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Editor's Letter

Dear Readers,

Paper seeks to give its readers nothing but the best information, whether in fashion or lifestyle, and to do it quickly. So what better way to keep updated with the latest trends and what's going on around town than our new fashion blog, styleonpaper.com? We've already received over 370,000 hits from around the world as the blog serves as a new avenue through which to interact with our audience.

The last few months have been extremely hectic and it's hard to believe that spring is almost around the corner. We at Paper have been lucky to be able to take short trips abroad, and all we can say is that it's a great way to be inspired. You can get a snapshot of the recent events that have been keeping us busy, most notably Kiran Chaudhry's cross-border wedding in India. The experience showed us that our neighbours are amazingly progressive, something we could learn from.

Sadly, in Pakistan we seem obsessed with the question of who is or isn't a Muslim. Yet again, there has been more senseless killing of Shia Muslims. The best we can do is to extend our sympathies to all the families devastated by losing a loved one, to speak out against the atrocities and to get on as best with our daily lives. Some see it as a time to leave Pakistan. More and more seem to be seeking opportunities outside of the country. Namoos Zaheer, a Pakistani expatriate, discusses how returning to her homeland brings her back to a bleak reality in our open letter, 'Dear Patriot', (page 172).

There is no doubt that some of us in Pakistan live a very comfortable life. Do we have it too easy, compared to our Western counterparts? Have we simply moved from the cradle to the basement? Sana Khan asks whether living with the parents rather than independently has stunted our growth in 'Arrested development', (pages 94-95).

Our cover this issue is graced by the fantastic Sanam Saeed, who exuberates charm. She is funny and witty and, most importantly, is not afraid of being herself. Read more about this awesome star in 'Oh Sanam', (pages 134-142).

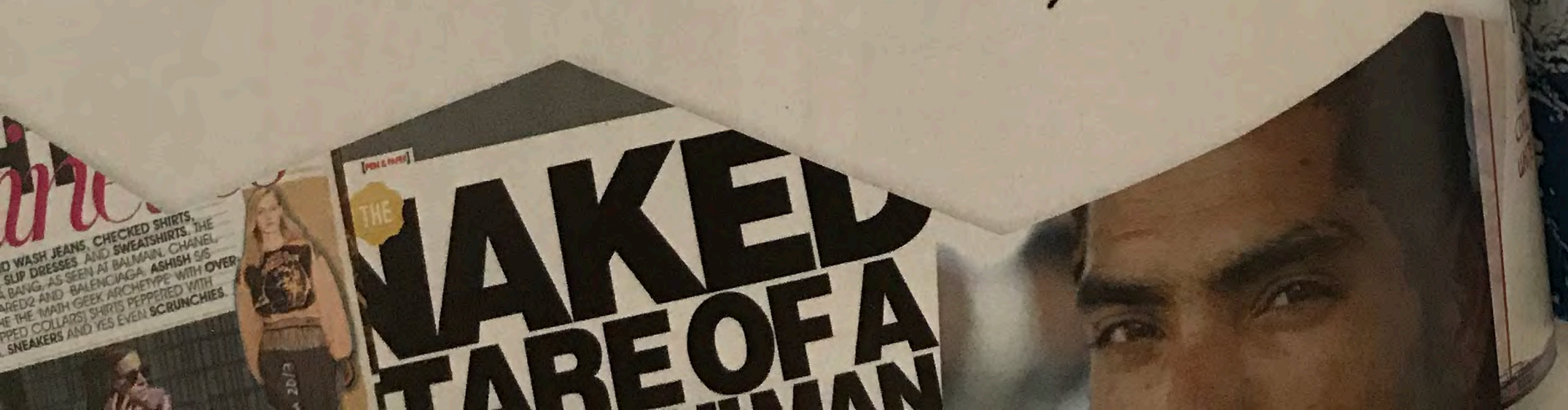
We like to go the extra mile to bring you the very best in fashion and lifestyle. In this issue, we take a look at the life and style of Sadaf Jalil. Anisa Shaikh gives a very personal account of knowing her, in her article, 'Growing up with Sadaf Jalil' (pages 148-155).

We also meet the dynamic Maira Pagganwala. It is rare to meet out-of-the-box thinkers in the local fashion scene. We visit her beautiful home in Karachi and give you an exclusive look inside her wardrobe in 'A Fashionable Life', (pages 125-129).

As the season changes, it's a good time for a makeover. Mehar Hasan Rafi gives us before and after images of how to get that new look. And don't miss an in depth interview with Faris Shafi and his life as a rap artist in Pakistan in 'The F factor', (pages 144-147).

Please continue giving us your feedback on our blog (styleonpaper.com), Twitter (@papermagpak), Facebook fan page (facebook.com/papermagpk) and feel free to contact us on papermagazine2010@gmail.com.

Samina Khan



THE NAKED STARE OF A PAKISTANI MAN

WOMEN IN PAKISTAN TRY TO PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM THE SEXUAL STARE OF PAKISTANI MEN THEIR WHOLE LIVES. MEHREEN AJAZ EVALUATES THE REASONS BEHIND THIS 'STARING PROBLEM' AND EXPLAINS HOW HER PERCEPTION OF IT HAS CHANGED OVER TIME.

BY MEHREEN AJAZ / PHOTOGRAPHY BY NAUREEN SHAH

THIS IS AN ARTICLE ABOUT the Pakistani man's staring problem. As a woman who has been subjected to this gaze for most of her life, my perception of the stare has dramatically altered over the years: it has become steadily less threatening. I believe that the stare, and our perception of it, gives an interesting insight into our society. I'm writing this because, in the end, this is not about men staring at women. It's about how men perceive women, how women perceive men, and how we perceive ourselves.

We all see the massive wealth gap in our country. Poverty is pervasive in Pakistan, and it is very visible. Wealth, while exceedingly less pervasive, is equally visible. Pakistan is also a country with a very marked gender divide. Women are relegated to the private sphere. There are few women on the streets. The majority of women in the country dress and behave like women are meant to behave. (I am going to insert a disclaimer here: I am writing from a position of privilege. This article is based on my experiences and my reflections on them, and is simply one point of view). Growing up, we learn to be embarrassed about our bodies and our sexuality. We learn to hide our period. We learn to never ask questions about sex. We blush when we walk past condoms in a supermarket aisle, or when an ad for Always maxipads comes on TV. Consequently, we learn nothing about our bodies except that we should protect it from men. Our bodies are the sites of our honour, and our families' honour. We know all about chastity before marriage. I knew how important it was. I knew there was no question about not keeping it.

For a very long time, I never questioned any of this. And it instilled in me a fear of the public. So naturally, when I was in public, and men stared at me, I felt threatened and insecure. When I go to Raja Bazaar, or Jinnah Super - no matter what I'm wearing - men look at me. When I go running at the Margallah cricket ground, men stare at me. It makes me uncomfortable be-

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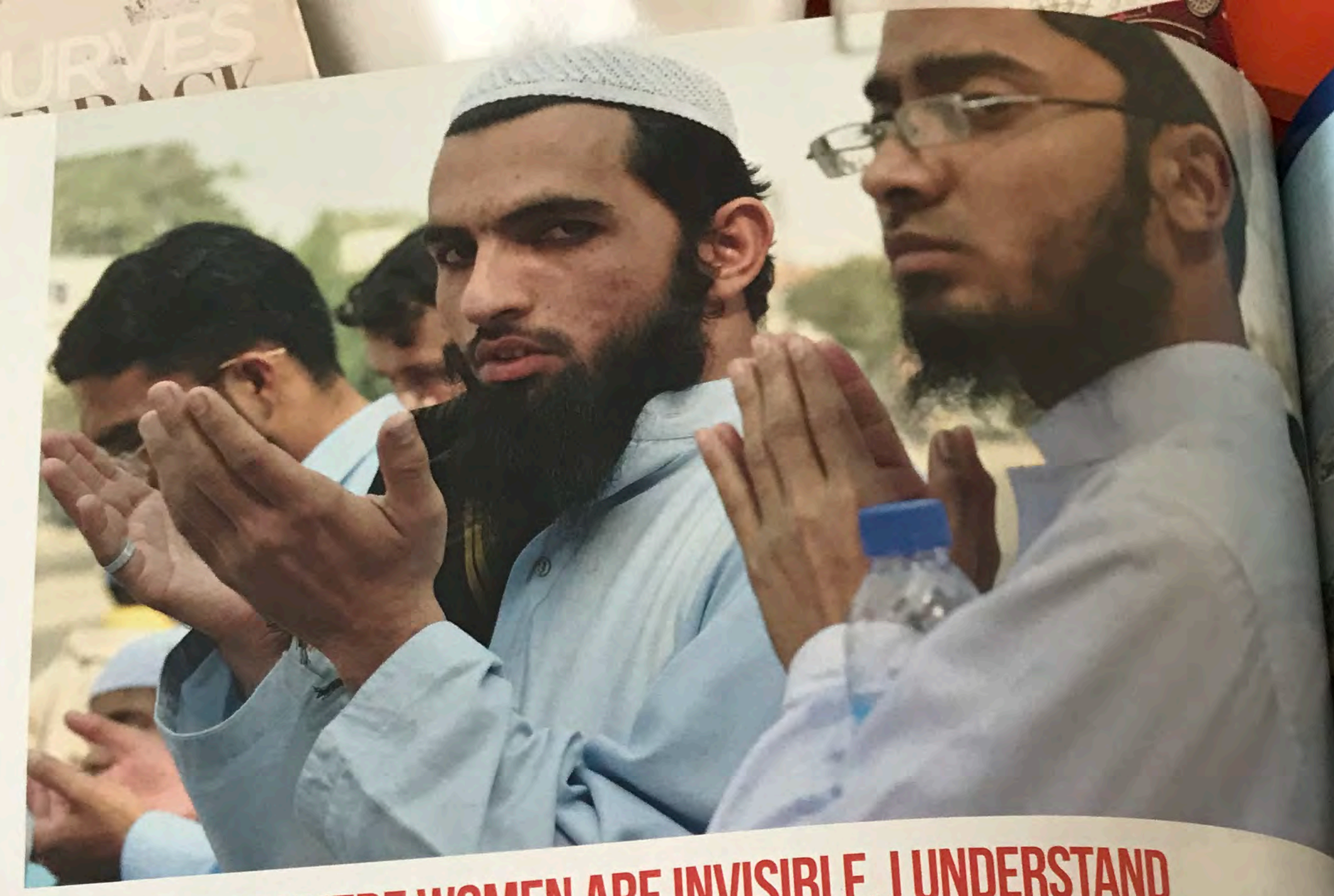
SOMEHOW, AT SOME POINT, WITHOUT MY CONSENT, MY BODY BECAME EVERYBODY'S PROPERTY TO JUDGE AND COMMENT ON AND LOOK AT. MY WOMAN'S BODY, IS SOCIETY'S BODY. IT WILL NEVER BE WHOLLY MINE.



IN A WORLD WHERE WOMEN ARE INVISIBLE, I UNDERSTAND WHY SEEING A WOMAN WOULD AROUSE EXCITEMENT.

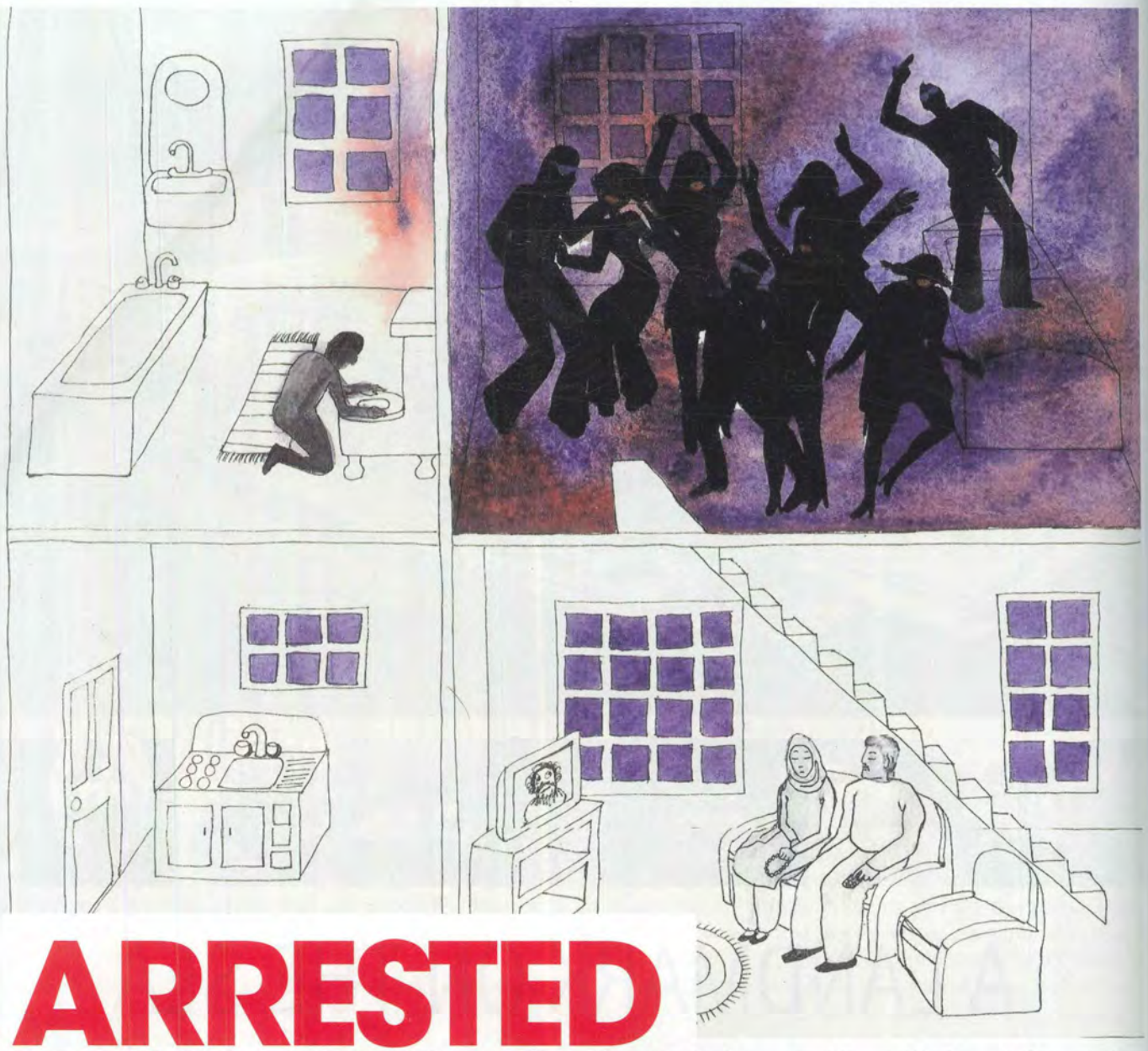
cause it underscores this feeling that I have that my body is not entirely mine. Somehow, at some point, without my consent, my body became everybody's property to judge and comment on and look at. My woman's body is society's body. It will never be wholly mine.

To protect myself, I construct the public as a threat. If they are looking at me, it is because they want to violate me. It is because they are lecherous and vile. This is unfair. I don't deny that, as a woman, I experience a near-constant sense of insecurity that is ubiquitous wherever I go - be it London or Washington instead of Islamabad or Lahore. It may be different, it may vary, but it is always there. Because of the patriarchal world we live in, women are perceived as weak, or inferior, or easy, or asking for it, or defenceless, or whatever - because of how I am constructed by the world and because of how I construct the world in response, the world is less safe for me than it is for a man. The world is less open for women than it is for men.

Almost always, when I feel threatened, I find what I am afraid of is men. It is not an unfounded fear. But it is unfair. All men are not rapists. All men are not undressing me with their eyes. It's smart, in potentially dangerous situations, to be alert - but in the bigger picture, men are not the real problem. The world we occupy is. We are products of our surroundings. My surroundings make men an object of fear. Pakistani men's surroundings make me an object of curiosity. In both cases, we are estranged from each other, and in both cases, we make people into objects.

Men in Pakistan stare all the time but I have begun to give them the benefit of the doubt. I am not outraged anymore. I don't immediately assume the stare is lecherous. If I'm honest, peo stare everywhere. They stare at things that are or desirable new. We look at things to make sense of them and are threat by things that are different. So yes, in Pakistan, people Men look at women and this makes us uncomfortable. B think they stare more because I am, by virtue of being in p and out of the private sphere, by virtue of being well-off driving an expensive car unaccompanied or buying ciga or generally doing things in public that are unexpected - a curiosity. The looks can be perceived as hostile - and nervingly frank and sexual - but most of the time, they are looking at something they don't usually see. And it's not men who stare. Women stare too. And kids. Everybody

In a world where women are invisible, I understand why ing a woman would arouse excitement. I understand the my cultures and taboos and traditions that separate us. So I immediately jump to demonising conclusions. I learn to tion myself and the world around me. When people stare I learn to take it in stride and with that, I reclaim my bo don't feel the sense of shame that used to come with staring. I inhabit my body, and I do what I like with it people stare, I don't care. I know my body is natural and be helped, or hidden, no matter how hard I try. It's empow It's difficult. I am privileged to be able to do it. So when I man staring at me while I am hiking on Trail 3, I say *'salaam'* and he says *'salaam'* back and just like that, we establish nection - and I am no longer a stranger or an object. I a person who is not afraid and the dynamic instantly chan make myself visible for all the women who cannot beca ibility, is an important stepping-stone to equality. ▪



ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

BY **SANA KHAN**

*SANA KHAN EVALUATES THE **EFFECTS** OF LIVING IN A **JOINT FAMILY SYSTEM** FOR A NATION THAT REALLY JUST NEEDS TO **GROW UP.***

I love to tell friends abroad about my life in Islamabad. They're always startled to hear about the *paaaaahties jaaaani,* the seemingly bottomless bottles of 'viskey' and 'wodka', the sparkling spaghetti strap dresses, the myriad-function weddings, the drunken, veering Mercedes, the LV belts.

It's such a stark contrast to what they expect Pakistan to be like. Fortunately, I think, this facet of Pakistani society is relatively unknown outside of Pakistan. We've got writers and artists and filmmakers and humanitarians and athletes and academics showing the world that we are more than that horrendous news report. But there are so few of these people. Universities abroad are full of Pakistanis. Where are all our success stories?

Oh, there's one at the bar, swigging from a can of 'Carlsburrrrg'.

There's another, trying on Rolexes in a dodgy Supermarket.

Boutiques and fancy restaurants are full of them. So are drawing rooms in F-sector mansions.

If you're not careful, you'll miss the one still under the covers at 1300 hours on a Tuesday.

If you're careful enough, the coked-up party animal might not wrap you, himself and his Beemer around a tree at 150 kmph.

Some only emerge from behind their hash-smoke veil when it's Hardee's time.

This is a small cross-section of Pakistani society. But it is an important one. These are people - capable people - with university degrees, with opportunities, with connections, without impediment, sitting on their haunches, waiting for mom and dad's hand-me-downs, or waiting for things to happen to them, because their whole lives, things have just happened to them. Dad's friend got them that internship that they needed for university applications. Dad's money paid off the policemen, and paid for the *chaukidars*, the drivers, the waiters. Dad's money paid for the car to be fixed. Dad's money paid for what else?

A lot of people I know change when they go to university. They take an eye-opening class, or they meet interesting people, or they have a wild acid trip, or they have un-self-conscious sex, or they work in a restaurant kitchen, or they start taking photographs, or they fall in love with the wrong person, or they volunteer at a homeless shelter, or they learn to play an instrument, or they read that one pivotal book. They step outside their comfort zones and experience a world they would never otherwise have known. They do things they couldn't have done at home. They learn about themselves. They reflect. They question. They create. They are wonderful, productive members of society. These are the people that make a better future.

THESE ARE CAPABLE PEOPLE WITH UNIVERSITY DEGREES, WITH OPPORTUNITIES, WITH CONNECTIONS, WITHOUT IMPEDIMENT, SITTING ON THEIR HAUNCHES, WAITING FOR MOM AND DAD'S HAND-ME-DOWNS, OR WAITING FOR THINGS TO HAPPEN TO THEM BECAUSE THEIR WHOLE LIVES, THINGS HAVE JUST HAPPENED TO THEM.

But on the other hand, an overwhelming number of people have none of these experiences. They go to university abroad to hang out with their friends from Froebels. They shop on Oxford Street just like they did with their parents every summer. They listen to the Top 40, drink Absolut and Jager, buy £80 sweatshirts, covet Chanel bags, smoke Marlboros from the cartons that they bring from home every three months. These people spend their entire time in a different country doing exactly what they would do at home. With possibly more varied beverages, and potentially an occasional bumping of uglies with a coursemate (probably South Asian).

Then, they come home to marry or be married because marriage is, of course the next logical step. This is where it gets good. Those boys that have been drinking and gambling and snorting and clumsily flirting? They're on the lookout for a pure, virginal bride - preferably one who has no pretensions of a career or even a life outside her husband, children and in-laws. No independent women need apply. Fortunately for these men, the promise of a moneyed, designer life has much more appeal than one of personal and financial independence. The Marriot is rented out, the Range Rover is plastered with roses, the unemployed couple flies to Seychelles on dad's dime for two weeks, and then returns to a life of shallow opulence.

I realise I am making it sound like depending on and/or living with parents is repugnant, vile, the epitome of failure. I assure you, as I sit here writing this from my bedroom in the upper portion of my parents' house on a computer being charged by power that my parents will pay for, that this is not the case. I foster no disdain for the thirty-somethings that live at home. It's an expensive world out there. Those fancy foreign degrees definitely don't translate into fancy foreign currency salary slips. Pakistan is a tough place to be for us just-starting-out folk, let's be honest.

So I understand the benefits of living at home. You get to maintain the lifestyle you're used to. You get fed. You have a car. Your mom and dad are downstairs when you need a hug. It's great. Some of us do it because we can't support ourselves independently, at least not currently. Some of us do it because it's just how it's done; joint families are a way of life that provide support, company and security. Both scenarios have their ups and downs. When you live with someone, you bear a responsibility to them. You sacrifice at least some degree of independence. You can't watch porn with the volume up. You have to eat what's on the table. You have to say *salaam* to guests. You can't have a nice cold beer openly after work because you feel like it. But you've got people around, and you might fight with them more, but sometimes it's nice to not be alone. If parents were more open-minded and kids were less snotty and contributed to the household, I think we could have a great thing going.

But I'm going off on a tangent, rambling about communal versus independent living. Really, what I want to get at is that high Pakistani society is where dreams of a productive and independent populace go to die.

I look at my peers sometimes, and I feel helpless and angry and frustrated. What happened to us to make us be like this? I blame parents, in part, for wanting the best for their children to such a degree that they've turned us into soft-palmed, superficial shells of humans. I blame our society, which values wealth, caste and class over substance. I blame our parents and our elders and our teachers and our schools for not encouraging critical thinking in a population that needs gumption desperately.

Somehow, we have created a generation in Pakistan, that, stripped of its wealth, is almost universally useless. I'm sure I could survive without my dad's support, but it would be difficult. I'm not so sure about the rest of my peers. ◘

ILLUSTRATION BY ASMA JAVERI

Fat Black COOL CAT

FROM **FAIR AND LOVELY** TO YOGA OBSESSION, DOES THE **BATTLE** TO BE **PERFECT** EVER END? ANAM MANSURI CHARTS OUT THE **EVOLUTION** OF EXPECTATION FROM HER **BODY** OVER THE YEARS.

BY **ANAM MANSURI**

There are times when I really need to feel good about myself, and 'Filmazia' is nowhere to be found on my television. My cable provider can be really annoying. On days like these I often take a deep breath and try to play the Lollywood music channel's dance sequences in my mind. I picture the actress Sana in a midriff, her gigantic breasts spilling out of her *cholli* as she launches into series of bust thrusts when Shaan grabs on to her rolls of stomach fat and stares at her longingly. I burst out into giggles. It is jarring to see, or even imagine, a woman that big, unabashedly showing off her body. And, on top of this, all of that being attractive to a man half her size. Because fat is just not nice right? I could just as well be amused by the overly contrived sexual expressions Sana makes that switch with every beat of the song or Shaan's statuesque side profile in every shot. While all of these features definitely add to the amusement they are not even close to the star of the show. It is mostly the fat that makes this scenario so comical. For some time now though I have begun to wonder why.

I have never been the average South Asian body type. Ever since I can remember I have been bony and athletic. It worked really well for me for about 10 years. I loved outdoor sports, and was always invited to play with the boys at lunch break, even when it was cool to dislike the female kind. I was fast and fearless and wore my gazillion scars like shiny medals. All of this often made me the cool one in class - the girl that seamlessly defied the gender barriers that were so distinct in those early years. I didn't realise then how badly the tables were soon going to turn.

When we hit eleven, all the girls' breasts started to grow. Apparently mine did not get the memo. At twelve, my best friend, the annoying one who always chose to sit out PE period, became the object of every boy's adoration. She had come of age before every other girl, and apparently years before I was ever going to get there. At this point I was still wiry, taller than the rest of the girls and flat as a board. I insisted on getting a sports bra when all the other girls did, and then a regular bra a year later. My mother's pleas to "just wait a little while longer" met with streams of tears and banging of doors loudly.

Where I was thinner than the average girl my age, my sister, one year older, was heavier than the average girl her age. At family dinners and social events aunties would always glance down at us and point out to my parents in fascination and often amusement, how both of us were such different sizes: "One soo *patli*, and one quite healthy Mashallah!" It was around this time both of us had discovered, that the meanest and most hard-hitting insults that we could possibly give each other when we fought, were ones that focused on our bodily insecurities. "*Moti bhains*" was my weapon of choice while "*patli chipkali*" was hers. As I became more comfortable with being less curvy than the average Pakistani girl, my sister grew bigger and my insults had greater impact. It was then she discovered the greatest manufactured Pakistani female insecurity of all time. Colour. I was darker than her, and now she had all the ammunition she needed for a while.

Ever since I can remember, Pakistani women have been told that being dark equals being unattractive. My own cousins, boys at school, the ads on TV and the billboards all over the city kept reminding me how severely inadequate I was. "*Kaali Kaloti*," was and still is a very common slur and I remember hearing it often, as a joke as well as a spiteful insult. Today, while a small segment of our fashion world has begun to accept the dusky woman as a creature of beauty, being fair is still widely considered as a panacea to every trouble a woman encounters. Become fair and you shall find a husband, get a job, become wealthy, the pride of your family, an upstanding citizen, mother, friend and then some.

By the time I was 13, I would set aside a portion of my monthly allowance on 'Fair and Lovely', which I applied religiously twice a day. I tried to avoid the sun like the plague, which is very difficult in a city like Karachi, and spent hours reading romantic novel after novel where I would day dream that I was the pale skinned heroin that won the hearts of powerful men. And while this fairness-cream obsession lasted for just a year, the dark colour of my skin irked me every single time I looked in the mirror up until I went to university in New York. In this new place, my colour was apparently, beautiful. Here men and occasionally women of varied races and ethnicities, strangers and friends would make it known that they found me beautiful and unique. It was also the land of the padded-bra. My confidence got a boost.

EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER, PAKISTANI WOMEN HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT BEING DARK EQUALS BEING UNATTRACTIVE. MY OWN COUSINS, BOYS AT SCHOOL, THE ADS ON TV AND THE BILLBOARDS ALL OVER THE CITY KEPT REMINDING ME HOW SEVERELY INADEQUATE I WAS.

At the same time I was introduced to the beautiful world of American junk food. As college going kids my friends and I often chose the tastier, less healthy options of sustenance, which went straight to my thighs. This, again, was not OK.

After I graduated I got a taste of New York's high fashion and magazine world. The women who worked in these offices all looked like models. My body that was once too bony now had some meat on it. And again I was unhappy. I cringed when I looked at my chunky thighs and whined about my bumpy South-Asian nose to anyone who would care to hear.

After a year of working in America I came back to Pakistan and took the position of editor at Women's Own Magazine. For some odd reason I thought that being back in Pakistan would be good for my body image, given our appreciation of curves, Madhuri, forgiving *shalwar kameezes*, Saima, Sana and that lot. How wrong I was.

I strolled back into the country at a time where thinness had become from a fascination to an obsession, at least amongst the crowd I interacted with on a daily basis. My co-workers discussed for hours on end, which diet would make them thinnest by the weekend, and my aunts and older female friends who had money to spend were all consulting nutritionists regularly and on customised diet plans. Lollywood had collapsed and fashion weeks were the new thing, where the models weren't the only ones who looked painfully skinny. TV actresses would beg me to Photoshop their arm flab while editing their pictures and hardly any cover was completely satisfying for the beautiful woman who was gracing it. It would upset them if they weren't made to look artificially better than they actually were, because that's what magazines were there for. Some other foreign return friends who had also packed the pounds felt worse about their bodies than they ever had before. One went into hiding for two years, one became unhealthily addicted to working out and another mildly depressed. All three of them claimed that it was more difficult being bigger here than where they just came from.

And then from praying to God for bigger boobs, I began bombarding my yoga teacher's BBM for poses to try at home while I waited for the next class.

After 27 years all of this has become a tad-bit exhausting. It is probably just exhausting reading about it. Let's assume that one day I do become the emblem of beauty and femininity that I idolise in my head. When it happens will I actually be able to realise it? And if I do, how much longer would I be able to retain it? When childbirth comes along or when I have wrinkles and grey hair? And then when it's gone, was it all worth it?

In a recent Harper's Bazaar article, journalist Tanya Gold writes on her own evolving relationship with her body since childhood, she says, "I know I cannot try to retain youth, I do not believe in it. Whatever victories they bring, the Botox, the face-cutting are transient and will eventually break the heart. You cannot be beautiful if you are not easy with yourself; that is the law of ageing."

The past two years have been a transforming time for me in terms of self acceptance. I have recovered much of the joy and pride I had in my body when I was ten. Padded bras were exchanged with soft ones for comfort, Fair and Lovely for sunscreen, and yoga continued not because I wanted to tone up, but mainly because it brought me peace of mind and gave me strength. Fat jokes are not really funny anymore, and men who make jabs at any physical inconsistency are clear no-no's. When somebody calls me "*Kaali Kaloti*" I shake my head and correct them with "*Saanwli Saloni*" and a smile.

There are often moments when I still cringe at my thigh jiggle but never a day when I feel dark. Being comfortable with who you are is slow and often painful, but mostly wonderfully humbling process. According to some studies it is between the age of 30 and 35 when a woman is most confident with her body. This is often linked to achieving satisfaction in other areas, such as financial empowerment or being in a stable relationship. I wonder if that is the reason I am less hard on myself. If it is, I hope the world evolves in a way that the generations after me don't need any kind of crutches to feel good about the way they look.

Even though the sight of Sana and her tummy still makes me giggle, it also makes me severely envious. She can fearlessly use her body to evoke desire and assert herself, something that I probably will not be confident enough to, at least not for a while. ▫

DANCING in a STATIONARY WORLD

By **Nuzhat** Saadia Siddiqi

THE DANCING **GIRLS OF LAHORE** HAVE COME FAR FROM THE KOTHAS OF THE WALLED CITY TO **WEDDING FUNCTIONS** AND **THEATER STAGES** ACROSS THE TOWN. AS THE TRADITION TAKES ON A **MODERN & TRAGIC** TWIST, PAPER DELVES DEEP INTO **THE MYTH,** GLAMOUR, **ECONOMICS** AND THE REALITY OF THESE **ONCE REVERED** PRACTITIONERS OF THE **AGE-OLD** FORM OF DANCE.

She walks into the middle of the bejewelled and sartorially flawless crowd with the unshakeable pride of a gladiator. She is armed with a kind of brash charm that immediately commands attention. Dressed to the nines, her form-fitting clothes feel as if she was sewn into them, just as French princesses of old were by their couturiers. She flicks her long, glossy hair to the side and steps up onto the low wooden stage adorned with flowers and lights. A hush falls over the people around her. The music starts. And her rhythmic movements begin to match beat after beat after beat. As her eager audience applauds and whistles in appreciation, she keeps unleashing one pulsating move after another, as if her dance is fuelled by the cheers from the crowd. When the medley of songs ends – new and classic Bollywood, with a dash of Arabic rhythms and one or two bhangra beats – she has the entire congregation up on their feet, thrilled at what they have witnessed. While a few older ladies shake their heads or arch their finely shaped eyebrows in disapproval, it is a fact that the evening belongs to her. She is the queen, and the people at this meticulously planned and executed Mehndi of the son of a Sialkot Industrialist are her subjects.

After her performance is over, I corner her while the cousins of the bride and groom fumble around the same stage she just vacated, attempting to execute rehearsed dance routines in unison. Up close, I can see her make-up is layers deep, and hides a girl much younger than I earlier imagined her to be. A thin film of sweat covers her, but her excitement is tantamount. "This was my first solo performance," she tells me as she gulps down a glass of water her younger 'sister' brings her. "I will be getting Rs. 25,000 for it."

Nazli is a dancing girl, and claims heritage from the princesses of Bahadur Shah Zafar's court. The ruined princesses, she claims, were sold by the British to the *kothas* of Delhi and Lahore, and some even took voluntary refuge at the houses of courtesans their fathers and brothers once frequented. Her great-great-grandmother was a young princess who was then raised by a kindly courtesan getting on in years and it was through her that she learned the great art of dance and song. And so it has been in her family; the 'craft' is learned from an early age and passed down to every female child so she can continue it, earn her living from it, and spread joy.

I ask her if she lives in Lahore's infamous Red Light District, and she glares at me with the practiced poise of a seductress, then laughs and shakes her head. "No self-respecting artist lives in that hell-hole anymore, *Baji*," she says, taking off the heavy drop-earrings from her ears that are red with their weight. "We live in a *kothi* in Defence, and we have two cars. My mother still has a house in one of the streets in Taxali Gate, though. We only go there during Muharram, to participate in *Majaalis* and *Ashur*."

And so began my dialogue, and inner monologue, with and about the dancing girls of Lahore, a cultural boon or bane (depending on which cultural promoter or religious scholar you are listening to) that has barely survived over three decades in the historical city. What was once a cultural respite for princes, nawabs, and

umra'aa (rich) of the society is now a synonym for prostitution and vulgarity. With the decline of the cultural traditions of old, in which courtesans and singers indeed were considered the greatest patrons of the arts such as story-telling, poetry, singing and dance, we now find the void filled with illiteracy, poverty, exploitation, and garish glamour that is only a gilt surface to a saddening whole.

The fall of the Mughals and the domination of the colonials drove the true representation of the old art-form to extinction. With the passage of time and shift in the socioreligious narrative of the country, which peaked during Zia-ul-Haq's regime, the once beguiling and inviting courtesans were forced to remove themselves further from society. Today, it is considered a sin to be associated with the profession, or to belong to such a family. On a lesser degree, it is mocked, ridiculed, and in a patriarchal system, these women are considered easy prey. What would a *randi* (derogatory term used for a dancing girl) know of honour?

But Rani, a verbose young woman belonging to the ancient pleasure district of Lahore, disagrees. Quiet vehemently, in fact. When asked about the concept of honour and the lack thereof associated with their profession, Rani is quick to point out that there is a distinction between dancing girls and prostitutes. "Not all the girls who dance are prostitutes, although all prostitutes may know how to dance well," she says, offering me a *paan* at a dingy old *paan* shop inside Taxali gate. It is only by chance that I have run into her. She lives in Gulberg and was only passing through, after collecting rent from the Pakhtun family that now resides in her mother's old home. She stopped at her favourite *paan* shop, where I was asking the men a few questions about the dancing girls. She introduced herself with a laugh and a provocative proclamation of, "*inko kya maloom!*" ("What do they know!") and is now on a roll.

According to her, no matter how debauched society thinks they are, the dancing girls still have an honour code in which they respect each other and are fair while doing work. Rani's virginity was sold by her mother at age 16 to a landlord who took her to Dubai. But once back home, she received her fair share of earnings, which she put in a bank. Presently, she says, she is learning to speak English to communicate better with a clientele that is changing immensely in lifestyle and tastes. What about exploitation? A dark shadow crosses her face as she eyes the burly man who accompanies her. He is standing at a distance, smoking a cigarette, imposing yet silent with bloodshot eyes. She quickly says that the girls who are stupid enough to sign away their lives to middlemen – pimps – are the ones who get into the most trouble. But isn't that how the system works? She shakes her head and tells me that the phone and internet have changed the way things work for many of the girls. Then she leaves, setting her dark but expensive pashmina shawl neatly on her head.

My doubt about independence and economic empowerment are validated through the news reports I study about the dancing girls of Lahore, and the books I read as reference, especially *Dancing Girls of Lahore* by Louise Brown and *Taboo* by Fouzia Saeed. In Brown's narrative, as in Rani's story, dance mixes with prostitution and the line often becomes indistinct. Both non-fiction accounts of the female residents of the Red Light District tell a tale of economic strife, health issues, psychological stress and lack of support from any government institution. Of course, as a profession deemed illegal, both sex workers and dancing girls are lumped into a similar category and receive no support from either law enforcement or any other governing body. To survive, they form close-knit groups inside and outside the family units. And they need all the support they can get, especially when one of them goes to perform at a private function or at a theater during the course of a drama.

"Not every girl is Nargis or Deedar," says Goshi, a self proclaimed 'Dance Manager', who arranges for dancing girls to appear at private functions. "They have reached the pinnacle of their careers and have been able to break the cycle of exploitation. Most of the girls don't know what their rights are and are happy just getting lots of clothes, make-up, trips to foreign countries and jewellery. They don't think about anything else."

As I go through my photographs of the Red Light District, it hits me how there is not a single woman to be found in the images. Even in the olden days, the streets were littered with men from all walks of life, whereas the girls remained in their *kothas*, in their *baithaks*. Now, even the sound of their feet matching the rhythm of the *tabla* has become silent. With no poetry to uplift the spirits of the visitor, it is a dark and dreary place. The culture has been diminished, but the girls, spirited as they are, haven't been broken.

Not all the girls who dance are prostitutes, although all prostitutes may know how to dance well.

PAINTING BY IQBAL HUSSAIN

While their craft still largely remains the domain of men who exploit them, whether by putting up their charms for sale or buying them, the undeniable glamour at the surface still creates allure that keeps people hooked. And Nazli's words, remembered and recorded, bring a smile to my face:

"Not everyone can become a doctor or a lawyer or an engineer. But everyone can do what they can to the best of their abilities. The world should be happy that we stick to our ancestors' profession; if we put this much hard work into anything else, we'll take away your jobs!"

**Names in the story have been changed at the request of the persons interviewed to protect their identities. ◘

ART & ACTIVISM

BY **LALEH HABIB**

PUBLIC ART

LALEH HABIB WRITES ABOUT STREET ART IN KARACHI, WHERE INDIVIDUALS ARE USING THIS UPCOMING ART FORM AS A MEANS OF SOCIAL COMMENTARY, SELF EXPRESSION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT.

'BURKILYN' AND NAMES OF POLITICAL PARTIES


'BURKILYN' WITH AN ELABORATE SILVER MASK

Graffiti is not new to those of us living in Karachi. We have long grown accustomed to words and phrases sprayed and stencilled across every available surface in our city. Most of the time, graffiti tends to be political, commercial and even romantic. Different neighbourhoods in the city scream allegiance to various political parties; the reputations of gangs and girls are built and broken across our boundary walls. You can find public service messages and even handy reminders of what number to call for an ambulance. Recently, many 'Islamist' parties have taken to broadcasting their ideologies and aversions on the walls of their mosques. And then, there's the myriad commercial messages: pest control solutions, tutoring centers - you name it, someone's sprayed it.

But every once in a while, something different catches our eye. Something that isn't just advertising, vandalism or defacement but is perhaps aesthetically pleasing, or even intelligent. It is that which may rise above the charge of graffiti and may be called street art. It can make one stop and smile - or even pause a moment to think. It engages the onlooker.

"Public art is public engagement," states Sabeen Mahmud of The Second Floor (T2F) fame. It has a far greater reach than other forms of art, which are often confined to galleries and museums and are the purview of a select elite. By contrast, street art is accesible to a far greater audience. It invites public consumption.

Sabeen has done much to promote street art in the city. She has donated a wall of T2F for the creation of street art, and has promoted Pakistani street artists - including Rang de Karachi and the celebrated artist and graffiti activist, Asim Butt (who passed away a few years ago but his name still lives on in many facets of art and activism).

"Street art can start a dialogue," Sabeen says. "One individual and group can spray-paint something, someone else can respond, and so it goes on." The process itself invites interaction. Street artists have shared stories of how, while they were stencilling and spray painting their message, members of the public stopped to ask about their work and share their opinions and points of view.

Recently, students of a 3rd year class at the Indus Valley School (IVS) were asked to explore non-violent modes of resistance. Inspired by the British street artist Banksy and by the subversive street art seen in Eygpt and Tunisia during the Arab Spring, many students turned to street art. Ayesha Omer, a lecturer at IVS and an unabashed proponent of street art, guided them in this.

"Street art can be creative, fun, intelligent and bad-ass," Ayesha said in an interview. "It's about standing up to the man and using a public space to broadcast a public message." Ayesha's students armed themselves with stencils and spray cans and hit the streets. One group tackled public urination - they drew a cartoon figure urinating with a stern tag line following, "Maya *Dekh Rehi Hai*" (Maya [Khan] is watching). Another group protested against the senseless target killings taking place across the country

"STREET ART CAN INTRODUCE COLOUR AND INTELLIGENCE INTO A CITY, WITHOUT HAVING TO CHANGE THE INFRA-

IN 2007, ASIM BUTT TOOK TO THE STREETS TO PROTEST AGAINST MUSHARRAF'S MILITARY RULE. HE SPRAY-PAINTED AN 'EJECT' SYMBOL ACROSS WALLS, TREES AND THE STREETS OF THE CITY TO SYMBOLISE REJECTION OF DICTATORSHIP.

'EJECT' BY ASIM BUTT

by spray-painting a poignant verse by the celebrated poet, Faraz.

Like many before them, the IVS students took to spray painting as a way of venting in a society where their voices may not otherwise find an avenue for expression.

"Street art can be a way of voicing frustration," shared art historian Taimur Suri. In his upcoming book on the visual culture of Pakistan, Suri devotes a chapter to exploring street art and graffiti in Pakistan in all its manifestations. In an interview, Suri outlined the commercial aspect of street art - a form of low-cost, high-impact art - as well as the more subversive streams of the medium, including the ultimatums issued by Islamist parties broadcast across city walls. He also identified a uniquely 'Defence' manifestation of graffiti: a type of extracurricular activity for the elite youth.

A former student of Taimur Suri and a celebrated artist himself, the late Asim Butt will be remembered as one of the most prominent graffiti activists in Pakistan. In 2007, Butt took to the streets to protest against Musharraf's military rule. He spray-painted an 'eject' symbol across walls, trees and the streets of the city to symbolise rejection of dictatorship. The symbol quickly became synonymous with the pro-democracy movement and was replicated in scores across the country.

Asim Butt also used street art as a form of social commentary. In 2003, he created two large murals in the city of Karachi about subjects as diverse as the US military operations in Iraq and the glue-sniffing street children in Karachi.

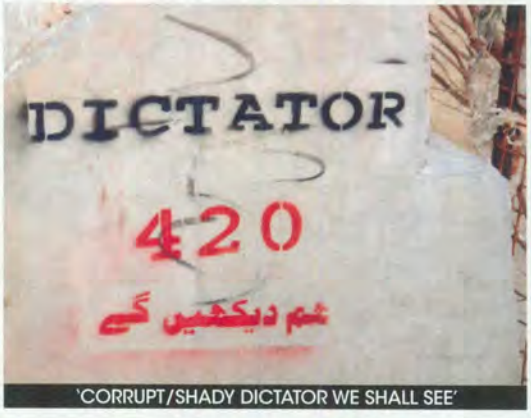
Other artists in the city have also used street art as a form of social commentary. More recently, we have started seeing 'Burkilyn', a woman in a Marilyn Monroe pose with her skirt flying up, dressed in a full *burka*. The acronyms that political parties use have also been poked fun at on the streets of Karachi and the Pakistani map has been redesigned as a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

The art work can be subversive or silly, it can form a wider social commentary or it can be a tongue-in-cheek statement - but what separates it from the other stencilling that we see across the city is that it suggests a form of public engagement and dialogue. It brings residents - not just political parties and commercial enterprises - out of their homes and onto the streets to engage with their fellow citizens. It also adds some vibrancy and wit to our otherwise bleak urban landscape.

"Street art can introduce colour and intelligence into a city, without having to change the infrastructure," Sabeen Mahmud says. It can be a way of beautifying a city and making it a more lively place.

All the colour, humour and life that street art injects still hasn't lifted it to the status of an art form. It is mostly still regarded as vandalism or destruction of public or private property. Street art also has a notoriously short shelf-life. Asim Butt's murals have long been painted over. Other pieces have been covered by new layers of graffiti or have been white-washed. But this, in itself, creates a new canvas, allowing the cycle to continue. ▫

'MAYA DEKH RAHI HAI'



'CORRUPT/SHADY DICTATOR WE SHALL SEE'

'PAKISTAN NEEDS YOU TO VOTE' (Courtesy Aarij Hashmi)

'UNN DUKHI MAAON KAY NAAM' (Courtesy Aarij Hashmi)

STRUCTURE," SAYS SABEEN. IT ALSO ADDS VIBRANCY AND WIT TO OUR OTHERWISE BLEAK URBAN LANDSCAPE. ●

Dear Patriot,

My relationship with Pakistan has always been a tumultuous one. Much like a crazy love affair, it oscillates from senseless devotion to deep resentment. Like Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton's rollercoaster romance; me and Pakistan are united, torn apart, reunited, parted again; and so the cycle continues. I have now been living in London for close to 6 years now. This has been my longest separation from Pakistan and I have never ever thought that I will permanently live outside Pakistan.

My forays into the West have always been quite opportunistic. I thought, I would stay in London long enough to get my British passport. The desire for the passport was not because I had hoped to settle here; but in order to save me the anguish of applying for visas when I travel. Now that I have come close to getting my passport, I don't really feel that there is much of a Pakistan left to go back to. The passport is now not to save me visa fees and dirty looks at airports, but rather an insurance policy because I have no idea what the future of my homeland will be. Will it be a country I can live in? Or more scarily, will my country be able to accept the likes of me.

In my mind, like a furious romance, my beloved and I were just taking a break. My parents however (despite having green cards) bravely hold fort in our Islamabad home, because they insist their children must have a place to call home in their Motherland. I was sure of my return that is, until my last visit home.

This time I realised my tumultuous romance with my homeland was over. Me and Pakistan would never get back together. Time had changed good old Pakistan into a stranger. Gone were the comforts of home I miss when in London. How can you rest and be comfortable when there is no electricity or gas or water. How can it feel like a proper homecoming when your mother can't cook your beloved biryani because there is not enough gas?

Gone are the days of long peaceful drives along the scenic Margalla Road. There were no police check posts when I left 5 years ago. Kosar Market was not stained with Salman Taseer's blood when I left, where we spent afternoons at Table Talk. We weren't scared that it was a prime terrorist target spot back then. We would hike up trail 3 on sunny afternoons. We weren't scared of bearded men disapproving of our attire on the trail back then. We could walk into Marriott and Serena without feeling like we were entering a fort. The diplomatic enclave didn't feel like city in and of itself, like the Vatican in Rome and Pakistan didn't feel like Nazi Germany. There was no genocide against minorities back then. The public was not so hungry for some kind of leadership that charlatans like Qadri could highjack a city for days!

The banking sector and telecom sectors were booming. We were young Isloo yuppies, who had leased cool cars, bought the latest cell phones, threw fun parties, and were frequently, found splashed on the pages of society pages. We had our counterparts in Lahore and Karachi. We were a generation that thought the damage of Zia's era may finally be falling away. We had hope. We had big dreams, and Pakistan was an intrinsic part of those dreams.

But over my six years in London; bearded monsters, greedy politicians, brutal army folk, American drones have all brutalised my homeland. Over my December break in Pakistan this year, I also went to India. I had last visited India in 2006. At that time, apart from greater female mobility in streets and the ready availability of alcohol, there was no tangible difference between India and Pakistan. This time around, there was a world of difference. I am not going to go into details. Sufficed to say, India feels like it is booming. There is an energy and buzz in the air that is symptomatic of a nation that knows it is on the cusp of greatness. The older generation seems proud and the younger generation seems excited. In Pakistan, the older generation seems tired and the younger one terrified.

So in a nutshell, for the first time in my life, what I had thought was my cooling period outside of Pakistan is soon to become my reality. I am now in voluntary exile; an exile that feels like banishment, like I have been orphaned by my Motherland and torn from my past. But for those who think I am lucky to be out of Pakistan or those who think I am an unpatriotic coward, let me tell you this, exile (Voluntary or involuntary) is a painful thing. As Edwards Said the famed Palestinian academic who spent this entire adult life in voluntary exile from his native Palestine wrote:

"Exile is the unbearable rift forged between a human being and a native place; between the self and its true home; it's essential sadness can never be surmounted...."

YOURS SINCERELY,

Namoos Zaheer

[PAPER] MAGAZINE