled with burden of art historical representation in post-colonial London, Abidi and Abbas expose the systemic conditions that make representation essentially impossible.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 81.

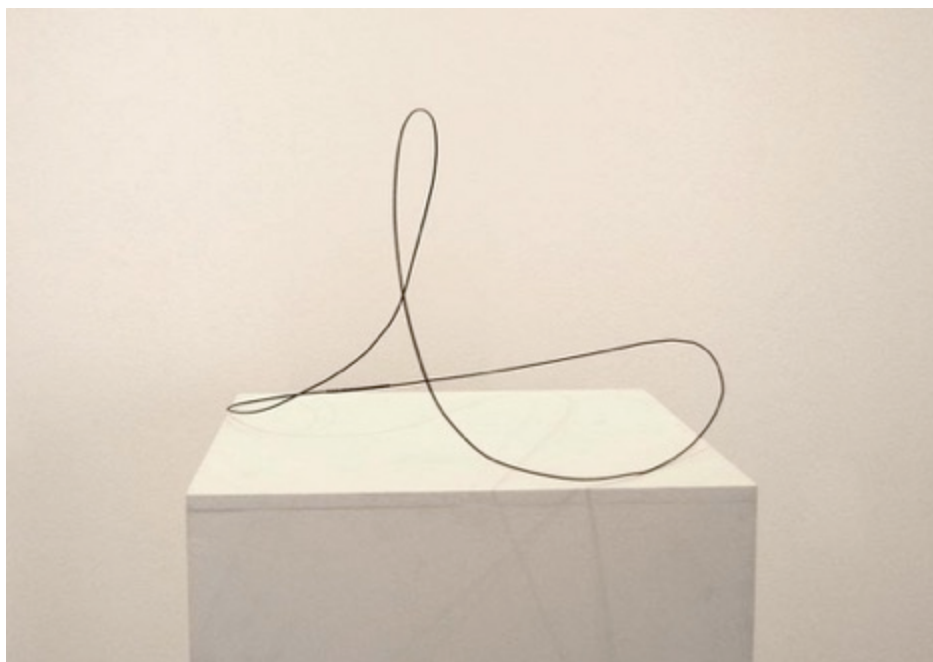


Fig. 1.1
Rasheed Araeen
My First Sculpture, 1959/1975
Steel, 18 x 18 x 15 in.



Fig. 1.2
Rasheed Araeen
Burning Bicycle Tyres, 1959/1975
Series of 9 photographs, dimensions variable



Fig. 1.3
Rasheed Araeen
Sculpture No. 2, 1965
Steel and paint, 48 x 48 x 48 in.



Fig. 1.4
Rasheed Araeen
First Structure, 1966–67
Painted steel, 55 x 55 x 55 in.

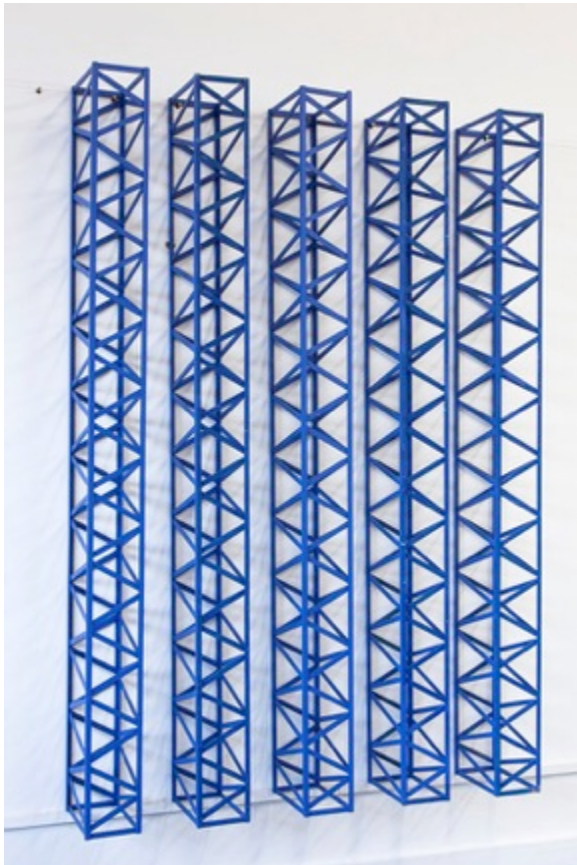


Fig. 1.5
 Rasheed Araeen
Punj Neelay (Five Blues), 1970
 Wood and paint, 67 x 61 5/8 x 5 in.



Fig. 1.6
 Rasheed Araeen
Zero to Infinity, 1968/2007
 Painted wood, 19.5 in square, each



Fig. 1.7
 Rasheed Araeen
Chakras, 1969–70
 sixteen C-prints, sixteen wood disks



Fig. 1.8
 Rasheed Araeen
Chakras V (Disks in Jheel Park, Karachi), 1974
 Performance



Fig. 1.9
 Rasheed Araeen
For Oluwale, 1971–73
 Collage on board, 4 panels, 47.8 x 47.8



Fig. 1.10
 Rasheed Araeen
For Oluwale, 1971–73 (detail)
 Collage on board, 4 panels, 47.8 x 47.8 in.

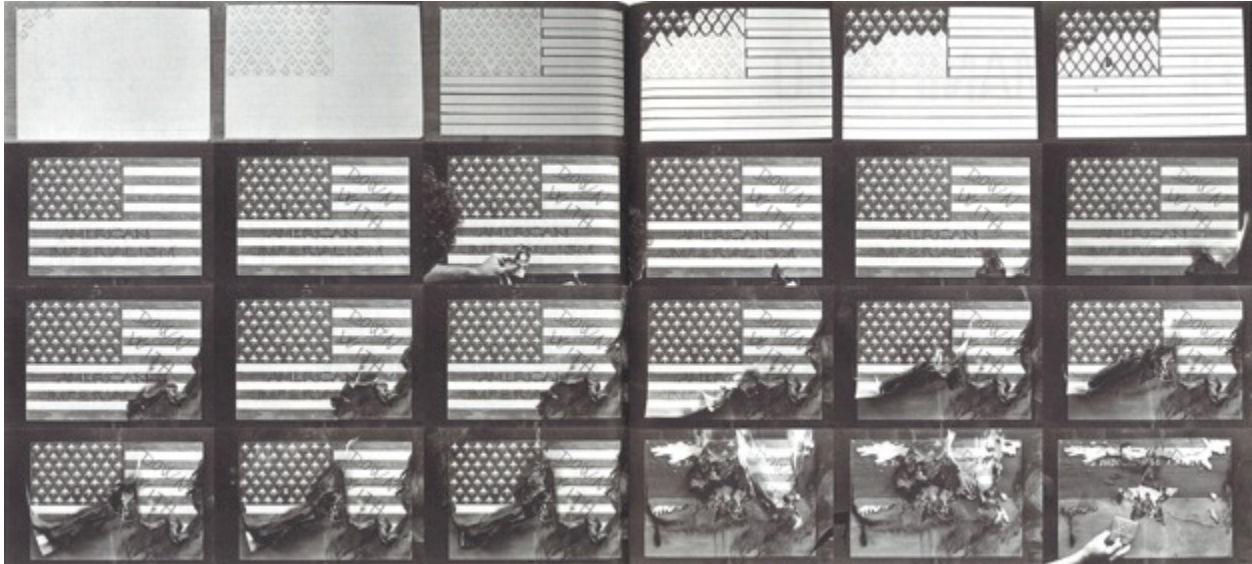


Fig. 1.11
 Rasheed Araeen
Fire!, 1975
 24 black and white photographs, 31.5 x 31.5 in.



Fig. 1.12
 Rasheed Araeen
Burning Ties, 1976/79
 Eight color photographs, 29.75 x 19.75 in., each

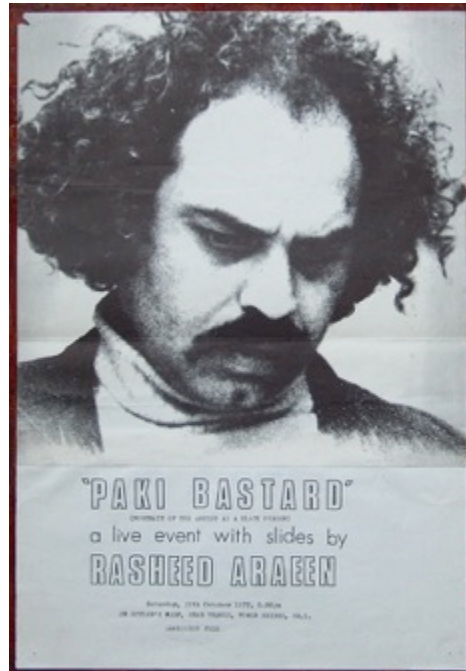


Fig. 1.13
Promotional poster for *Paki Bastard* (*Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person*), 1977



Fig. 1.14
Rasheed Araeen
Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person), 1977
Performance with slide projection and sound



Fig. 1.15
Vito Acconci
Claim Excerpts, 1971 (still)
Video, 60:20 min.



Fig. 1.16
Rasheed Araeen
How Could One Paint a Self-Portrait!, 1978
Mixed media, 47.25 x 39.25 in.



Fig. 1.17

Carrie Mae Weems

Mirror, Mirror, from the *Ain't Jokin'* series, 1987

Gelatin silver print, 24 x 20 in.

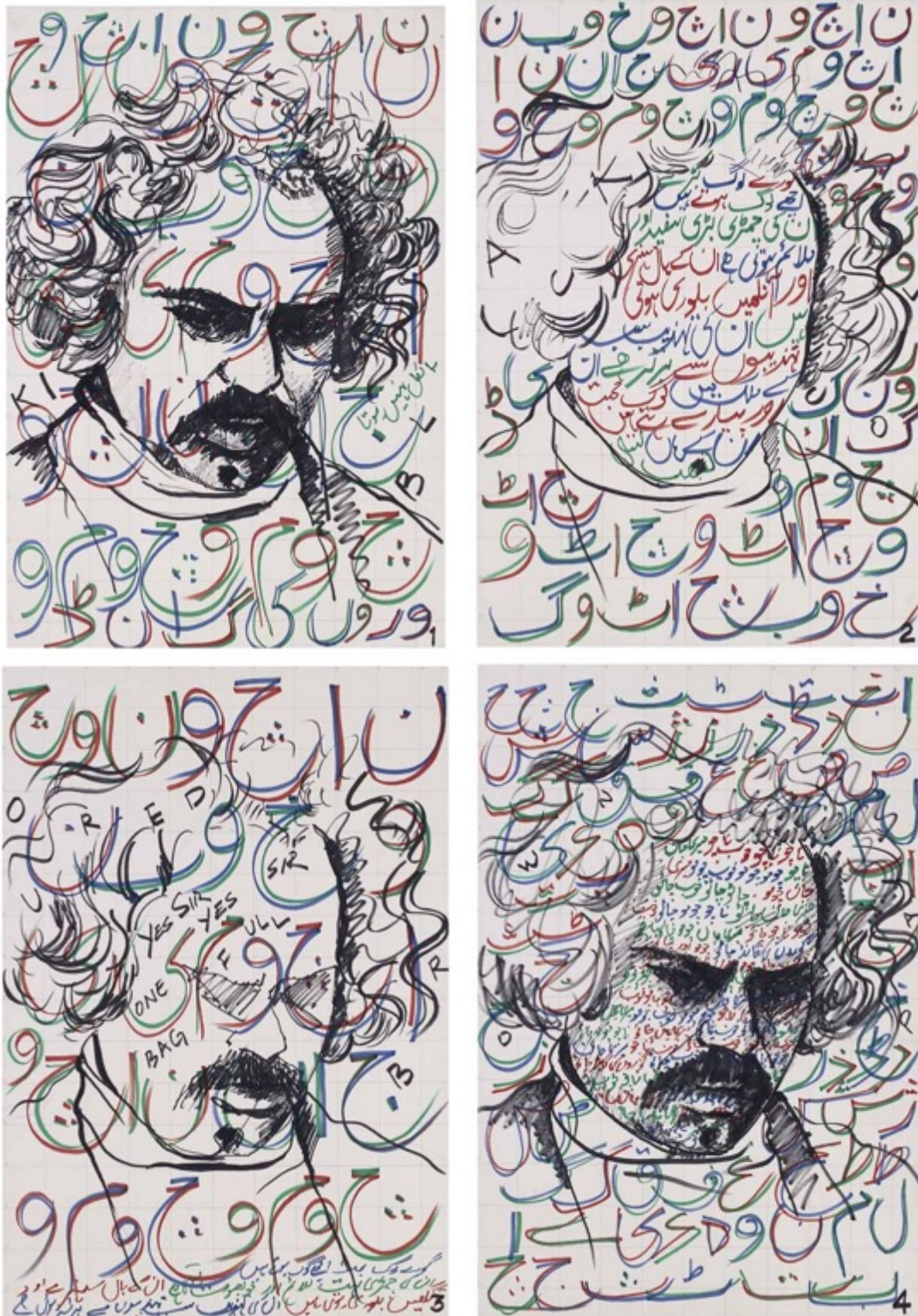


Fig. 1.18
Rasheed Araeen
Ethnic Drawings, 1982
4 panels, 30.5 x 20.75 in., each

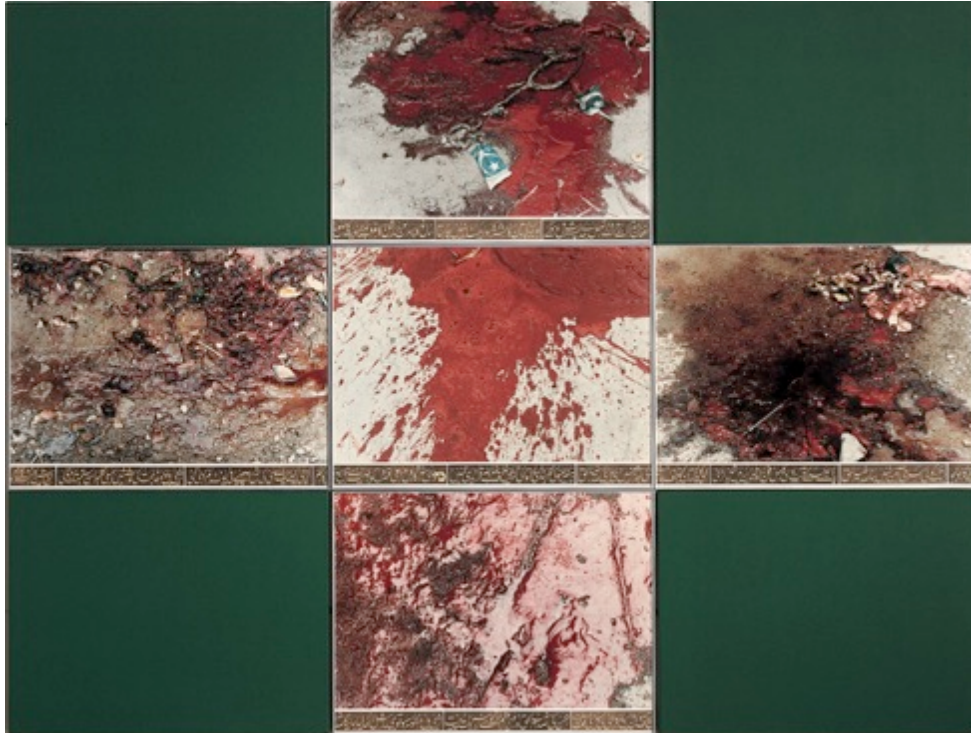


Fig. 1.19
 Rasheed Araeen
Green Painting, 1985–86
 Mixed media, nine panels, 68 x 89 in.

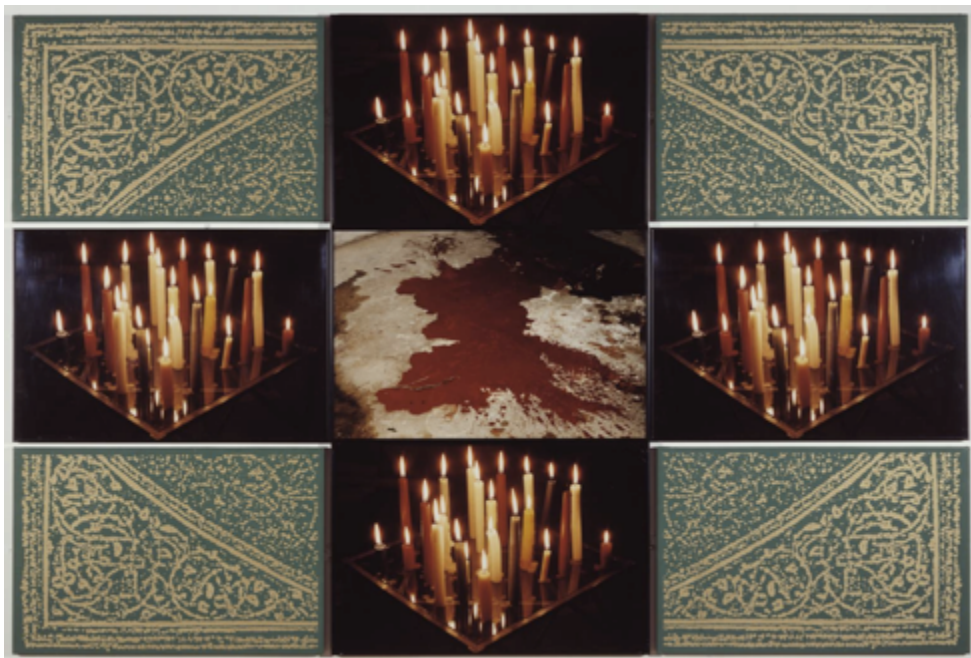


Fig. 1.20
 Rasheed Araeen
Bismullah, 1988
 Mixed media, nine panels, 68 x 89 in.

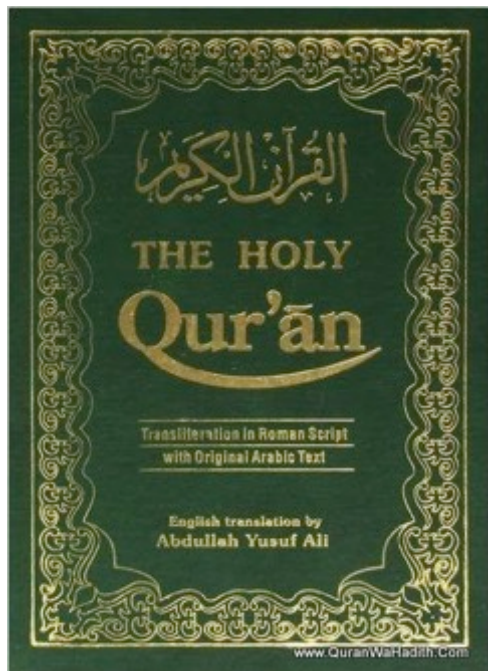


Fig. 1.21
The Holy Qur'an translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali



Fig. 1.22
Rasheed Araeen
The Golden Verses, 1990
Multicolor commercial print, 118 x 236 in.
Artangel billboard project, Jamaica Road, London

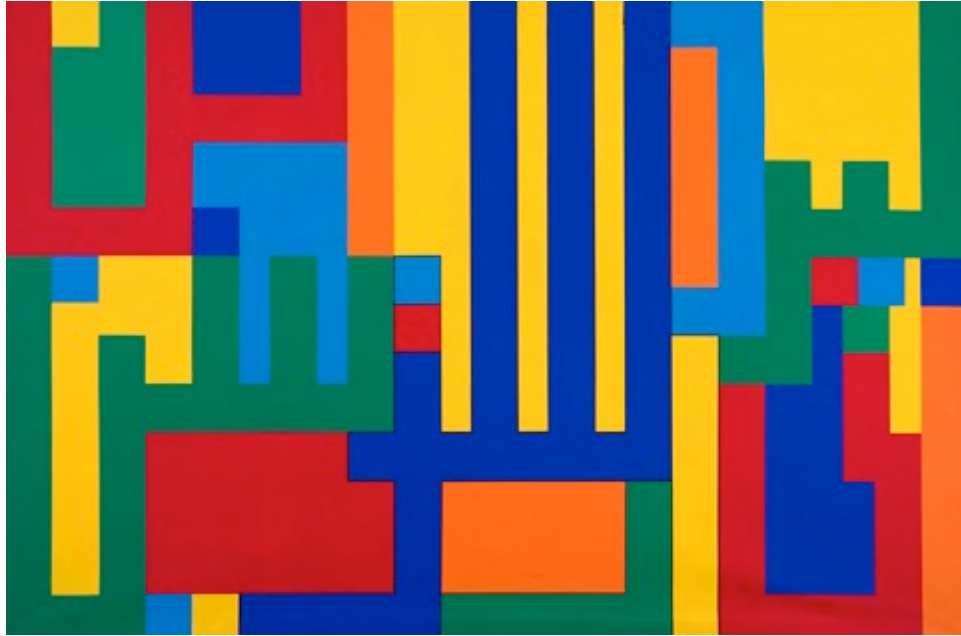


Fig. 1.23
 Rasheed Araeen
Guftugu I (A discussion between Al Barundi and Ibn Sina about Aristotle), 2014
 Acrylic on canvas, 63 x 93.7 in.



Fig. 1.24
 Rasheed Araeen
Shamiyaana—Food for Thought: Thought for Change, 2016–17
 Interactive installation at documenta 14, Athens

CHAPTER TWO: BANI ABIDI

A little more than ten years after the Rushdie Affair, Al-Qaeda terrorists would fly a plane into the World Trade Towers in New York City. If the Rushdie Affair helped define Islam as an extreme and fundamentalist religion in the Western media, then the events of September 11 amounted to Islam declaring an all-out war on Western civilization. The subsequent US-led “global war on terror” solidified mistrust of Islamic culture and the heightened Islamophobia that emerged in response created a global anxiety that continues to be felt to this day. Bani Abidi’s first work to gain international recognition, *Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner* (2004), was made in response to the fallout of 9/11 after her return to Pakistan following five years living in the United States (figs. 2.1–5). After September 11 and the subsequent US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, Pakistan—like most of world—was forced to articulate its relationship to the United States. As stated by then President George W. Bush in his September 20 address to Congress, “Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.”¹⁹⁶ For Abidi, *Shan Pipe Band* speaks directly the cultural and political subservience many countries have had to demonstrate towards the United States in the wake of the so-called “war on terror.”¹⁹⁷ And while Pakistan and the United States are both former British colonies, this shared—but ultimately very different—experience speaks to a circulation of imperial power in the global community.

A somewhat singular work in Abidi’s career, *Shan Pipe Band* is the only one that directly responds to contemporary political events, and yet—as an early work in her career—it emerges as

¹⁹⁶ “CNN.com - Transcript of President Bush’s Address - September 21, 2001,” accessed January 16, 2018, <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>.

¹⁹⁷ Bani Abidi, “Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner, 2004,” Accessed July 5, 2019. <https://www.baniabidi.com/#/shan-pipe-band-learns-the-star-spangled-banner-2004>.

a critical piece with which to consider her larger practice. In the film, Abidi lays the foundation for many of the concerns and strategies that would define future works. Throughout her practice, she exposes the way national identity is a series of performances, explores the myriad ways power is made visible, and documents varied modes of resistance that challenge those mechanisms of power. I argue that—in her ruminations on Pakistan—Abidi’s work highlights how the modern construction of the nation-state is both unstable and illusory, but at the same time wields very real power.

In her attention to the performance of the nation, Abidi points to the illusion at the heart of all identity and, in so doing, her work facilitates a challenge to the way we write art history around categories of identity. Moreover, in drawing our attention to how histories are constructed, she exposes the artifice and power behind all such narratives. In this way, she begins to unravel the seeming neutrality of historical and national narratives. As discussed in chapter one, throughout his career, Rasheed Araeen has expressed his desire to be a subject of history, to be a “free agent” and recover his contributions to the art historical discourse. Abidi’s work, however, highlights the idea that history is a construction of the hegemonic voice, and through this, we begin to see the futility of such desires.

Beginning with *Shan Pipe Band*, the backdrop of September 11 and the subsequent war provide the framework for much of her work going forward. Pakistan—as the major staging ground for the US-led war in Afghanistan—was destabilized by US military activity, including the refugee crisis of North Waziristan that was a result of the Taliban’s infiltration into the North-West Frontier Province.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, in 2011 Osama Bin Laden would be found and killed in Pakistan, an event that highlighted the country’s increasingly precarious relationship with the United States.

¹⁹⁸ Shahzeb Jillani, “North Waziristan Offensive: Anger and Fear of Refugees,” *BBC News*, June 24, 2014, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27980938>.

As detailed in the introduction, Pakistan's daily climate is one of insecurity, hostility, and conflict as it grapples with its national and Islamic identities. These conflicts are only exacerbated by the neo-imperial activities of the United States. Abidi's body of work is an incisive and ongoing investigation of nationhood, political power, and bureaucracy in Pakistan.

For *Shan Pipe Band*, Abidi commissioned a brass pipe band to learn and play the United States national anthem. A two-channel video, the left opens with the band listening to the recording of a traditional brass band playing "The Star-Spangled Banner," followed by their attempts to play it (fig. 2.1). As the band members listen to the recording, the camera pans throughout their studio—we see various instruments hanging on walls, photographs of the band, and religious imagery—both photographs and bazaar art. The drummer is the first to learn the piece, practicing on the floor alongside the recording. Later, when the bagpipes begin to play, the other performers laugh and joke—the dissonant sounds are both jarring and humorous, not just to the performers, but also to those of us watching the video. One of the band members in particular laughs and turns around to look directly at the camera—aware not only of being watched, but also of the peculiar task before them (fig. 2.2). This simple, spontaneous gesture further invites viewers in, asking them to be a part of the joke and laugh with the struggling performers.

The band leader, who at times plays clarinet and other times sings along, directs the other band members and helps them find the melody. A later scene in the video reveals a piper struggling to find his note—the leader laughs, resting his forehead in his hand, the absurdity of their performance seeming to keenly strike in that moment (fig. 2.3). There are a lot of starts and stops, a lot of joking, and a lot of shaking heads throughout the video. Finally, in the last minute and a half, the band does a complete run through with all the instruments—a snare drum, bass drum, tambourine, clarinet, and two bagpipes.

Meanwhile, on the right channel of the video we see the environment surrounding the band's practice space in the city of Lahore, as well as the band members themselves while they dress for the performance. The first thing we see is the sign outside the studio featuring the image of a painted bagpiper surrounded by Urdu words. The right channel then goes black and we are told this is the "Shan Pipe Band, Bhatee Gate." After about a minute, we are given a view of a street scene; presumably outside the studio in Bhatee Gate, one of the six remaining historic gates in the walled city of Lahore. The street scene reveals a fruit vendor as vehicles and pedestrians pass by, occupied with the daily tasks that go on regardless of what is happening in the studio, or in the world (fig. 2.4). The film then cuts to an interior shot looking out a studio window toward a building across the street.

After these scenes outside the studio, the video returns inside as the performers begin to dress in their uniforms (fig. 2.5). Their red jackets, green pants, fantail hats, and epaulets with the crescent moon and star of the Pakistani national flag recall the pageantry of military uniforms. Their hats, in particular, evoke those of the Pakistan Rangers who—among other tasks—close the Wagah border in a nightly ceremony of elaborate spectacle. More recently (in 2014), the Rangers formed a military band whose uniforms are identical to the Shan Pipe Band's, with the exception that their pants are gray rather than green. The band's uniform also includes a long tartan shoulder cape—called a full plaid—that evokes the Scottish roots of these bands. But instead of the traditional Scottish kilts, the band members wear pants. Our last view is of them still getting dressed, before the camera returns outside—we never see the band fully dressed in their uniforms. In fact, we are never treated to a full performance—on the left side of the screen we see and hear the performers complete one run-through of the song and on the right we see them in the process

of dressing—but we are never privy to the full regalia of the performance. We are ultimately left wanting more.

Throughout the film, other than the occasional conversation among band members, all we hear, in one form or another, is “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Despite seeing street scenes in Lahore, we are denied the cacophony of sounds we can assume would accompany such moments of city life. Abidi denies her viewers the full experience of the space. We are not allowed to access the sights and sounds of all that is happening—we can only see and hear what she has permitted. “The Star-Spangled Banner” affects the entirety of the viewing experience, evoking the global omnipresence of the United States and its policies.

What at first appears to merely be a humorous exercise slowly unfolds into a conversation on issues of globalism, migration, and imperialism. As the band struggles to learn this foreign piece, Abidi has produced an allegory of Pakistan’s history being forced to yield to other cultures. Moreover, because brass pipe bands are a leftover from the colonial era, the piece further speaks to the Indian subcontinent’s complex and prolonged history of colonialism. Originally attached to the British colonial military, these bands continue to play, often performing Indian music at weddings and other events.¹⁹⁹

The translation of the musical score that occurs throughout the video proves a useful framework for considering the piece more broadly. Translation, while often used to reference the exchange of languages, by definition includes any act of exchange. The most evident act of translation within the video is the translation that occurs when the band listens to a recording of the anthem played by a traditional brass band and works to transpose the melody for a pipe band.

¹⁹⁹ Salima Hashmi, “Hanging Fire: An Introduction,” in *Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art from Pakistan*, ed. Salima Hashmi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 29.

Much like the act of linguistic translation, the difficulty of this process exposes the labor and complexity that are hallmarks of genuine exchange and cultural interaction.

Translation helps to map moments of cross-cultural contact and indeed—at its core—is about exchange and understanding across cultures.²⁰⁰ But if translators seek to maintain fidelity to the original words in an effort to create a “literal” translation—instead of translating to give an overall impression of the idea—the resulting translation can be bewildering and difficult to comprehend in the foreign culture. This awkwardness of translation can be felt throughout Abidi’s video. The clumsiness of the performance in *Shan Pipe Band* underscores the often forced and unwieldy interactions that result from globalism. The process of taking a musical score not written for bagpipes and transposing the music—after only listening to the score—is an experience that is at best hard and, at worst, nearly impossible given the divergent instruments. The work highlights the awkwardness that results from encountering difference and, moreover, speaks to the “asymmetry and inequality in modern cross-cultural encounters.”²⁰¹ Because it is not simply a matter of opening oneself up to the foreign, important questions about relationships of power are at the forefront of such encounters. Abidi simultaneously addresses the promises and failures of globalism. The work speaks to the possibility of coming together by crossing borders. After all, the video acknowledges encounters across and between South Asia, Great Britain, and the United States. But one must also acknowledge the power relationships between these encounters. The struggle of transposing this music draws attention to the difficulty of reaching across borders and speaks to the complexity of these countries ever truly seeing eye-to-eye. The piece reminds viewers that exchange is not devoid of geopolitical concerns.

²⁰⁰ Schulte and Biguenet, *Theories of Translation*, 1.

²⁰¹ Akcan, *Architecture in Translation*, 3.

Abidi reflects on the colonial experience, exploring how countries are forced to perform the traditions of and be subjected to the rules and regulations of the colonizing country. But critically, forms of resistance can be witnessed throughout the film. Moments of humor and joviality can be understood as moments of resistance to cultural oppression. Jokes, as Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson argue, can be understood within the framework of James C. Scott's articulation of everyday resistance. Joking among oppressed peoples can create a reprieve from the brutal conditions in which they live and can further provide a sense of camaraderie.²⁰² Other forms of resistance can be witnessed throughout the video. For example, over the duration of *Shan Pipe Band*, Abidi reveals the everyday events that are happening outside the studio in Bhati Gate, part of the historic heart of Lahore. This area of the city speaks directly to the multiple histories and identities of Pakistan: there is architecture in the area reflecting the country's Mughal, Sufi, Sikh, and Colonial histories. Bhati Gate reveals that not only has life continued throughout these long histories, but that the populations have absorbed and interpreted these histories, making them a part of their own identity.

Moreover, it should be emphasized that the performance is a translation of "The Star-Spangled Banner," not a copy—no translation is a duplicate of the original. Rather, the process of translation is one of transformation. In this way, the performance becomes a metaphor for the refusal to simply be subjects of a colonizing force. Abidi not only speaks to how Pakistan has been colonized, but critically reflects on how the country has absorbed the foreign, often translating these imported objects and histories into emblems of national identity. As detailed in the introduction, translation enables spaces of authority to be transformed into spaces of rebellion. The pipe band—a remnant of colonial authority—was changed and ultimately subverted into a marker

²⁰² Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson, "'Everyday Resistance': Exploration of a Concept and Its Theories," *Resistance Studies Magazine*, no. 1 (2013): 19.

of Pakistani-ness. The US national anthem, too, is transformed. They are, to quote Bhabha, “split between [their] appearance as original and authoritative and [their] articulation as repetition and difference.”²⁰³ These zones of contact—a result of imperialism—become spaces for subversion and resistance in Pakistan.

In her work, Abidi addresses Pakistan’s history and status as a nation-state, deconstructing the relationship between the two, which are intimately bound, as Judith Butler writes in *Who Sings the Nation-State*. The state comprises the laws and bureaucratic structures under which citizens of the state are bound.²⁰⁴ But if it is the state that binds, Butler writes, it is also what unbinds, and it does so in the name of the nation.²⁰⁵ In the case of Pakistan, the state obtains its validity from the nation; it is the construction of the nation that justifies the formation of Pakistan in the first place. In drawing attention to the fraught and contingent history of Pakistan, Abidi encourages her viewers to deconstruct and reconsider all such frames of reference. She highlights the relationship between the performative and the political.²⁰⁶

National Identities and the Making of Histories

Abidi’s work is staged in a way that fiction reads like truth. While narrative remains integral throughout her practice, her work draws our attention to the fluid space between truth and fiction. Abidi identifies the ways in which power dynamics are naturalized through the production of images and other forms of representation. While images are increasingly relied on as a primary medium of communication as well as mobilized as a means of persuasion, Abidi’s work asks us to consider the veracity of such images. Moreover, she explores the construction and performance of

²⁰³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 153

²⁰⁴ Butler and Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, 3.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 4–5.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 66.

national identities—nations are built on histories that have become mythologized and there is, therefore, an inherent balance between truth and fiction in the construction of these histories. National identities, Abidi reminds us, are brought into existence by being performed and reified. Her work thus enacts a resistance to the ways that national identities are created and expressed. This resistance, in turn, opens a space for reexamining our frames of reference. Her practice investigates the lacuna between fact and fiction, and Abidi considers not just the construction of nations, but of our daily social relations in every stratum of society.

Bani Abidi was born in Karachi in 1971. Her parents, originally from India, migrated to Pakistan with their families at the time of partition. This history of migration places Abidi in the Mohajir community in Karachi.²⁰⁷ Like others in this community, Abidi grew up in a literary and intellectual household that had a mediated relationship with the country.²⁰⁸ The largely Urdu-speaking Mohajir community was, typically, wealthier and better educated and therefore had greater political power early on in Pakistan. Moreover, the status of Muslim refugees in Pakistan's early years was seen as analogous to the sacrifices made by the first Islamic community in seventh-century Arabia.²⁰⁹ Settling in Karachi, the Mohajir community transformed this port-city into an Urdu-speaking metropolis, causing friction and mistrust between local Muslims and the refugees.²¹⁰ Further exacerbating this complex relationship to Pakistan, Abidi is a Shia Muslim, which has often meant at least discrimination or at worst to be the target of terrorist attacks.²¹¹ The

²⁰⁷ Bani Abidi, e-mail message to author, July 21, 2011. The Mohajir community refers to those Muslims who chose to leave India and migrate to Pakistan.

²⁰⁸ Bani Abidi, e-mail message to author, July 21, 2011.

²⁰⁹ Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 50, 51.

²¹⁰ Mohammad A. Qadeer, *Pakistan: Social and cultural transformations in a Muslim nation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 40.

²¹¹ Bani Abidi, e-mail message to author, July 21, 2011. Throughout Pakistan's history, a belief that Shia Muslims failed to properly express Islam has justified discrimination by the Sunni Majority (Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan*, p 4). Unlike Sunnis, Shia Muslims believe that only God can appoint someone to uphold Islam, the Quran, and Sharia. In other words, God's representatives (such as prophets and imams) cannot be elected. This sectarianism has repeatedly dominated politics in Pakistan and has given rise to violence that has threatened to destroy the country.

intense desire to define a Pakistani identity through Islam relegated minorities (including those minorities within the Muslim faith) to outsider status. As Butler writes—echoing the words of Hannah Arendt—the nation-state is “bound to expel and disenfranchise national minorities” because they pose a threat to the foundations of the nation-state.²¹² Abidi’s relationship to these histories and her position as a minority within the dominant culture of Pakistan resulted in a mediated relationship to the country that has colored much of her work.

After earning her BFA in painting and drawing at the National College of Arts in Lahore, Abidi pursued her MFA in the United States. It was here that she began to investigate and unpack issues of identity in a post-colonial world.²¹³ After leaving the US, Abidi’s work shifted and she began to explore the structural aspects that mark and define Pakistani identity. Many of her projects have the unique ability to point to Pakistan, while simultaneously pointing elsewhere. Objects that at first read as typically Pakistani are, upon further inspection, not rooted to the country in any concrete way. There is a particularity devoid of anything innately specific to Pakistan. This ‘elsewhere-ness’ of her practice enables Abidi to question Pakistani national identity by pointing to the outside influences the country has absorbed and translated. Moreover, in this way, Abidi’s

This conflict was exacerbated under General Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamization program, which was resisted by Shia Muslims and viewed as privileging Sunni interpretations of Islamic Law (Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan*, p 58.) Sectarian violence has become more prominent since Zia’s rule. Shia-Sunni violence was particularly bad in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the Punjab. In 1989–99 in the Punjab province, over 600 people—most of whom were Shia—were killed as a result of sectarian violence. (Naveeda Ahmed Khan and Syed Akbar Hyder, eds., “Iqbal and Karbala,” in *Beyond Crisis: Re-Evaluating Pakistan*, Critical Asian Studies [London: Routledge, 2010], 390.) Violence against Shia Muslims has escalated in the 2000s.

²¹² Butler and Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, 23.

²¹³ Francesco Cincotta, “Featured Artist: Interview with Bani Abidi,” *Naked Punch* 10 (Spring 2008), 92. For example, her first film, *Mangoes* (1999) shows two immigrant women—one Pakistani and one Indian. As they sit and eat mangoes, they recollect memories of their childhood and homelands in English. What is at first a simple encounter turns increasingly hostile as the two women (both played by the artist) start to compare the different types of mangoes grown in their respective countries, always trying to one-up the other. On the surface, this interaction reveals the level of nostalgia and nationalism that exists in immigrant communities. But more deeply, the interaction speaks to the tense relationship between India and Pakistan. As they discuss the varieties of mangoes in each country, a clear metaphor for nuclear armament unfolds. (Stephen Wright, “Beyond Borders Art of Pakistan,” *Parachute*, 2005) “So how many sorts of mangoes do you have in Pakistan,” the Indian woman asks, to which the Pakistani woman replies, “About five, and in India?” “We have six,” she responds. It is clear that the women are referring to nuclear weapons, as the varieties of mangoes are actually in the hundreds.

work could be described as destabilizing, reconsidering, and challenging narratives of national identity on a broader scale.

The staging of her 2006 series, *The Boy Who Got Tired of Posing*, combines photography and video in ways that blur the line between documentary and narrative fiction. The series focuses on the historical eighth-century figure of Muhammad bin Qasim and questions his role in the history of nation building. Bin Qasim was an Arab general who led a successful campaign into India and conquered Sindh (the southern province of Pakistan, the capital of which is Karachi) in the year 712 CE. He is, therefore, identified as the first citizen of Pakistan, in spite of the fact that Pakistan was far from anyone's imagination at the time. Historian Manan Ahmed Asif opens his book exploring the history of bin Qasim's narrative, saying, "Beginnings are a seductive necessity. The interest in beginnings is not new—narratives of origins and genealogies frame much of the recorded past."²¹⁴ Indeed, the desire to locate historical roots is not in any way unique to Pakistan, but Asif's book investigates what happens when we re-visit "history" and question its narratives and origins. Abidi, too, is interested in unpacking history's narratives and origins and, by highlighting of the façade of bin Qasim's narrative, she draws our attention to the fallacy of all such historical re-imaginings.

The Boy Who Got Tired of Posing—which is composed of three distinct works—is a potent critique of the ways national histories are constructed. In the 1980s, under the presidency of General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan attempted to create an official history that was centered on Islamic history and past Muslim glories. Bin Qasim's mythos is integral to this official history, which extended to textbooks that were written to convey Pakistan as a nation-state with

²¹⁴ Manan Ahmed Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 1.

inextricable connections to the history of Islam.²¹⁵ Narrative is an integral component to the series. Indeed, Abidi has described the text and images working in tandem and without hierarchy.²¹⁶ Throughout the series, Abidi replicates the myth-making process or, rather, unmask and re-appropriates this invented history.

In three photographs, *The Boy Who Got Tired of Posing* re-enacts the 1980s trend of parents having their sons photographed as bin Qasim (fig. 0.8).²¹⁷ Accompanying the images is a framed text Abidi has written to narrate the work:

During the 80's there emerged a new genre of studio photography in the urban centers of Pakistan. Many parents would come to studios wanting to get their sons photographed as Mohammad bin Qasim. Some people who noticed this trend ascribe it to the fact that it was around this time that the subject of Pakistan Studies taught at schools and colleges started focusing on the conquest of Sindh by Arab General Mohammad Bin Qasim as the seed that eventually led to the creation of Pakistan. Subsequently this removed any doubts in the minds of millions of Pakistanis as to where the origins of their nation lay. Presented here are photographs that the artist has collected from 2 studios in Karachi from that period. In the collection is also included a photograph of one boy who apparently got tired of posing.

Abidi's narrative explores how national myths are reified through everyday actions. But she also pokes fun at the notion that school lessons and textbooks would have the power to sweep away an entire country's doubts about Pakistan's national origins. Through humor, she disarms the viewer, making them culpable in so easily accepting such narratives.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 7. As Manan Ahmed Asif recounts, social studies textbooks were re-written in 1979 under General Zia-ul-Haq's educational policies. The chapter "First Citizen" reads (as quoted in Asif): "Before the dawn of Islam, the trade relations had been setup [sic] between India and the Arabs. The Muslims invaded the subcontinent in 712 A.D. Prior to this Arabs used to visit this land for the sale & [sic] purchase of their goods. The Arab traders were staunch Muslims and therefore taught Islam to the people of India. A number of Arab traders had also settled in Sri Lanka and due to trade had good relations with the people. With the passage of time some of the traders died. The Raja of Sri Lanka who was kind hearted, he sent the widows and their children and belongings on eight ships along with gifts for the Muslim caliph. When these ships reached near the port of Debal the pirates plundered these ships. The Arab women and children were made captives. Some of the Muslims managed to escape and made aware of Hajjaj bin Yousaf of the entire incident. Conflict between the Arabs and rulers of Sind started due to this incident. Hajjaj bin Yusuf sent Muhammad bin Qasim to conquer Sind. This was the foundation of Pakistan."

²¹⁶ Bani Abidi, e-mail message to author, July 21, 2011.

²¹⁷ Simone Wille, "Trumping History," in *Bani Abidi: Videos, Photographs, and Drawings*, ed. Anita Dawood (London: Green Cardamom, 2009), 25.

In the first two images we see young boys dressed as the famous Arab warrior; one boy is riding a toy horse while the other is standing and wears a costume version of a thobe—the long robe worn by Muslim men. Both boys wear a ghutra and egal—the headscarf and band that keeps it in place—and carry toy swords. Their modern, ‘Western’ clothing remains visible underneath their costumes—the conflation of costume and everyday attire echoes the conflation between truth and fiction in the mythologizing of history. In the third image, however, we see an empty studio, the Arab clothing on the floor, the sitter fleeing the scene; all that we see is his foot as he departs the set. Abidi reflects on how nations are upheld through the daily performance of its citizens. By continuing to emulate bin Qasim, Abidi draws our attention to how myths surrounding the foundation of Pakistan are continually reaffirmed. In fact, the performance of the nation becomes so inundated in everyday life that it is often done without awareness. Moreover, in drawing our attention to boyhood, Abidi conveys the ways in which children are the future national body. In much the same ways that textbooks educate young adults, toys and play inform future identities. In the final image, however, the sitter has fled the scene. He has become tired of posing and refuses to be a part of this narrative any longer. In rejecting the performance, the boy who has tired of posing simultaneously resists national narratives.

Further exploring how these nationalist narratives become absorbed and reified, *This Video is a Re-enactment* uses footage taken from a film dramatizing Muhammad bin Qasim’s conquest of Sindh—and therefore also the beginning of Islam in Sindh—which aired on PTV (Pakistan Television Corporation) in 1993 (fig. 2.6). The footage of the 58-second video is shown on a series of five television sets, all set in non-descript settings, all showing the same scene on repeat. That scene depicts bin Qasim riding in slow motion on horseback alongside his companions on a

mission to rescue Arab prisoners captured by Hindu pirates. As narrated in the accompanying text, which is framed and appears alongside the video:

On the evening of June 19th 1993, a historical drama about the conquest of Sindh by Mohammad Bin Qasim was being aired on local TV channels, a strange twist in the broadcast was noticed by the TV channel staff. In that particular episode, Mohammad Bin Qasim and his companions are shown riding towards Sindh to rescue Arab prisoners captured by Hindu pirates in the Arabian Sea. What occurred was that this scene appeared to run in extreme slow motion during the broadcast, whereas in fact it was not shot or edited this way. No one was ever able to explain the reason for this discrepancy between the actual footage and the way it appeared on television sets across the country.

Abidi directly confronts the manipulation of history and the ways it gets absorbed into every layer of daily life—appearing in living rooms, history books, family photographs, and more.

Abidi focuses on a critical moment in the narrative. The modern mythologizing of bin Qasim is, in part, a response to colonial histories that defined Muslims as conquerors. British histories of the Indian subcontinent were often an integral part of their colonial project and, in their histories of Muslim rule in India, the British defined them violent oppressors. This became a justification for their interventions in Sindh. As Manan Ahmed Asif writes, “the [East India] Company’s own conquest of Sind was cast as a corrective to the Muslim conquest—a move to proclaim the emancipation of Hindus from the clutches of foreign Muslims.”²¹⁸ When Pakistan was writing its own history, it was vital to recast this narrative and, as such, focused on the Muslim woman that was abducted and needed rescuing.²¹⁹ Pakistan’s history rests on the notion that the conquest of Sindh was to redress this wrong.²²⁰

Abidi then re-writes history herself by attributing the slow-motion scene to an almost divine-like intervention. This ‘discrepancy’ in the film becomes a part of the mythology in such a

²¹⁸ Asif, *A Book of Conquest*, 162–163.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 146.

²²⁰ Ibid.

way that further immortalizes bin Qasim and his actions. Abidi points to the way historical myths are blend of fact and fiction. Moreover, the apparently miraculous slow motion of the film further draws our attention to the way in which modern modes of image making are often seen to reveal a higher truth. Abidi deconstructs and challenges the political use value of image making, while at the same time inserting her body of work into that very history of myth making.

The largest component of the series, *The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim* is comprised of eight photographs and a framed story accompanying the images (figs. 2.7–14). The story tells of the young man seen in each of the images:

Yusuf Masih, a young choir singer from Hyderabad, converted to Islam at age 17 and changed his name to Yusuf Khan. According to his family he had always been a very sensitive and withdrawn child. Soon after his conversion, Yusuf, after a spate of arguments with his family members left home and moved to Karachi. Having become a Don Quixote of sorts, he now rides around all over the country on his horse dressed up as an Arab warrior believing himself to be Mohammad Bin Qasim.²²¹

Abidi has invented the character Yusuf Masih, who believes that he is Muhammad bin Qasim.²²²

In each of the images we see the man; often he is depicted on horseback and carrying a plain, solid colored flag. Seen roaming throughout the modern cities of Karachi and Lahore, he is situated in front of recognizably Muslim sites—both those of historical and contemporary significance: the Three Swords Monument in Karachi, commissioned by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and inscribed with Jinnah’s creed of Unity, Faith, and Discipline (fig. 2.7); the Minar-e-Pakistan (or Tower of Pakistan) monument in Lahore built in commemoration of the Lahore Resolution, the first official declaration to establish Pakistan in 1940 (fig. 2.8); the Mazar-e-Quaid in Karachi, the tomb of Muhammad Ali Jinnah (fig. 2.9); the Lahore Fort, a citadel that dates back to the Mughal emperor

²²¹ Anita Dawood, ed. *Bani Abidi: Videos, Photographs & Drawings* (London: Green Cardamom, 2009), 14.

²²² Traditionally, the historic figure’s name is spelled Muhammad bin Qasim, whereas Abidi has spelled his name Mohammad, the transliteration common in Pakistan. Muhammad is the transliteration of the original Arabic.

Akbar and has been added to by subsequent rulers (fig. 2.10); and the Tomb of Jahangir in Sindh, a mausoleum built in 1637 for the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (fig. 2.11). All of these locations reflect Mughal history or individuals and moments that are integral to Pakistan's contemporary history as a nation-state. The sites Abidi has chosen as a backdrop for her bin Qasim speak to Pakistan's complicated—and revisionist—history.

At first glance, these images strike the viewer as authentic; Abidi relies on the history of black and white documentary photography in order to confuse her audience. A closer investigation, however, clearly identifies them as constructed images. The relationships of figure to ground and their odd proportions reveal the digital manipulation of these works. The result is unsettling; the images hover between verisimilitude and surreality. This bin Qasim is bizarrely out of proportion to his surroundings, towering over people and buildings in several images, while in other images, his horse is strangely hovering above the ground. And yet, in every image, he seems to go about his business, completely unaware of his strange relationship to his surroundings. In one image, in particular, the horse and his rider travel through the urban city as cars move alongside the pair (fig. 2.12). The historical figure is oddly out of place in his modern surroundings, but he seems unaware, or perhaps just unconcerned.

Abidi's digital manipulation draws our attention to the staging of history. She unpacks how the creation of these official histories can substantively alter the actual course of a country. Abidi's use of photographs and video emphasizes the seductive nature of such shams, which in part rely on a long history of individuals being trained to view and understand photographs as capturing the reality of an event. In the creation of an 'official' history of Pakistan, previous and subsequent cultures and religions have been marginalized and written out of that history. By situating her bin Qasim in front of a number of buildings with significance to the history of Islam, Abidi is further

articulating the role religion has played in constructing and defining the national identity of the country.

Many of the images have the potential to appear confrontational. In several of the images, bin Qasim almost looms into our visual space. In others, viewers are confronted with what is a larger than life Muslim man who is dressed as an Arab warrior. Perhaps these images can be read as more than a response to the Islamization process in Pakistan, but also as a response to the Islamophobia that has gripped much of the world. The absurdity of his size is almost comical. By ‘othering’ her figure in the extreme, she is confronting narratives of Islam in the Western media, urging her viewers to question their assumptions about difference. Furthermore, when confronted with bin Qasim quietly sipping a cup of tea (fig. 2.14), we are left to wonder what, exactly, are we are meant to fear.

In fact, it is arguably this very image that becomes the fulcrum to the entire series. As with the final image in the trio of photographs, this bin Qasim is another boy who has gotten tired of posing, of posturing, of performing. This candid moment reveals a certain fatigue; as though we are witnessing the actor take a break. It is as if Abidi is taking a look behind the curtain and revealing the performance of it all. Perhaps the message is that Pakistan, too, can “take a break” from this performance if they are tired of posing.

In the text we can perhaps begin to see a metaphor unfold that Abidi has constructed for Pakistan. The story of Yusuf Masih tells of a “sensitive and withdrawn child” who now dresses himself as an “Arab warrior.” Is Pakistan this sensitive and withdrawn child that now fancies itself as an Arab warrior? Abidi states that the politics of the 1970s and 1980s have “had a long lasting [effect] on this society and we are only now looking at the real damage of laws and constitutional

changes that were put in place then.”²²³ Because of the emphasis placed on Islam in the country’s foundation as well as the global response after September 11, Pakistan now finds itself frequently depicted as an “Arab warrior.” It is perhaps this conception of Pakistan that Abidi addresses throughout the work. It is, of course, not the nation that feels the burden of this posing, but its citizens. As the original vision of Pakistan as a secular state continues to fade into memory, and debates over meanings of Islam are continually waged inside the state, Abidi remains invested in deconstructing Pakistan’s myths in order to consider who has been left behind in the construction of the nation.

Naveeda Khan discusses the complexity of understanding Pakistan’s relationship with Islam—both in the past and present—writing:

Pakistan’s relationship with Islam is as problematic as its relationship with the state form, nationalism or foreign influence. In other words, mulling over the problems of Islam in Pakistan, in its myriad ties to colonial bureaucracy and governance, the perception of official Islam as artificial, the multiple imaginings of Islam, the fears over the outer aggression towards Islam and its inner pollution, the endurance of the tradition along both its majoritarian and minoritarian forms, all speak to how integrally Islam is tied to the problem of belongingness and the means of attaching to Pakistan.²²⁴

In *The Boy Who Got Tired of Posing*, Abidi presents a nuanced exploration of Pakistan’s history with Islam. She manages to collapse time—exploring the use and transformation of bin Qasim’s narrative from its earliest chronicles, through colonial history, to Pakistan’s Islamization beginning in 1978, and through contemporary iterations of the narrative. In so doing, Abidi explores the many ideological, cultural, and political constructions of Islam.

In *Karachi Series I*, Abidi continues to blur the line between truth and fiction (figs. 2.15–20). Reflecting a performativity consistent throughout her work, the artist photographed actors in

²²³ Bani Abidi, e-mail message to author, July 21, 2011.

²²⁴ Khan, *Beyond Crisis*, 25–26.

scenes that are clearly staged, but give details that imply a level of reality. The series is comprised of six light boxes, each photograph revealing a solitary figure that is engaged with a commonplace activity, in the middle of a street. The photographs are titled with the name of the character as well as the date, time, and location of the photograph. For example, *Jerry Fernandez, 7:45pm, 21 August, 2008, Ramadan, Karachi* depicts an older man photographed from behind, seated at the side of an empty street at nightfall (fig. 2.15). The image, along with its title, gives us enough information to construct the narrative. While we cannot see this man's face, it is clear from his balding head and grey hair that he is older. He is sharply dressed in a crisp, clean white shirt and khaki pants, as he sits on a chair reading his newspaper. He appears to be in an affluent part of the city—the street is well lit, clean, and manicured; while shiny cars and large homes surround the sitter.²²⁵ We can assume, based on these visual clues, that Jerry Fernandez is a member of the middle class and not a man who frequently reads his newspaper on the street.

In another image, a woman, Chandra Acharya, sits at a vanity applying makeup with her back to us in a deep blue sari (fig. 2.16). Again, she is in the middle of a well-lit, manicured street, with the presence of homes and, in this case, construction that indicates a burgeoning neighborhood. Her clean, beautiful sari, the collection of her makeup brushes, the vanity—all combine to indicate this is not her usual dressing room. Throughout the other four photographs we see a woman ironing and another arranging flowers, a man packing a suitcase and another polishing his shoes; all mundane activities that would not typically be performed in the street.²²⁶

²²⁵ Hammad Nasar, "A Public Inquiry," in *Bani Abidi: Videos, Photographs & Drawings*, ed. Anita Dawood (London: Green Cardamom, 2009), 84.

²²⁶ While performing some of these acts in public might not be a rarity in Pakistan, it is typically the marginalized members of society that would perform these acts, not the middle class, of which these figures are clearly members.

Abidi's titles give us the concrete information we need to decipher the scenes: it becomes immediately clear that they were all taken at roughly the same time—in late August (between August 21 and August 30, 2008), at approximately 7:45pm (between 7:42 and 7:50pm to be precise). The photographs were, therefore, all taken during the month of Ramadan when Muslims can break their fast and the streets of Karachi become deserted. The fact that these subjects sit outside during this time, as well as their names, indicate to us that they are part of Pakistan's non-Muslim minority—they are Christian, Parsi and Hindu.²²⁷ Abidi's exploration of these minority communities pushes against a country not known for its acceptance of religious difference. In its ongoing effort to convey the country as having a monolithic Muslim identity, these minority populations have largely been removed from the narrative. These banal, yet intimate, acts being performed in the open allows these individuals to reclaim the space and their place within society. Abidi focuses on the minority populations that have been systematically ignored through Pakistan's history and, particularly, in the process of Islamization in the 1980s. Denied a stake in Pakistan's history, they are exerting their bodily presence on the land.

In a country officially established just seventy-two years ago,²²⁸ the creation of Pakistan is an ongoing process and much of Abidi's work is an intervention into a history where minority groups are marginalized by the dominant culture. In *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, Judith Butler details the 2006 story of a group of "illegal" immigrants singing the national anthem of the United States in Spanish and its subsequent reception, including President Bush's response that the anthem could only be sung in English.²²⁹ Perhaps we might think of this response in relation to

²²⁷ Hammad Nasar, "A Public Inquiry," in *Bani Abidi: Videos, Photographs & Drawings*, ed. Anita Dawood, (London: Green Cardamom, 2009), 84.

²²⁸ Or forty-eight years if we think of the state as beginning anew after the 1971 civil war and cessation of East Pakistan.

²²⁹ Butler and Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, 58–59.

Butler's earlier treatise on gender and performativity: in the same way that the transvestite on the bus reveals the performance of gender, these migrants singing the national anthem reveal the performance of all such displays of the nation. Similarly, many of Abidi's projects expose the performativity of nations. But in her exploration of the performativity that is integral to the creation and continuation of nations, Abidi asks an important question: who gets left out of these narratives?

Performing Power

Unifying Abidi's projects is an underlying interest in the ways that power is made manifest. The performance of power is integral to understanding her practice. In *The Performance of Power: Theatrical Discourse and Politics*, Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle G. Reinelt write, "Theatricality as a metaphor, or analogy, accommodates the materialist perception that there is a 'playing out' of power relations, a 'masking' of authority, and a 'scenario' of events. In other words, power is spectacle."²³⁰ Abidi employs the language of theater by staging her works to draw our attention to the myriad ways that power is staged, is exercised. In so doing, she makes us aware of the performance of power, thereby de-naturalizing all such performances.

Perhaps nothing highlights Abidi's inimitable ability to draw our attention to the elusive and sweeping power of bureaucracies as her 2006 video *Reserved* (figs. 2.21–27). The 9½-minute dual channel video depicts people waiting, and—as they wait—we wait. On the left channel, we see children in school uniforms line up, waving flags, and fidgeting in universal gestures of childhood (figs. 2.22–23). Traffic has been stopped. People clean their cars while they wait, they chat with each other and share a smoke (figs. 2.24–25). Vendors mill about the stopped traffic—these responses give viewers an understanding of just how common such disruptions are in

²³⁰ Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle G. Reinelt, eds., *The Performance of Power: Theatrical Discourse and Politics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), x.

everyday life. Meanwhile, inside an unidentified auditorium, crowds begin to fill up seats, but the front row remains empty and reserved. A group of men chat and pace along a red carpet, appearing anxious as they check their watches (fig. 2.26). The left channel ends in the same way it began, with the children seated on the curb, waiting. It is clear that we are all waiting for the impending arrival of somebody important. The right channel reveals the progress of that individual—motorcycles and police vehicles escort several black SUVs with tinted windows (fig. 2.27). In between scenes of the moving vehicles, the screen cuts to black. We never get a glimpse inside the cars; we are denied any indication of whom we are all waiting for.

Moments of humor break through as people in cars laugh and joke with each other and in another scene, the children—instructed by their teacher to stand and wave their flags—run after a passing ice cream truck. As mentioned above, Abidi frequently employs moments of humor as acts of resistance throughout her films. It is often an integral component to her work. Abidi states: “I think humor is the measure of brilliance and resilience in human society. It is awkward, it is daring, it is transgressive and it always chronicles its times. That’s the role that court jesters have played throughout world history, harsh critique in the guise of jokes and buffoonery . . . There are entire traditions of popular humor and performance in Pakistan, which are crucial to the lives of people.”²³¹ Abidi’s deployment of humor is confrontational, it challenges and critiques but does so in an elusive way. Her humor is often based on the inevitabilities of life—the inability of children to stand still, particularly when confronted with ice cream; the inescapability of stopped traffic. Abidi manages to find certain universal contradictions in life that she exploits in her work to comedic effect. But through humor, she exposes forces that govern the world and—in calling attention to them—deprives those forces of their power. At the same time, these moments of humor

²³¹ Bani Abidi, e-mail message to author, July 21, 2011.

scattered throughout the film reflect incidents of everyday resistance that are employed in response to power; actions that challenge the supremacy of the state.²³²

Abidi is interested in the gesture of power in making people wait. She not only considers and de-naturalizes the power structures behind waiting, but she also claims that power for her own—making her audiences wait for any kind of resolution. As Nicole Wolf writes, her works “prepare us for something to come, they raise our expectation, they keep us captive. We are made to wait; for a performance to take place, for someone to arrive, for a speech to be given, for the real plot. Her stories offer the promise of an event only to seemingly withhold it.”²³³ Throughout *Reserved*, audience members—like many individuals in the video—are not sure what they are waiting for. As you watch the video, you begin to wonder what is its objective, what is the main action? After several minutes it becomes clear that this *is* the video. And then, without any real warning, the video is over. The waiting is done without having been satisfied. We are left without any answers. Denial becomes a gesture of power on Abidi’s part.

By imitating these largely symbolic manifestations of power, Abidi thereby reveals the performativity behind all such manifestations of power. As Foucault reminds us, if power is to remain successful, the methods of control must stay hidden, must appear neutral.²³⁴ If society continues to be unconscious of the various forms and methods of control, those devices will not be questioned and will appear as a natural part of their lives. Abidi stages these mechanisms of power to identify how all displays of power are artificial and, in so doing, urges her viewers to question all demonstrations of hegemonic power.

²³² Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.

²³³ Nicole Wolf, “The Promise of Withholding,” in *Bani Abidi: Videos, Photographs, and Drawings*, ed. Anita Dawood (London: Green Cardamom, 2009), 36.

²³⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

Abidi creates works specific to Pakistan, with experiences and imagery recognizable to anyone from the region. Abidi has stated that she “enjoy[s] annotating Karachi or Pakistan for people from here.” She goes on to say that, “Interestingly enough, if the ideas in ones work are taken from experiences one shares with an audience, the contemporariness or abstraction of the art form does not come in the way.”²³⁵ However, while the imagery is clearly linked to Pakistan, Abidi is interested in broader universals. As Nicole Wolf argues, Abidi’s work points to “particular structures that are as much specific as they are universal.”²³⁶ Experiences of waiting for the unknown, of the impending arrival of an important person, of being stuck in traffic delays, all are universal experiences. And yet, there is something innately Pakistani about the nature of *this* waiting, of *this* traffic delay. In her deployment of structures that are at once specific and universal, Abidi draws our attention to the ways that all such displays of power in service of the nation are, in truth, illusory.

Continuing her exploration of the gesture of power inherent in making people wait, in *The Address* (2007), an empty stage awaits an important speech (fig. 2.28). The microphone, blue curtained wall, image of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Pakistani flag make it clear to viewers what is about to take place. But Abidi has tricked her viewers, constructing not a stage, but a trompe l’oeil painting that has been produced only to appear on camera. Abidi then filmed this painting and placed the resulting video at various locations across Karachi. The resulting images—which comprise *The Address*—show people in the routine of everyday life—at restaurants, hair salons, and stores—watching and waiting for the stage to be filled (figs. 2.24–33). They have seen similar stages numerous times and they know what to expect.²³⁷ As if to underscore the ubiquity of such

²³⁵ Bani Abidi, e-mail message to author, July 21, 2011.

²³⁶ Wolf, “The Promise of Withholding,” 37.

²³⁷ The people in the photographs are not actors. Abidi describes her process behind *The Address*, saying that she went to different public spaces and played a still video of the painting (which was painted by street artists

scenery in Pakistan, a few months after Abidi produced the work, President Musharraf declared a state of emergency in front of a similarly blue curtained wall. But in Abidi's *The Address*, the speech will never happen. The stage will always remain empty, its viewers always left unsatisfied. Abidi explores the gesture of power in making people wait; the everyday bureaucracy that controls and exhausts the individual. As Abidi states, "The politics of making somebody wait is a power game. It's a small and subtle gesture but it shows the hierarchy in our society."²³⁸ *The Address* is no exception to the essential humor that punctuates many of her works. We naturally wait for some kind of resolution, but nothing is resolved. The stage remains empty. The audience remains unsatisfied. Perhaps, this is part of Abidi's message—it does not matter whether the speech is made, ultimately we will not gain resolution or satisfaction. No speech given, no announcement made, will alter the course of things in any substantive way.

Underscoring the structural link between the nation and the state, and further reminding us that the state draws its legitimacy from the nation, Abidi's constructed stage is marked by two symbols integral to the idea of Pakistan: an image of Muhammad Ali Jinnah on the left and the Pakistani flag on the right. The image is Jinnah's official portrait as the quaid-i-Azam, or "great leader," and one that is immediately familiar to all Pakistanis. Jinnah's complicated relationship to Pakistan underscores the complicated foundations of the country. While contemporary leaders have sought to mythologize Jinnah's history and relationship to Islam, in truth, religion was never of particular importance to him. As detailed in the introduction, Jinnah originally conceived of Pakistan as a democratic, secular nation similar to Nehru's vision of India. But he relied on religion at the time to unify India's Muslim populations, which had many divisions.²³⁹ Rather than fading,

who paint backdrops for photo studios) and what resulted were casual conversations about Pakistan's political climate. (Bani Abidi, e-mail message to author, July 3, 2019.)

²³⁸ Zeenat Nagree, "Barrier Method," *TimeOut Mumbai*, September 3, 2010, 114.

²³⁹ Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, 17.

religion has continued to be of fundamental importance to Pakistan and its leaders; used to validate its existence as an independent nation-state. The dictator General Zia-ul-Haq once declared: “What does Pakistan mean? There is no God, but God.”²⁴⁰ Evoking the words of the Islamic call to prayer, ul Haq connected Pakistan directly to Islam. This emphasis on Muslim nationhood has led to distorted national identities.²⁴¹ To be sure, all national identities can be described as distorted, and by drawing our attention to Pakistan, Abidi illustrates the instability of all such performances of national identity. The image of the quaid— dressed in his sherwani, which is today common Pakistani attire, and karakul hat—is a forceful reminder of Pakistan’s origins.²⁴² But by the time he was given the title Quaid-i-Azam in the 1940s, Jinnah had become the voice of Muslim welfare in India.²⁴³ His stern, but tired face underscores the hard work and sacrifices made for his country and people.

The other potent symbol of Pakistani national identity in the image is the flag—somewhat hidden, but immediately recognizable on the right side of the stage. At its outset, the flag—adopted by the first constituent assembly on August 11, 1947—had a different meaning than it has come to have today. The green flag with crescent moon and star (absent the stripe) was the flag of the All India Muslim League for 40 years.²⁴⁴ Most Pakistanis know that the green background and crescent moon speak to the country’s association with Islam. However, while green is certainly the color of Islam, it is also symbolic of prosperity and the white is symbolic of peace. The white stripe was added at Jinnah’s urging in order to stress the state’s promise of extending equal rights

²⁴⁰ S. Akbar Zaidi, “Re-Imagining the Image,” in *Mazaar, Bazaar: Design and Visual Culture in Pakistan*, ed. Saima Zaidi (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 189.

²⁴¹ Carla Petievich, “The World Changes and it Doesn’t: A Note on Pakistani Culture,” in *Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art from Pakistan*, ed. Salima Hashmi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p 60.

²⁴² Zaidi, “Re-Imagining the Image,” 190.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Jalal, “Beyond the Symbolic to the Significant,” 185–187.

to its non-Muslim minorities.²⁴⁵ The crescent moon is waxing—or rising—to symbolize progress, while the five-pointed star means light and knowledge.²⁴⁶

Since its adoption as the national flag, its meaning has become convoluted. To quote historian Ayesha Jalal at length:

Over the years the dark green and white of the flag, far from symbolizing prosperity and peace for all Pakistanis have, metaphorically speaking, almost merged into each other, not so much to reflect the better accommodation of minority religious groups but their extreme isolation and abject marginalization. Official flags of political parties in Pakistan pursuing conservative, if not ‘Islamic’ agendas, have readily adopted lighter shades of green minus the politically significant white stripe along with the crescent and the star. As the country has been convulsed into a spate of violence along religious and sectarian lines in the past decade and a half, the symbolic white of the flag, whether as peace or accommodation of minority groups, stands seriously undermined. If prosperity and peace have been compromised in the interest of the politics of expediency, the significance of the rising moon and the star as symbols of progress, light and knowledge have become victims of an all-pervasive national amnesia.²⁴⁷

The full meaning behind the flag has slowly been transformed, much like Jinnah’s vision for the country. The construction of a Pakistani national identity has often been the result of manipulated histories and overlooked populations. The long history of these symbols of Pakistani identity underscores the protracted and fraught relationship between Islam and Pakistan, as well as between Pakistan and its minority citizens. These issues are central to Abidi’s practice. Her work focuses on those left out of the master narrative or, more specifically, when they are actively written out of the official narrative. In a piece that addresses the socio-political reality of Pakistan, Abidi includes two objects in *The Address* whose history underscores a long-forgotten vision of the Pakistani nation-state.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

In 2008, Abidi produced two related series: *Security Barriers* and *Intercommunication Devices*. To make each, Abidi photographed individual security barriers and intercom devices found throughout Karachi and then, using the photographs as her reference point, made each into a vector drawing on a clean white background.²⁴⁸ Vector graphics first emerged in US military use and are commonly associated today with advertising and web design. In so doing, Abidi connects the series both to military and commercial histories. Moreover, the use of vector drawings continues the artist's practice of hovering somewhere between truth and fiction, between documentary and narrative.

A series of twelve inkjet prints, *Security Barriers* is typically hung in a grid of four rows organized by color (figs. 2.34–45). The location of each barrier appears as a sort of title at the bottom of the print. The barriers are largely from, or nearby, government spaces—embassies, airports, naval bases, and the like. Occasionally, they protect more private spaces—for instance, a site of cooperative housing. While still others, such as traffic barriers, exist in locations scattered across the city. Extricated from their original surroundings, the isolated objects require viewers to fill in the blanks, to complete their narrative. As with *Shan Pipe Band*, Abidi has denied viewers a full understanding of the physical surroundings. As viewers, we are unaware what the buildings behind the barriers look like—or, what the barriers are protecting—but we can guess. Even without Abidi's labels, we could likely make some conjectures about the spaces these barriers protect. For example, the large blue mass that protects the American consulate (barrier h) simultaneously projects anxiety as well as self-importance: what could need such protection, we might ask ourselves (fig. 2.41). The hulking barrier resembles a repurposed shipping container, giving no impression of aesthetic considerations, only a concern for protection. Meanwhile, Barrier Type

²⁴⁸ Sarah Suzuki, "Bani Abidi: Security Barrier A–L," *Art on Paper*, December 2009, 88.

J—a barrier that contains a planter near the British Deputy High Commission—evokes an attempt to masquerade security as something more appealing (fig. 2.43). Other barriers speak to special considerations, such as type c, which would persuade a car from passing through, but allows space for pedestrians (fig. 2.36).

Barriers, of course, keep people out. But, depending on your point of view, they also protect the people within. The word barrier generally refers to an obstruction erected to prevent the advance of people or things, restricting access. Historically, however, the word connoted protection—particularly of a territory or land—from an enemy.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, the word evokes the various barriers constructed in day-to-day life—racial barriers, national barriers, gender, age, economic, and so on. A barrier is simply another type of man-made border. The question of whether barriers insulate or exclude is entirely dependent on your identity. *Security Barriers* depicts the “exclusionary architecture and objects which one sees in cities all around us now,” Abidi states, “It’s a global apartheid, generated by heavy doses of fear we consume daily.”²⁵⁰ *Security Barriers* highlights our collective obsession with borders, defense, and divisions.

Abidi continues her inquiry into forms of exclusionary architecture with *Intercommunication Devices*, which depicts a series of nine intercoms that were found outside homes along the 13th street of Defense Housing Authority, one of the most affluent areas in Karachi (fig. 2.46). Sometimes hung in a grid of three by three and other times hung in a row, this series—unlike its predecessor—is done in gray scale. The title calls attention to the absent person on the other end of a two-way conversation. Similar to *Security Barriers*, we imagine the surrounding space as well as the person on the other end of the intercom. We might even occupy the position

²⁴⁹ “Barrier, N.,” OED Online (Oxford University Press), accessed May 10, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/15765>.

²⁵⁰ Enoch Cheng, “Interview with Bani Abidi,” Diaaologue: Asia Art Archive, February 2010, <http://www.aaa.org.hk/Diaaologue/Details/796>.

of the speaker, being kept at a distance. Ironically, the name of the objects implies bringing people together—devices that allow two people to impart information or ideas to each other, when, in reality, they are meant to separate, to keep at bay.

Questions of class fuel *Intercommunication Devices*, as well as discussions of the public and private. Like the security barriers, these devices mark a threshold, or a boundary of sorts. Moreover, they explore “the space where access to the private domains of the privileged can be granted or denied, a space where the restrictions of class and power must not be transgressed, symbolically keeping out undesirable elements.”²⁵¹ Through seemingly benign architectural apparatuses, these objects represent the control and separation of peoples. In visually isolating these ostensibly banal objects, Abidi is reminding viewers that they are, in fact, not at all benign. Evoking Foucault’s argument that power exists through the seemingly neutral enterprise of discourse; power, here, is made manifest through apparently neutral architectural elements. These everyday objects belie their inherent power.

Abidi engages with colonial history by exploring enduring class divisions, drawing a line from colonial to neo-colonial practices. Speaking to *Intercommunication Devices*, Iftikhar Dadi states: “Although gated communities are hardly unique to Pakistan, it is here that feudal privilege has relayed smoothly into neo-liberal hierarchies of space without ever passing through an imperfectly realised sense of citizenship and equality.”²⁵² The British employed an apparatus of power that relied on land ownership and, in post-colonial Pakistan, these systems have continued to be expanded and exploited. While at its birth, Pakistan was very poor and had little infrastructure, the influence of Western economic policies led to rapid growth within the country.

²⁵¹ Nada Raza, “The Politics of Space,” in *Bani Abidi: Videos, Photographs, & Drawings*, ed. Anita Dawood (London: Green Cardamom, 2009), 68.

²⁵² Iftikhar Dadi, “Introduction,” in *Bani Abidi: Videos, Photographs, & Drawings*, ed. Anita Dawood (London: Green Cardamom, 2009), 2.

It was, however, a growth so distorted that one could speak of the twenty-two families that controlled nearly all industry, insurance, and banking.²⁵³ This massive class disparity continues with the cities being home to a very small, but overrepresented group of cosmopolitan elites. Abidi engages with this history by exploring the unequal power relations that define everyday life throughout Pakistan. Her investigation into neocolonial forms of power—often a result of globalization—is nuanced. Rather than confront these histories directly, she instead explores the hierarchies within the citizenry and engages with the structural aspects of power.

Moreover, removed from their original context, the images begin to appear as consumer products, a catalogue from which we are perhaps to select a barrier or intercom device for our home.²⁵⁴ In this way, Abidi reflects on the ways that consumerism and capitalism control society. But in isolating these objects, Abidi makes the commonplace look peculiar, asking us to reflect on the myriad ways that bodies are controlled. They comprise, in the words of Hammad Nasar, her “archive of control mechanisms in Karachi.”²⁵⁵ Abidi’s work is categorizing and archiving the mechanisms of power that control and define our everyday lives. Moreover, when juxtaposed with *Karachi Series I*, we see the exclusionary architecture as well as the excluded populations that define a country deeply divided by class and religion, underscoring the illusion and violence of the country’s national origins.

Abidi is interested in gestures and objects that articulate universal experiences, yet the nuances she explores are innate to a Pakistani experience and often to Karachi specifically. While both series are undeniably connected to Karachi, in reality these objects could be from anywhere.

²⁵³ Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 223.

²⁵⁴ Suzuki, “Bani Abidi: Security Barrier A–L,” 88–89.

²⁵⁵ Hammad Nasar, “Security Barriers A–L,” in *Resemble Reassemble: Contemporary Art from Pakistan*, ed. Rashid Rana (New Delhi: Devi Foundation, 2010), 85.

Security Barriers and *Intercommunication Devices* both appear devoid of anything “Pakistani,” but they are intimately tied to life in Karachi and the daily violence and class divisions that define city life. From unmasking how the universal experience of waiting has been exploited to serve power, to exposing how colonial forms of control have been re-purposed, Abidi explores the universal experiences and benign objects that have come to articulate everyday life in Pakistan.

Visualizing Migration

Abidi’s 2010 video, *The Distance from Here*, captures a fictionalized day at the immigration office. The artist constructs two sets within her video—an outdoor space and an indoor waiting area. The video opens in the outdoor setting—we see people wait in line with documents gathered—some appear anxious, others bored, and still others seem to be complacent with the task before them. Everyone is filed into queues that are divided by yellow lines painted on the ground (figs. 2.47–48). Brief moments of subtle levity break up an otherwise daunting experience: a group of men, for example, sit and chat while waiting their turn, laughing and joking. Meanwhile, in another scene, a man carefully selects a clip-on tie, dressing himself for his visa photo (fig. 2.49). While the state apparatus does not care which tie he wears, his careful consideration underscores the significance of this process to him and the apparent weight of his choices. This individual moment of vulnerability contradicts the anonymous bureaucracy that characterizes immigration law. Abidi seems intent to highlight the disparities that define this process. In fact, these moments of disjuncture populate the film—we hear the birds chirping juxtaposed with the beeps of a metal detector; the mechanical noises of the typewriter contrasted with the footfalls of people shuffling along the pavement. Meanwhile, some lines move forward quickly, as others are left at a standstill—illustrating the arbitrariness of the bureaucratic process.

The outdoor scene references an actual space in Islamabad, where a parking lot has been converted into a similar waiting area where buses then transport people to diplomatic offices. Abidi describes it as a “waiting before the waiting . . . [as] an outdoor space that’s converted completely into a space of control.”²⁵⁶ The video continues to narrate from an interior space—presumably the embassy—where people are now seated, but continue their waiting (figs. 2.50–51). In *The Distance from Here*, Abidi explores not just the power in making people wait, but also the psychological space of having to wait. For most of the individuals throughout the film, the anxiety of their experience is palpable and can be witnessed in glances, gestures, and postures. The entirety of the film is people waiting—they wait to be frisked, photographed, and interviewed. The lengthy bureaucratic procedure and its jargon are manifestations of the power the state wields. And, while waiting is a universal experience, the particular anxiety associated with waiting at a visa office is not one shared across the world. *The Distance from Here* responds to travel and migration in a post-9/11 world by speaking to the realities that surround those excluded from a so-called global citizenship. The fear and anxiety, coupled with the sometimes absurdity of the process, reveals itself throughout the video.

The Distance from Here is one component of the four-parts series *Section Yellow* (2010), in which Abidi investigates migration in the globalized world, questioning relationships of power and national identity. The three photographic series in *Section Yellow* work to punctuate the scenes that unfold throughout the video. In *Untitled*, the folders of the would-be travelers are rendered in close-up, almost to the point of abstraction (figs. 2.52–53). These folders call to mind the way identity is compressed into a series of filled out forms. There is a dehumanizing quality to the

²⁵⁶ Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, *BALTIC Bites - Bani Abidi: Section Yellow*, 2011, <https://vimeo.com/77696848>.

objects—they represent a person, but individuality is stripped until all that is left are one’s socio-economic factors. Identity, Abidi reminds us, is what regulates mobility.

It is worth considering why this series is untitled when the other three in *Section Yellow* have proper titles. By not naming it, Abidi calls attention to the very act of identifying and marking that is intrinsic to the travel process. While we are unable to see the contents of the folders, we are still able to make assumptions about their owners. The size of the various objects speaks to the traveler’s destination or where they are traveling from—the thicker the folder, the more stringent the visa requirements for the traveler. Abidi draws our attention to the fact that travel is not the same process for everyone.

In the photo collages *Exercise in Redirecting Lines*, Abidi highlights the man-made quality of borders (figs. 2.54–55). The inkjet prints digitally manipulate yellow borders—presumably those featured in *The Distance from Here*—redirecting them, as the title informs us. Instead of being parallel lines, they now cut at strange angles and run perpendicular to each other. Her exercise reveals what WJT Mitchell describes as the “arbitrary, even imaginary and ephemeral character of a border.”²⁵⁷ There is nothing indissoluble to a border—they can be, and often do, change. Borders are man-made and are guided by the caprice of human nature. At the same time, however, these collaged photos evoke the very real power of borders. There is perhaps no greater example of the power, arbitrariness, and ephemerality of borders than Pakistan itself. The border between Pakistan and India was announced two days after independence, at which time millions of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus discovered they were on the “wrong” side of the border. The partition of the Indian subcontinent, as detailed in the introduction, resulted in a violent mass

²⁵⁷ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Migration, Law, and the Image: Beyond the Veil of Ignorance,” in *The Migrant’s Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora*, ed. Saloni Mathur (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2011), 61.

migration. Just twenty-four years later, East Pakistan—which India divided by 1000 miles from West Pakistan—separated after a civil war. In Abidi's film, *The Distance from Here*, the lines drawn on the pavement serve to contain bodies. In these painted, yellow lines, we are reminded of the many borders throughout the world that serve as “visible manifestations of immigration law.”²⁵⁸ For without borders to cross, there would be no need for immigration laws. Abidi focuses not just on the immigrant body, but also on the borders that need to be crossed, the land that needs to be traversed.

As scholar Irit Rogoff reminds us, borders—and their associative powers—are vestiges of the colonial project. She states:

Geography as we inherited it in the late 20th century was really a colonial project that constantly mapped out the view from the center of a colonial empire outwards, towards its peripheries, and then through those kinds of mechanisms of mapping, proceeded to regulate the relations of subjects to places. And so there was a way in which colonial attitude refracted through prisms of widely respected knowledges, such as geology and cartography, defined relations of subjects and places via relatively unexamined sets of criteria because they had somehow been legitimated through empirical knowledge.²⁵⁹

The process of mapping the world has irrevocably transformed it into one where its inhabitants are bound and controlled by lines. The history of mapping outward, with the empire existing at the center, is today demonstrable in the visa requirements for different countries. For example, past colonial powers such as the United Kingdom (and neocolonial powers such as the United States) have relatively few travel restrictions when compared to its former colonies of India and Pakistan.

The photographs in *Two of Two*, meanwhile, depict how travel and migration mentally and emotionally affect people. From the bureaucracy and its language that acts as a form of control, to the emotional toll when people are left behind—either because of necessity or choice—this series

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 64

²⁵⁹ Hammad Nasar, “Interview with Irit Rogoff,” in *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space*, ed. Iftikhar Dadi and Hammad Nasar (London: Green Cardamom, 2012), 101.

speaks to the psychological space of migrants. Each image is a diptych with a caption below. For example, the caption below one reads: “He had tried to explain that he needed the briefcase to carry all the documents they had asked for but the guards had turned him away. After carrying the briefcase every day for thirty years he could not understand why this hard grey bulk of an object was suddenly causing alarm” (fig. 2.56). Abidi highlights the status of many travelers in a post-9/11 world. The reality of terror alerts is evoked in the account of this anonymous traveler. In a world where being Muslim—or simply looking or sounding Muslim, as is often the case—can result in harassment at the airport or getting ejected from a flight, mundane objects such as a briefcase are suddenly turned into threatening ones. Abidi’s work highlights the irrationality and absurdity of these fears.

Accompanying this caption, an image of a large gray suitcase sits on the left and a stairwell on the right. Perhaps more so than other images in the series, these two seem unrelated. But the juxtaposition evokes notions of travel and displacement, conjuring the liminal status of the migrant. A suitcase is the embodiment of Walter Benjamin’s dialectical image according to W.J.T. Mitchell.²⁶⁰ Luggage is simultaneously a sign imbued with excitement and expectation of future adventures as well as one of unease, displacement, and dislocation. It is a symbol for either new beginnings or of exilic endings. This dialectical image is further emphasized through the seemingly banal image of a stairwell. As discussed in chapter one, for Homi Bhabha the stairwell is itself a liminal space that constructs difference by asking you to go up and down; this back and forth preventing any one identity from settling into place.²⁶¹ Hybridity, for Bhabha, is ultimately very powerful and positive. It escapes traditional hierarchies, opening up a third space that challenges

²⁶⁰ Mitchell, “Migration, Law, and the Image,” 62.

²⁶¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 4.

the conditions of both originals.²⁶² While the migrant is indeed a liminal figure whose position challenges originary categories, Abidi's stairwell speaks to the trauma and indeterminacy that accompanies the in-between space of the migrant. It is this space of the stairwell that the migrant inherently occupies—they exist between locations, unable to claim either as their home. Furthermore, zones of travel such as embassies, airports, and the like are liminal spaces in and of themselves—spaces where one's identity is in constant state of flux. In highlighting the impermanent status of migrants, Abidi points to the realities of movement in the 21st century.

Other objects in the series *Two of Two* speak to the complex bureaucracy of movement, such as the dual image of a suit and visa application, with the caption “He had overlooked the instructions where it read ‘fill in all caps’” (fig. 2.57). The viewer is left to imagine the remainder of the story—but we can assume the would-be traveler likely had to re-do the forms, the minor error perhaps causing a delay in his travel or even halting it altogether. Others speak to the psychological toll of migration. One image contains two separate windows, with the caption “The distance had started weighing heavily on their relationship” (fig. 2.58). Like the other diptychs in the series, we are given very little information and asked to make certain assumptions about the work. But it is clear that this reflects the experience of a couple unable to live in the same place—we can imagine that we are seeing out of their respective windows.

All told, *Section Yellow* speaks to the complexities of migration in the contemporary globalized world and relays an experience of migration to its audience. As WJT Mitchell argues about images of migration:

[W]e need to focus not only on images of the immigrant body—faces, genders, skin color, clothing, the data gathered on identification documents—but also images such as “the Jordan” to be crossed over. Images of immigration crucially involve the places, spaces, and landscapes of immigration, the borders, frontiers, crossings, bridges, demilitarized zones, and occupied territories that constitute the material

²⁶² Ibid., 41.

and visible manifestations of immigration law in both its static and dynamic forms.²⁶³

Abidi addresses the whole of migration. She considers the migrant both through their physical body as well as the data that makes up their identity. But she further reflects on the spaces that need to be traversed as well as the psychological spaces and traumas that accompany movement.

Images are inextricably tied to migration. As Mitchell reminds us, “images ‘go before’ the immigrant.”²⁶⁴ It is images—through the news, stereotypes, documents, and the like—that always precede the physical body of the migrant. In this way, “the problem of migration is structurally and necessarily bound up with images.”²⁶⁵ Abidi manages to shift the conversation—moving it away from the stereotypically negative implications of the migrant body and instead asks viewers to consider the whole of the experience. She asks her Western viewers to consider their privilege and ability to move freely throughout the world. *Section Yellow* helps expose what we otherwise cannot experience or perhaps even see. This project, which hovers between documentary and fiction, confronts our preconceived images and ideas of migration in the globalized world, exposing its points of crisis.

In the twenty-first century—where migrants create a general feeling of unease and societies are preoccupied with security and safety—borders and binaries continue to be erected and reified. *Section Yellow* works to expose the failures of globalism, bringing us face-to-face with its inherent problems. Her work engages with the structural aspects of migration—the bureaucracy, the infrastructure, and the power that lies behind the policies. The implications of *Section Yellow* are immediately recognizable to anyone from the global south. Indeed, this project underscores experiences that are instantly familiar to those from parts of the world where travel is restricted.

²⁶³ Mitchell, “Migration Law, and the Image,” 64.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 60.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 59.

Yet, this project, more so than her others, feels directed towards a Western viewer. It is a project meant to expose the realities of travel in a globalized world. The heightened xenophobia that emerged as a result of September 11, as well as increased security at national borders, have created tensions that continue to impact global movement. In *Section Yellow*, Abidi explores who gets to move freely across borders, and who controls the process. In other words, Abidi explores how the state binds and unbinds in the name of the nation.²⁶⁶

Conclusion

Abidi's work explores not just the borders that separate nations, but also those borders that exist in everyday life. Her own history is one of dislocation and movement: she is from a country brought into being by a violent partition and resulting mass migration of which her family was a part. Because of that history, she is a minority within Pakistan's dominant Islamic culture. Abidi's work is a penetrating investigation of nationhood, political power, and bureaucracy in Pakistan. Her practice exposes the way national identity is a series of performances, explores the mechanisms of power that govern the world, and documents varied modes of resistance that challenge those systems of power.

Abidi's 2013 work *A Table Wide Country* is a series of photographs that document the home of a fictional character. The work explores, as Abidi describes, the "make-believe worlds and human eccentricities that often serve as psychological safeguards against life and memory."²⁶⁷ These make-believe worlds extend to constructions of the nation. Pakistan has created a narrative that explains its history and justifies its existence in light of the traumas of partition. The fragile

²⁶⁶ Butler and Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State*, 4–5.

²⁶⁷ Bani Abidi, "A Table Wide Country, 2012," *Bani Abidi*, accessed July 7, 2019, <https://www.baniabidi.com/#/a-table-wide-country-2013>.

“country” in Abidi’s photographs underscores Pakistan’s fragility. Moreover, the toy soldiers that populate the photographs are frequent substitutes in real-life war planning, demonstrating the ways that power is staged and produced. But—like *The Boy Who Got Tired of Posing*—the toy soldiers also evoke the role of childhood play in establishing and reinforcing national identities. In one image, an Arab soldier with a sword is surrounded by Western-looking soldiers with machine guns (fig. 2.59). The coffee stained envelope on which they stand repeats the handwritten phrase: “the soldiers arrive with the thundering sound of boots and the old man points them in the wrong direction.” Who or what are these soldiers looking for? And why has the man pointed them in the wrong direction? Perhaps another image answers that question as several individuals are depicted fleeing through a crack in a wall, which evokes the Israeli West Bank barrier (fig. 2.60). Other images from the series confirm that this is indeed the border wall in the West Bank, as empty pages in a photo album are labeled “Jericho, West Bank” and “Gaza, Palestine—1988,” which also marks the first intifada which began in December 1987 (fig. 2.61). W.J.T Mitchell describes Israel-Palestine as representing the most pressing political conflict of the contemporary world: “the struggle between the West and the Middle East, European Judeo-Christian civilization and the Arab and Islamic World.”²⁶⁸ Throughout the images, Abidi explores the violence done in the name of the nation-state and the trauma—and memories—that accompany political violence.

This chapter has explored the ways in which Abidi’s career investigates the inextricable links of the nation and the state; how the nation is performed in service of legitimating the state. She draws our attention to supposedly benign objects and displays of control, stripping them of their power. In Abidi’s explorations of the performativity of the nation and the staging of power, she de-naturalizes modern conceptions of the nation-state, which are used to control the world and

²⁶⁸ Mitchell, “Migration, Law, and the Image,” 68.

govern art historical discourse. In her investigations of the myths that produce history, Abidi makes clear how historical narratives are constructions of the hegemonic voice and, in this way, she reveals how narratives are written to exclude minority voices.



Fig. 2.1
 Bani Abidi
Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner, 2004 (still)
 Double channel video, 7:30 min.



Fig. 2.2
 Bani Abidi
Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner, 2004 (left channel, still)
 Double channel video, 7:30 min.



Fig. 2.3
 Bani Abidi
Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner, 2004 (left channel, still)
 Double channel video, 7:30 min.



Fig. 2.4
Bani Abidi
Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner, 2004 (right channel, still)
Double channel video, 7:30 min.



Fig. 2.5
Bani Abidi
Shan Pipe Band Learns the Star Spangled Banner, 2004 (right channel, still)
Double channel video, 7:30 min.



Fig. 2.6
Bani Abidi
This Video is a Re-enactment, 2006 (still)
Video, 0:58 min. loop



Fig. 2.7
Bani Abidi
The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim, 2006
Inkjet prints on archival paper
18.25 x 14.5 in.



Fig. 2.8
Bani Abidi
The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim, 2006
Inkjet prints on archival paper
18.25 x 14.5 in.



Fig. 2.9
Bani Abidi
The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim, 2006
Inkjet prints on archival paper
14.5 x 18.25 in.



Fig. 2.10
Bani Abidi
The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim, 2006
Inkjet prints on archival paper
14.5 x 18.25 in.



Fig. 2.11
Bani Abidi
The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim, 2006
Inkjet prints on archival paper
14.5 x 18.25 in.



Fig. 2.12
Bani Abidi
The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim, 2006
Inkjet prints on archival paper
14.5 x 18.25 in.



Fig. 2.13
Bani Abidi
The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim, 2006
Inkjet prints on archival paper
14.5 x 18.25 in.



Fig. 2.14
Bani Abidi
The Ghost of Mohammad Bin Qasim, 2006
Inkjet prints on archival paper
14.5 x 18.25 in.



Fig. 2.15
Bani Abidi
Jerry Fernandez, 7:45pm, 21 August, 2008, Ramadan, Karachi, 2009
Duratrans lightbox, 20 x 30 in.



Fig. 2.16
Bani Abidi
Chandra Acharya, 7:50pm, 30th August, 2008, Ramadan, Karachi, 2009
Duratrans lightbox, 20 x 30 in.



Fig. 2.17
Bani Abidi
Pari Wania, 7:44pm, 22 August, 2008, Ramadan, Karachi, 2009
Duratrans lightbox, 20 x 30 in.



Fig. 2.18
Bani Abidi
Ken De Souza, 7:42pm, 25 August, 2008, Ramadan, Karachi, 2009
Duratrans lightbox, 20 x 30 in.



Fig. 2.19
Bani Abidi
Ashish Sharma, 7:44pm, 23 August, 2008, Ramadan, Karachi, 2009
Duratrans lightbox, 20 x 30 in.



Fig. 2.20
Bani Abidi
Jacky Mirza, 7:45pm, 26 August, 2008, Ramadan, Karachi, 2009
Duratrans lightbox, 20 x 30 in.



Fig. 2.21
Bani Abidi
Reserved, 2006 (still)
Video, 9:49 min.



Fig. 2.22
Bani Abidi
Reserved, 2006 (left channel, still)
Video, 9:49 min.



Fig. 2.23
Bani Abidi
Reserved, 2006 (left channel, still)
Video, 9:49 min.



Fig. 2.24
Bani Abidi
Reserved, 2006 (left channel, still)
Video, 9:49 min.



Fig. 2.25
Bani Abidi
Reserved, 2006 (left channel, still)
Video, 9:49 min.



Fig. 2.26
Bani Abidi
Reserved, 2006 (left channel, still)
Video, 9:49 min.



Fig. 2.27
Bani Abidi
Reserved, 2006 (right channel, still)
Video, 9:49 min.



Fig. 2.28
Bani Abidi
The Address, 2007
Diasc C-print, 30 x 39.75 in.



Fig. 2.29
Bani Abidi
The Address, 2007
Inkjet print, 11 x 17.3 in.



Fig. 2.30
Bani Abidi
The Address, 2007
Inkjet print, 11 x 17.3 in.



Fig. 2.31
Bani Abidi
The Address, 2007
Inkjet print, 11 x 17.3 in.

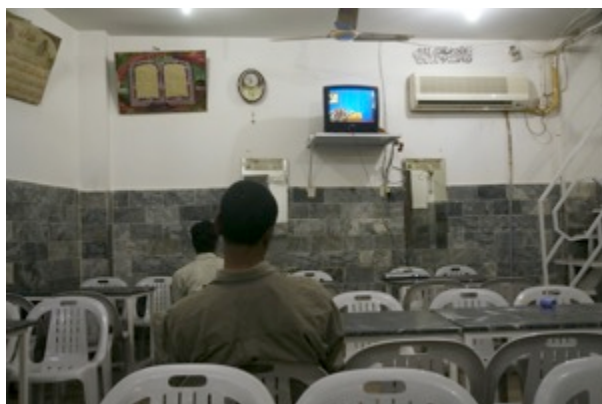


Fig. 2.32
Bani Abidi
The Address, 2007
Inkjet print, 11 x 17.3 in.



Fig. 2.33
Bani Abidi
The Address, 2007
Inkjet print, 11 x 17.3 in



Fig. 2.34
Bani Abidi
Security Barriers, Type A, 2008
Inkjet print, 11 5/8 x 16 1/16 in.



Fig. 2.35
Bani Abidi
Security Barriers, Type B, 2008
Inkjet prints, 11 5/8 x 16 1/16 in.

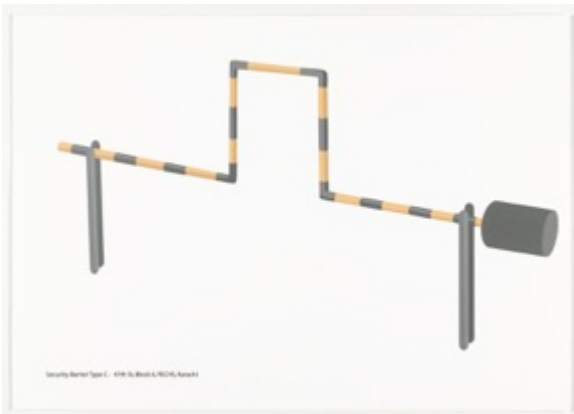


Fig. 2.36
Bani Abidi
Security Barriers, Type C, 2008
Inkjet print, 11 5/8 x 16 1/16 in.



Fig. 2.37
Bani Abidi
Security Barriers, Type D, 2008
Inkjet prints, 11 5/8 x 16 1/16 in.

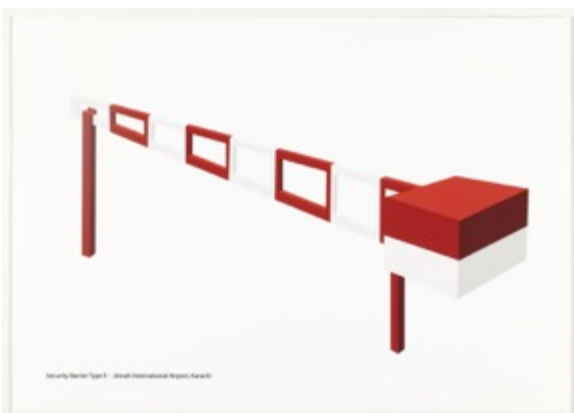


Fig. 2.38
Bani Abidi
Security Barriers, Type E, 2008
Inkjet print, 11 5/8 x 16 1/16 in.



Fig. 2.39
Bani Abidi
Security Barriers, Type F, 2008
Inkjet prints, 11 5/8 x 16 1/16 in.



Fig. 2.40
Bani Abidi
Security Barriers, Type G, 2008
Inkjet print, 11 5/8 x 16 1/16 in.



Fig. 2.41
Bani Abidi
Security Barriers, Type H, 2008
Inkjet prints, 11 5/8 x 16 1/16 in.



Fig. 2.42
Bani Abidi
Security Barriers, Type I, 2008
Inkjet print, 11 5/8 x 16 1/16 in.



Fig. 2.43
Bani Abidi
Security Barriers, Type J, 2008
Inkjet prints, 11 5/8 x 16 1/16 in.



Fig. 2.44
Bani Abidi
Security Barriers, Type K, 2008
Inkjet print, 11 5/8 x 16 1/16 in.



Fig. 2.45
Bani Abidi
Security Barriers, Type L, 2008
Inkjet prints, 11 5/8 x 16 1/16 in.



Fig. 2.46
 Bani Abidi
 Intercommunication Devices, 2008
 Inkjet prints, 17.3 x 11 in., each



Fig. 2.47
 Bani Abidi
The Distance From Here, 2010 (still)
 Video, 12:00 min.



Fig. 2.48
 Bani Abidi
The Distance From Here, 2010 (still)
 Video, 12:00 min.



Fig. 2.49
 Bani Abidi
The Distance From Here, 2010 (still)
 Video, 12:00 min.



Fig. 2.50
 Bani Abidi
The Distance From Here, 2010 (still)
 Video, 12:00 min.

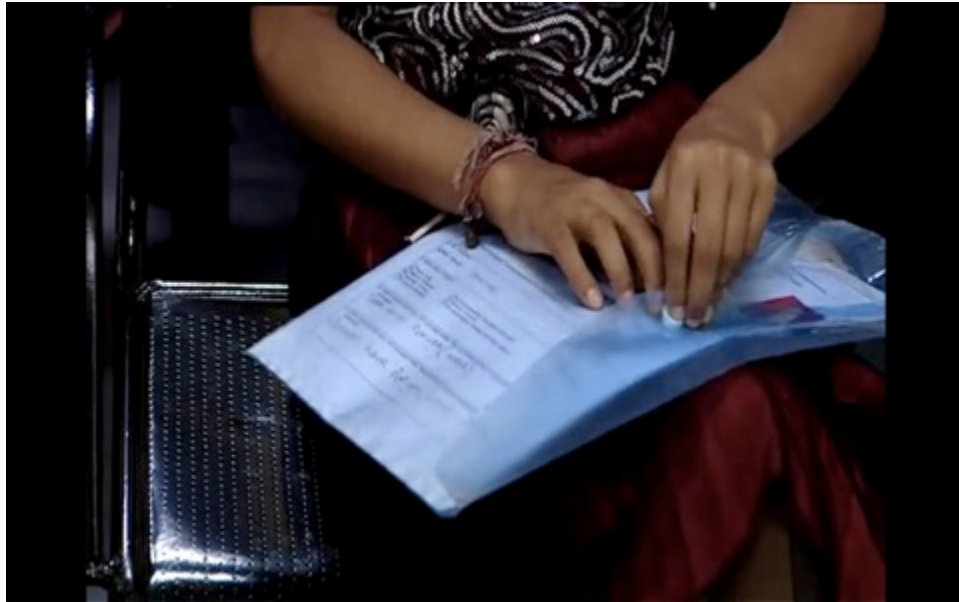


Fig. 2.51
 Bani Abidi
The Distance From Here, 2010 (still)
 Video, 12:00 min.



Fig. 2.52
 Bani Abidi
 Untitled, 2010
 Inkjet prints, 44 x 30 in., each



Fig. 2.53
 Bani Abidi
Untitled, 2010
 Installation view at Baltic+, 2011



Fig. 2.54
 Bani Abidi
Exercise in Redirecting Lines, 2010
 Inkjet prints, 17 x 25 in.

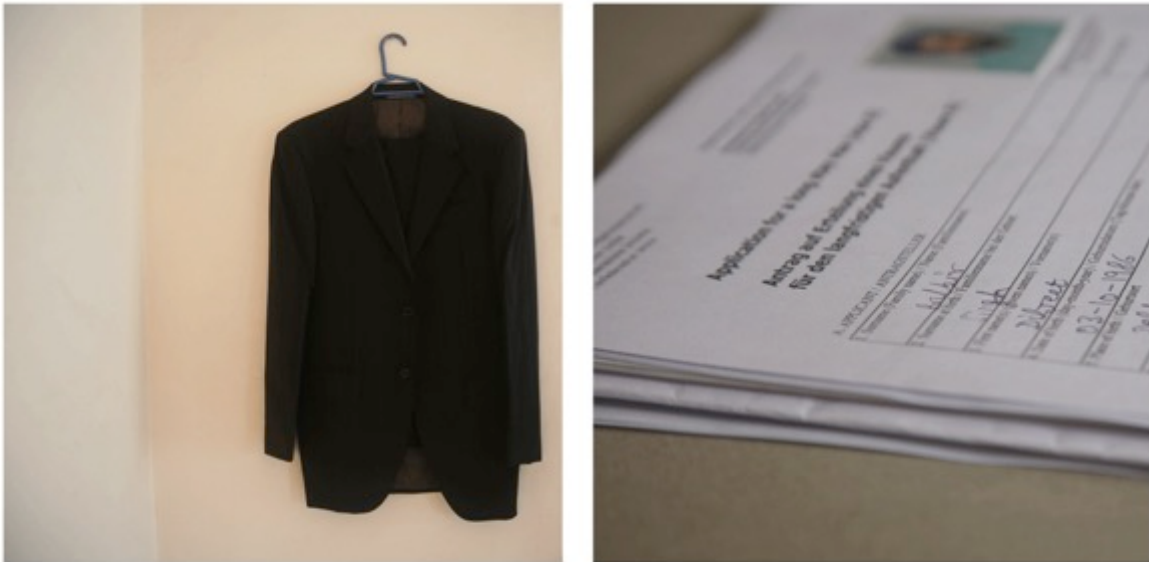


Fig. 2.55
Bani Abidi
Exercise in Redirecting Lines, 2010
Installation view at Baltic+, 2011



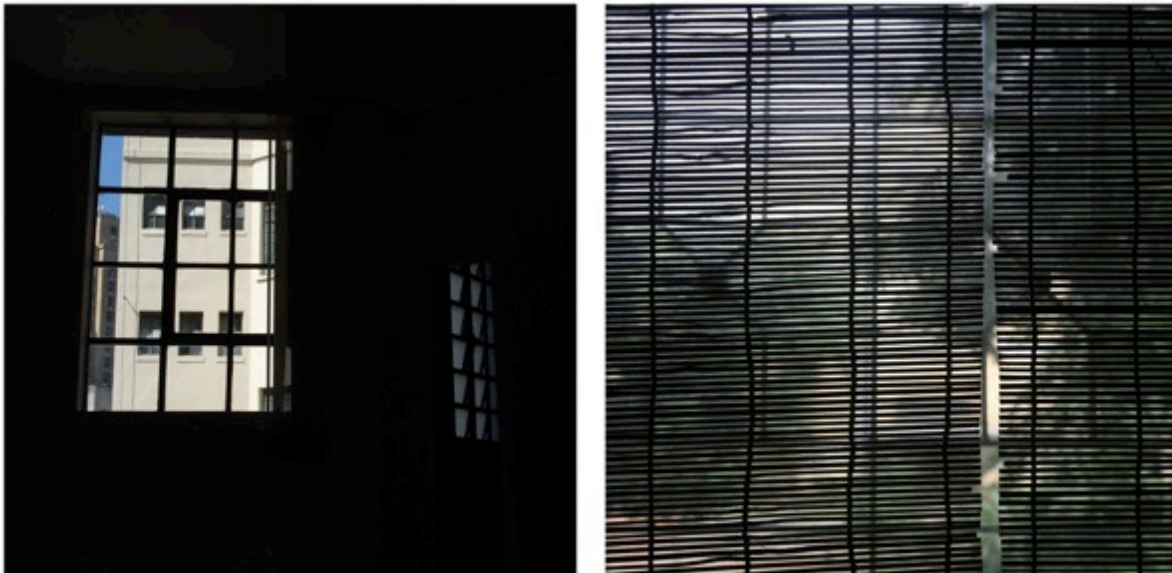
HE HAD TRIED TO EXPLAIN THAT HE NEEDED THE BRIEFCASE TO CARRY ALL THE DOCUMENTS THEY HAD ASKED FOR BUT THE GUARDS HAD TURNED HIM AWAY. AFTER CARRYING THE BRIEFCASE EVERY DAY FOR THIRTY YEARS HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY THIS HARD GREY BULK OF AN OBJECT WAS SUDDENLY CAUSING ALARM.

Fig. 2.56
Bani Abidi
Two of Two, 2010
Inkjet prints, 14 x 24 in.



HE HAD OVERLOOKED THE INSTRUCTIONS WHERE IT READ 'FILL IN ALL CAPS'

Fig. 2.57
Bani Abidi
Two of Two, 2010
Inkjet prints, 14 x 24 in.



THE DISTANCE HAD STARTED WEIGHING HEAVILY ON THEIR RELATIONSHIP

Fig. 2.58
Bani Abidi
Two of Two, 2010
Inkjet prints, 14 x 24 in.



Fig. 2.61
Bani Abidi
A Table Wide Country, 2012
C-print mounted on Alu-dibond, 6.3 x 9.8 in.

CHAPTER THREE: HAMRA ABBAS

In her queries into how identity defines the world, Hamra Abbas deconstructs and challenges assumptions about Islam, depicting a more nuanced reality. Her work explores and replicates Islamic mythologies, reinterpreting both iconic and everyday images, and—like Bani Abidi—much of her career has been invested with a process of unmasking myths. Abbas, however, is interested in those narratives that have emerged out of and in response to imperialist, Orientalist, and sectarian contexts. In *God Grows on Trees* (2008), for example, the artist responds to the sudden notoriety that madrassas acquired in a post-9/11 world (figs. 3.1–3). Abbas has likened the madrassa to its colonial counterpart, the harem, saying: “As an artist, I see the world’s current fascination with the madrassah as similar to the Orientalist painters’ fascination with the harem in the 19th and early 20th century, which is needless to say, quite reduced and sensationalised. And my determination to work in this manner was a response to this sensationalism.”²⁶⁹ Her exploration of contemporary attitudes towards madrassas—and by likening them to harems—underscores how the practice of Orientalizing and othering has continued into the neocolonial context. Throughout her career, Abbas deploys traditional metonyms of Islamic culture, in order to challenge understandings of Islam—from class divisions and sectarian schisms throughout Pakistan, to a flat understanding of Islam in the West, Abbas resists those narratives, offering different points of entry for her viewers.

In an attempt to confront stereotypes perpetuated not only in the Western media, but throughout Pakistan as well, Abbas spent months visiting madrassas across the country. What emerged was an intimate engagement with these spaces of religious education that, for many

²⁶⁹ Sharmini Pereira, “In Conversation: Hamra Abbas and Sharmini Pereira,” in *Object Lessons*, ed. Anita Dawood and Sharmini Pereira (London: Green Cardamom, 2009), 62.

viewers, will be their only encounter with these sites. In *God Grows on Trees*, Abbas depicts the likeness of 99 children from madrassas across Pakistan. Painted with meticulous detail using the Persian miniature technique, each portrait is approximately one-inch square, and was painted based on photographs the artist took.²⁷⁰ The portraits are mostly straight on, distancing them from traditional Mughal portraiture in which figures are represented in profile or three-quarter profile. Abbas renders each child so carefully and with such detail, she forces viewers to engage with their individuality. Throughout the portraits, we see the curious eyes, shy demeanors, and goofy smiles of childhood.

The number of portraits is a clear evocation of the 99 names and attributes of Allah, which expresses his divine and unknowable nature. Much like Allah's unknowable nature, Abbas hints at the unknowable nature of madrassas to much of the world. By evoking Islamic faith through the number 99, Abbas connects the madrassa to its primary function of religious education. Rote memorization—the style of learning characteristic of madrassa education—ensures homogeneity in thinking, particularly in matters of religious content and conduct.²⁷¹ An example of rote memorization, the 99 names of Allah are often committed to memory, as urged by the Prophet Muhammad: “The sacred number 99 relates to the Quranic injunction: ‘And remember God often’ (Surah 62:10) whereby repeating one or all of the beautiful names of Allah may be accompanied with counting the 99 prayer beads.”²⁷² Abbas not only identifies the importance of rote learning

²⁷⁰ Recent discourse has troubled the term “miniature” because of its dismissive intimations, and there has been a turn towards using the less politicized “manuscript painting.” However, as detailed in *Karkhana: A Contemporary Collaboration* (Ridgefield, CT: Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 2005), “it is now widely accepted that the term ‘miniature’ derives not from the small scale of the work but from the Latin word *miniare*, meaning to ‘color with red’ (the adornment of books originally was executed in red, or minium).” (p. 52) Moreover, the National College of Arts in Pakistan continues to use this term, offering a degree in miniature painting. For these reasons, I use miniature throughout the chapter.

²⁷¹ Virginia Whiles, “God Grows on Trees,” in *Hamra Abbas: Object Lessons*, ed. Anita Dawood and Sharmini Pereira (London: Green Cardamom, 2009), 38.

²⁷² Ibid., 38.

through the number of figures represented, but also through the very repetition of figures, appearing one after another. But in contrast to absolute sameness, Abbas instead emphasizes the individual characteristics of each child's face. Moreover, positioned in different places in each of their frames, the faces peering out at viewers disrupt what at first glance appears to be an orderly row of images (figs. 3.2).

Accompanying these paintings is a photograph of a tree-lined street in Lahore, where each of the trees contains a plaque listing one of the 99 names of Allah (fig. 3.1). Metal plaques such as these are not uncommon sights on trees in Lahore. In an exhibition context, the photo is hung low on the wall. The juxtaposition of the orderly rows of children with the offhanded placement of the photograph is curious, but the long row of 99 images of children recalls the row of trees with 99 metal plaques. Abbas has further expressed a connection to modern capitalism, with its focus on 99 as a psychologically important price point.²⁷³ Further pointing to the conflation of religion and capitalism is the adage “money doesn’t grow on trees,” an idiom meant to caution people about how they spend because there is not an endless supply of money; money is something to be cherished, to be protected. The title of the work suggests that God—unlike money—does indeed grow on trees, but Abbas seems to advise caution when using God’s name. *God Grows on Trees* cautions that the widespread uses of God’s name in order to justify action—such as fanatical misinterpretations of Islam or the divisiveness of sectarianism—devalues Islam; God’s name is not cherished, not protected. Throughout the work, Abbas makes connections between Islam, capitalism, neo-imperialism, and terrorism, and asks her viewers to consider how—and by whom—the future of Pakistan is being shaped.

²⁷³ Pereira, “In Conversation: Hamra Abbas and Sharmini Pereira,” 62.

Finbarr Barry Flood has argued that, as art historians, it is imperative to acknowledge the ways that colonialism, capitalism, and the canon are intimately bound together. “The most obvious way of doing this,” he argues, “is to broaden the canon, including artists and works that problematize the history and reception of Islamic art since the nineteenth century.”²⁷⁴ Abbas’s practice, I would argue, is one that draws our attention to what he identifies as the false binary between the historical and contemporary. Flood writes about contemporary Iranian artist Shadi Ghadirian, whose *Qajar Series* stages photographs suggestive of late nineteenth century Qajar era studio portraiture (fig. 0.13). Ghadirian inserts modern elements into the portraits—such as a Pepsi can or vacuum cleaner. Flood argues that “this deployment of strategic anachronism offers a paradigm that opens the potential for academics, curators, and scholars to treat the objects of ‘Islamic’ art not as teleological markers in a master narrative that occludes the circumstances of its own production (and ongoing reproduction), but as contested objects within a disjunctive and tendentious discourse.”²⁷⁵ The conflation of past and present disrupts ordered, teleological narratives of art history, narratives that ignore intertwined histories of production. While traditional narratives of Islamic art promote a specific point of view, images by Ghadirian, for example, challenge those traditional narratives and allow for the discussion of Islamic art as a category of objects that lack cohesion. In her conflation of past and present, Ghadirian disrupts the art historical convention of a golden age of Islamic art. Similarly, Hamra Abbas often plays with disjuncture between tradition and modernity, historical and contemporary, original and copy. By working within and exploiting multiple frames of reference, her work resists art historical categories built on a teleological view of history. In fact, her works draws our attention to the production of “Islamic art history” and how that construction continues to influence our

²⁷⁴ Flood, “From the Prophet to Postmodernism?,” 44.

²⁷⁵ Flood, “From the Prophet to Postmodernism?,” 45.

understanding of Islamic art and culture. In so doing, Abbas engages with this history, offering the possibility of a potent critique of its Western origins and definitions, and allowing for a possible interruption from within the discourse of art history.

God Grows on Trees is, in part, a response to US/Pakistan relations and attitudes following the September 11 attack on the United States and the subsequent so-called “War on Terror.” As places of religious education, madrassas became a particular scapegoat in the wave of Islamophobia that emerged after the 9/11 attacks on the United States. In 2003, then US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld asked in a leaked memorandum: “Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?”²⁷⁶ The following year, Secretary of State Colin Powell would describe madrassas as “breeding grounds for ‘fundamentalists and terrorists.’”²⁷⁷ Similarly, after the 7/7 tube attack in London, then-Prime Minister Tony Blair stated in a speech, the “roots [of Islamic extremism] are not superficial, but deep, in the madrassas of Pakistan, in the extreme forms of Wahabi doctrine in Saudi Arabia, in the former training camps of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan; in the cauldron of Chechnya; in parts of the politics of most countries of the Middle East and many in Asia; in the extremist minority that now in every European city preach hatred of the West and our way of life.”²⁷⁸ And, in an article titled “On Their Way to Terror School,” *The Evening Standard* describes the actions of the 7/7 bombers in the months leading up to the attack, identifying that one of the would-be bombers arrived in Karachi to attend a madrassa, or, as they

²⁷⁶ msnbc.com, “Rumsfeld’s Memo on Iraq, Afghanistan,” *msnbc.com*, December 5, 2003, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/3225926/ns/us_news-security/t/rumsfelds-memo-iraq-afghanistan/.

²⁷⁷ Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey, “The Madrassa Myth,” *The New York Times*, June 14, 2005, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/14/opinion/the-madrassa-myth.html>.

²⁷⁸ Tony Blair, “Full Text: Blair Speech on Terror,” *BBC*, July 16, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4689363.stm.

define it, “a religious school said to be a haven for so-called Islamic warriors.”²⁷⁹ Moreover, the generic madrassa image that accompanies news stories is one of uniformity: a group of boys, dressed alike in their *shalwar kameez* (a long tunic worn over loose pants) and *taqiyah* (skullcap), usually depicted with heads bent over their studies. These attitudes and images have contributed to a pervasive understanding in the West of madrassas as places of uniformity that are nothing more than terrorist recruitment and training centers.

In reality, however, madrassas—at their most fundamental—are places of religious education that are particularly appealing for the poor of Pakistan because of the free housing, meals, and education they provide. While madrassas are typically made up of the children of devout villagers, only a small percentage of Pakistani children are actually enrolled in madrassas. In fact, just seven percent of Pakistani villages even have madrassas, and only four percent of Pakistan’s population lives in a village where madrassas are the only educational opportunity.²⁸⁰ Moreover, in places where other educational opportunities do exist, less than one percent of enrolled children attend a madrassa, irrespective of their family’s income.²⁸¹ Thus, it would seem that in spite of what we are told by politicians and the global media, in truth, the majority of Pakistanis are not educating their children in madrassas, nor are madrassas their only educational choice. While it *is* true that terrorists are slightly more likely to have attended a madrassa than Pakistan’s general population,²⁸² in practice, madrassas do not produce the technically literate

²⁷⁹ Richard Edwards, “On Their Way to Terror School; New Film of Suicide Bombers Entering Pakistan,” *The Evening Standard*, July 18, 2005, <https://www.questia.com/newspaper/1G1-134118122/on-their-way-to-terror-school-new-film-of-suicide>.

²⁸⁰ Madiha Afzal, *Pakistan Under Siege: Extremism, Society, and the State* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 130.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 132. In a 2012 study of the 230 most wanted terrorists by Pakistan’s Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Afzal found that—of the seventy on which the FIA has their educational information—seventeen percent has some form of madrassa education. In “The Madrassa Scapegoat,” Peter L. Bergen and Swati Pandey find that of the 79 terrorists responsible for the five most recent and worst anti-Western terrorist attacks, only eleven percent attended madrassas (p. 118).

individual necessary to organize a terrorist attack.²⁸³ For example, in a 2006 look at the five worst anti-West terrorist attacks, “missions undertaken by Al Qaeda and its affiliated groups are not the work of impoverished, undereducated madrassa graduates, but rather of relatively prosperous university graduates with technical degrees that were often attained in the West.”²⁸⁴ Indeed, terrorist attitudes often seem to be fostered while attending Western institutions, where students may feel isolated or targeted.²⁸⁵ While there is evidence showing that the curricula of many madrassas fosters extremist attitudes with anti-Western, anti-India, and anti-minority sentiments,²⁸⁶ in truth there is little a correlation between attitudes and actions, or perhaps between attitude and ability.

In *God Grows on Trees*, Abbas’s diminutive portraits of childhood evoke passport photos or other such forms of identification, recalling the ways that images are used to control and restrict travel. As discussed in chapter two, images precede the body of the migrant.²⁸⁷ Particularly in the wake of global terrorist threats and travel alerts, through new stories and stereotypes, images of Muslim, migrant others have become imbued with anxiety. But Abbas has only rendered the children’s faces—their caps and scarves are white, blending in with the background. While not completely erased, only a shadow of these signifiers of their Islamic identity remains. Moreover, in isolating the children’s faces, Abbas emphasizes the similarities between boys and girls at this age and thereby undermines the frequent use of gender as a means to discriminate in education across Pakistan and globally. In this portrayal of the humanity of childhood, Abbas asks her viewers to confront assumptions that madrassas churn out faceless Islamic extremists. One rosy-

²⁸³ Peter L. Bergen and Swati Pandey, “The Madrassa Scapegoat,” *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2006): 117–125.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 122–123.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁸⁶ Afzal, *Pakistan Under Siege*, 134–135.

²⁸⁷ Mitchell, “Migration, Law, and the Image,” 59.

cheeked child appears as though captured in mid-sentence, one can almost hear the “chirpy and chatty kids” that Abbas describes encountering.²⁸⁸ Another child appears to mug for the camera with a goofy smile, while others look shy and curious. These are not the faces of Islamic terror that Western media and politicians would have us believe lurk inside madrassas.

There is, of course, an audience to whom much of this imagery will be immediately recognizable. The children, the tree-lined street, the referents to the Quran are evocative of life in Pakistan. But while the imagery might be more recognizable to a Pakistani audience, it is worth considering the class distinctions between an art-going audience and those who rely on madrassas for education. In fact, it is not only Westerners who are uninformed about madrassas, but many Muslims as well—there is a cultural, class-based awareness of what they are and the type of education they provide.²⁸⁹ And, while madrassas are not what they have been portrayed to be in popular Western media, some are nevertheless tied to extremism, particularly to attacks on the Pakistani state.²⁹⁰ In *God Grows on Trees*, Abbas does not indicate the madrassa these children attend, nor does she include any marks of sectarian difference or class distinction. In so doing, Abbas perhaps invites her viewers to wonder what will happen to these children after their religious education—will they learn compassionate lessons of Islam, or will the intolerance and extreme attitudes taught in many madrassa textbooks prevail?²⁹¹ Put simply, viewers might wonder how—and by whom—the future of Pakistan is being shaped.

Curator Anna Sloan defines Abbas’s practice as diverse, saying that “as opposed to most artists today who maintain something akin to a formal and conceptual ‘brand’ identifiable as their

²⁸⁸ Pereira, “In Conversation: Hamra Abbas and Sharmini Pereira,” 58.

²⁸⁹ Ebrahim Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 11.

²⁹⁰ Afzal, *Pakistan Under Siege*, 131.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

own, Abbas devises a new language for each project she begins.”²⁹² But, while she is perhaps devising a new language for each project, I would argue that she is, in fact, striving to translate the same message. She is, in other words, systematic in her thematic choices throughout her projects. Her work is a rejoinder to the ways that Islam has been claimed and positioned by a variety of forces, from sensationalist portrayals in the global media, to reactionary politicians, and Islamic fundamentalists. Abbas is invested in exploring how Pakistani and Islamic identity have been manipulated and controlled by myriad forces—from the political uses of Islam to an Orientalist legacy that has persisted in art and politics, her diverse body of work questions who gets to determine what it means to be Muslim.

Art History’s Narratives

Art historian Finbarr Barry Flood argues that Islamic art and politics are inextricably entwined. As detailed in the introduction, the category of Islamic art history developed into an area of study during colonialism and the category, as it exists today, is extremely complicated, covering a variety of artistic practices that span nearly 1400 years and multiple continents. The category of Islamic art is stuck between being both a religious and cultural identification.²⁹³ At the same time, Islamic art is used to construct a global Muslim identity that speaks to the notion of an authentic Islamic faith and culture.²⁹⁴ Moreover, the newly formed Pakistani state relied on Islamic art in 1947 to aid in the creation of a pan-Islamic identity in the face of differences of class, ethnicity, and language. Islamic calligraphy, and to a lesser extent miniatures produced in the Mughal

²⁹² Anna J. Sloan, “Object Lessons,” in *Hamra Abbas: Object Lessons*, ed. Anita Dawood and Sharmini Pereira (London: Green Cardamom, 2009), 8.

²⁹³ Flood, “From the Prophet to Postmodernism?,” 32.

²⁹⁴ Flood, “From the Prophet to Postmodernism?,” 42. See, for example, the Saudi sponsorship of 2004–05 National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC exhibition, *Palace and Mosque*; the intro to the catalogue *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600*; or discussion around the Louvre’s 2002 formation of a department of Islamic art, as discussed by Flood (40–42).

imperial tradition, were preferred by the Pakistani government of General Zia ul-Haq under the country's process of Islamization.²⁹⁵ Islamic art and culture have a long history of being coopted by a variety of forces.

Colonial collecting has long informed our understanding of Islamic art; contemporary geopolitics has often meant that objects easily accessed (or, those objects in Western collections) are the ones that get studied and absorbed into the canon. As such, Islamic art is frequently valued in the same terms it was under colonialism: miniature painting and monumental architecture. In *All Rights Reserved* (2004), Abbas highlights the consumption and commodification of Islamic art and, in particular, Mughal miniatures (figs. 3.5–6). The work focuses on a detail from *The Padshahnama* (1630–57), a manuscript created to celebrate the life and rule of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (fig. 3.7). *The Padshahnama* is today a part of the Royal Collection housed in Windsor Castle, having been given to King George III in the late 18th century by the Nawab of Oudh as a diplomatic gift. The precious and rare manuscript rarely leaves Windsor, but in 1997–98 it traveled to the US as part of the exhibition *King of the World: a Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle*. In *All Rights Reserved*, Abbas extracts a scene from a manuscript page depicting the delivery of presents for the wedding of Shah Jahan's son, Prince Dara-Shikoh. In reality, the image is once removed—Abbas is not depicting a scene from the manuscript per se, but instead the image is taken from the exhibition catalogue and is in fact the same scene that serves as the catalogue's cover (fig. 3.8).

All Rights Reserved is an installation comprised of four panels. The first and last panels are taken from the manuscript page, and focus on a detail in which men carry gifts from the

²⁹⁵ Salima Hashmi, "Radicalizing Tradition (2000)," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: A Critical Reader*, ed. Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011), 287.

bridegroom's family to the house of the bride on large, round trays covered with cloth.²⁹⁶ The figures in Abbas's rendering, however, have had their gifts carefully cut out and placed on a separate panel. While the gifts are placed in the same arrangement as in the original image, they have been mirrored so that it takes the viewer some time to find their counterparts. The gifts hover on the fourth panel in midair, absent of any corporeal presence; the ghostly shapes of hands help mark where their owners once stood. Abbas thus highlights the way the manuscript was removed, having been gifted to the King of England during India's colonization. The gifts—which these men once carried—have been detached from their person in an act of destruction on Abbas's part. In much the same way, this manuscript has been removed through the violent effects of colonialism.

The other two panels, sandwiched between the two images from the manuscript, are the catalogue's copyright and title pages. Abbas draws our focus to the copyright, which states: "All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the copyright holder."²⁹⁷ In reproducing this page, Abbas has highlighted her blatant disregard for these directions and reveals the artist's "concerns over authority and control" of cultural property.²⁹⁸ Moreover, this act draws our attention to the irony that while Lahore is a major center for the production of miniature painting, many of the original Mughal miniatures are today in England, a legacy of when India was its colonial subject.²⁹⁹ *All Rights Reserved* is, as art historian Virginia Whiles writes, "an ironic comment on the astounding

²⁹⁶ Milo Cleveland Beach and Ebba Koch, *King of the World: The Padshahnama: An Imperial Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 181.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Sophie Gordon, "All Rights Reserved," in *Hamra Abbas: Object Lessons*, ed. Anita Dawood and Sharmini Pereira (London: Green Cardamom, 2009), 26.

²⁹⁹ Whiles, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan*, 67.

fact that this most hallowed Mughal manuscript is owned by the Queen of England, and rarely allowed out of her collection.”³⁰⁰

Abbas highlights the West’s ownership of South Asian art and culture. Not only are these objects quite literally owned by Western institutions, which Abbas clearly addresses in the work, but more subtly, these objects are also the preserve of Western scholarship. Her attention to a detail of *The Padshahnama* underscores the methods of Western art history—scholars emphasize and isolate moments, removing them from their larger context.³⁰¹ This detail, chosen to represent the entire manuscript on the cover the exhibition catalogue, speaks to a sort of art historical vandalism—the ways art historians choose to focus and draw our attention on specific moments in paintings, as well as histories. What gets remembered, preserved, and studied—in other words, what gets valued—is determined by scholars.

In one of a handful of assessments of the field of Islamic art, scholars Sheila Bloom and Jonathan Blair evoke a certain “canonical anxiety,” to use the words of Gülru Necipoğlu.³⁰² Bloom and Blair acknowledge the problems within the field—in turns they refer to it as an “unwieldy” field; they say it is more easily described by what it is not, rather than what it is; and they describe it as being “formed in the crucible of colonialism.”³⁰³ In spite of all this, Bloom and Blair ultimately defend the category—rather than trouble it, they want to maintain the field of Islamic art, they want it to remain survey-able. There is a troubling undercurrent to their assessment of the field, when they write:

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 132.

³⁰¹ See, for example, Tapati Guha-Thakurta’s discussion of how the photographic detail has been instrumental in determining the study of erotic imagery from temples. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, “Art History and the Nude: On Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality in Contemporary India,” in *Monuments, Objects, Histories, Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-Colonial India* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 237–267.

³⁰² Gülru Necipoğlu, “The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Discourses and New Approaches,” *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. Number 6 (June 2012): 9.

³⁰³ Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, “The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field,” *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 1 (March 2003): 153.

White non-Muslims are becoming less dominant in the field ... This new diversity of experience and expectation is welcome indeed, but it also raises complicated issues about who is doing what for whom. The interests and opinions of those seeking to understand their own heritage can be very different from those who are seeking to understand and explain something they consider somewhat distant in time and space. It is one thing, for instance, to study the Dome of the Rock because it is the superb example of late antique architectural ideas transformed to suit the needs of new Muslim patrons and another to study it because it is the most prominent visual symbol of a thwarted Palestinian nation.

While we admire students' eagerness to understand what they identify as their own heritage and appreciate their willingness to use linguistic skills they may already have, we are concerned that this approach transforms the study of Islamic art, once a branch of the humanistic study of art history open to all, into one of many fields of area and ethnic studies, sometimes organized along national or ethnic lines.³⁰⁴

The notion that Islamic art history belongs to some scholars and not others is a colonial legacy. Throughout *Orientalism*, Edward Said revealed how “the Orient” was marked as other and was, therefore, the domain of scholars to be studied and controlled. As outlined in the introduction, discourse was the primary way the Orient was handled—by making statements about it, teaching it, settling it, and ultimately ruling over it. For power to remain successful, however, the means of control must appear neutral. This enables the control of the so-called Orient (and, by extension, the people and ideas that transcend the fiction of the Orient). Bloom and Blair evoke this history with their claim that younger (non-white) art historians are too ideological in their pursuit of Islamic art history. But their generation, they argue—a generation of largely white art historians—remains disinterested and objective in their scholarship.

Established under colonialism, the subfield of Islamic art history remains informed by colonial collections and Western scholars continue to exert ownership over Islamic art history by policing its borders. As an art historical category, Islamic art after 1800 has no home, as it is viewed as neither Islamic nor Modern—it is largely ignored in survey texts of Islamic art as well as surveys

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 176.

of modern and contemporary art. Surveys of Islamic art history operate under the antiquated notion that there is a golden age of Islamic Art and anything done after 1800 is “contaminated” by the West and, therefore, unworthy of study.³⁰⁵ Flood writes “most authors seem to take it for granted that no art worthy of comment was produced in the Islamic world after 1800.”³⁰⁶ There is an underlying assumption to this attitude that the art of the Muslim world cannot produce modernity from within, but that it is merely a Western copy. Such attitudes expose the problems that have long existed in the field of art history. Oleg Grabar wrote in 1983 that this attitude towards modern Islamic art “suggests that Islamic creativity may have meaning for Westerners only if it dates from before 1700; it is perhaps also not an accident that studies of eighteenth-and nineteenth-century Islamic art have come more frequently from Muslims than from Westerners.”³⁰⁷ Flood similarly surmises that locating Islamic art only in its past glories does not allow it the prospect of being equal with European modernity.³⁰⁸ While it is certainly true that scholars and institutions are beginning to trouble this history (and the canon more broadly), Islamic art as a field of study

³⁰⁵ A review of traditional survey texts reveals that 1800 is the latest cut-off for Islamic art history. See, for example, Barbara Brend, *Islamic Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), which looks at Islamic art through roughly the 17th century, with three pages in the conclusion devoted to what Islamic art is “doing now;” Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) contains a final chapter dedicated to the legacy of Islamic art—its impact on the West (Orientalism), as well as later art and architecture that is rooted in the work discussed throughout the remainder of the text; Robert Irwin, *Islamic Art in Context: Art, Architecture, and the Literary World* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997), which contextualizes Islamic art from its beginning through approximately 1800.

Global art history survey textbooks can confuse the matter even further. For example, in ‘Volume One of Marilyn Stokstad’s *Art History*, (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2017)—which surveys prehistory through the fourteenth century—the chapter on Islamic art looks at art from the ninth through the seventeenth century, and includes a brief look of modern art, writing: “Islamic art is not restricted to the distant past. But with the dissolution of the great Islamic empires and the formation of smaller nation-states during the twentieth century, questions of identity and its expression in art changed significantly. Muslim artists and architects began to participate in international movements that swept away many of the visible signs that formerly expressed their cultural character and difference.” (p. 291, 293) It seems that even when there is an acknowledgement of modern Islamic art, it is unclear when and how to categorize it. And in surveys of modern and contemporary art, such as H.H. Arnason’s *History of Modern Art* (Boston: Pearson, 2013), there is no mention of Islamic art throughout the text.

³⁰⁶ Flood, “From the Prophet to Postmodernism?,” 33.

³⁰⁷ Oleg Grabar, “Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art,” *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): 5.

³⁰⁸ Flood, “From the Prophet to Postmodernism?,” 34.

nevertheless continues to be taught in a way that denies its coevalness with European art.³⁰⁹ Gülru Necipoğlu writes, “Most survey books of world art perpetuate this nineteenth-century taxonomy by classifying the whole Islamic visual heritage, spanning nearly a millennium and a half, as an essentially medieval tradition that is often accompanied by early Christian and Byzantine art.”³¹⁰ In the art historical narrative, the category of Islamic art is a bit of a contradiction. On the one hand, it is a monolithic category that encompasses hundreds of years and many different geographical areas. On the other hand, in survey texts, its history is compressed, and it functions as a transitional category—along with Byzantine art—between antiquity and medieval Europe.³¹¹ It simultaneously covers a vast array of objects, while also existing as a rather narrow bridge.

In *All Rights Reserved*, Abbas not only problematizes Western approaches to and attitudes about Islamic art history but, moreover, questions the ownership of that history. Abbas’s work engages with both Islamic tradition and contemporary practices, allowing for the productive possibility of thinking beyond a teleological, Eurocentric art history. Her work highlights the incommensurability of the discipline and disrupts art historical narratives that separate the world into fixed categories. While many artists rework the past, Abbas’s manipulation of iconic images inserts her into the canon of Islamic art history. In so doing—much like Flood describes the work Ghadirian—Abbas challenges those narratives and facilitates a discussion of Islamic art as a category of objects that lack cohesion.

In *All Rights Reserved*, Abbas not only marks miniature painting as a legacy in which she has the right to intervene, but in naming her work based on the exhibition catalogue’s copyright

³⁰⁹ See, for example, Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*; Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000).

³¹⁰ Necipoğlu, “The Concept of Islamic Art,” 2.

³¹¹ Ibid., 3.

page, Abbas recalls and intercedes in the colonial history of manuscript pages being titled by Western scholars. At the time of their creation, these pages would not have been consumed as individual artworks but were instead part of a large folio or book. They were one page of many—both image and text—that recounted the life of Shah Jahan. Western modes of consumption have required these pages be exhibited like paintings and given specific titles. In turn, what was once part of the larger story in the life of Shah Jahan, is removed from the larger narrative and exists only as “The delivery of presents for Prince Dara-Shikoh’s wedding.” Similarly, Abbas has intervened and renamed the scene *All Rights Reserved*.

We might, therefore, consider Abbas’s act in *All Rights Reserved* as a reclamation of these objects and their histories. Her work facilitates, in the words of James D. Herbert, “the possibility of resistance and disruption from within—both in the past and in the present.”³¹² Abbas draws attention to the myriad apparatuses of art historical power. In *All Rights Reserved*, she uncovers the ways that art has come to be defined and owned by colonial collecting. Modern ideas of property mean that the owner of the *Padshahnama*—the Queen of England—can claim both intellectual ownership and copyright over reproductions of the Mughal manuscript. While the Indian subcontinent is no longer a colonial power, the Queen of England still controls their history and culture. But, in the same way that Bani Abidi appropriates the power that she critiques, so too does Hamra Abbas assert her ownership over this work and its history. In reproducing these images and (re)claiming them, she now “owns” the images. She both claims the power for herself and critiques this largely arbitrary power that is a legacy of colonialism.

³¹² James D. Herbert, “Passing between Art History and Postcolonial Theory,” in *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 219.

Battle Scenes (2006), another object in which Abbas reinterprets the legacy of Mughal miniature painting, further draws attention to this convention of titling individual manuscript pages (fig. 3.9). Taken from the *Akbarnama* (c. 1590–96), the account of the third Mughal Emperor Akbar, the original image Abbas works with is *The Victory of the Imperial Mughal Army over Sultan Adam of Ghakkar, in the Punjab, in 1563* (fig. 3.10). The original image illustrates a battle between the army of Emperor Akbar and his enemies. The scene is a characteristic of the *Akbarnama*: it is a vibrantly colored, lively composition that is teeming with people. In *Battle Scenes*, Abbas has again highlighted and isolated moments within the scene. But rather than depict a detail, she instead isolates only the fighting figures—the landscape, weapons, horses, all have been stripped from the scene. Abbas created the work in two formats: an animation and a lenticular print, which evokes the popular visual forms of television and gifs.³¹³ In this way, she recalls one of the original uses of manuscripts as a form of imperial entertainment.³¹⁴ But in spite of the animation, her soldiers remain frozen, forever repeating the same actions.

Rather than repurposing the original image—as she did with *All Rights Reserved*—here, Abbas has reconstructed the image with visitors from an array of London parks that she posed in the warrior-like stances conveyed in the original manuscript page. Made during her London residency at Gasworks, *Battle Scenes* depicts a glimpse of London’s diversity: the figures—dressed casually—are different races, ages, genders, and religions. There is little that unites them in the composition and the empty, black background places Abbas’s soldiers in a void—their exact time and place is impossible to discern. London’s own diversity—reflected in *Battle Scenes*—is a

³¹³ See:

https://redirect.media.tumblr.com/image?url=/469771c719166357b2ae156a8592f5ed/tumblr_mqpnacFiQbIqiaw1ao2_400.gif
https://redirect.media.tumblr.com/image?url=/f00bd9927a0ac68cc80410a5f60343b1/tumblr_mqpnacFiQbIqiaw1ao1_400.gif

³¹⁴ Of course, these manuscripts had many functions, including recording important events, individuals, and histories that provided evidence of the ruler’s superiority.

direct result of their colonial history, a history that in many ways mirrors the imperial practices of the Mughals. As outlined in chapter one, commonwealth immigrants have increasingly faced scrutiny and restriction in Britain, and today—although over a decade after the creation of *Battle Scenes*—Brexit, among other things, underscores the deep anxiety with difference that the country continues to endure. The *Akbarnama* is today scattered in fragments around the world, but large portions of it are at the Victoria and Albert in London. The current location of the *Akbarnama* in London, as well as the individuals portrayed in *Battle Scenes*, speak to the protest line that emerged in London in the 1970s: “we are here because you were there.” Moreover, as Susan Stronge writes, the majority of paintings in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum “were once illustrations to books . . . now detached from their bindings or from colophons stating when the books were completed, they yield frustratingly incomplete information.”³¹⁵ Much like Abbas depicts figures that are detached from their surroundings and give us incomplete information, so too is the *Akbarnama* incomplete.

Abbas’s use of lenticular prints and animations puts her in dialogue with a long tradition of innovation in Mughal workshops. At the same time, her intervention into the history of miniature painting critiques notions of tradition. As Nadeem Omar Tarar writes about Miniature painting in Pakistan, “The notion of an unchanging tradition . . . is an outcome of nationalist history . . . From its imperial origins in Timurid kitabkhanas (royal book-making workshops) and Safavidi courts, Persian painting arrived in Mughal ateliers, transforming yet retaining its essence under the influence of European pictorial conventions, as well as those of indigenous-Hindu aesthetics.”³¹⁶ Far from being a static tradition, miniature painting was in fact a global art form, absorbing and

³¹⁵ Susan Stronge, *Painting for the Mughal Emperor: The Art of the Book, 1560-1660* (London: V&A Publications, 2002), 8.

³¹⁶ Nadeem Omar Tarar, “Framings of a National Tradition: Discourse on the Reinvention of Miniature Painting in Pakistan,” *Third Text* 25, no. 5 (September 2011): 577.

interpreting the influences from many sources. Art historian Virginia Whiles argues, “a positive blueprint for globalisation exists in the Mughal period, which was a time of intense intercultural exchange and spiritual eclecticism.”³¹⁷ Abbas’s intervention—and dialogue with the artists of the *Akbarnama*—challenges the national and art historical myths of an unchanging art form.

In dismantling and deconstructing images from the two most famous Mughal manuscripts, the *Padshahnama* and *Akbarnama*, Abbas not only critiques the consumption and production of Islamic art history, but further reflects on the modes of dissemination in the miniature practice at the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore, where Abbas received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1999 and her Master of Fine Arts in 2002 with a major in sculpture and a minor in miniature painting. The NCA is a prestigious art school and the only university in the world with a serious department in miniature painting.

The legacy of miniature painting and instruction in Pakistan is largely informed by India’s colonial history. By the mid-nineteenth century, miniature painting had all but disappeared after a gradual loss of patronage and when the Punjab fell under colonial control in 1849, the last miniature workshops in Lahore closed.³¹⁸ Famous miniature albums were subsequently plundered or sold into collections, many of which are now in Western institutions.³¹⁹ Originally established as the Mayo School of Art in 1875 by the British, its original mission was to ‘save’ Indian crafts.³²⁰ After Independence, however, the tradition of miniature painting became critical in Pakistan’s search for a suitably authentic national art form.³²¹ Although the miniature program had been a

³¹⁷ Whiles, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan*, 20.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

³¹⁹ Virginia Whiles, “Karkhana: Revival or Re-Invention?,” in *Karkhana: A Contemporary Collaboration*, ed. Hammad Nasar and Anita Dawood-Nasar (Ridgefield, CT: Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 2005), 26.

³²⁰ Whiles, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan*, 11.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

part of the curriculum since 1920, it was not until 1958—when the Mayo School of Art became the National College of Arts—that a traditional miniature workshop was established.

Beginning in the 1970s, a teacher at the NCA—the late Zahoor ul Akhlaq—began encouraging young artists to experiment with the miniature by introducing contemporary content to works inspired by and responding to the historical miniature.³²² While Akhlaq was instrumental in establishing miniature painting as a major area of specialization alongside painting and sculpture, his student—Bashir Ahmed—had a very different view of what miniature painting should be. Today, the department remains orthodox and rigorously disciplined. “Its official nationalist discourse is pursued through two strategies,” writes Virginia Whiles, “by reiterating the menace of loss . . . and by promoting the Mughal legacy.”³²³ The studios emulate a traditional workshop with students working on the floor under the attentive eyes of the master, or *ustad*.³²⁴ Abbas trained under *Ustad* Bashir Ahmed, who is known for his conservative approach to miniature painting and his resistance to experimentation. Ahmed’s philosophy is that the survival of the miniature depends on not challenging traditional modes of dissemination and, in fact, he described the miniature as an “endangered Islamic tradition.”³²⁵ Since Akhlaq’s time at the NCA, two modes of instruction have persisted within miniature education: one to maintain the tradition of miniature painting and the other to experiment with and challenge that tradition.³²⁶

Abbas engages with these modes of instruction by dissecting images that are among the most famous in Mughal miniature history. Akhlaq challenged the traditional method of miniature instruction by working from photocopies instead of faithfully copying originals and this lineage of

³²² *Ibid.*, 55–56.

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 48, 50.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 60–61.

working with a variety of source materials can be traced in Abbas's work. In *All Rights Reserved* she includes copies of the *Padshahnama* and its exhibition catalogue whereas in *God Grows on Trees* the paintings are based on her original photographs. Moreover, in *All Rights Reserved* and *Battle Scenes*, although engaging with the legacy of the miniature, Abbas does not actually paint in either work. Rather than simply reinterpreting tradition, Abbas is innovating from within the traditions of Islamic art history.³²⁷

Abbas draws our attention to the long history of power that is embedded in these objects. Her work is a response to how colonial practices have informed the NCA and her education there, as well as global understandings of Islamic art. Rather than an unchanged tradition, Abbas's work points to the long history of innovation in manuscript painting. In dialogue with the painters of imperial Mughal workshops, Abbas becomes their collaborator, working with miniature painting techniques in *God Grows on Trees*, or engaging with their subject matter in *All Rights Reserved* and *Battle Scenes*. Her work is a potent critique of the way objects and histories are manipulated, categorized, and coopted by a variety of forces.

* * *

In her series *Paradise Bath* (2009), Abbas explores the ways art has historically been used as a political tool, particularly as a means to justify colonial expansion (fig. 3.11). In the series of photographs, a young, darker skinned woman, dressed in a navy blue polo, denim miniskirt, black tights, and black ankle boots is washing a naked white woman head-to-toe. There is a bowl of fruit—a sign of fertility and sexuality—that always appears in a different spot throughout the

³²⁷ See Hammad Nasar, "Pakistan: An Art of Extremes," *Orientations* 40, no. 1 (February 2009): 48–58. In the article, Nasar discusses the two most prevalent modes of art-making in Pakistan: "innovating through tradition . . . and the art of the everyday."

images.³²⁸ In each of the images, save one, the white woman looks directly at the viewer and smiles; she both invites and implicates them into the proceedings. The bath is taking place in an abandoned space (in fact in the hot rooms of the male quarters) at the Baths of Paradise in Thessaloniki Greece—what was once majestic, now simply appears cold and cavernous. Other than our two actors, there is no other activity in the bath.

The images recall any number of harem and bath paintings by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Jean-Léon Gérôme, Eugène Delacroix, and other Orientalist painters. Like madrassas are today, harems were innately fascinating to nineteenth-century Westerners. Men were not allowed inside so they became a space of fantasy, but in reality they were the spaces where the women and children of a Muslim household would live. In Western paintings and books, however, they were imagined as exotic, private brothels. A historically inaccurate representation of harem life, Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* of 1814 would come to typify many depictions of Orientalist female nudes (fig. 3.12). In *La Grande Odalisque*, a woman reclines and takes up most of the canvas, nearly touching all four of the painting's sides. Her back is elongated, reinforcing the languor of the scene. She is surrounded by luxury—velvet curtains and cushions, fur blankets, pillows, and a hookah crowd her environment. As she gazes over her shoulder at the viewer, there is a tension between the sensuality of the scene and her measured regard. She is an object of desire, a commodity to be had, but she views us with a wary eye. More clearly evocative of Abbas's imagery, Gérôme's *Moorish Bath* (1870) depicts a similar scene as Abbas with a fair-skinned woman being bathed by a darker skinned attendant (fig. 3.13). The composition is carefully constructed, lending the entire scene an air of authenticity: the smooth surface of the marble, the intricately patterned tiles, the discarded fabric over the wall, the reflection of light throughout the room, all of which come

³²⁸ See Béatrice Laurent, "Juicy Fruit in the Harem: Pomological Symbolism in Some Paintings by John Frederick Lewis," *Visual Culture in Britain* 17, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 1–17.

together to persuade the viewer that this is not a work of art, but an image of truth. These women are, above all else, beautiful, exotic, sumptuous, and languorous. Even the woman who does the washing in Gérôme's painting is relatively inactive—her muscles strain as she carries the basin, but she is not active. While less overtly sexualized than her fair-skinned counterpart, she performs her duty, breasts exposed—she is still an object to be desired, to be consumed. Such Orientalist imagery helped justify colonial interventions into other parts of the world—these motifs function as a way to comment on the corruption of Islamic society. In other words, the peoples of Islamic cultures—depicted as overly sexualized, lazy, and ultimately different—were unable to take care of themselves or their culture, thereby reinforcing the need for the civilizing influence of British intervention.

When Edward Said famously deconstructed ideas of the Orient, he revealed how domination was constructed through culture, and not only political and economic strength. Orientalism, he argued, was a potent form of power. Because the Orient is inherently 'other,' it is a world that must be handled, controlled, and dominated—for while it is exotic and mysterious, it is simultaneously dangerous and unknown.³²⁹ Taking up Said's work, Linda Nochlin looked to images of the Orient in her groundbreaking essay, "The Imaginary Orient." Nochlin calls for an assessment of the political uses of art and—throughout the essay—evaluates the ways that Orientalist painters did not depict objective views of reality, but rather created an illusion that was meant to produce a reality that served to justify colonial expansion. Nochlin writes that the Orient "existed as a project of the imagination, a fantasy space or screen onto which strong desires—

³²⁹ Said, *Orientalism*.

erotic, sadistic, or both—could be projected with impunity” and that such images projected “the fantasy of absolute possession of women’s naked bodies.”³³⁰

In *Paradise Bath*, Abbas deconstructs this historical body of images that produced a worldview in which the non-Western world was portrayed as other—as feminine, passive, and exotic. Like Abidi, Abbas uses photography in order to draw our attention to and challenge the supposed authenticity of such images. Indeed, Nochlin writes that Gérôme’s “realist” work used photographs to render architectural details and was often compared to photography. But as she goes on to note, photography is not immune to Orientalizing tendencies.³³¹ Photographs can be dramatized and framed to be more picturesque; photographs can be manipulated as easily Orientalist painting was to portray an imagined reality. Similarly, Abbas draws our attention to this manipulation of images, and challenges a long history of believing in the veracity of photographic evidence.

Said writes that “Orientalism itself, furthermore, was an exclusively male province . . . This is especially evident in the writings of travelers and novelists: women are usually the creatures of male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing.”³³² Representations of the other were always a means of underscoring Western supremacy over the body and land. The Orient was—above all else—different; “its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability; this is why every writer on the Orient . . . saw [it] as a locale requiring Western attention, reconstruction, even redemption. The Orient existed as a place isolated from the mainstream of European progress

³³⁰ Linda Nochlin, “The Imaginary Orient,” in *The Politics Of Vision: Essays On Nineteenth-Century Art And Society*, ed. Linda Nochlin (New York: Westview Press, 1991), 41, 43.

³³¹ Ibid., 39.

³³² Said, *Orientalism*, 207

in the science, arts, and commerce.”³³³ Images of the harem were made for Western consumption and, it is possibly to that assumed viewer that the woman in *Paradise Bath* smiles. The implied viewer of historical harem scenes was white, male, and Western. He is, Nochlin writes, the “gaze which brings the Oriental world into being, the gaze for which it is ultimately intended.”³³⁴

At the same time, however, Abbas seems to address the role European women played in the creation of such images. In *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature*, Mary Roberts reevaluates the history of harem imagery. Typically discussed as images created by and for men, Roberts investigates the role that Western women played in creating their own Oriental fantasies. Often rejecting the more overtly sexual fantasies of men, women’s descriptions of the harem were a blending of fantasy and experience, imagining themselves as the main characters in their own harem adventures.³³⁵ Descriptions of the domesticity of the harem that women encountered during their visits mingled with exotic fantasies, blurring the line between fact and fiction. Emerging from this history, *Paradise Baths* is perhaps directed at the women who bring these spaces into being. Moreover, a neocolonial tourism trope emerged after the 2006 publication of Elizabeth Gilbert’s memoir, *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman’s Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia* (and only increased after the 2010 film adaptation starring Julia Roberts): women looking to “find themselves” in their travels to so-called exotic lands, or, in the words of Sandip Roy, “white people discovering themselves in brown places.”³³⁶ Books like Gilbert’s recall the colonial travel writing of the nineteenth century and Abbas’s intervention into this neo-colonial tourist trope reminds us that—in the words of author

³³³ Ibid., 206

³³⁴ Nochlin, “The Imaginary Orient,” 37.

³³⁵ See Mary Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2007), in particular pages 59–108.

³³⁶ Sandip Roy, “The New Colonialism of ‘Eat, Pray, Love,’” *Salon*, August 14, 2010, https://www.salon.com/2010/08/14/i_me_myself/.

Jessa Crispin—“the way we deny other people’s humanity might change over time, but it has the same result.”³³⁷

Invited to the 2009 Thessaloniki Biennial, Abbas spent months learning a ritual cleansing process.³³⁸ At the core of *Paradise Bath* is an investigation into history, power, and memory. The work is not only a query into the colonial past, but also into the Ottoman past. Built in 1444 by Sultan Murad II, Bey Hamam—also known as the Baths of Paradise—were the first Ottoman baths in Thessaloniki and among the most famous in Greece. In the abandoned and decaying space, Abbas evokes another famous Orientalist painting by Gerome: *The Snake Charmer* (c. 1870) (fig. 3.14). In this work, as Nochlin details, “the vice of idleness was frequently commented upon by Western travelers to Islamic countries in the nineteenth century...[T]hese people [in *The Snake Charmer*]—lazy, slothful, and childlike, if colorful—have let their own cultural treasures sink into decay.”³³⁹ Today, the Baths of Paradise stand as a symbol of a golden Muslim past under Ottoman rule. In depicting their ruined state, Abbas not only reminds us of the art historical narrative of a glorious Muslim past, but also continues to draw on Orientalist narratives of a culture in decay.

Abbas engages with objects rich in history, but it is a history that has been manipulated by the machinations of global geo-politics. Her body of work—from recreating Orientalist paintings, to re-appropriating and reimagining Mughal miniature paintings—explores the divisions between the historical and contemporary, problematizing how Islamic art has been received and interpreted throughout history. Abbas acknowledges and explores the myriad ways power can be exerted through images and she both resists those narratives and reclaims the objects and their histories.

³³⁷ Jessa Crispin, “How Not to Be Elizabeth Gilbert,” *Boston Review*, July 20, 2015, <http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/jessa-crispin-female-travel-writing>.

³³⁸ Hanae Ko, “The Sound Of Broken Clapping: Hamra Abbas,” *ArtAsiaPacific*, no. 71 (December 2010), <http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/71/TheSoundOfBrokenClappingHamraAbbas>.

³³⁹ Nochlin, “The Imaginary Orient,” 38–9.

Her work explores categories that have historically defined “Islam” and offers a means of critiquing Western constructions of knowledge and art historical narratives.

Narratives of Contemporary Political Discourse

While Abbas has traditionally worked in a variety of media, underlining her practice has always been an interest in negotiating a flat understanding of Pakistani identity and Islamic culture, more broadly. While in some of her work—as discussed above—this has meant an engagement with the artistic legacy of colonialism, it has also meant investigating the effects September 11 and the resulting “war on terror” have had on Islamic art and culture. In much the same way that Muslims were defined as “other” under colonialism, Muslims have been defined as violent terrorists in the contemporary world.

At the same time, Pakistan has seen a rise in homegrown terrorism after September 11. What had been simmering for years was set ablaze after Pakistan’s official response to the US-led war on terror. In 2007, the Lal Masjid—or Red Mosque—and its associated madrassa the Jamia Hafsa violently clashed with the Pakistani government. The complex had long been associated with militancy, and its leaders openly supported Al Qaeda. Critical of the government’s alliance with the US after September 11, the mosque—owned and run by two brothers and clerics Maulana Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid Ghazi—wanted to defeat the Musharraf government and instill Sharia law. After a number of smaller conflicts, in January 2007 the female students at Jamia Hafsa overtook a public library, demanding that Sharia law be enforced throughout Pakistan. Students became vigilantes—wandering the streets and enforcing their own version of Sharia law and punishing those believed to be in violation, including kidnapping Chinese sex workers, raiding shops, burning DVDs, and generally threatening shopkeepers. The burqa-clad women emerged as

an aggressive and threatening image of madrassas and militant Islam (fig. 3.15). The Musharraf government's resistance to act for fear of backlash ended up being seen as an embarrassing mark of weakness, but after months of indecision, the government acted after some of the students refused to leave the library or cease their vigilante activities.³⁴⁰ In July 2007, the military raided the Lal Masjid complex and the events ended with approximately 154 people dying, including soldiers and female students.

The state's raid on the Red Mosque angered militant groups throughout Pakistan, which they understood to be confirmation of the state's war on Islam.³⁴¹ The event particularly intensified hatred in the tribal areas of Pakistan and, in September of 2007, the leader of Al Qaeda vowed revenge, targeting military and government personnel (including the December 2007 assassination of former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto); over the course of the next year, 88 suicide bombings killed approximately 1000 and wounded another 3000. The events at Lal Masjid were, moreover, the impetus to unite disparate anti-government groups in Pakistan's tribal areas.³⁴² In December of that same year, a village imam established the Pakistan Taliban. Its main target was the Pakistani state because of its alliance with the US in its war in Afghanistan, as well as the government's suppression of militant groups in Pakistan's tribal areas.³⁴³ The main targets of the Pakistan Taliban (also known as the Tehrik-e-Taliban) have been civil servants—politicians, the military, police—but it has also attacked civilians in spaces like mosques, schools, and parks.³⁴⁴ These incidents have had a direct impact on attitudes toward violence in Pakistan. From 2004 to 2013, the percentage of Pakistanis who said violence was never justified—even in defense of Islam

³⁴⁰ Eamon Murphy, *The Making of Terrorism in Pakistan: Historical and Social Roots of Extremism* (London: Routledge, 2013), 146–47.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 148.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Afzal, *Pakistan Under Siege*, 4.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

from its enemies—jumped from 41 to 89 percent. “This trend over the years,” Madiha Afzal writes, “suggests it is Pakistan’s own experience with large-scale terrorist violence—an abstract phenomenon before 2004 that became more widespread and has multiplied in scale after 2006—that has driven Pakistanis’ clear opposition to violence against civilians, even when in the name of Islam.”³⁴⁵

In 2008, Abbas responded to these events with her sculpture *The Woman in Black*—a nude, six-and-a-half foot tall, fiberglass sculpture that is painted black (fig. 3.16). The work articulates the diversity of concerns with which Hammad Nasar defines Pakistani art: “Nationhood and identity; political tussles between the army, clergy and politicians; gender roles ‘fixed’ by society and state; . . . the effects of globalization in general . . . these are some of the diverse issues that have shaped the course of recent art production and distribution in Pakistan.”³⁴⁶ While her evocations are many, perhaps the most obvious is the burqa-clad women associated with the Red Mosque siege. *The Woman in Black*, though nude, wears boots and a long veil-like cape that flows out behind her, and she wields a staff not unlike those of the Jamia Hafsa students. She gives the viewer the middle finger as her gaze seems to float upward—she seems, at best, indifferent towards us if not directly hostile. Her nudity recalls a tradition of Western female imagery, but unlike the languorous nude of artists such as Ingres’s *Odalisque*, *The Woman in Black* is a powerful, warrior-like figure. Physically she evokes the voluptuous Didarganj chauri bearer with her large breasts and hips. Or perhaps her nude, black skin is meant to evoke the Hindu Goddess Kali, destroyer of evil forces. She further conjures up ideas of a comic book superhero—all the more reinforced by Abbas’s manipulation of the sculpture in photographs like *Adventures of the Woman in Black* (fig. 3.17).

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 1.

³⁴⁶ Nasar, “Pakistan: An Art of Extremes,” 48.

The myriad points of reference that Abbas evokes results in a figure who is dominant and powerful; she is not the victim, but rather is the one in control. Abbas stated in an interview, “The notion of the veil as a symbol of control or oppression does not interest me from any angle. The Jamia Hafsa women, who inspired this work, were not oppressed or controlled; if anything they were ‘out of control’.”³⁴⁷ Abbas’s work highlights the inherent contradiction in the female madrassa students: they exist in a culture and religion that is often viewed as controlling of women and their bodies, but these women rejected any rigid notion of femininity and asserted their power in a world controlled by men and militant aggression. Rather than denuded of her power, *The Woman in Black* is empowered through her veil and sexuality. She is a figure that rejects many of the stereotypes used to define women, and Muslim women in particular. This work, Abbas states, comes out of her “attempts to explore ideas of belief, fact, fiction and myth.”³⁴⁸

This exploration of belief, fact, fiction, and myth—and how those ideas inform our understanding of the world—can be said to inform much of her practice. In *Read* (2007)—a work thematically connected to *God Grows on Trees*—a minimalist, wooden, maze-like structure is suspended from the ceiling at roughly eye level (figs. 0.12, 3.18). Abbas evokes a history of minimalism with her sculpture—its size and repeating geometric forms make you aware of your body and its relationship to the work. But unlike minimalism, there is a clear narrative to the work. As viewers walk through the space, they hear the sounds of children reciting the Qur’an as they memorize its verses. Played through speakers concealed within the structure, the sounds underscore the importance of rote memorization to the educational structure of madrassas. While rote emphasizes the standardization of religious content, the cacophony of voices disrupts any notion of order. The discordant voices evoke universal sounds of childhood.

³⁴⁷ Pereira, “In Conversation: Hamra Abbas and Sharmini Pereira,” 62.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

As viewers navigate through the labyrinth-like structure, they are immersed in a site where outsiders are not typically allowed access. In a manner of speaking, Abbas brings her viewers into Pakistan's madrassas enabling an experience that avoids a sensationalized point of view. Viewers are asked to reconcile their politically motivated views of madrassas as sites of terrorist education juxtaposed with the emotions of hearing many children's voices—a sound that is hardly threatening. Something interesting happens as viewers enter and walk through the space: they can no longer see outside of the structure and those outside cannot see the faces of those within. In much the same way, this experience echoes the reality that madrassas cannot be experienced by an outsider—for non-Westerners and the many in the Islamic world who are not educated in madrassas, the sounds, sites, and experiences inside madrassas can only be imagined. Abbas's creation of a structure that viewers enter and can hear the sounds of madrassa education provides her audience with an experience of madrassas, which is otherwise viewed from the outside, from a distance. The sculpture evoked a sacred space so much, in fact, that some viewers even removed their shoes before entering (fig. 3.18).

The sculpture evokes a labyrinth that has been reduced in scale. A labyrinth—a maze-like structure that one has to navigate—has its roots in Greek mythology. Daedalus created the labyrinth for King Minos to hold the Minotaur, a terrifying monster that indiscriminately murdered people. Abbas uses this form in her evocation of the madrassa—a similarly confusing space to her viewers. Labyrinths are a contradiction in terms—they are dynamic when on the inside, but static if seen from the outside; represent both order and disorder; they might be inextricable or impenetrable; labyrinths are, in the words of Penelope Reed Doob, “intrinsically unstable: change your perspective and the labyrinth seems to change.”³⁴⁹ Mazes come in two forms: multicursal and

³⁴⁹ Penelope Reed Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth: From Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 1.

unicursal. Multicursal mazes are confusing and meant to frustrate, they have many choices that lead to nowhere. The labyrinth that Abbas has created is a unicursal maze in miniature—a path that twists and turns but has no dead ends. This type of maze dates back to prehistory, but is also common in medieval churches like Chartres cathedral.³⁵⁰ Abbas encourages her viewers to go on this symbolic pilgrimage in order to gain the truth and to confront their fear of the contemporary world's most fearsome “monster”: the Islamic terrorist.

In a related work, *In this is a sign for those who reflect* (2009), the audience wears headphones as they proceed through a white corridor between two large, wooden structures (figs. 3.19–20). As they advance, they hear the sounds of people breathing, while the walls move in and out in tandem with the breaths. The sensory experience allows viewers to “imagine the power of many people's minds synchronizing to a single idea or belief.”³⁵¹ The work evokes the Sufi meditation practice, *zikr*, in which followers typically gather in order to recite prayers, the names of Allah, or other phrases. Participants of *zikr* are—in many ways—isolated in spite of being in the presence of other people. In a similar way, viewers experience *In this is a sign for those who reflect* together, but they are isolated from each other because of the headphones.

Abbas first began attending *zikr* in 2007 with her husband, who was a regular attendee, and she reports the experience as initially being confusing and overwhelming.³⁵² Abbas recreates this experience of being overcome in the work *In this is a sign*. She states:

In the work I create a house of fake walls that has come to life. The breathing movements of the walls, inhaling and exhaling, whilst moving inwards and outwards can be read or misread simply as an enclosing experience. But for me it was also about the power of belief, of synchronizing to one single idea, one cause, and its effects. The most captivating feature during my first experience of *Zikr*, in

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 48–51, 117–132.

³⁵¹ Hanae Ko, “The Sound Of Broken Clapping: Hamra Abbas.”

³⁵² Sharmini Pereira, “In Conversation: Hamra Abbas and Sharmini Pereira,” 64.

the dark, was mainly sound; the thump, the rhythm of high frequency notes, which I imagined as needles on sound meters shooting all the way up into the red zone.³⁵³

In re-creating this experience for her viewers, she reflects on her own feelings of being overwhelmed the first time she attended *zikr*. A viewer could leave their encounter with *In this is a sign* feeling—quite literally—boxed in. But Abbas urges her viewers to reconsider—to reflect on the experience of being connected to others through a shared encounter. Abbas encourages an experience of Islam that is foreign to many in the West, as well as for many Muslims across Pakistan, where Sufism is both misunderstood and often not tolerated by more extremist and majoritarian branches of Islam.³⁵⁴

Abbas's work frequently responds to or reflects the way Islam is perceived in the contemporary globalized world. Her panoramic photographs of the Istanbul skyline, *Cityscapes* (2010), evoke the glossy vistas of a tourist postcard (figs. 3.22–23). But upon careful examination, viewers might notice that something is amiss. Something is, in fact, missing—the artist has carefully erased the minarets that punctuate the city's skyline. While it has the potential to be missed, this removal radically transforms the city's skyline as well as its religious and historical landscape.

Abbas made the work in direct response to a controversial 2009 referendum in Switzerland that banned the constructions of new minarets.³⁵⁵ One of a spate of anti-Islamic laws that emerged after the 9/11 and 7/7 London tube attacks, the ban on minaret construction condemned visible manifestations of Muslim identity. While few mosques in Switzerland even had minarets attached,

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Sufism is popular throughout Pakistan (and across South Asia), but recent years have seen an increase in attacks on Sufi Shrines throughout the country not conforming to the narrower interpretations of Islam. According to a 2019 news article, between 2005 and 2017, over 200 people have been killed and 600 more were injured in 29 different attacks. Sabir Shah, "Attacks on Shrines of Revered Sufi Saints Continue," *The News International*, May 9, 2019, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/468766-attacks-on-shrines-of-revered-sufi-saints-continue>.

³⁵⁵ Kadist, "Hamra Abbas: Cityscapes 1 (Boats), 2 (Woods)," 2010, <https://kadist.org/work/cityscapes-1-boats-2-woods/>.

and those that did were not used in the daily call to prayer, the minaret emerged as a potent political symbol. As one commenter to a contemporaneous *New York Times* article wrote, the ban “portrays a legitimate fear; fear of an archaic and tribal faith erasing the rights guaranteed under secularism. Muslims ... cannot integrate into modern societies, they tend to impose their tribal approach to life on modern and free societies.”³⁵⁶ While other commenters rightfully noted that this law was not about religion, but about migration and the inability of Muslim immigrants to truly integrate into Swiss culture because of the physical manifestations of their identity.³⁵⁷ Similar to other controversial laws surrounding the veil that were passed in France and Belgium, the rhetoric around these actions is little changed from when such language was used to justify colonialism—namely that Muslims are inherently different; they are incurably *other*.

But rather than use images of the Swiss landscape in *Cityscapes*—whose Muslim presence is hardly marked within the nation’s architecture—Abbas instead uses a city whose Islamic history is fundamental to its architectural history and identity. Moreover, Switzerland’s Muslim population is largely made up of Turks,³⁵⁸ and the act of removing minarets from the Turkish skyline exposes the underlying desire of this far-right legislation: to remove the Turkish (and other visibly Muslim immigrants) from the Swiss landscape.

Moreover, it was also at this time that Turkey was attempting to become a member of the European union.³⁵⁹ Art and culture were not exempted from the strategies employed to justify the case for membership. In the forward to the catalogue for the 2005 exhibition *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600* at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, Prime Minister Tony Blair

³⁵⁶ Nick Cumming-Bruce and Steven Erlanger, “Swiss Ban Building of Minarets on Mosques,” *The New York Times*, November 29, 2009, sec. Europe, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/30/world/europe/30swiss.html>.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Kadist, “Hamra Abbas: Cityscapes 1 (Boats), 2 (Woods).”

wrote that the history of movement by the Turkic people “demonstrates that the interaction of different cultures in our world is crucial if we are to survive.”³⁶⁰ President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan similarly wrote, “Cultural diversity is a source of richness for all nations. This exhibition comes at a most propitious time, as Turkey’s aspirations toward membership of the European family of nations in the European Union are centre stage.”³⁶¹ There is, of course, a great irony in Turkey’s ongoing aspirations to be part of the European political landscape, when Western European countries were actively trying to erase the physical presence of Turkey’s migrant, Muslim population. Abbas’s manipulation of the Istanbul skyline draws our attention to the political, historical, and cultural implications of xenophobic laws in an increasingly anti-Islamic world.

Conclusion

This chapter considers how Hamra Abbas employs—and resists—tropes of identity that continue to describe the Islamic world and Islamic art in particular. Her work confronts the myriad ways that Islam has been defined by outside forces, and probes who is allowed to define what it means to be Muslim. Abbas confronts not only the imperialist and xenophobic stereotypes that inform understandings of Islam in the West, but also how the legacies of colonialism and militant violence inform constructions of Muslim self-identity. Her work occupies a space that moves beyond a teleological view of art history, resisting and challenging the Western origins and categories of the art historical canon. Abbas exists in a space that is simultaneously Islamic *and* contemporary *and* traditional. Broadly speaking, her work asks viewers to reconsider understandings of Islamic identity. Abbas’s ongoing series *Please Do Not Step* is a blending of her

³⁶⁰ David J. Roxburgh and Royal Academy of Arts (Great Britain), eds., *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005), 9; as quoted in Flood, “From the Prophet to Postmodernism?,” 41.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

explorations—it challenges art historical narratives while also complicating contemporary political narratives. Evoking the delicate, geometric patterns of Islamic decoration, intertwined strips of paper, each printed with the eponymous phrase in a continuous loop cover the floor. Because of the how the work is installed, Abbas either requires that the warning printed on the paper be ignored or, at the very least, makes it extremely difficult for her viewers to obey.

For example, the construction of a minimalist, four-walled, enclosed space ensured an intimate engagement with the work in the first iteration of the series, created for the 2004 Sydney Biennial (figs. 3.23–25). Because the artist provided only a narrow walkway between the patterning on the floor and the fabricated walls, viewers were forced to be aware of their body and its relation to the piece. A level of vigilance is required while viewing the miniature paintings on the wall in order to adhere to the admonition and not step on the floor patterns. Abbas requires her viewers to get close to the miniature paintings, a style of looking that echoes the original mode of viewing miniature paintings. In the exhibition, viewers stood mere inches from the paintings and, in their original context, the pages of a manuscript would have been viewed in hand and closely observed.³⁶²

The images and text on the wall explore the relationship between Christianity and Islam. Abbas translates texts from the Bible and Quran in English, alongside images that depict each scene with the Latin and Arabic text overlaid.³⁶³ The use of text and images from these two Abrahamic religions points to their shared history, but it is impossible to ignore the divisions between the two in contemporary political thinking. Moreover, the restricted movement around these scenes echoes the difficulty navigating these religions and the way religion is used to explain difference and justify animosity between their respective cultures.

³⁶² Sloan, “Object Lessons,” 10.

³⁶³ Gasworks, “Residencies: Hamra Abbas,” 2006, <https://www.gasworks.org.uk/residencies/hamra-abbas/>.

Beyond the work's allusion to the precarious relationship between Christian and Islamic worlds in contemporary geo-politics, the work also underscores Abbas's ongoing concern with the appropriation of Islamic art and culture by Western institutions. As Anna Sloan writes:

For her, the mixture of components is a metaphor for a generalized 'clash of civilizations,' in which a version of the museum placard's 'Do Not Touch' stands in for larger issues of cultural preservation. It is also, of course, a means of reclaiming the exhibition of miniature paintings on the artist's own terms—reversing centuries of their appropriation by European dealers, collectors, and museums. It is noteworthy that in order to avoid stepping on the delicate patterns of paper strips on the floor, while also viewing the accompanying paintings, the spectator finds oneself taking great care to follow the dictates of the message. In the context of her mixed-media installation, those dictates include a denial of the miniature's perceived exoticism and purity. Abbas insists that the miniature be contemporary and hybrid, as it was historically, when courtly workshops drew together artists and imagery from Persia, India, China and Europe.³⁶⁴

Abbas has often explored the ways that art and culture have been employed as a means of justifying colonial expansion or neo-imperial activities. Throughout this series, Abbas makes a request of her viewers, but simultaneously constructs a situation that requires them to ignore that request. This precarious position is one that in many ways echoes the precarious relationship between the West and Islam—in both art history and politics. Abbas implicates her viewers in this history, often forcing them to collectively destroy the work by repeatedly stepping on it. Viewers are made complicit in this history. Other works in the series manipulate viewers in similar ways. In *Please Do Not Step 2* (2008), Abbas has exploded the warning—the patterns spell out the directive in a phrase nearly 100 feet in length (fig. 3.26). The words “please do not step” take over, covering the floor and climbing up the walls. Existing in the natural walkway, Abbas has made it nearly impossible for viewers to avoid doing exactly what the works asks them not to.

³⁶⁴ Anna J. Sloan, “Embodied Space: The Miniature as Attitude,” in *Beyond the Page: Contemporary Art from Pakistan*, ed. Hammad Nasar and Anita Dawood (London: Asia House, 2006), 28, 30.

Resisting the conventional narratives of art history, Abbas's work exists in a productive space of liminality. As art historian James Elkins writes, a majority of art historians think in terms of Western art historical categories.³⁶⁵ But Abbas manages to simultaneously exist within *and* explode those categories—creating works that evoke histories of miniature painting, monumental Islamic architecture, minimalist sculpture, installation, and institutional critique all at once. This resistance towards being categorized speaks to her larger critique of Western frames of reference. Where Rasheed Araeen has felt consistently hemmed in by these categories, Abbas exploits and challenges them. She not only critiques these art historical categories, but also considers the way they have been utilized to justify political action.

Hamra Abbas engages with long histories of mistrust towards Islamic culture, but her work rejects these narratives, providing an alternative view of the Islamic world. Monolithic understandings of Islamic identity have served as the rationalization for neo-imperial activities in the same ways that Orientalist authors justified colonial expansion in the nineteenth century. Her work confronts—and resists—myths that inform flat understandings of the Islamic world. Whether it means reading current moments through the lens of Mughal imperial practices, unpacking class divisions and sectarian schisms throughout Pakistan, or complicating understandings of Islam that are portrayed in Western global media, Abbas disrupts how the Islamic world and its culture is understood, offering different points of entry for her viewers.

³⁶⁵ James Elkins, *Stories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 19.



Fig. 3.1

Hamra Abbas

God Grows on Trees, 2008 (installation view)

99 Gouache on wasli, 1.38 x 1.18 in., each; C-print, 30.43 x 40.2 in.



Fig. 3.2

Hamra Abbas

God Grows on Trees, 2008 (detail)

99 Gouache on wasli, 1.38 x 1.18 in., each; C-print, 30.43 x 40.2 in.



Fig. 3.3
 Hamra Abbas
God Grows on Trees, 2008 (detail)
 99 Gouache on wasli, 1.38 x 1.18 in., each



Fig. 3.4
Hamra Abbas
All Rights Reserved, 2004
4 c-prints, 32.3 x 22.6 in., each



Fig. 3.5
Hamra Abbas
All Rights Reserved, 2004 (detail)
4 c-prints, 32.3 x 22.6 in., each



Fig. 3.6
The delivery of presents for Prince Dara-Shikoh's Wedding from the Padshahnama
 Agra, The Riverfront, November–December 1632
 Folios 120B–121A, Attributed to Bishandas, Circa 1635



Fig. 3.7
 Catalogue cover for *King of the World: a Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle*
 London: Thames & Hudson, 1997



Fig. 3.8
Hamra Abbas
Battle Scenes, 2006
2 lenticular prints, 59.8 x 36.2 in. (152 x 92 cm) each



Fig. 3.9

Victory of the Imperial Mughal Army over Sultan Adam from the *Akbarnama*

Outline by Tulsi, portraits by Sanwala, painting by Bhawani
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper, Mughal, ca. 1590-95

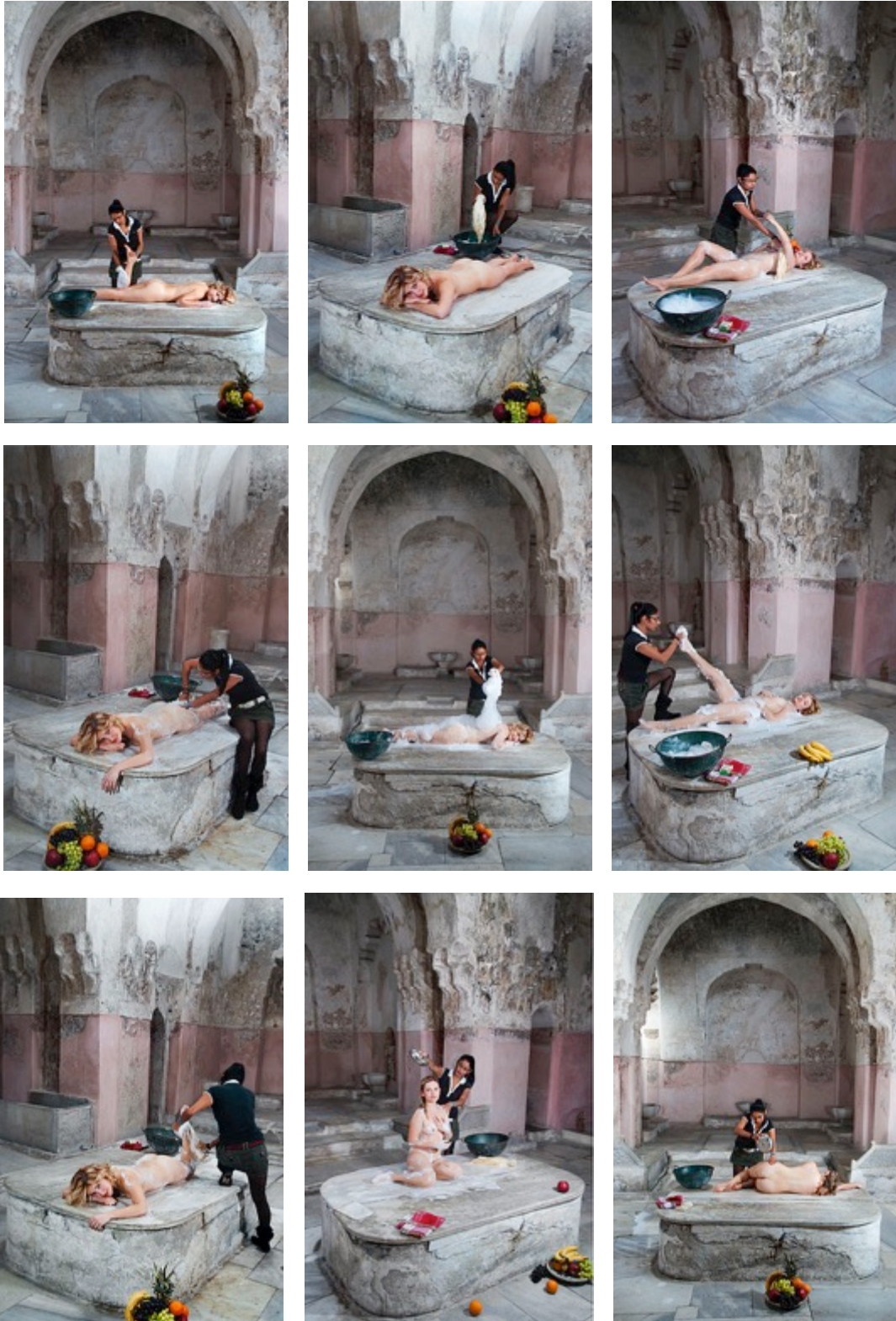


Fig. 3.10
 Hamra Abbas
Paradise Bath, 2009
 9 archival pigment prints, 41 x 30 in., each

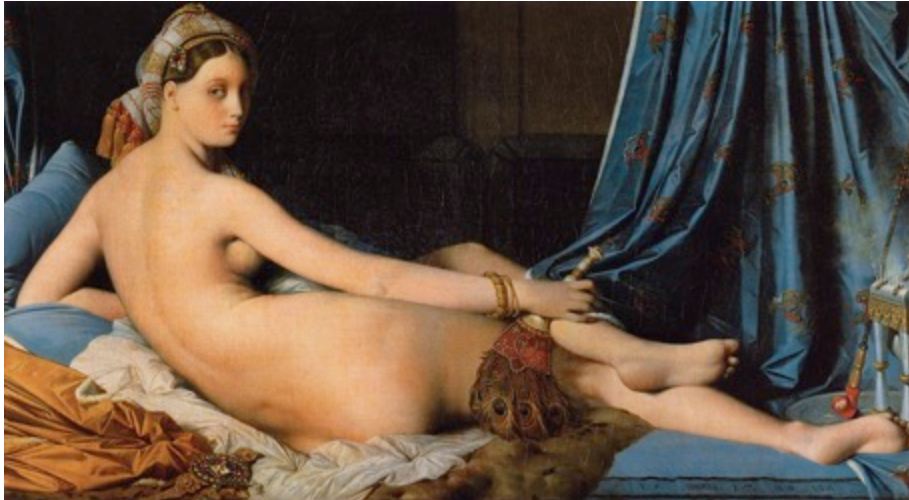


Fig. 3.11
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres
La Grande Odalisque, 1814
Oil on canvas, 36 x 63 in.



Fig. 3.12
Jean-Léon Gérôme
Moorish Bath, 1870
Oil on canvas, 20 x 16 in.



Fig. 3.13
 Jean-Léon Gérôme
The Snake Charmer, 1870
 Oil on canvas, 33 x 48 in.



Fig. 3.14
 Students of Jamia Hafsa madrassa protesting
 Islamabad March 28, 2007



Fig. 3.15
Hamra Abbas
The Woman in Black, 2008
Painted fiberglass, 82.7 x 31.1 x 39 in.



Fig. 3.16
Hamra Abbas
Adventures of the Woman in Black, 2008
C-print (diasec), 59 x 39.4 in.



Fig. 3.17

Hamra Abbas

Read, 2007

Mixed media installation: sound, wood, jute, speakers

132 in. (outer diameter), 59 in. (inner diameter), 24 in. (walking passage)



Fig. 3.18

Hamra Abbas

In this is a sign for those who reflect, 2009

Multimedia installation: synchronized drive mechanism, sound system, wood, aluminum, steel, approx. 143.7 x 192.9 x 179.1 in.



Fig. 3.19

Hamra Abbas

In this is a sign for those who reflect, 2009

Multimedia installation: synchronized drive mechanism, sound system, wood, aluminum, steel, approx. 143.7 x 192.9 x 179.1 in.



Fig. 3.20
Hamra Abbas
Cityscapes, 2010
Archival pigment print, 19.7 x 90.5 in



Fig. 3.21
Hamra Abbas
Cityscapes, 2010
Archival pigment print, 19.7 x 90.5 in



Fig. 3.22
Hamra Abbas
Please Do Not Step I, 2004
Mixed media installation: paper collage, gouache on wasli, dimensions variable

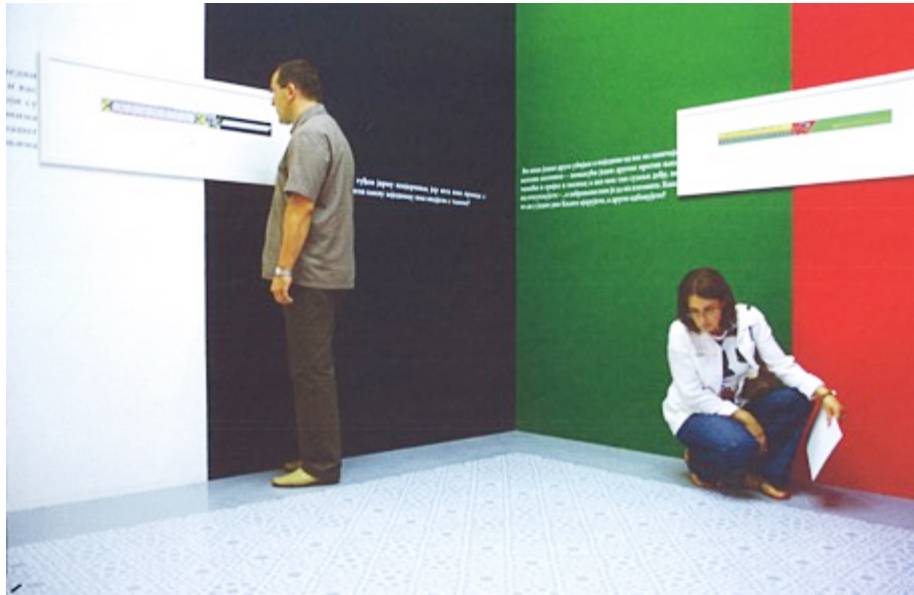


Fig. 3.23
 Hamra Abbas
Please Do Not Step I, 2004
 Mixed media installation: paper collage, gouache on wasli, dimensions variable

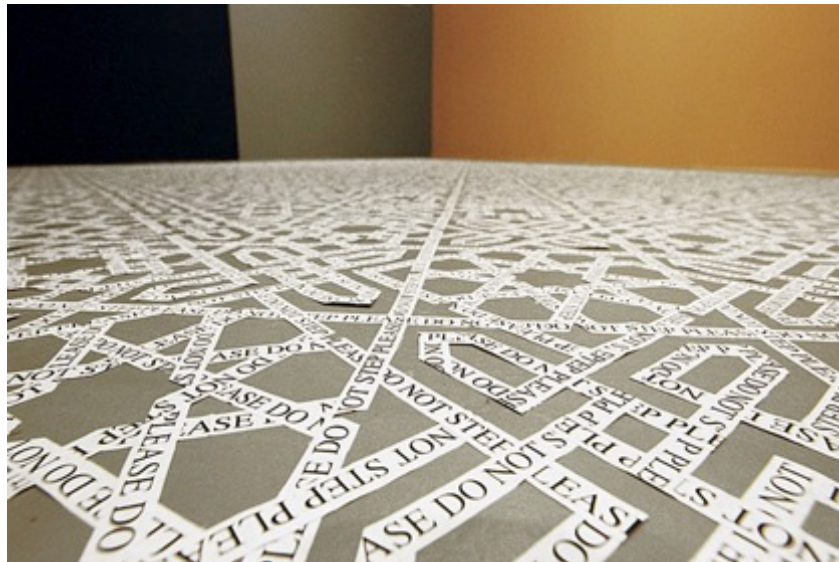


Fig. 3.24
 Hamra Abbas
Please Do Not Step I, 2004
 Mixed media installation: paper collage, gouache on wasli, dimensions variable



Fig. 3.25
Hamra Abbas
Please Do Not Step 2, 2008
Site specific installation: paper collage
Dimensions variable

CONCLUSION

In late 2018, *The New Yorker* published an article titled “The Myth of Whiteness in Classical Sculpture.” In the article, Margaret Talbot detailed that while art historians and curators have long known that classical Greek sculpture was in fact vibrantly painted, knowledge and acceptance of this has been slow to take hold in the larger public. Indeed, this “lie” that Western society holds on to has sweeping implications beyond mere art historical inaccuracies: white supremacists have long used classical Greek sculpture as symbols of white, male superiority. In 2016, for example, the White nationalist group Identity Evropa posted flyers on college campuses across the US featuring imagery of classical sculptures such as the Apollo Belvedere (fig. 4.1). This is not a new phenomenon, Hitler was also known to admire classical sculpture and the Nazi party borrowed symbols from Greek and Roman culture.³⁶⁶ Moreover, white supremacists have long sought out classical studies in order to “affirm what they imagine to be an unblemished lineage of white Western culture extending back to ancient Greece.”³⁶⁷

The synonymy of clean, white marble and beauty is deeply rooted in cultural discourse and can be traced back to one of the earliest art historians: Johann Winckelmann. Winckelmann famously wrote: “Colour contributes to beauty, but it is not beauty itself, though it generally enhances beauty and its forms. Since white is the colour that reflects the most rays of light, and thus is most easily perceived, a beautiful body will be all the more beautiful the whiter it is.”³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Donna Zuckerberg, *Not All Dead White Men: Classics and Misogyny in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 3.

³⁶⁷ Margaret Talbot, “The Myth of Whiteness in Classical Sculpture,” *The New Yorker*, October 22, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/29/the-myth-of-whiteness-in-classical-sculpture>.

³⁶⁸ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, trans. H. F. Malgrave (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006), 195.

Indeed, as Nell Irvin Painter writes about the foundations of art history in her book *The History of White People*,

For Winckelmann and his followers, color in sculpture came to mean barbarism, for they assumed that the lofty ancient Greeks were too sophisticated to color their art. The equation of color with primitivism meant that experts often suppressed and removed color when they found it in the Greeks. Even now, the discovery of ancient Greek polychromy can still make news, for the allure of Winckelmann's hard, white, young bodies lives on.³⁶⁹

While Winckelmann had suspicions that Greek sculptures were indeed painted, this standard of beauty would pervade cultural thought for centuries.³⁷⁰ In truth, special equipment is hardly necessary to discern the pigment on these ancient sculptures. Western discourse has been collectively involved in willful blindness that has had the real-world repercussions of white supremacist organizations relying on classical art objects to support their vision of an idealized white, masculine society. It is clear that this shared, racist vision—the idea that whiteness is normal and beautiful, while color is strange and ugly—has had implications far beyond art's history.

As demonstrated throughout this dissertation, art history is a product of larger Eurocentric forces that erase—or disallow—difference. The epistemic and very real violence that accompanies narratives privileging Western frames of reference necessitates a re-imagining of art history's categories and definitions. While current art historical categories separate the world into a series of fixed identities that assume self-contained histories, the artists examined throughout *An Aesthetics of Resistance* challenge current frames of reference such as the Islamic, national identity, and modernism. Because they resist these monolithic and universalizing categories, Rasheed Araeen, Bani Abidi, and Hamra Abbas make possible the formation of a radically expanded discipline.

³⁶⁹ Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 61–62.

³⁷⁰ Talbot, "The Myth of Whiteness in Classical Sculpture."

An Aesthetics of Resistance puts forward three intertwined propositions towards the visualization of a new art history. First, Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas explore how the Islamic has been framed as a series of social constructs. Through their work they remain skeptical of any authoritative understanding of Islam—whether that is the Pakistani government, sensationalized portrayals in Western media, or art historical narratives. Similar to national identity, artists from the Islamic world are often compelled to speak to their Muslim identity. While they engage with Islam in their work, they do so by exploring its multiple histories and identities, thereby challenging any monolithic understanding of Islam.

Second, they unpack the ways the nation has been used as an exclusionary device not only in political discourse, but in art historical narratives as well. Art history has long been defined by national identities or other geographic boundaries. As art historian Nora Taylor writes in an essay on artist Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, “there has been a problematic conflation between an artist’s ethno-nationality and his or her work. This creates a quagmire for artists, a rut out of which they find it difficult to emerge. They are included in exhibitions because of their nationality, but also excluded from the Western art historical canon because of it.”³⁷¹ Contemporary artists from the global south are often burdened with speaking to their “homeland” and its history. Exploring three artists from Pakistan draws attention to socially constructed displays of the nation and is an important step to de-centering it as a framework. Moreover, because Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas move physically and intellectually between Pakistan and other parts of the world, their work probes and challenges conceptions of national identity and the complex realities of the migrant in the world.

³⁷¹ Nora A. Taylor, “Running the Earth: Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba’s *Breathing Is Free: 12,56.3*,” in *The Migrant’s Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora*, ed. Saloni Mathur, Clark Studies in the Visual Arts (Williamstown, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2011), 214.

Third, and emerging from these critiques of Islamic and national identities, *An Aesthetics of Resistance* argues that Western art historical categories are inherently exclusionary. Islamic and national identity—alongside other geographic markers—are used as two examples of distinctly problematic categories within the art historical canon. Through a variety of methods, the work of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas challenge such “universal” ideas and categories by disrupting conventions of categorization, collection, and display. Moreover, this dissertation employed a range of theoretical models in order to highlight the incommensurability of the discipline and rethink how art history is written.

An Aesthetics of Resistance disrupts categories of definition by exploring various strategies of resistance that challenge modern conceptions of the nation, monolithic ideas of Islamic identity, and art historical categories. Chapter one explored the work of Rasheed Araeen, an artist who emigrated from Pakistan to London in 1964, where he began exploring the history of modernist sculpture and creating his own minimalist structures. As an artist, however, Araeen was consistently defined by his otherness—his Blackness, Islamic identity, or Pakistani nationality—and was excluded from larger art historical narratives. As Courtney Martin describes Great Britain of the 1970s: “*black* encompassed a nationalist binary: *black* was, simply, the opposite of English, which was white.”³⁷² To be Black in London was to be different, and thus to be excluded from national narratives. As Martin continues, “Araeen conceived of modernism as the proposition of the self as artist over the public, or viewers of his art.”³⁷³ Araeen, however, was denied the opportunity to express the self because he was always and insurmountably defined by his status as an outsider.

³⁷² Martin, “Rasheed Araeen, Live Art, and Radical Politics in Britain,” 110. Emphasis in original.

³⁷³ Ibid.

In works like *How Could One Paint a Self Portrait!* Araeen confronts this position as an outsider. A self-portrait, the work participates in a long history of self-portraiture in Western art, but in his intervention Araeen depicts his “colonized self.”³⁷⁴ He wrestles with the impossibility of representing yourself when the hegemonic voice has already defined your identity. In later works, Araeen begins to explore his otherness through the Urdu language and Islamic identity, juxtaposing those frameworks within a minimalist vernacular. In *Green Painting*, for example, Araeen “pollutes” the clean, minimalist grid with photographs of a blood-splattered ground from the ritual slaughter of animals during Eid-ul-Azha. Araeen, who was denied from the larger discourse of minimalism *because* of his otherness, has in response “contaminated” the minimalist space *with* his otherness.

Araeen’s career is illustrative of a generation of post-colonial artists who have struggled against art historical narratives. His work considered throughout this dissertation both articulated and examined the reality of being a Black body in London. His work—which importantly straddles the modern and contemporary—is instructive for thinking about an emergent global contemporary art. Araeen’s work develops at a time when questions of the Islamic become a part of public discourse in a way that it previously had not and—as such—foretells the generation of artists to emerge after September 11. While Araeen confronts the historical violence of colonialism and racism, the work of Abidi and Abbas point to the systemic structures that inform neo-colonial thinking and practice.

Chapter two explored Bani Abidi, whose work is an incisive investigation of nationhood and political power in Pakistan. Her explorations of gestures of power, constructions of national narratives, and benign objects of control address life in Pakistan. Moreover, Abidi employs a

³⁷⁴ Aikens, “In Conversation: Nick Aikens and Rasheed Araeen,” 204.

performativity throughout her work so that fact and fiction blend together, their boundaries porous. In so doing, she questions the performativity behind all such constructions of the nation and the power of the state. Her work is a cogent analysis of how—in the words of Judith Butler—“if the state is what ‘binds,’ it is also clearly what can and does unbind. And if the state binds in the name of the nation, conjuring a certain version of the nation forcibly, if not powerfully, then it also unbinds, releases, expels, banishes.”³⁷⁵ Abidi’s work highlights the myriad ways that the state unbinds in the service of national identity.

Karachi Series I, for example, draws our attention to the ways that national minorities are written out of narratives in service of the ideology of the nation-state. By focusing on non-Muslims—Christians, Parsis, and Hindus—Abidi asserts the presence of minority populations that were systematically ignored and removed from Pakistan’s history. *Section Yellow*, meanwhile, investigates migration in the globalized world and the relationships of power and national identity that controls movement in the 21st century. Abidi draws our attention to the reality of movement and travel for many in the global south. She reflects on the experience of migration through the physical body of the migrant as well as the data that comprises their identity in a world of travel advisories and terror alerts. But she also explores the space of the migrant—the manmade borders that need to be crossed as well as their psychological spaces. The series, all together, addresses the power of the nation-state, exposing the uneasy status of the migrant in the neoliberal world. Throughout her practice, Abidi points to the ways that national identity is comprised of a series of performances, explores the mechanisms of power that govern the world, and documents varied modes of resistance that challenge those systems of power.

³⁷⁵ Butler and Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, 4–5.

The third and final chapter of this dissertation addressed the work of Hamra Abbas, an artist who exploits and deconstructs tropes of the Islamic world in order to confront long histories of Muslim identity being controlled and defined by outside forces. Deeply skeptical of anyone who speaks for Islam, Abbas's work confronts not only imperialist and xenophobic stereotypes that inform understandings of Islam in the West, but also the legacies of colonialism and militant violence that inform constructions of Muslim self-identity. Moreover, through her work, Abbas critiques the construction of "Islamic art history," and draws our attention to how this category continues to influence the ways we understand Islamic art and culture.

In *Paradise Baths*, for example, Abbas deconstructs the long history of Harem painting that helped to define the Islamic world as feminine, passive, and exotic. Historically, these paintings were often produced by, and for, men. The gaze of the white, Western, male is, as Linda Nochlin writes, the "gaze which brings the Oriental world into being, the gaze for which it is ultimately intended."³⁷⁶ But Abbas has flipped the script, and instead has depicted two women, in an image created *by* a woman. She points to the role European women played in the creation of such Oriental fantasies, and the ongoing role of Western women in producing neo-imperial narratives. In *God Grows on Trees*, Abbas associates the fascination with madrassas in the 21st century to the allure of harems in the 19th century. In the work, Abbas painted with meticulous detail using the Persian miniature technique the likeness of 99 children from madrassas across Pakistan. The result is an intimate encounter with these sites of religious education that is simultaneously a response to skewed understandings of Islam in the West, as well as to the cultural, class-based awareness of madrassas in Pakistan. Throughout her practice, Abbas is invested in

³⁷⁶ Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," 37.

exploring how Pakistani and Islamic identity have been manipulated and controlled by myriad forces and Abbas asks who is allowed to speak for Islam.

An Aesthetics of Resistance analyzed the strategies of resistance that Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas employ in response to a variety of hegemonic institutions that exert power in a variety of contexts, including the art historical discourse, constructions of national identity, and the rhetoric of white supremacists. Their work de-naturalizes socially constructed identities and frames of reference by identifying and calling our attention to such issues as the political motivations behind art historical categorization, myths that create the nation, or the illusion of identity.

My argument in this dissertation is not dependent on the identity of Araeen, Abbas, and Abidi as Pakistani, but uses the history of this nation-state to explore the problematic use of national identity as a determining factor in art historical narratives. In this way, *An Aesthetics of Resistance* does not seek to create a history of contemporary Pakistani art, but instead reflects on the tense and tenuous legacy of the nation-state to explore a number of tangled ideas: the legacy of colonialism, the promises and failures of globalization, modern constructions of the nation-state, the many framings of the Islamic, and questions around migration. In a variety of ways, Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas resist easy absorption into the art historical canon, complicating narratives that privilege the hierarchy of Western art history, thereby allowing an opportunity to move away from the hegemony of a Eurocentric discourse and engage with the intertwined histories of a global art.

Describing the divisions among members of the US Democratic Party in 2019, journalist Alexander Burns succinctly articulated the discord as being about “whether you think the system can be made to work in more or less the form it currently exists, or whether you need to blow it

up.”³⁷⁷ This, too, seems to be the very dilemma that art history currently faces. It is clear that in 2020, the world is beginning to deconstruct the many distorted ways in which we see and define the world. In a recent article on the need for more critics of color, Elizabeth Méndez Berry and Chi-hui Yang affirmed this overlap between art historical and political discourse, saying: “[T]hose who have for decades been given the biggest platforms to interpret culture are white men. This means that the spaces in media where national mythologies are articulated, debated and affirmed are still largely segregated. The conversation about our collective imagination has the same blind spots as our political discourse.”³⁷⁸ Art history is beginning to wrestle with its Eurocentric origins and consider how we might move beyond such exclusionary narratives that all-too-often have consequences beyond the discipline: from informing the narratives of white nationalists to justifying political actions in the Middle East and beyond. These sentiments echo the words of Aruna D’Souza, quoted in the introduction: “What would it mean to understand art history’s global turn as something that does not merely expand, but potentially explodes the borders between fields and even the discipline itself?”³⁷⁹ While it might be difficult for many to imagine what shape an exploded art history would take, throughout *An Aesthetics of Resistance* I have argued that the work of Araeen, Abidi, and Abbas proposes one path. Their work—which resists, challenges, and subverts art historical categories and frames of reference—facilitates a discursive practice unconstrained by categorization and allows the opportunity to rethink our disciplinary narratives.

³⁷⁷ Michael Barbaro, interview with Alexander Burns, “A Guide to the Democratic Debates,” *The Daily*, June 26, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/26/podcasts/the-daily/2020-democratic-candidates-debates.html>.

³⁷⁸ Elizabeth Méndez Berry and Chi-hui Yang, “The Dominance of the White Male Critic,” *The New York Times*, July 5, 2019, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/05/opinion/we-need-more-critics-of-color.html>.

³⁷⁹ Aruna D’Souza, “Introduction,” in *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, eds. Aruna D’Souza and Jill Casid, (Williamstown, Massachusetts: Clark Art Institute, 2014), vii



Fig. 4.1
Identity Evropa poster, 2016

CITED LITERATURE

- Abidi, Bani. "Bani Abidi." Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://www.baniabidi.com/#/>.
- Afzal, Madiha. *Pakistan Under Siege: Extremism, Society, and the State*. Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2018.
- "Aga Khan Foundation | Aga Khan Development Network." Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://www.akdn.org/our-agencies/aga-khan-foundation>.
- Aga Khan Museum. "Aga Khan Museum." Accessed July 22, 2020. <http://agakhanmuseum.org/>.
- Aikens, Nick. "In Conversation with Rasheed Araeen." *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 45 (March 1, 2018): 80–87.
- , ed. *Rasheed Araeen*. Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2017.
- Aikens, Nick, Iftikhar Dadi, Prajit Dutta, and Kate Fowle. "Aicon Conversations: Kate Fowle, Nick Aikens, Iftikhar Dadi, and Prajit Dutta discuss the work of Rasheed Araeen," Aicon Gallery, May 7, 2020.
- Akcan, Esra. *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2012.
- Anderson, Benedict R. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006.
- Araeen, Rasheed. "How and Why I Became a 'Muslim' Artist?," May 2020.
- . "Paki Bastard." *Black Phoenix* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1978): 12–17.
- . "Preliminary Notes for the Understanding of the Historical Significance of Geometry in Arab/Islamic Thought, and Its Suppressed Role in the Genealogy of World History." *Third Text* 24, no. 5 (September 1, 2010): 509–19.
- . "Swamped? An Art Statement/Editorial." *Black Phoenix* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1978): 2–3.
- . "The Artist as a Post-Colonial Subject and This Individual's Journey towards 'the Centre.'" In *Art and Its Histories—Views of Difference: Different Views of Art*, edited by Catherine King, 231–255. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
- . *The Essential Black Art*. London: Chisenhale Gallery, 1988.
- . *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*. London: South Bank Centre, 1989.

- Araeen, Rasheed, Angela Kingston, and Antonia Payne, eds. *From Modernism to Postmodernism: A Retrospective: 1959-1987*. Birmingham, England: Ikon Gallery, 1987.
- Arnason, H. H., and Elizabeth C. Mansfield. *History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Photography*. Seventh edition. Boston: Pearson, 2013.
- Asif, Manan Ahmed. *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.
- Bailey, Stephanie. "Rasheed Araeen: A Man of History." *Art Asia Pacific*, no. 89 (August 2014): 58–67.
- Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art. *BALTIC Bites - Bani Abidi: Section Yellow*, 2011. <https://vimeo.com/77696848>.
- Barbaro, Michael. "A Guide to the Democratic Debates." *The Daily*, June 26, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/26/podcasts/the-daily/2020-democratic-candidates-debates.html>.
- Bassnett, Susan, and Harish Trivedi, eds. *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Beach, Milo Cleveland, and Ebba Koch. *King of the World: The Padshahnama: An Imperial Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1997.
- Bergen, Peter L., and Swati Pandey. "The Madrassa Scapegoat." *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2006): 117–125.
- Bergen, Peter, and Swati Pandey. "The Madrassa Myth." *The New York Times*, June 14, 2005, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/14/opinion/the-madrassa-myth.html>.
- Berry, Elizabeth Méndez, and Chi-hui Yang. "The Dominance of the White Male Critic." *The New York Times*, July 5, 2019, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/05/opinion/we-need-more-critics-of-color.html>.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2004.
- Biswas, Sutapa, and Homi K. Bhaba. "The Wrong Story." *The New Statesman*, December 15, 1989, 40–42.
- Blair, Sheila, and Jonathan Bloom, eds. *Islamic Art: Past, Present, Future*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.
- . *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250-1800*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

- . “The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field.” *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 1 (March 2003): 152–184.
- Blair, Tony. “Full Text: Blair Speech on Terror,” July 16, 2005.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4689363.stm.
- Brend, Barbara. *Islamic Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Brett, Guy. “Abstract Activist.” *Art in America* 86 (February 1998): 80–85.
- Burns, Gordon, and Margaret Thatcher. “TV Interview for Granada World in Action (‘rather Swamped’).” *Granada TV*, January 27, 1978.
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485>.
- Butler, Judith. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519–531.
- Butler, Judith, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging*. London: Seagull Books, 2007.
- “Cameron: ‘Swarm’ of Migrants Crossing Sea.” BBC News, July 30, 2015.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-politics-33714282/david-cameron-swarm-of-migrants-crossing-mediterranean>.
- Case, Sue-Ellen, and Janelle G. Reinelt, eds. *The Performance of Power: Theatrical Discourse and Politics*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991.
- Chambers, Eddie. *Black Artists in British Art: A History Since the 1950s*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2014.
- Cheng, Enoch. “Interview with Bani Abidi.” *Diaaalogue: Asia Art Archive*, February 2010.
<http://www.aaa.org.hk/Diaaalogue/Details/796>.
- Cincotta, Francesco. “Featured Artist: Interview with Bani Abidi.” *Naked Punch* 10 (Spring 2008): 91–96.
- “CNN.Com - Transcript of President Bush’s Address - September 21, 2001.” Accessed January 16, 2018. <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>.
- Cork, Richard. “Buried Treasures: An Art World That Makes You Feel an Outsider.” *The Listener*, December 7, 1989.
- Crispin, Jessa. “How Not to Be Elizabeth Gilbert.” Text. Boston Review, July 20, 2015.
<http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/jessa-crispin-female-travel-writing>.
- Cumming-Bruce, Nick, and Steven Erlanger. “Swiss Ban Building of Minarets on Mosques.”

- The New York Times*, November 29, 2009, sec. Europe.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/30/world/europe/30swiss.html>.
- Dadi, Iftikhar. "Foreward." In *Cinema in Muslim Societies*, edited by Ali Nobil Ahmad, 1 edition., xi–xii. Routledge, 2017.
- . "Rasheed Araeen's *Homecoming*." *Essay for Exhibition Catalogue at VM Gallery, Karachi*, 2014.
https://www.academia.edu/10615738/Rasheed_Araeens_Homecoming_catalog_essay_.
- . *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Dalmia, Yashodhara, and Salima Hashmi. *Memory, Metaphor, Mutations: Contemporary Art of India and Pakistan*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Dawood, Anita, ed. *Bani Abidi: Videos, Photographs, and Drawings*. London: Green Cardamom, 2009.
- Dawood, Anita, and Hammad Nasar, eds. *Beyond the Page Contemporary Art from Pakistan: An Exhibition*. London: Asia House, 2006.
- Dawood, Anita, and Sharmini Pereira, eds. *Hamra Abbas: Object Lessons*. London: Green Cardamom, 2009.
- DeLaure, Marilyn, and Moritz Fink, eds. *Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance*. New York: New York University Press, 2017.
- Demos, T. J. "Desire in Diaspora: Emily Jacir." *Art Journal* 62, no. 4 (2003): 69–78.
- . *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.
- Diamond, Jeremy. "Donald Trump: Ban All Muslim Travel to U.S. - CNNPolitics." CNN, December 8, 2015. <https://www.cnn.com/2015/12/07/politics/donald-trump-muslim-ban-immigration/index.html>.
- Doob, Penelope Reed. *The Idea of the Labyrinth: From Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- D'Souza, Aruna, and Jill Casid, eds. *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*. Williamstown, Massachusetts: Clark Art Institute, 2014.
- Dyer, Richard. "Rasheed Araeen in Conversation." *Wasafiri* 23, no. 1 (March 2008): 22–33.
- Edwards, Richard. "On Their Way to Terror School; New Film of Suicide Bombers Entering

- Pakistan." *The Evening Standard*. July 18, 2005.
<https://www.questia.com/newspaper/1G1-134118122/on-their-way-to-terror-school-new-film-of-suicide>.
- Elkins, James, ed. *Is Art History Global?* Art Seminar, v. 3. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- . *Stories of Art*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Elkins, James, Zhivka Valiavicharska, and Alice Kim, eds. *Art and Globalization*. The Stone Art Theory Institutes, v. 1. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010.
- Enahore, Carole. "The Other Story—Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain," 1989, unpublished review accessed at the Hayward Gallery Archive.
- "Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' Speech," November 6, 2007, sec. Comment.
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>.
- Essaydi, Lalla A. "Disrupting the Odalisque." *World Literature Today* 87, no. 2 (2013): 62–67.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2008.
- Flood, Finbarr Barry. "From the Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art." In *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions*, edited by Elizabeth Mansfield, 31–53. London: Routledge, 2007.
- . *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. 2nd edition. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- Framke, Caroline. "Graffiti Artists Wrote 'Homeland Is Racist' in Arabic on the Show's Set. Nobody Noticed." *Vox*, October 15, 2015.
<https://www.vox.com/2015/10/15/9547525/homeland-arabic-graffiti-explainer>.
- Fraser, C. Gerald. "'Black Art' Label Disputed by Curator." *The New York Times*, June 29, 1977, sec. Archives.
- Gasworks. "Residencies: Hamra Abbas," 2006.
<https://www.gasworks.org.uk/residencies/hamra-abbas/>.
- Grabar, Oleg. "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art." *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): 1–14.
- Greenwalt, Karen, and Katja Rivera, eds. *Traduttore, Traditore*. Chicago: Gallery 400,

- University of Illinois at Chicago, 2017.
- Guha-Thakurta, Tapati. In *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-Colonial India*. Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Gupta, Atreyee. "Review: Cosmopolitan Modernism and a Politics of the Self in Muslim South Asia." *Art Journal* 71, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 117–119.
- Hartman, Saidiya. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (July 17, 2008): 1–14.
- Hashmi, Salima, ed. *Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art From Pakistan*. New York: Asia Society Museum, 2009.
- . "Radicalizing Tradition (2000)." In *Contemporary Art in Asia: A Critical Reader*, edited by Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio, 285–94. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011.
- Herbert, James D. "Passing between Art History and Postcolonial Theory." In *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Hersh, Seymour M. "The Gray Zone." *The New Yorker*, May 17, 2004.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/05/24/the-gray-zone>.
- Hughes, Aaron W. *Muslim Identities: An Introduction to Islam*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.
- Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.
- Irwin, Robert. *Islamic Art in Context: Art, Architecture, and the Literary World*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1997.
- Jalal, Ayesha. *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*. Reprint edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- . *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Joselit, David. *Heritage and Debt: Art in Globalization*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2020.
- Kadist. "Hamra Abbas: Cityscapes 1 (Boats), 2 (Woods)," 2010.
<https://www.gasworks.org.uk/residencies/hamra-abbas/>.
- Kapur, Geeta. *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*. New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000.

- Khan, Naveeda Ahmed, ed. *Beyond Crisis: Re-Evaluating Pakistan*. Critical Asian Studies. London: Routledge, 2010.
- Ko, Hanae. "The Sound Of Broken Clapping Hamra Abbas." *ArtAsiaPacific*, no. 71 (December 2010). <http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/71/TheSoundOfBrokenClappingHamraAbbas>.
- Kolstø, Pål. "National Symbols as Signs of Unity and Division." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, no. 4 (August 16, 2006): 676–701.
- Kramer, Hilton. "Black Art or Merely Social History?" *The New York Times*, June 26, 1977, sec. Art View.
- Kravagna, Christian, and Kunsthau Bregenz, eds. *The Museum as Arena: Artists on Institutional Critique*. Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1999.
- Lambert-Beatty, Carrie. "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility." *October* 129 (Summer 2009): 51–84.
- Laurent, Béatrice. "Juicy Fruit in the Harem: Pomological Symbolism in Some Paintings by John Frederick Lewis." *Visual Culture in Britain* 17, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 1–17.
- Lewis, Bernard. *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Malik, Kenan. *From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and Its Aftermath*. 1st U.S. ed. Brooklyn: Melville House Pub, 2009.
- Manchester, Elizabeth. "Rasheed Araeen, 'Bismullah' 1988." Tate, May 2000. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/araeen-bismullah-t06986/text-summary>.
- Martin, Courtney J. "'Non-Compositional and Non-Hierarchical': Rasheed Araeen's Search for the Conceptual and the Political in British Sculpture." In *Anglo-American Exchange in Postwar Sculpture, 1945–1975*, 122–132. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011.
- . "Rasheed Araeen, Live Art, and Radical Politics in Britain." *Getty Research Journal* 2 (2010): 107–124.
- Mathur, Saloni, ed. *The Migrant's Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora*. Williamstown, MA: Clark Art Institute, 2011.
- Mercer, Kobena. "Busy In the Ruins of Wretched Phantasia." In *Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire*, edited by Ragnar Farr, 15–55. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1995.
- Metcalf, Barbara Daly. *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan*. New

- Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- . “Translator Translated: Interview with Cultural Theorist Homi Bhabha.” *Artforum* 33, no. 7 (March 1995): 80–84.
- Moosa, Ebrahim. *What Is a Madrasa?* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- msnbc.com. “Rumsfeld’s Memo on Iraq, Afghanistan.” msnbc.com, December 5, 2003.
http://www.nbcnews.com/id/3225926/ns/us_news-security/t/rumsfelds-memo-iraq-afghanistan/.
- Murphy, Eamon. *The Making of Terrorism in Pakistan: Historical and Social Roots of Extremism*. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Nagree, Zeenat. “Barrier Method.” *TimeOut Mumbai*, September 3, 2010, 114.
- Narusevicius, Vytas. “Walid Raad’s Double Bind: The Atlas Group Project, 1989-2004.” *RACAR: Revue d’art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 39, no. 2 (2014): 43–53.
- Nasar, Hammad. “Interview with Irit Rogoff.” In *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space*, edited by Iftikhar Dadi and Hammad Nasar. London: Green Cardamom, 2012.
- . “Pakistan: An Art of Extremes.” *Orientations* 40, no. 1 (February 2009): 48–58.
- . “Security Barriers A–L.” In *Resemble Reassemble: Contemporary Art from Pakistan*, edited by Rashid Rana, 85. New Delhi: Devi Foundation, 2010.
- Nasar, Hammad, with Anita Dawood-Nasar, eds. *Karkhana: A Contemporary Collaboration*. Ridgefield, CT: Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 2005.
- Necipoğlu, Gülru. “The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Discourses and New Approaches.” *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. Number 6 (June 2012): 1–26.
- Nochlin, Linda. “The Imaginary Orient.” In *The Politics Of Vision: Essays On Nineteenth-Century Art And Society*, edited by Linda Nochlin, 33–59. New York: Westview Press, 1991.
- Overy, Paul. *The New Works of Rasheed Araeen*. London: South London Gallery, 1994.
- Painter, Nell Irvin. *The History of White People*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010.
- Patai, Raphael. *The Arab Mind*. Revised Edition. New York: Hatherleigh Press, 2002.
- Patel, Gieve. “To Pick up a Brush.” *Third Text* 31, no. 2–3 (2017): 289–300.

- Phipps, Claire. “‘Homeland Is Racist’: Artists Sneak Subversive Graffiti on to TV Show.” *The Guardian*, October 15, 2015, sec. Television & radio. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/oct/15/homeland-is-racist-artists-subversive-graffiti-tv-show>.
- Pollock, Griselda. *Differencing the Canon: Feminism and the Writing of Art’s Histories*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- “POPULATION BY RELIGION | Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.” Accessed May 21, 2019. <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/population-religion>.
- Qadeer, Mohammad A. *Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Robinson, Douglas. *Translation and Empire: Postcolonial Approaches Explained*. Booklands: St. Jerome, 1997.
- Roberts, Mary. *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2007.
- , ed. *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600*. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005.
- Roy, Sandip. “The New Colonialism of ‘Eat, Pray, Love.’” *Salon*, August 14, 2010. https://www.salon.com/2010/08/14/i_me_myself/.
- Said, Edward. “Impossible Histories: Why the Many Islams Cannot Be Simplified.” *Harper’s Magazine*, July 2002, 69–74.
- . *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
- Schulte, Rainer, and John Biguenet. *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Scott, James C. “Everyday Forms of Resistance.” *Copenhagen Papers in East and Southeast Asian Studies* 4 (1989): 33–62.
- . *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Shah, Sabir. “Attacks on Shrines of Revered Sufi Saints Continue.” *The News International*. May 9, 2019. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/468766-attacks-on-shrines-of-revered-sufi-saints-continue>.
- Shahzeb Jillani, “North Waziristan Offensive: Anger and Fear of Refugees,” *BBC News*, June 24, 2014, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27980938>.

- Shaikh, Farzana. *Making Sense of Pakistan*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak." In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, 271–313. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998.
- Stokstad, Marilyn, and Michael W. Cothren. *Art History Vol 1*. 6 edition. Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2017.
- Stronge, Susan. *Painting for the Mughal Emperor: The Art of the Book, 1560-1660*. London: V&A Publications, 2002.
- Suzuki, Sarah. "Bani Abidi: Security Barrier A–L." *Art on Paper*, December 2009, 88–89.
- Szymczyk, Adam. "Hiwa K." Documenta14, 2017.
<http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13528/hiwa-k>.
- Tahmasbpour, Mohammadreza. "Photography During the Qajar Era, 1842–1925." In *The Indigenous Lens: Early Photography in the near and Middle East*, edited by Markus Ritter and Staci G. Scheiwiller, translated by Reza Sheikh, 57–76. Berlin: De Gruyter, Inc., 2017.
- Talbot, Margaret. "The Myth of Whiteness in Classical Sculpture." *The New Yorker*, October 22, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/29/the-myth-of-whiteness-in-classical-sculpture>.
- Tarar, Nadeem Omar. "Framings of a National Tradition: Discourse on the Reinvention of Miniature Painting in Pakistan." *Third Text* 25, no. 5 (September 2011): 577–93.
- "Trump on Deportation: 'They're Here Illegally... They Have To Go,' 'It's Not Mean Spirited, It Is Business' | Video | RealClearPolitics," November 13, 2015.
https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2015/11/13/trump_theyre_here_illegally_they_have_to_go_its_not_mean_spirited_it_is_business.html.
- Vinthagen, Stellan, and Anna Johansson. "'Everyday Resistance': Exploration of a Concept and Its Theories." *Resistance Studies Magazine*, no. 1 (2013): 1–46.
- Walker, John A. *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2001.
- Whiles, Virginia. *Art and Polemic in Pakistan: Cultural Politics and Tradition in Contemporary Miniature Painting*. London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010.
- Wille, Simone. *Modern Art in Pakistan: History, Tradition, Place*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2015.
- Winckelmann, Johann Joachim. *History of the Art of Antiquity*. Translated by H. F. Malgrave.

Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006.

Wright, Stephen. "Beyond Borders Art of Pakistan." *Parachute*, 2005. Accessed 3 December 2011. http://www.parachute.ca/para_para/20/para20_Wright.html.

Wroczynski, Emily. "Walid Raad and the Atlas Group Mapping Catastrophe and the Architecture of Destruction." *Third Text* 25, no. 6 (November 2011): 763–773.

Zaidi, Saima, ed. *Mazaar, Bazaar: Design and Visual Culture in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Zuckerberg, Donna. *Not All Dead White Men: Classics and Misogyny in the Digital Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018.

VITA

EDUCATION:

PhD, Art History, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2020
 MA, Art History, University of Illinois at Chicago, December 2011
 BA, Government, Lawrence University, Appleton, WI, June 2004

AWARDS:

Ross Edman Fellowship, Department of Art History, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2019
 Humanities Without Walls, University of Illinois at Chicago, Grad Lab Practicum Fellowship, 2018–19
 Dean's Scholar Fellowship, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2016–17
 American Institute of Pakistan Studies, Travel Grant, 2016
 Graduate Student Council Travel Award, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2016
 Chancellor's Award, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2016
 American Institute of Pakistan Studies, Junior Fellowship, 2015

PUBLICATIONS:

"Translation in Edra Soto's *Graft*," co-author, in *Edra Soto: Graft*, Chicago: DePaul Art Museum, 2018.

Traduttore, Traditore, co-editor, Chicago: Gallery 400, 2017.

Review of *Mithu Sen: Border Unseen* at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University. *Art India*, volume XVIII, issue II quarter II (2014), p. 66–67.

Review of *Naiza Khan: Karachi Elegies* at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University. *Art India*, volume XVII issue IV quarter I (2013), p. 80–81.

PAPERS:

"Translating and Transforming Mughal History," *Material Translations in the Art of South Asia*, CAA Annual Conference, Chicago, February 12–15, 2020.

"Beyond the Nation: Rasheed Araeen and the Art of Migration," *Vitriol: Art and its Discontents*, Concordia University, Montreal, March 11–12, 2016.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Lecturer, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2016–2020
 Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013–2020
 Program Coordinator, Art Institute of Chicago, Department of Photography, April–August 2015
 Collections Assistant, Art Institute of Chicago, Department of Contemporary Art, 2013–2014
 Graduate Assistant, Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2010–2013

EXHIBITIONS:

Gallery 400, *All have the same breath*, organizer, January 18–March 9, 2019.
 Gallery 400, *Traduttore, Traditore*, co-curator, November 3–December 16, 2017.