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Guest Editor: Nanditha Narayanamoorthy

Issue 14-1, 2023

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Cover image: R. Benedito Ferrão

(UN)SEEING GOA'S BOM JESUS IN VISHVESH PRABHAKAR KANDOLKAR'S THIS IS NOT THE BASILICA!

R. BENEDITO FERRÃO

This article examines the interrogation of visual history associated with Goan church architectural legacies offered by Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar's installation series, This is Not the Basilica! (2021). The artist's subject is the 16th-century Basilica of Bom Jesus, which was built in locally domesticated Baroque style during Goa's Portuguese colonial era and which houses the remains of the Spanish saint, Francis Xavier. Kandolkar's work makes viewers intimate with the Basilica's history, I contend, so as to posit the need for conservation efforts that will save the deteriorating church while also revealing its unseen aesthetic past as a symbol of still-unfolding Goan identity.

Cet article examine l'interrogation de l'histoire visuelle associée aux héritages architecturaux de l'églises de Goan offerte par la série d'installations de Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar : Ceci n'est pas la basilique ! (2021). Le sujet de l'artiste est la basilique de Bom Jesus, construite au XVIe siècle dans un style baroque domestiqué à l'échelle locale à l'époque de la colonisation portugaise de Goa, et qui abrite les restes du saint espagnol François Xavier. L'œuvre de Kandolkar rend le spectateur intime avec l'histoire de la basilique, de manière à faire ressortir la nécessité d'efforts de conservation qui sauveront l'église en voie de détérioration tout en révélant son passé esthétique invisible en tant que symbole de l'identité goaienne qui n'a pas encore pris forme.

Look up most advertising content about Goa, and it will predictably have some assemblage of the words sun, sand, and sea, the coastal location on India's west coast fitting the geographic requirements of most tropical holiday destinations. The usual clichéd seaside imagery of palm trees, surf, and sun-drenched

beaches are not only replicated in the touristic visual culture that depicts Goa for the consumption of vacationers, but also perpetuates a particular look that is associated with and expected of the tropics. While Kye-Sung Chon postulates that a "destination image" is created to promote tourism (2), Krista A. Thompson reminds us of the construction of tropical imagery through recursivity (5). Thompson notes of images of holiday destinations in the Caribbean that they are "created and circulated by tourism promoters … [to form] destination images [that] can become … representative of the essential character of a place, despite the [locale's] specificities" (5). Such specificities may include the people whose lands have become popular holidaymaking spots. Or, more precisely, the erasure or mischaracterization of the inhabitants and their role in making the culture of these locales, thereby ensuring a destination image that caters to the fantasies of visitors. Moreover, such destination images can even become so entrenched locally as to have an influence on the views people have of their own homelands and histories. And how Goans see their own heritage is a subject of much import in Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar's art.

In the case of Goa as a tourism market, it is the former Portuguese colony's historical and architectural distinction from the rest of once-British India that is incorporated into visual representations of the tropical destination to set it apart. To this end, the structure very often co-opted is the iconic 16th-century Basilica of Bom Jesus, as Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar demonstrates in his installation series, *This is Not the Basilica!* Displayed at Sunaparanta Goa Centre of the Arts between September 8 and November 20, 2021, Kandolkar's research-based installations evidence how the Portuguese-era church, famous for holding the relics of St. Francis Xavier (1506-1552), has come to stand in for Goa's historical and regional difference in South Asia while becoming a victim of its own fame. Yet, Kandolkar's purpose is not merely to chronicle the appearance of the Basilica in everything from Goa-related tourism promos to souvenirs. Rather, Kandolkar's works examine how visual cultures subsume history, especially in allegedly postcolonial settings. In effect, what *This is Not the Basilica!* seeks to achieve is an alternative form of

seeing, one that challenges imposed mainstream perspectives while activating a practice of decolonial viewership that engages with local histories.

Kandolkar is an architect and architectural historian by training, as well as a professor at the Goa College of Architecture. *This is Not the Basilica!* marks his artistic debut as part of the group show *Goa: A Time that Was*, curated by Leandré D'Souza at Sunaparanta. Kandolkar's installations showcase the long-standing Basilica as a living part of Goa rather than only an emblem of its past or a curiosity consumed by visiting tourists. Kandolkar's intent is to destabilize how the usual representations of Goa feed into its consumption as India's pleasure periphery (Routledge 2652), its preferred holiday destination (Ferrão 142), and real estate market for second homes (Kandolkar, "Consuming" 267). Concurrently, Kandolkar's works draw attention to the eponymous subject of his exhibition—the Basilica of Bom Jesus—and, more specifically, the plight of the early modern monument that has served as an archetypal icon of Goa while suffering the vagaries of time, colonial politics, and climate change.

In this article, I concentrate on the decolonial approaches within Kandolkar's art practice, especially as it emphasizes historical research and cultural knowledge. I centre Kandolkar's efforts to recover Goan architectural heritage from the colonial past and institutional failure. Goa's unique circumstances as an enclave that endured Portuguese colonial rule, only to then find itself under the colonial purview of the newly emerged post-British Indian nation-state, doubles the histories of coloniality the artist grapples with. Yet, in either case, Kandolkar's focal point is the Basilica and its visual legacy as a Goan emblem of cultural and political changes between these colonial periods. Kandolkar traces the palimpsestic transformations undergone by this building over time, both in its architecture and in its visual adoption/co-option.

In *This is Not the Basilica!*, Kandolkar considers how Bom Jesus is sometimes a representative figure of failure and at other times a beacon of resilience. As a consequence, the artist's installation series also raises questions about the part played by colonial, governmen-

tal, and even ecclesiastical institutions in the long life of the structure. Critical of the colonial practices that have allowed the Basilica to deteriorate, ultimately, Kandolkar's exhibits offer a view of how the study of visual culture can decolonize our understanding of the linkages between built heritage and cultural identity. Through the use of indigenous materials in his installations, the artist deliberately brings to the fore the native knowledge that contributed to the making of the iconic monument and its history. My analysis in this regard considers how caste and gender are part of the suppressed legacy of the iconic monument, and what it means to recover these parts of the building's heritage, especially as a means to protect it moving forward. Taking cue from Kandolkar's work, I analyze how practices of conservation, archival research, and preservation, as well as knowledge gathering and teaching need to be revolutionized in Goa. To this end, I look to the study of art history and the participation of Goan civil society in the active recovery of their heritage as decolonial practices that reiterate the utility of projects such as *This is Not the Basilica!*

(UN)SEEING

The title of Kandolkar's show is a nod to that most famous of René Magritte's surrealist works, *La trahison des images* (*The Treachery of Images*), also known as *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (*This is Not a Pipe*) (1929). Magritte was most interested in what art renders visible, what it allows to be seen—a concern central to Kandolkar's own preoccupation with representing the history of Bom Jesus and reshaping the gaze directed upon it. In a 1966 letter to Michel Foucault, Magritte muses that "thought resembles ... by being what it sees...; it becomes what the world offers it" (Foucault 57). Notably, John Berger's influential book, *Ways of Seeing*, begins with a reference to Magritte's observation about the insurmountable distance "between words and seeing" before stating that "[t]he way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe" (Berger et al. 7-8). In so deciphering, Berger considers the incommensurability between seeing and expressing but also apprehends how and what may remain unseen and unexpressed. For his purposes, Kandolkar

likewise uses his art to challenge how the visual history of the Basilica has, in fact, rendered much of its past unseen, as will become apparent.

Of the role of art in laying bare the unseen, Magritte holds that "painting interposes a problem: There is the thought that sees and can be visibly described … Then is the invisible sometimes visible? … [I]t is evident that a painted image—intangible by its very nature—hides nothing, while the tangibly visible object hides another visible thing" (Foucault 57). Magritte's deliberation over how visibility itself obscures correlates quite closely to the aesthetic history of the Basilica of Bom Jesus, whose present look only came about due to a colonially motivated makeover. This political alteration of the structure's appearance is one of the main concerns taken up by Kandolkar, especially in an effort to underscore how the anteriority of the building's visual history has come to prevail and even be of detriment to the edifice's future. In other words, Kandolkar's art queries how visuality has shaped the Basilica's legacy, the visible unrevealing of the historical manipulations it has undergone.

Taking up the question of art, representation, and the un/seen, Foucault likens Magritte's *This is Not a Pipe* to a calligram, an image created from thematically linked text. But in the case of the Surrealist's famous painting, the calligram has come undone, Foucault goes on to say, an unraveling deliberately orchestrated in the "doubly paradoxical … nam[ing of] something that evidently does not need to be named … And at the moment when he should reveal the name, Magritte does so by denying the object is what it is" (23-24). So, what is achieved by such dissembling, where the calligram "shuffles what it says over what it shows to hide them from each other" (Foucault 24)? The very design of the calligram frustrates revelation, because in order

> "[f]or the text to shape itself … the gaze must refrain from any possible reading … The text must say nothing to this gazing subject who is a viewer, not a reader. As soon as [the viewer] begins to read, … shape dissipates … [T]he calligram never speaks and represents at the same moment. The very thing

> that is both seen and read is hushed in the vision, hidden in the reading." (Foucault 24-25)

Ultimately, the words and images in their non-collusion divulge that "[n]owhere is there a pipe," as Magritte's purpose is to indicate that "the letters are but the image of letters … [and] the figure is only the didactic continuation of a discourse" (Foucault 29). In Foucault's analysis, what Magritte makes apparent "[f]rom painting to image, from image to text … [is the imposition of] a system of references, [that] tries to stabilize a unique space" (30). Meaning lies beyond its imposition and what is made intentionally visible. So, too, with *This is Not the Basilica!*, Kandolkar attempts to disentangle the image of the Basilica from its present day, seeking out the legendary building's longer history to posit a different way of seeing (or salvaging) it.

SEEING THROUGH WALLS

Upon entering the darkened gallery where Kandolkar's installations are placed, visitors to Sunaparanta are immediately greeted by the curious sight of suspended, backlit latticed palm leaves that cast dramatic shadows on the wall. This scrim of entwined foliage forms part of the title piece in the exhibition *This is Not the Basilica!* But a closer look would reveal that the interwoven fronds obscure a large image that can only be properly viewed by navigating around the leafy screen. Forced to peer through the network of leaves, visitors catch sight of a digitally manipulated photograph of one of the Basilica's red laterite walls, lashed by rain and with some of its windows surrounded by lime plaster. The stark whitewash around the casements in the image is an embellishment not visible in the actual building, but what remains true to life in the photograph are perceptible signs of the laterite wall crumbling. In fact, the pediment over one of the windows in the picture has completely vanished. The patchwork lime render and the enmeshed palm leaves a mystery, the clue to this installation's meaning lies in the long history of Bom Jesus which only looks as it presently does due to a politically induced renovation.

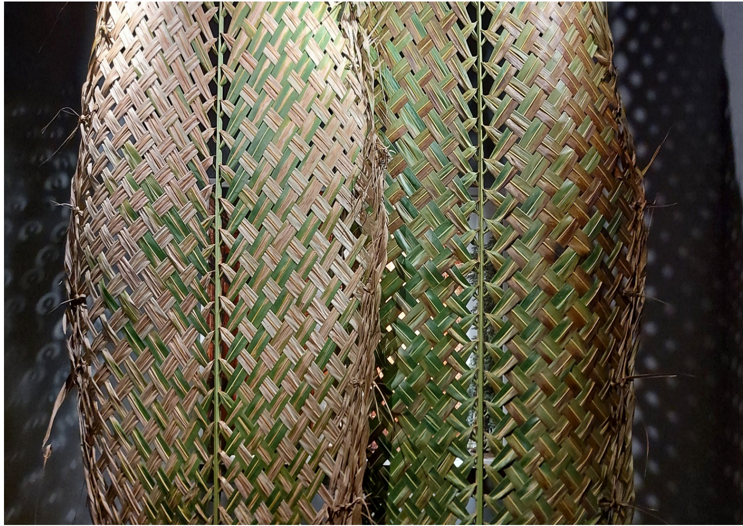

Figure 1: Woven Palm Detail from This is Not the Basilica! (2021). Photo by the author.

Figure 2: Uncovered Photo Detail from This is Not the Basilica! (2021). Photo courtesy of Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar.

As the curator's note highlights, Bom Jesus "is one of the few surviving monuments from the fabled period of Old Goa and an emblem of Indo-Portuguese aesthetics" (D'Souza). Capital of the *Estado da Índia* from the early-1500s, the colonial Portuguese seat of government in Old Goa, for a time, oversaw an empire that encompassed regions as far apart as Africa and eastern Asia, as well as various locales in South Asia. With construction beginning in 1594, the history of the Basilica of Bom Jesus ran almost parallel to that of the duration of Portuguese India, now even having outlived it with the 1961 annexation of Goa by India. Yet, although the church may have been built during the period of Portuguese rule, its aesthetic is definitively Goan while demonstrating what Kandolkar identifies as "the flowering of Baroque style architecture in Goa" ("Symbol of Goan Identity").

The legend of the Basilica was sealed when it became the final resting place of the Basque Jesuit missionary Saint Francis Xavier in the 17th century, some fifty years after his death. As Pamila Gupta ascertains, despite Xavier's demise in 1552 in Sancian, an island off the coast of China, Goa was chosen as the site where his remains would be relayed, a choice made collusively by church and state (*Relic State* 51). The Portuguese colonial state as well as the Iberian-founded Jesuits, whose purview now extended beyond Spain and Portugal to their colonies, sought to benefit from an attachment to Xavier's storied legacy of miracles performed in his overseas missionary work. The relocation of Xavier's body may have had to do with the saint's "[strong] biographical attachments to [Goa]," but also because, as the capital of Portuguese Asia, Goa had become "a developed centre of colonial and missionary activity" by the time of the saint's death (Gupta, *Relic State* 51).

The housing of Xavier's illustrious relics at the Basilica apart, the edifice's architectural innovations are additionally prominent. In *Whitewash, Red Stone: A History of Church Architecture in Goa*, Paulo Varela Gomes recounts the church's discernibly European influences. Yet, these were remade in Goa, by Goan artisans, according to local taste, bringing together such disparate features as "Flemish ornament, Serlian mouldings, round windows and French Serlian window frames"

in the building's constitution (69). To foreground the Basilica's place in Goa's architectural history, these very words quoted from Varela Gomes' book appear in the gallery that displayed Kandolkar's exhibits at Sunaparanta. What should be gleaned from this, as well, is that the adaptation of European church architecture by Goans was also confirmation of the localization of Catholicism in the region since early modernity. Elements of localized baroque, as seen in the Basilica, found their way into the design of other churches of the day, Varela Gomes maintains (69). Likely, this was also true of non-church architecture in the period, domesticated European Renaissance design influences even featuring in Goa's Brahmanical temple forms in the 17th century (Kanekar 254).

Indeed, as I state at the outset, a major draw for Indian sojourners in Goa is its Iberian influence as translated locally in the region's built culture, a heritage that has given rise to much sought after and so-called "Portuguese homes" (Menezes, "Portuguese Architecture"). Referring to such nomenclature as a "lobotomised real estate shorthand," Vivek Menezes underscores how the housing market uses Goa's Portuguese colonial cachet to advertise the territory and its architecture to Indian buyers ("Portuguese Architecture"). That Goa, a Portuguese colony from 1510, was annexed by India in 1961, thirteen years after the latter's own independence from the British, heavily inflects the colonially consumeristic relationship traceable here, one that inscribes Goa as a colony of a postcolony. If the 1961 takeover replaced Goa's European colonizers with Indian ones, while circumventing the self-emancipation efforts of Goans themselves (Lawrence 9-10), Goa's Portuguese past makes it the other to the Indian nation-state whose history and postcolonality are largely defined by its formerly British colonial heritage.

These issues are the impetus for Kandolkar's second installation, *(T)here is the Basilica.* The multimedia exhibit includes, among other elements, video loops from Indian national television that feature the appearance of the Basilica in tableau on Goa's floats in some of the yearly Republic Day parades (2019 being the most recent iteration of the inclusion of the structure), as well as print advertisements that

use images of the church to shill holidays and real estate in Goa. The title of the installation explores the distance between the cultural and historical "there" and "here" of the postcolonial nation and its colony, the centre and periphery. This is poignantly dramatized in Kandolkar's use of a video segment that shows the Basilica as an emblematic representation of Goa, alongside floats epitomizing other states, in the annual Republic Day parade in New Delhi, India's capital. If the Basilica is a symbol of Goa's Portuguese past, situated as it is in the former capital of the now bygone *Estado da Índia*, then its simulacral reemergence in a national event celebrating the creation of the post-British Indian Republic collapses Goan history into a mainstream national narrative.

Figure 3: Wide View of (T)here is the Basilica (2021). Photo by the author.

Figure 4: Detail from (T)here is the Basilica (2021). Photo courtesy of Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar.

This occurs even as the presence of the representational Basilica seems to gesture at Goa's cultural and religious specificities, a perfunctory, orchestrated, and performative nod to the multiculturalism of contemporary India as is to be seen in the array of territorially illustrative floats. Simultaneously, *(T)here is the Basilica*'s use of print media that traces how the Basilica has been co-opted into consumeristic representations of Goa for the consumption of Indian tourists and real estate buyers bears witness to the insidiousness of capitalism as colonialism. Writing on this subject, Kandolkar takes cognizance of how Goa's Portuguese colonial aesthetic heritage, as is made manifest in its architecture, is advertised to "Indian urban elites" who are enticed to "[buy] 'a piece of Goa' … [and] what this land signifies: an exotic 'laidback' Goan lifestyle" ("Consuming" 267). These orientalizing notions of the salubriousness of life in Goa deriving not only from its coastal location but also from the territory's association with supposed easy-going Iberianness, lead Kandolkar to propound that "Indian elites are manufacturing the idea of Goa as an internal space of difference in order to consume it" ("Consuming" 268).

The Indian misnaming of Goan architecture of colonial derivation as "Portuguese homes" is indicative of much misinformation about Goa and its people's own hand in their heritage-making; even as they seek out purportedly Portuguese architecture, what Indian buyers are actually hoping to acquire are structures of historically Goan creative origin. As further evidence of the built form in Portuguese Goa bearing testament to local inventiveness, consider how the façade of the Basilica of Bom Jesus melds European and South Asian design. This look was achieved through the use of basalt quarried from Bassein (mirroring the hard stone used in the façades of European churches of that era), while other external parts of the church were built in the now ever-emblematic red laterite that is native to Goa. With one massive difference—the laterite brick with which the Basilica was constructed was rendered invisible. Coated as it was with lime plaster, the Basilica once looked like so many other whitewashed churches that dot Goa's landscape of red hills and green palms. It was not until the 1950s that the Basilica gained the look it

wears now, purposefully denuded of its white lime render by political design.

(IN)VISIBLE

Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos chronicles how Portuguese architect Baltazar da Silva Castro was tasked in the mid-20th century with restoring Goan monuments, including the Basilica, by then-Portuguese Prime Minister António de Oliveira Salazar (244-245). Restoring is really not the appropriate term, for Castro had been instructed to age such early modern Portuguese Goan relics as the Basilica by reverting them to their alleged "original shapes" (Rodrigues dos Santos 245). The intention was for these historical structures to appear even older than they really were. In the wake of the decolonization of adjoining British India in 1947, Salazar sought to demonstrate Portugal's longstanding influence on Goa and its culture (245). As part of his propaganda to justify the continued presence of Portugal in its overseas territories in South Asia, Salazar believed that architecturally fabricating the antiquity of the Portuguese presence in its erstwhile capital of Old Goa was a viable tactic to achieve this goal. The avenue through which this was to be realized was by giving famous sites, tied to the early modern Portuguese empire, a reverse facelift.

In the case of the Basilica of Bom Jesus, this meant that it was entirely stripped of its protective white plaster barrier (Rodrigues dos Santos 247). No doubt this achieved the required outcome of making the already historic building appear even more ancient by making visible the porous and primeval-looking laterite that for centuries had been sheathed by lime render. This resulted in the (seemingly) quintessential look the monument bears now. If the aesthetic of ageing historic structures like Goa's Bom Jesus establishes anything, it is that the Portuguese colonial enterprise was clutching at straws to retain the vestiges of its influence in the Indian Ocean arena. While these politically supported architectural reforms did little to sustain Portuguese rule in Goa, they incontrovertibly left their mark on the Basilica and the visual culture premised upon the metamorphosed edifice. For

example, *(T)here is the Basilica*, includes a webpage for a three-dimensional model kit of the unplastered church available for sale online. This image, along with other advertisements and tourism-related paraphernalia in the installation, shows how the more recent vision of the monument as an imposing red-brown laterite building has been immortalized in the present time. To recount Magritte's pronouncement, "the tangibly visible object hides another visible thing" (Foucault 57). In proffering the many mediated iterations of the Basilica's current look, sans white walls, Kandolkar's installations remind viewers that what they see of the church conceals its past, hiding it in plain sight.

HEAVY RAIN, LOW VISIBILITY

An entire generation of Goans will have only known the Basilica in its present form, devoid of its once highly contrasting white plaster surfaces. And why should this be a problem? The lime cast which was removed during Castro's renova-

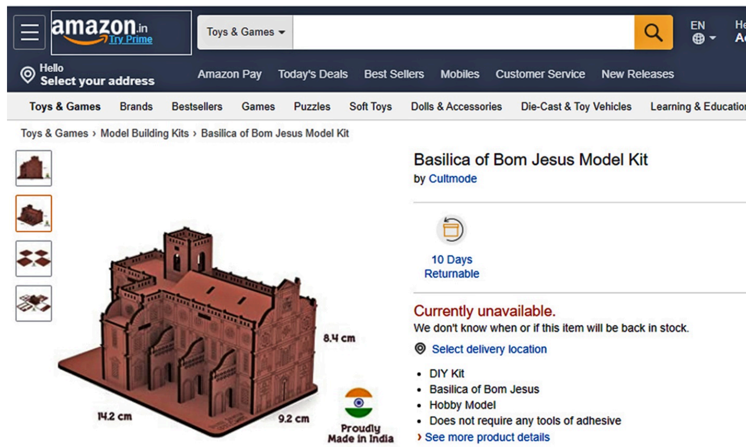

Figure 5: Detail from (T)here is the Basilica (2021). Photo courtesy of Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar.

tion was not meant to merely serve as a decorative element, its presence on the church's walls functioning as prophylaxis against rain damage. A protectant of indigenous origin, lime plaster is a material that continues to be used in protecting other Goan structures presently. Laterite rock is naturally water-permeable, its constitution deteriorating with extended exposure to rainfall, a consistent and recurrent phenomenon in monsoonal Goa. As Kandolkar finds in his tellingly titled article "Rain in the Basilica: Protecting Goa's Bom Jesus from the Ravages of Climate Change," this is a problem that will only be exacerbated by climate change which has manifested in Goa "[o]ver the last century … [in] an increase of over 68% in rainfall … [which is] devastating to architectural heritage" (97).

Debates have raged about maintaining the Basilica's current look (Fernandes), especially so as not to upset the sentiments of Goans who have become habituated to seeing, and worshiping at, the unplastered church, which is one of the most popular in the region because of the presence of Xavier's relics (Kandolkar, "Restoring"). But things came to a head in April 2020 when it became apparent that drastic measures needed to be taken to conserve the building—the rain had found its way into the church (Kandolkar, "Rain" 96). The press picked up the story when the Basilica's rector, Fr. Patricio Fernandes, wrote a letter to the Archeological Survey of India, accusing them of being negligent of the care of the monument, which falls under their purview ("ASI"; "Urgent Efforts"). While the furor resulted in expedited repairs of the church's leaking roof (Monteiro), the question about whether the Basilica will once again be plastered—its best defense against the torrential rains Goa experiences (Velho)—still remains unresolved. It is this uncertainty that Kandolkar intervenes in, using his installations to offer an alternate vision of the Basilica's lifetime.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GRASS

Much like the Goanness of the Basilica in its adaptation of European design influences, grass-like woven palm frond awnings are of particularly Goan provenance in material

and design as Paul Melo e Castro points out (14). Once commonplace in Goa, the craft of enmeshing coconut palm leaves to create a protective barrier around built structures, especially during the monsoons, is a vanishing skill (Kandolkar, "Rain" 106). Instead, mass produced plastic tarpaulins have come to stand in for *mollam*, as handwoven palm leaf sheaths are known in Konkani. Changes like these, where *mollam* have given way to the less eco-friendly plastic coverings, are proof of the passage of time and evolutions in technology. Parallelly, the walls of Bom Jesus have endured transformations inflected by politics and history. By incorporating the re-enlivened tradition of defending architecture against the monsoons with the use of *mollam*, Kandolkar's exhibit invites visitors to rethink how one views architectural history and aesthetics and, indeed, the art of seeing itself. Barely visible through the mesh of leaves from Goa's ubiquitous coconut trees (seen so stereotypically in tourism advertisements for Goa), the image of the Basilica of Bom Jesus that Kandolkar offers is less obscured than it is renewed. It is a glimpse through the past to see what the future could hold for the endangered building.

The use of the *mollam* as an obscuring curtain also embroils viewers interactively, causing them to seek out the hidden image within the installation. This element of the installation is reminiscent of the work of Gustav Metzger, whose *Historic Photographs* series comprises images that are also exhibited in concealed form. In a 2007 interview, Metzger explains that the inspiration for the series came from an Italian newspaper photograph he saw in 1990, which depicted "two Israeli policemen with guns, guarding a group of [Palestinian] Arabs lying on the ground: it was the 'Massacre on the Mount' [at Al-Aqsa Mosque], and it caused a furore worldwide" (in Godfrey). To thwart the ephemerality of news media, Metzger chose to re-represent the photograph in enlarged form, but hid it behind a sheet. The artist titled the installation *To Walk Into—Massacre on the Mount, Jerusalem, 8 October 1990* (1996). In addition to memorializing the massacre of Palestinians, Metzger's title also provides directions on how to interact with his work. As Metzger describes, "[Viewers] had to walk … under the [cloth] and scrape or feel the [photograph], which was part of my point … [T]here are arguments along the lines

Figure 6: This is Not the Basilica! (2021), view through the Mollam. Photo by the author.

that Jews dominate Arabs as a kind of revenge to being dominated by Nazis. So this is the topic for discussion" (Godfrey). The importance of this subject was one that was close to the late Jewish artist's heart, having escaped the holocaust by fleeing from Germany to England

as a child on the Kindertransport in 1939 (Searle). Creating interactivity, Metzger's use of concealment "[forces] viewers to uncover and confront the image nose-to-nose … [It] counteracts a passive, spectatorial consumption of violence" (Tse). The confrontation also re-engages the viewer with history; a similar ethos informs Kandolkar's art, inviting viewers to grapple with and see history differently.

BEHIND THE BACKDROP

In creating an interface between the photograph and viewers, *This is Not the Basilica!* shifts the positions of what should be the backdrop versus the focus of attention. The image of the Basilica becomes secondary to the backdrop—the grid of leaves—which, here, frames how the picture is to be viewed but is, in fact, the first thing a spectator sees. The resemblance to Magritte's work is in the way the Surrealist uses a phrase to frame how the pictured pipe is (not) to be seen; likewise, Kandolkar advises his viewers that what they believe to be how the Basilica looks now, is not how it should be seen. Thus, the would-be backdrop takes centre stage in *This is Not the Basilica!* as it commands and controls the gaze of the viewer. Speaking to the role of backdrops in studio photography, Arjun Appadurai suggests that they "can be interpreted as sites of epistemological uncertainty about exactly what photographs seek to represent," for "backdrops constitute a peculiar counter-context to the [… photograph]," even managing to function allegorically in their own vein (5).

The use of *mollam* in *This is Not the Basilica!* pointedly brings to the fore traditional methods of architectural protection employed by Goans commonly in the past. The allegory offered is that similar indigenous protective practices (in its case, the use of lime render) had once helped the Basilica withstand the onslaught of time and weather. Appadurai contends that backdrops create "the major site for *localizing*" an image at the same time as they "provide occasions for rehearsing new positions" postcolonially; this is because backdrops "remain a place where the meanings of modernity can be contested and where experiments with the means of modernity can be conducted" (6-7). The *mollam* in Kandolkar's installation instills a back-

Figure 7: Side View of This is Not the Basilica! (2021). Photo by the author.

drop of local materiality and historicity, one through which the artist gives his viewers the opportunity to reckon with past and present as they consider the Basilica's future. Recall that the Salazarist intervention that deplastered the Basilica in the 1950s created its modern-day look by, ironically, aging the building—a technological advancement in aid of de-modernizing its look. Reversing this trend, contesting its meaning-making, what might be achieved by experimenting with past traditions, reinvigorating them for a new take on modernity? Just as *mollam* could stand in for plastic tarpaulin as an environmentally sound option for protecting buildings against rainfall, so too could the reuse of once-traditional plaster give the Basilica a new lease on life.

In identifying native practices in the legacy of the Basilica, Kandolkar is equally interested in the labour that informed such heritage, especially with regard to caste and gender. For *This is Not the Basilica!*, Kandolkar communicated to me in an interview that he commissioned Pingal Prakash Mashelkar, a caretaker at Sunaparanta, to fashion the *mollam* used in his installation; the artist also acknowledges Mashelkar's contribution in the exhibition pamphlet (D'Souza). This employment of local knowledge in the artwork

chronicles skills that, though in disuse, have not disappeared. Mashelkar's ability to call up a practice that she is not otherwise engaged in may speak to the gendered nuances of how traditional skills are passed on generationally, their sustenance occurring even when their uses lie dormant. What this might also signal is the forms of subaltern conservational knowledge that have contributed to keeping the Basilica standing for nearly five centuries. The past work of plastering the building would have been done by labourers employed for this purpose who would have been experienced in such techniques. If on the one hand the church's design evidences how "[Goan] artisans … domesticate[d] European architectural and ornamental vocabulary, [making] it their own" (Varela Gomes 70), the work of the Basilica's upkeep would have fallen to those in the caste hierarchy pressed into such service but whose ability to perform these functions drew from vital stores of native knowledge. Thus, Kandolkar's pairing of the contemporary photograph of the rain-lashed red-walled Basilica with the *mollam* of yesteryear not only offers a portrait that interrogates the monument's condition and how it may be viewed, but also the legacies of political involvement, artistry, and subaltern labour that have come to attend it over the centuries of its existence.

THE VANISHING OF LOCAL HISTORY

In a 2021 public talk held online, Kandolkar explained that Bom Jesus "continues to remain unplastered because people have been fed a particular misrepresentation of the monument's appearance in the contemporary moment" ("Looking"). In fact, what might help Goans come around to seeing the Basilica differently is a re-engagement with a visual culture that sidesteps contemporary representations of the edifice and provides a longer look at the church in its earlier form. With this in mind, Kandolkar's third and final installation *Weather the Basilica?* employs a timeline that starkly shows the difference between the short period during which the church has been unplastered and the significantly longer duration of its having been protected by a coat of lime mortar. To visually represent the contrast, the installation makes use of untreated laterite

bricks and rubble, sourced from Old Goa, standing in a vitrine balanced atop a tall, whitewashed pedestal. What becomes clear from the timeline matched with the dimensions of the exhibit is that it is the most recent period (represented by the raw laterite) that has borne witness to the most damage sustained by the Basilica. This coincides with the removal of the lime layer, a rise in monsoonal rainfall, and planetwide climate change.

In the face of overwhelming knowledge that the Basilica's unplastered state continues to be of detriment to the early modern building, why would public opinion tend toward leaving it as is rather than have it revert back to its pre-1950s' condition? This question is apt, especially given that it has only been the most recent decades within this nearly half-millennium old church's lifespan that has seen it devoid of plastered walls. As Kandolkar advises, this has much to do with the lack of information available to the Goan public about their own architectural history and its attendant visual culture. This lack of knowledge about local history is undergirded by the putative postcoloniality of Goa as is evidenced by the dictates of India's education system.

The nationalist ilk of Indian postcolonial education available in Goa precludes the incorporation of regional studies broadly and local art and architectural studies more specifically. At its independence from Britain, India desired to make radical ideological changes in creating new curricula at the federal level, but did not have the financial capacity to "[provide] high-quality education to [all Indian] children" (Sherman 505). States and regions were left to create and fund their own curricula because of the federal government's financial inabilities (505). Regardless, the development of educational programs across the country was unified in its exclusion of "foreign [educational] content … developed under colonial rule," following critiques by Indian nationalists (505-506). Sangeeta Kamat characterizes India's national curriculum guidelines, even at the start of the 21st century, as being predicated on the idea that "Otherness is … a generalized 'West', with specific reference to the history of British colonial rule" (279). If, as has already been established, Indians think of

Figure 8: Weather the Basilica? (2021). Photo by the author.

Goan architecture as being Portuguese, studies of local built forms or representative visual cultures associated with them, such as photographic histories of the Basilica, would find no room in local curricula in Goa. That church-built forms are associated with Catholi-

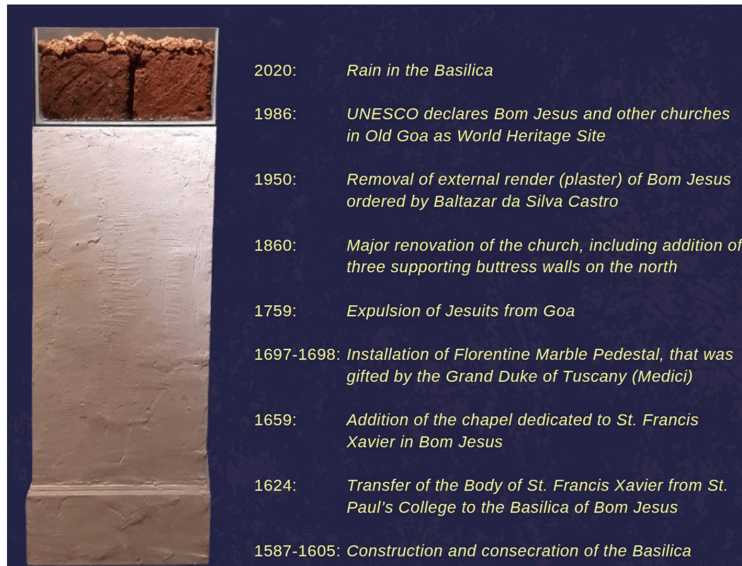

Figure 9: Accompanying Timeline to Weather the Basilica? (2021). From the curator's note.

cism adds a further complication in considerations of the suitable Indianness of architectural heritage, their presence in Goa relegated to Portuguese coloniality rather than the living heritage of Goans (Kandolkar, "Reclaiming"). Coequally, civic engagement with the arts in Goa has also been undermined for politically motivated reasons, state support generally being earmarked to aid public cultures of art that delimit Goa's connections, and influences from, beyond the subcontinent (Menezes, "the Goan").

THE LOST PHOTOGRAPH

The reason many latter-day Goans are unaware that the Basilica was not only once plastered, but that this was how it appeared for the greater part of its existence, is simply because they have never seen pre-1950s' images of the monument in this state; they would not have been exposed to such visual knowledge in

their schooling nor in public venues, given the institutional biases outlined above. This does not mean that visual representations of the once-plastered Basilica do not exist. Arguably, the most famous of these is an 1890 photograph of the Basilica taken by Souza and Paul. This duo is closely tied to the history of photography in Goa, being "[t]he first [studio] photographers to establish themselves [there] … in 1884," Goan art historian Savia Viegas records (5). Viegas deciphers that inasmuch as "[t]he photographs of Souza & Paul appropriated the imperial gaze, [they focused] more on locations than people, and undoubtedly were created for the consumption of viewers both, from Portugal and from the colonies" (7). What cannot be refuted, then, is that the photographs Souza and Paul took, especially of "cathedrals and church towers" (7), circulated in Portugal and Portuguese Goa, this being the precise intent of the photographers who were in the business of creating images for profit. Between the late 19th century and the Salazarist retrograding of the Basilica mid-20th century, perhaps other images of the plastered monument had also circulated alongside lived experience and living memory of the popular church.

Since, images of the whitewashed Basilica taken by Souza and Paul (and others) have fallen out of Goa's visual culture and memory. In this vacuum, the more apparent image of the church is the one that reiterates its contemporary look, a red-brown Bom Jesus sans plaster. This is an image that has become synonymous with Goa today and part of its destination image, especially in the multitudinous replications of this likeness across media, as Kandolkar's installation series proves. In capturing the earlier history of the Basilica in his installations, Kandolkar asks his viewers to broaden their visual lexicon and to re-immerse themselves in Goan architectural history. Such an intervention, through the use of visuality, its history and cultures, coincides with Pamila Gupta's insistence on the vital use of "visual archives to think about … representations of Goan-ness" ("Visuality" 258).

The pertinence of such a call applies quite specifically to the Basilica and its history, given that it was and is a vibrant part of Goan culture. For instance, the Basilica is the site of an annual celebration

Figure 10: The Basilica of Bom Jesus (Old Goa), photographed in 1890 by Souza and Paul. Photo courtesy of Goa State Central Library.

of Xavier's feast day, as well as a decadal exposition of his sacred remains. These events draw large crowds of Goans, an occurrence that Kandolkar declares,

> "signals the participants' connection to the Catholic site as one that, while obviously borne out of religious affiliation, may additionally speak to other possibilities, including an attempt to resist the homogenisation of their culture with that of a Hindu India. That non-upper-caste Catholics and other Goan minority subjects—themselves seeming relics of a colonial past—see in the relics of the saint the possibility of celebration and the need for constant commemoration speaks to the symbolic importance of Xavier, and the architecture that surrounds him." ("Reclaiming")

The cultural and religious significance of these Basilica-based events then also recommends that they be viewed as part of Goa's historical record. If state and other archives contain the visual evidence of these gatherings with the once-plastered church in view, surely such

imagery could be resurfaced. However, is it political will, as Kandolkar reckons, that may inhibit the recirculation of such historical images, the Basilica and its environs, "Old Goa[, being] more marketable as [ruins]" ("Reclaiming")?

What may be equally revealing of such a contention is that an investment in perpetuating the "[fossilization of] the community whose history, culture, and memory are an inextricable component of these monuments" (Kandolkar, "Reclaiming") may also explain the lethargy of the official response to intervening in the preservation of the Basilica ("ASI"). In lieu of this, the uninterrupted ruination of the Basilica by keeping it unmortared, as well as the lack of upkeep of the rest of Old Goa, "provide touristic locations to service the neoliberal economy" (Kandolkar, "Reclaiming"). And yet, these efforts to musealize Old Goa are interrupted because it is not only special events that bring the Goan faithful to Old Goa; besides it being a shrine for Xavier's relics, Bom Jesus operates as a local parish church with regular services. Between these quotidian uses of the church and special events, Kandolkar proposes that Goans "demonstrate that the monuments are an extension of themselves. By participating in the very monumentalisation of these edifices, Goans signify their refusal to be rendered insignificant—an act of resistance against their erasure in their own homeland, Goa" ("Reclaiming").

For the Basilica of Bom Jesus to continue to serve the Goan public as it has over the centuries, its replastering is an immediate necessity. As Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar's *This is Not the Basilica!* urges, the structure needs to be seen differently, not only as it now appears but as it once was. A renewed interaction with the church's visual history would benefit this reenvisioning, efforts that Kandolkar's installations initiate but that need to be maintained by resurfacing and making commonplace past evidence of the Basilica's former appearance. "Suppose a photograph is a lyric for the future," Anjali Arondekar contemplates ("Only You" 86), hinting at "the promise of archival presence as future knowledge" ("Reliable Ghosts" 99). When allowed to, a photo can make known so much, not only of its own moment but also in providing direction for the future. But as I have been contending, making Goans intimate with the past through the

discovery of their (visual) heritage requires institutional reform, an initiative that must range across systems of education, archival practice, and civic engagement with the arts. Such institutional collaborations hold the promise of an interdisciplinary framework for architectural preservation, one that can empower Goans to see their history anew and the future of their heritage more knowledgably. This can potentially reverse the erasure of Goan heritage-making by empowering Goans as stakeholders in the revelation and preservation of their own history. Stephen Sheehi conveys how "[t]he photograph is a social product and therefore an assemblage of meaning, production, technology, economy, and social forces" (401-402). In this vein, to know the visual history of the Basilica is also to know its place in the lives of Goan people, as well as their contribution to the church's creation and sustenance. To see it as such is to see the Basilica as more than just a monument of and to the past, for it continues to be a palimpsest of unfolding Goan identity.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Woven Palm Detail from *This is Not the Basilica!* (2021). Photo by the author.

Figure 2: Uncovered Photo Detail from *This is Not the Basilica!* (2021). Photo courtesy of Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar.

Figure 3: Wide View of *(T)here is the Basilica* (2021). Photo by the author.

Figure 4: Detail from *(T)here is the Basilica* (2021). Photo courtesy of Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar.

Figure 5: Detail from *(T)here is the Basilica* (2021). Photo courtesy of Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar.

Figure 6: *This is Not the Basilica!* (2021), view through the *Mollam*. Photo by the author.

Figure 7: Side View of *This is Not the Basilica!* (2021). Photo by the author.

Figure 8: *Weather the Basilica?* (2021). Photo by the author.

Figure 9: Accompanying Timeline to *Weather the Basilica?* (2021). From the curator's note.

Figure 10: The Basilica of Bom Jesus (Old Goa), photographed in 1890 by Souza and Paul Photo courtesy of Goa State Central Library.

REIMAGINING THE MARGIN: SPACE OF DIFFERENCE THROUGH A VISUAL NARRATIVE

ABU HAQUE

Representations of space do not fittingly reflect the lived experiences of the margin. Representational spaces, on the other hand, are linked to underground social life and art (Lefebvre 39), which are expressed through complex signs and symbols, sometimes coded and sometimes not. Revisiting these spaces provides an understanding of the spatial practices of the marginalized bodies within the existing social relations. This paper interrogates the discursive practices of those mediated bodies through a visual narrative. The paper also challenges the center-periphery rhetoric, revealing an ambiguous and ambivalent marginality that is not fixed. The images are used as a methodological tool to elaborate the actions of the bodies in space. A series of exclusions intertwined within the spatial practices not only confirms the ambiguity of the margin but also reveals that it is a process of becoming.

Les représentations de l'espace ne reflètent pas convenablement les expériences vécues des marges. Les espaces de représentation, en revanche, sont liés à la vie sociale souterraine et à l'art (Lefebvre 39), qui s'expriment à travers des signes et des symboles complexes, parfois codés, parfois non-codés. Revisiter ces espaces permet de comprendre les pratiques spatiales des corps marginalisés au sein des relations sociales existantes. Cet article interroge les pratiques discursives de ces corps médiatisés à travers un récit visuel. Il remet également en question la rhétorique centre-périphérie, révélant une marginalité ambiguë et ambivalente qui n'est pas figée. Les images sont utilisées comme un outil méthodologique pour élaborer les actions des corps dans l'espace. Une série d'exclusions entrelacées dans les pratiques spatiales confirme non seulement l'ambiguïté des marges mais révèle également qu'elle est un processus en devenir.

PRELUDE

Representations of the margin do not fittingly reflect the lived experiences of those bodies. On the other hand, representational spaces imagined by the margin are linked to the underground side of social life and art, which are expressed through complex signs and symbols that are often coded and often not (Lefebvre 39).[1] Revisiting these spaces reveals the discursive practices of the margin within the nuances of existing social relations.

The schema of the margin is flexible and ambiguous, as it stretches and includes identities that are always in a process of "becoming" such as the subalterns (Gramsci 20), new immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, LGBTQ2 communities, hyphenated identities, and women (of colour) but are always in relation to a dominant group. A well-rounded understanding of marginality would guide us to addressing the discursive practices of those spatiotemporal realities. The spaces of the margin, as it appears, reside in multiple spatiotemporalities composed of various identifying markers occupied by the subalterns and hyphenated identities, including but not limited to, new immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and others. Hyphenated identities refer to identities that are perceived as a tag of at least two different cultural and/or geopolitical identities, such as Bangladeshi-Canadian, Chinese-Canadian, or African-Canadian. Subalterns, on the other hand, are social groups that include what Antonio Gramsci identified as "slaves, peasants, religious groups, women, different races, and the proletariat" (qtd. in Green 2). Gayatri Spivak further expanded the idea, proposing that everything with very limited to no access to cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference (qtd. in de Kock 45). Synthesizing Gramsci and Spivak, I argue that the aboriginal peoples, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, LGBTQ2 communities, women (of colour), and people with disabilities, among others, also belong to this space (and time) of difference.

Hence, the subject of the study is always a work in progress, which is credited to belong to an ambivalent and ambiguous third space unrepresentable in itself (Bhabha 55). Here, marginality is viewed as a condition of being without a prefixed notion of spatiotemporal exi-

gency, the markers of which include but are not limited to race, class, religion, gender, culture, age, or language. Not only is the margin ambiguous without a fixed or obvious meaning attached to it, but also represents different cultural groups, both socially constructed and a process of becoming. Marginal identities are consigned to accepting precarious jobs, especially in the informal sectors also known as the gig economy. This paper interrogates the discursive practices of the mediated bodies in those (representational) spaces through a visual narrative that contradicts the popular representations of those bodies. Thereby, this paper deviates from the dominant discursive practices of knowledge creation by reproducing the spatiotemporal[2] representations of the margin—a perceived reality of the bodies frozen in time and space inside the frames and subsequent analysis of those.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to analyze and interrogate the lived reality of the margin that the representations of space exclude, and to which the representational spaces allude, thereby expanding the reach of our understanding of marginality—both in spatial and temporal terms.

THE RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Media play a crucial role in the construction of Canadian identity, which considerably affects how marginal identities are formed. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, is a political ideology that reinforces the status quo and differentiates people based on the colour of skin. The concept of diversity with all possible variants—visible minorities, religious minorities, ethnic minorities, women of colour, and so on—is judged against a Canadian "we," which essentially resides within ideology in the European/North American physique "in the body and the color of skin" (Bannerji 551) and not on the aspect of language, religion, or culture. Here the marginal identities, already alienated by the politics of differentiation and exclusion, are seen as unusual and irregular, and also discriminated against. This paper reveals the underlying conditions and

discursive practices of the marginal bodies through a visual narrative and subsequent analysis of those. The paper is a conceptual opening to a larger project exploring spatiotemporality of the margin beholding visible minorities, racialized and gendered bodies, and also the subalterns.

VISUAL NARRATIVE IN THE PRODUCTION OF MEANING

The use of photography has been a well-established research method in disciplines like anthropology and sociology, but increasingly it has also been used in areas like humanities and communication studies. Historically, photographs have been viewed from two different perspectives: one as a form of art and the other as a precise record of a subject or scene (Schwartz 120). This paper aligns more with the latter, that is, in the potential of photographs' ability to precisely record and symbolize the representational spaces of the margin, rather than in its aesthetics. It does not ignore the artistic inclination of the creative process nonetheless, as the process could potentially reveal interesting nuances about the representational spaces. Viewed as records, photographs reproduce reality and are thought to yield an "unmediated and unbiased visual report" (120). For example, a study on the American middle class shows that participants were inclined to respond to pictorial elements that were personally significant and/or were related to their everyday life, rather than responding to the encoded messages and making meaning out of them (122). This attachment toward the pictorial elements aligning with personal significance is the reason why interpretation of an image differs.

Moreover, widely shared ideological beliefs of one group are often represented as the attitude of the entire population (Van Dijk 117). As is evident, studies of children in poverty often portray a white, middle-class childhood due to the easy access to this group, and they are not studied through their lived experiences (Stanczak 169-70). Meanwhile, the use of photographs in this study has reduced the unequal power relations between the researcher and the participants, as it relies primarily on non-linguistic visual cues in the revelation of the

lived spaces occupied by the margin. Media representations of the margin, on the contrary, normalize a complex system of social and cultural hierarchy that reinscribes the dominant narrative, where the marginalized bodies are treated as strange and seen as the Other. They are usually incorporated in stereotypical representations, viewed from a hegemonic universal human being—white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied cis-men, where interest in the Otherness is a continual revival of interest in the primitive and the savage:

> "Certainly from the standpoint of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, the hope is that desires for the 'primitive' or fantasies about the 'Other' can be continually exploited, and that such exploitation will occur in a manner that reinscribes and maintains the status quo." (hooks 22)

Photographs have been used both as a methodological tool and a means of inquiry; however, using visual images as a research tool requires an understanding of the process of the production of meaning. Meaning is produced within the shared knowledge of language and discourse, and not outside of it. It is a process of identification within a hierarchy of classifications that excludes some and privileges others—constructed through, not outside, difference—pointing toward not so much what something is, but rather, what it is not (Hall 4). Hegemonic power structure and discourse are mediated through various repressive and ideological state apparatuses that maintain the hierarchies within the limits of different markers, making the marginal space a space of difference and struggle, fundamentally different from the dominant one. The demarcation works in two different ways: one is discursive and operates under erasure, while the other draws meaning in relations to the vicious hierarchy between two resultant poles such as white/black or man/woman in which white is synonymous to "human being" (5)—normalized and incorporated as such within the structure of power. Identities are affected by the way they are catalogued within this process of identification.

An analysis of the marginal spaces reveals the discursive practices of the marginal bodies. The visual cues reveal fascinating practices of the representational spaces of the margin, which do not always

represent physical bodies but incorporate ideas, too. Sometimes they expose contradictions—fear/acceptance or denial/conformity—however, they capture more complex details about those spaces than the process of identification does, which tends to produce binary oppositions.

> "Must we always polarize in order to polemicize? Are we trapped in a politics of struggle where the representation of social antagonisms and historical contradictions can take no other form than a binarism of theory vs. politics? Can the aim of freedom or knowledge be the simple inversion of the relation of oppressor and oppressed, margin and periphery, negative image and positive image?" (Bhabha 28)

These ambiguous spaces outside of the bipolar opposites (marginal/dominant) have no fixity but depend on how they are being interpreted and read, as the marginal and dominant positions can swap in a matter of a moment. For example, the driver of a motorized vehicle can quickly become marginal if s/he switches the position to a bicycle—starts riding within the marked lines of difference on the same road, but now riding on the edges—on the margin. Therefore, even though margin is a space of struggle, it is context-specific. The production of these spaces pushes the margin to the boundaries of society, to the edges, or traps them in between, which is almost always an ambivalent process of becoming. Kathleen Stewart adds a variant to the understanding of the spatiotemporality through "weak theory," which is not only complex but also aptly articulates the boundaries of the third space. Stewart suggests a space of potentials that is of primary interest to me: she conceptualizes cultural poesies that give birth to a weak theory when assemblage of discontinuous, yet mapped elements—disjointed and disparate things—throws itself together in a singularity to make up a scene—something that comes into existence that did not exist before (75). The word "margin," as it implies, is an extra, something more or less, but always in relation to a centre. It could be trivial but is impossible to think without. I will provide a real-life example to illustrate the weak theory.

THE WEAK THEORY IN THE PROCESS OF BECOMING

This is in reference to two different food delivery services: SkipTheDishes and UberEats. Both apps provide options for tipping the delivery drivers. In the SkipTheDishes app, customers are forced to put the tip amount upfront without ever knowing the identity of the driver beforehand, which means the tip is independent of the actions of the driver. For the driver, this could be the stimulus, as s/he can decide whether to accept the order or decline it depending on the total amount already promised (including the tip); however, there is no potential of any future gains except on very rare occasions where the customer might tip in cash.

On the other hand, the UberEats app is built on the notion of possibility, as the tip amount can be added not only at the time of the order but also later, at which point the customer can edit the amount if s/he wishes to. The actions of the driver can influence the size of the tip received, both negatively and/or positively. Therefore, tipping in the UberEats app is not wholly independent of the actions of the drivers. A kind and smiling face, a quick service, or a smooth handover could result in a potential gain; likewise, rude or sluggish service could result in a potential loss. The question is not about which app is better (or worse for that matter), but it is a matter of choice between two different approaches that behold two different philosophies or moral codes. One promises a guaranteed amount irrespective of the actions on the part of the driver, while the other promotes the idea of service excellence where the tip amount, at least partially, depends on the action of the courier and may yield higher reward, but only potentially. Some may like the potential of extracting a greater value; some might be satisfied with the prefixed notion of the value being guaranteed. This "potential of becoming" is what Stewart defines as weak theory—depending on the bits and pieces of a faint smile, a warm greeting, a kind text message, or a gentle handover of the food, and in the nuances of the anticipation of good work in the future. Similarly, the margin beholds the potential of becoming something meaningful in the changing multicultural space-time curvature.

THE METHODOLOGICAL PREMISE

The western mind has internalized the logic of binary antagonism through language and other discursive practices. On the contrary, photographs do not depend on spoken (or written) language for their meaning; rather, these are discernible through vision. However, like any other communications medium, photography reflects the perspective of the photographer where technological mediation reproduces a reality through alienation. This isolation from reality occurs through multiple intermediaries (technological) between the image and the viewer, such as camera, lens, screen, lab, paper, chemicals, and so on reproducing a version of the real where the subjectivity of both the photographer and the viewer plays a crucial role in the production of meaning. Hence, meaning partly depends on the intellectual and linguistic faculty for its interpretation—though only secondarily. However, the visual goes beyond language and discourse, at least at the beginning, and works in the abstract form as ideas, but the interpretation of the image again relies on language and discourse. Nonetheless, the photographic images reveal details about spaces otherwise imperceptible, reproducing an alternative position outside the dominant discourse through observable and objective narrative inferring generalization, as to generalize one requires "observable, more or less 'objective' evidence" (Bell 10). The space that the process reveals belongs to what Michel Foucault identifies as "other spaces" between utopias and heterotopias (Foucault and Miskowiec 24). These spaces complicate and transform the marginal spaces inside the ubiquitous view of globalization, especially within the purview of the world system theory (Wallerstein 15; Jameson 9), which seriously punctures through the nationalist and regionalist ideologies and becomes something post-national. It has, along with the effect of digital technologies, collapsed the world into an unequal global village.

Therefore, representation is the point of departure for this research, but it goes beyond representation and includes the discursive practices hidden in plain sight: signs and symbols of spatial and temporal references conceived within various social relations (Lefebvre 3-6;

Massey 2). Reconstructing the time and space of the margin through images and subsequent analysis provides an understanding of the marginal reality, and tests the limits and opportunities rendered through the creative process of photography. This is within the scope of abduction methodology, which avoids polarization between induction and deduction methods and derives from both (Alvesson and Skoldberg 10). For example, the premise that being a member of visible minority reproduces the conditions for marginalization could be confirmed by observation; however, the empirical data could be then analyzed and interpreted further to develop and elaborate on the theoretical assumptions. This methodology explores spaces beyond their bipolar oppositions and explores hybrid and in-between spaces.

The process is complex, as it begins with hypothesis-laden theory and tests that with empirical data. However, it does not conclude there but goes on to improve the theory with interpretation, and is open to more observations for confirmation, and finally expands on the theory. This methodology grants access to the lived experience of the margin, welcoming inclusion of the margin in perceiving their spatial reality, which means an interpretative process during which the researcher "…eats into the empirical matter with the help of theoretical preconceptions, and also keeps developing and elaborating the theory" (Alvesson and Skoldberg 5-6). And that is exactly how the researcher theorized and then analyzed the images; for instance, the way the marginal identities often explain certain terms that are otherwise obvious (see the discussion of Figure 4 and subsequent explanation), just to be in cohort with the dominant narrative.

The use of photography as a methodological tool produces an alternative meaning of the marginal bodies where the focus is now reversed—a switch in the focus from the representations of space to the representational spaces. On one hand, methods such as photography capture subjective data and thus are destined to be a part of indigenous research methodology within qualitative research approaches, since they reflect the photographer's perspective (camera position, camera angle, distance, focal length, framing, etc.) without quantifying. The method brings in the stories and perspectives of both the researcher (absorbed in the research process through qualitative re-

flection and analysis) and the research participants (through their actions) in the knowledge creation that are the traits of indigenous methodology (Kovach 28). Indigenous methodology, within the qualitative research tradition, is interpretive and searches for contextualized realities and acknowledges many truths, as opposed to the traditional positivist quantitative research approaches that seek a singular static truth from an objective distance (26). Besides, qualitative research considers reflexivity to reference the relational and "the reflexivity is the researcher's own self-reflection in the meaning-making process" (32). At the same time, indigenous methodology does not consider different parts of the research process such as method, methodology, and epistemology independent of each other; rather, it views research as a whole, where these parts are interdependent and relational (122).

Moreover, research is considered a lifelike work in progress in indigenous methodology: alive and messy, flexible and soft, and often fuzzy, which is about social relations (Kovach 30). Also, space must be considered along with time, and "not as some absolute independent dimension, but as constructed out of social relations: that what is at issue is not social phenomena in space but both social phenomena and space as constituted out of social relations, that the spatial is social relations 'stretched out'." (Massey 2).

Consequently, social relations in production of space are crucial, where interrogating the intricate social practices of the margin through a visual analysis allows us to explore these spaces through observations. Marginalization is generally constituted in relation to a white body, which, within the concept of diversity, consists of various nuances and is in itself problematic. The meaning starts to weaken with every deviation from the standard markers and has a narrow range of inclusivity as to who can pass and who cannot. It begins to wither away the further the body deviates from the standard Judeo-Christian English speaking subject of a white body. If replaced by a female or queer identity, the body loses its privilege; if replaced by a Muslim or Sikh identity, or by a person of colour, it loses even more, and so on and so forth. The counterargument to the logic that bodies and faith have been conflated here would be that even though these

are two distinctly separate categories, bodies are always wrapped up in clothes and symbolic ornamentations reflecting different faiths. Often, faith-based identities express themselves in hijab, niqab, turban, kurta, or in other religious symbols like a piece of jewelry, a cross, or an om et cetera, which adds another layer to the already marginalized bodies based on colour, creed, et cetera. Christianity is the default faith in North America; anything else is a deviation, a margin. The further the body moves away from those markers toward the periphery, the more it keeps losing privileges until ultimately it is left with nothing normative.

THE RATIONALE OF THE METHOD USED

Photography embodies a way of seeing, as an image is not merely a mechanical record but an act of choice on the part of the photographer (Berger 8). Each photograph is a conscious selection by the photographer from infinite other possibilities; therefore, it reflects their way of seeing through the choice of subject (10). However, besides the mechanical and material records, photography has magical components to it:

> "Photography is a form of magic—or to put it another way, the photographic provides cerebral experiences for the viewer that are equivalent to magic. Just as sleight of hand facilitates, but does not fully materialize, the magical experience that resides in the dynamic of our own imaginations, so too photography—when liberated from a pedestrian definition as the sum of its mechanics and materials, its chemistry and software—can spark the occurrence of magic in our minds." (Cotton 3)

This magical experience depends on the viewers' imagination and can be fully materialized only if viewed independently of the materials or processes of the medium. However, Charlotte Cotton's argument emphasizes that this magical experience is an interpretative process on the part of the viewer. Analyzing John Berger and Cotton, it becomes evident that the photographic experience relies not only on the photographer but also on the viewer for its meaning. This is true about any texts where the claim of originality has now been

made void and very well depends on who is reading, or in our case, whoever is interpreting the image, as "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author" (Barthes and Heath 148). There are also components of both art and science amalgamated in photography, which is revealed in Eadweard Muybridge's work *The Horse in Motion*, where he stopped time in revealing the aspects of motion that ultimately resulted in the radical concept of time as a spatial image (Premeaux 387; Muybridge).

There are places of interactions within social spaces known as "contact zones" where uneven relationships of power dynamics—that of domination and subordination—reproduce the conditions similar to "colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (Pratt 4). Mary Louise Pratt also unpacks the meaning blended and obscured in everyday chores, hidden beneath the

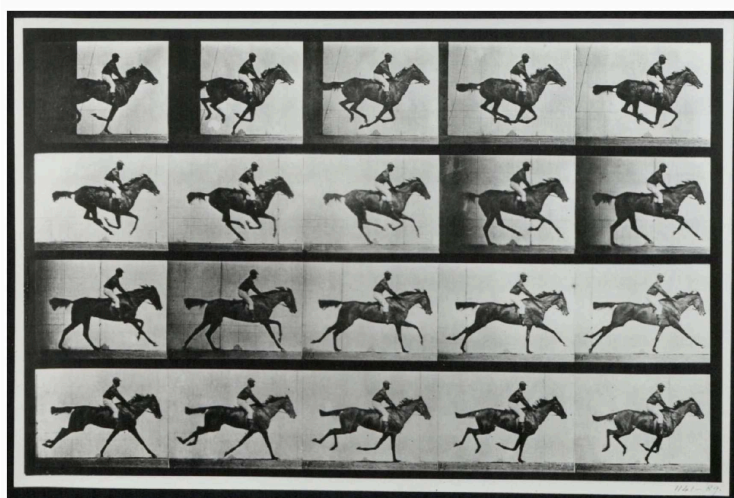

Figure 1: The Horse in Motion, Muybridge. The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum. EXEBD 61975. Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Victorian Popular Culture.

lines and structures of Eurocentric travel and exploration writings, and elsewhere within language where knowledge is produced as a discursive practice of writing (Foucault 56-58). All of these point toward the disparate location of the marginal voices that I have explored in this paper, a shrinking space also known as the public sphere (Habermas 75-79), of which Nancy Fraser was critical. She argues that the institutional arena of public sphere constitutes several significant exclusions—the key one being the *gender*—and she argues for a multiplicity of "subaltern counterpublics" instead of a single public (Fraser 67). Public spheres are usually seen as spatial, but I argue that these must be considered in temporal terms as well. The public uses these spaces for political reasons; however, they do so in their free time, which makes these public spaces a representation of temporality (Sharma 12). At the same time, power exercises control over its citizens through resource allocation (by its authority to decide what time and which space to allocate for the margin to congregate). Thus, space and time collapse in a dimension of power and struggle where the bodies "are orchestrated in space in order to delve further into distinctive temporal forms of power" (11). Moreover, the spaces of the modern nation-states such as Canada are increasingly becoming cultural hybrids where there is no specificity or centralized unity (Bhabha 200), yet the thrust from the dominant discourse looms over the language, representations, and cultural expressions. Marginality operates within a complex system, which is not just about representation but also about hierarchies of orders, where a holistic and representative vision of society could be materialized only if a discourse that "at the same time are obsessively fixed upon, and uncertain of, the boundaries of society, and the margins of the text" (207).

VISUAL ANALYSIS

Historically, marginal identities were consigned to the least desirable jobs such as cleaners, gas station attendants, food servers, delivery drivers, garbage collectors, maids, nannies, hairstylists, and barbers, and other informal and precarious jobs because of the systemic discrimination and exclusion from professional

Figure 2: Images are arranged from left to right, and taken by the author in different locations.

sectors. Therefore, their survival was "premised on their acceptance of inferior working conditions" (Bernhardt 5). The images below show empirical evidence of this claim, which demonstrate an over-representation of marginal identities in jobs such as at the gas stations, food services, restaurant workers, delivery jobs, et cetera.

The first image in Figure 2 shows a marginal body, represented through skin colour as non-white, working at a gas station, while the second one confirms a Black body working as a garbage collector. The third image shows a trolley attendant, who is marginalized as being non-white (even though it cannot be seen from the back), while the last image shows a restaurant worker, marginalized as being non-white and a woman, preparing the order for the delivery drivers. On the other hand, the set of four images in Figure 3 below depicts the bodies of delivery drivers and restaurant workers frozen in motion.

The first image in the series shows the subject, a marginal identity represented in skin color as non-white, reaching out for his car door,

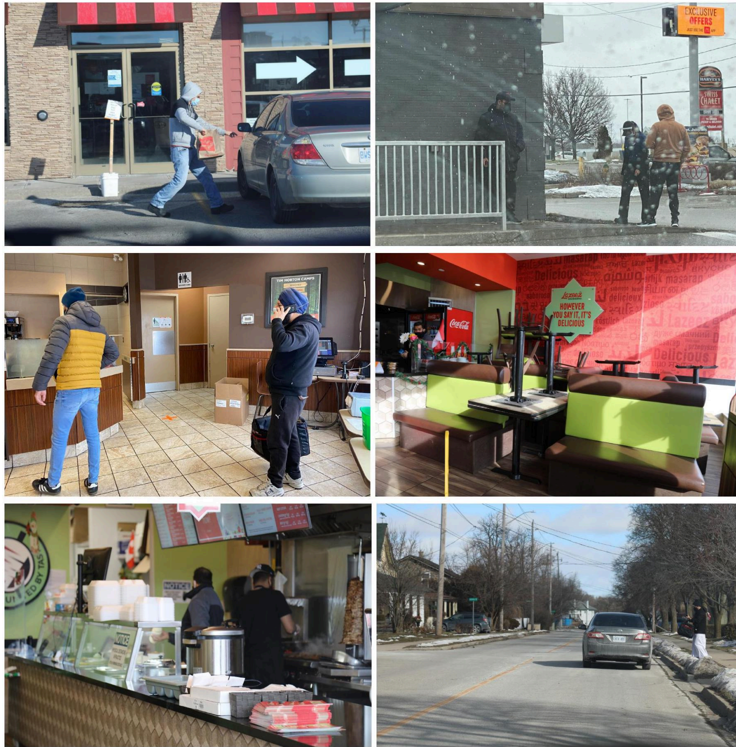

Figure 3: From left to right: Images of delivery drivers & food industry workers, by the author.

while the second image shows drivers waiting outside in the snow, also represented in their skin color as non-whites. The third image shows the drivers waiting inside the restaurant for delivery, which is not something every restaurant is offering during the pandemic. The drivers here has triple jeopardy due to their skin color (non-white), an expressive religious symbol (a turban associated with Sikhism), and language marginalization, as one of them was speaking a language other than English (or French). The next image shows the inside of a restaurant where the workers are waiting for the drivers to come in and pick up an order; the identities represented are marginal

by skin colour (non-white), and spoken language other than English (or French). The subsequent images explore the time and space of these essential workers, which reveal an overrepresentation of marginal bodies in the food delivery service. The last image shows both an ethnic and religious minority, traits that are considered marginalization through exclusions, going back to his car after completing a delivery. The observation reiterates the findings that immigrants, especially recent immigrants, work in the gig economy at a disproportionately higher rate than Canadian-born workers. Over one-third of all male gig workers are immigrants, (Jeon et al.) even though immigrants only make up about 24% of the Canadian labor force as a whole. Also, the income of a food delivery driver is far below the national average of $49,500 (Mojtehedzadeh), which means they are subject to income discrimination.

The analysis of the two images below in Figure 4, a seemingly ordinary discursive act, reveals another aspect of the marginal identities. The reading of the two images (the second one is zoomed from the first image) reveals the prevalent anxiety and unease in the margin that Wendy Chun calls a "normal paranoid response to and of power" (3), which often drives the margin to do things differently and forces them to provide explanations for things otherwise obvious, as a testament to their acknowledgement and conformity to the dominant discourse.

The images show that the Cambridge Muslim Society was praising the front-line heroes by rendering prayer for their safety and well-

Figure 4: Images of a banner of Cambridge Muslim Society, by the author.

being; however, the group finds it necessary to provide an explanation for the word Allah in the bracket (God), which is not only redundant but also obviously never thought of reciprocally (who provides an explanation for God in the bracket!). The violence brought about through the process of identification and exclusion renders the marginal body an extension to a dominant body, which also compels the margin to endorse such pronouncements. The need for this sort of conformity comes from the fear of backlash against marginal identities, which continuously puts the burden of proof on them; therefore, they learn to endorse cultural differences that are not too different or expressive. The fear of backlash comes as a reminder for the marginal groups every once in a while; for instance, when Alexandre Bissonnette went on a shooting spree killing six innocent people at the Quebec Islamic Cultural Centre on January 29, 2017 (Page), or the most recent terrorist attack, by the 20-year-old white male suspect Nathaniel Veltman perpetrated on a Muslim family due to their faith that took four innocent lives on June 6, 2021 (Bell et al.; Coletta).

By the same token, the need for the margin to accept the essentialized, stereotypical representation that the process of identification renders possible often leads them to endorse that identity. Because the marginal groups, knowingly and/or unknowingly, far too often conform to these stereotypes for their survival that the dominant narrative enforces through the process of Othering. The ways the marginal bodies themselves become wary of these discursive texts are visible in their desire to conform, in an attempt to become what the dominant narrative suggests (and wants) them to become: the exoticized, commodified, sexualized, eroticized "other" ready for consumption, ready to feed the normative body's primal desire to assert power and privilege (hooks 36).

So they conform to the discourse of being exotic, conform through discursive practices such as the one that reveals itself on the advertisement board of the plaza above (Figure 5). A visual analysis of the content shows that the plaza Heritage Square accommodates several businesses including a dental office, convenience store, physiotherapy office, laundromat, cremation service, salon, pizza shop, et cetera, most of which announce something they do: the nature of the busi-

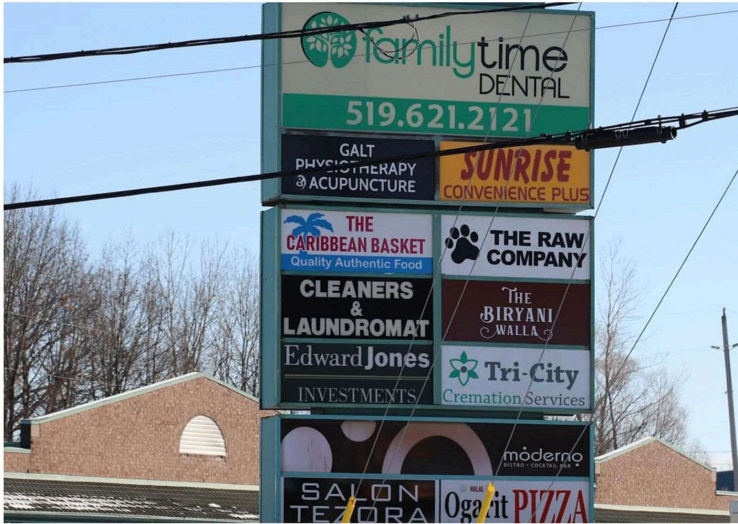

Figure 5: Image of an advertising board photographed by the author.

ness, or the product. The only exception to this is The Caribbean Basket that has offered something extra through the catchy tagline that reads "Quality Authentic Food," thus exoticizing the food, flavour, and identity therein. But what does authentic food really mean? Is the chef Caribbean, or is it the ingredients that are claimed to be authentic? Is it something brought from the Caribbean, or is it the process of making the food that makes it authentic? It becomes complicated following this line of argument, and this is not the proper place for that debate either; however, the pronouncement of such authenticity makes the Basket a desirable commodity/place for consumption. The question of authenticity mentioned here is in reference to how the margin is forced to conform, so as not to be perceived too differently. It is another way of endorsing the exotic (in a discourse of authenticity) for the purpose of consumption (eating the other) by the dominant culture, even though within the political discourse Canada is projected as a mosaic, where it is depicted as diverse and multicultural. Also, the issue of authenticity is crucial, as the margin, even a second or third generation of Canadian born

to immigrant parents and raised here since birth, often has to respond to their *authenticity* against a forced marginalization through the type of question: "but where are you really from?" The proposition which the margin often exploits in its favour. They are always the first to be blamed and avoided during the onslaught of global happenings like the COVID-19 pandemic and related health crises, as throughout history, people of Asian descent; marginalized groups including religious, ethnic, and racial minorities; and immigrants have been stigmatized and targeted through the process of othering, systematic racism, and xenophobia (Gover et al. 648-653, Dionne & Turkmen E213). Also, marginalized identities, immigrants, and low-income residents have been at a higher risk of contracting and dying from the disease: "Similar to the U.S. and U.K., urban regions in Canada with higher shares of Black residents have been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19" (Choi et al. 159), which reiterates the existing racial discrimination against marginal groups. However, these positions can flip, and a dominant position can become a subordinate one in a moment. For example, a restaurant, formerly a dominant space, has now become marginal because of the pandemic. A once-vibrant place, such as the mall, has now turned peripheral; a once-bustling place has now become vacant, extra, as the following images reveal.

Through a similar token, a truck driver occupying the road in a dominant position can become marginal once s/he changes position and becomes a biker. In the literal sense of the meaning, cycling on the edges inside the demarcated white line drawn by the power (authority), as seen in the image below where other mechanical vehicles now dominate the road.

CONCLUSION

The space of the margin is ambiguous and contains cultural hybrids where identities can often change their relative positions. However, marginal identities, in all the nuances of the term, get excluded from the professional sectors due to systemic discrimination and consigned to occupy precarious jobs, as well as to

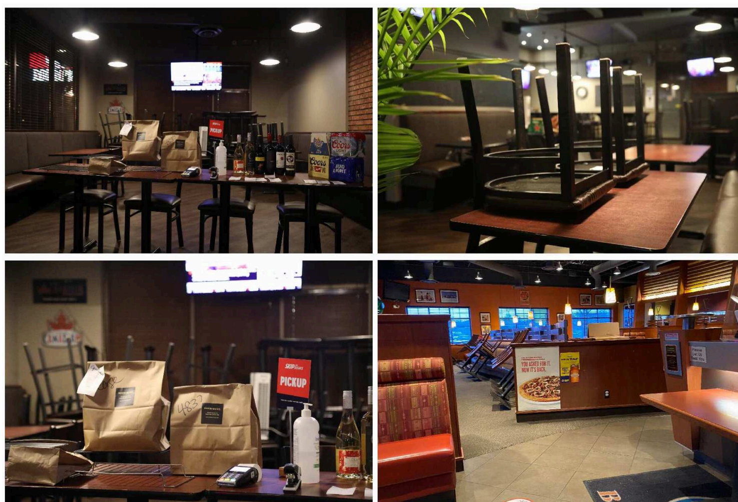

Figure 6: A once-vibrant and dominant place turns marginal during COVID.

Figure 7: Images of flipped positions, from a dominant to a marginal. Photos by the author.

informal sectors referred to as the gig economy—a position that can be confirmed through observation. Spaces of the margin are also prone to backlash, especially in vulnerable times where the burden lies with the margin to prove their innocence against any such misrepresentations, which ultimately pushes them toward conformity or assimilation. Therefore, the idea of Canadian society being a mosaic of different cultures is rendered problematic and dubious, as a dom-

inant discourse looms out of the spatial practices that unsettles that claim. This suspicion, occupying a spatiotemporal condition of always being reminded of the vulnerability of that claim, of living at the edges, often wary of being judged and gazed at from a position of hierarchy produces anxiety, and in worst case paranoia. These exclusions, the traits such as the pronouncement of the language, colour of skin, expressions of religious symbols, et cetera, all melt down to a body politic: a process of becoming. Thus, marginalization becomes a process of becoming that the grand narrative suggests, spatiotemporal isolation that appropriates and tolerates the margin within the schema only as long as it is within the cultural limits that are considered acceptable and does not challenge the discursive practices—anything beyond that is abnormal, considered too exotic for consumption.

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IMAGE NOTES:

Figure 1: *The Horse in Motion,* Muybridge. The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum. EXEBD 61975. Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Victorian Popular Culture.

Figure 2: All images taken by the author at different locations.

Figure 3: Images of the delivery drivers (faces unrecognizable) taken by the author at different locations.

Figure 4: Images taken by the author of a mosque and banner of Cambridge Muslim Society.

Figure 5: Image of an advertising board photographed by the author.

Figure 6: Images of a restaurant during the pandemic—a vibrant and dominant place now becomes marginal. Photos by the author.

Figure 7: Images of flipped positions, from a dominant to a marginal. Photos by the author.

NOTES

1. Lefebvre identified representational spaces as the ones that embody complex symbolisms, either coded or not, but linked to the underground side of social life, and art. The representations of space have to be lived first in order for someone to perceive the representational spaces, which are spaces imagined by writers, philosophers, and artists.↩

2. It might be necessary here to explain what the term "spatiotemporal" means; for example, Canada came into being in the year 1867, was not in existence before, and may not exist forever. The geographical boundaries of nation-states are also something not fixed; therefore, any mention of space is always in relation to time. For example, it would be impossible for two people to meet if only a temporal reference is provided (If one says, "I will meet you tomorrow at 11am," then the question would be, "but where?"). Similarly, if only spatial reference is given ("I will meet you at Eaton Centre," then the obvious question would be, "but when?"). Thus, it is always spatiotemporal, and therefore, the condition of the margin discussed in this paper is in relation to the discursive practices of the contemporary Canadian society, which is historically grounded in a colonial settler society.↩

DIGITAL RESISTANCE TO ASIAN-AMERICAN HATE DURING COVID-19: STUDY OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND ART ON INSTAGRAM

NANDITHA NARAYANAMOORTHY

In this research, I study the digital resistance to Asian-American hate, isolation, alienation, and 'othering' visibilized during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21 in the Global North. Specifically, I draw attention to the role of personal and artistic representations of Asian female bodies that perform both a resistance to hate, in the context of the pandemic, and an affirmation of ethnic and racial heritage and belonging of the self in North America. Through the engagement with #stopasianhate and #haterisavirus hashtags on Instagram, I uncover the rejection of historic and contemporary racial and gendered violence, harassment, xenophobia, and othering that emerges through visual activism and personal and artistic performativity online. I focus on the interplay be-

Dans cette recherche, j'étudie la résistance numérique à la haine, à l'isolement, à l'aliénation et à « l'altérité » des Asiatiques-Américains, visible pendant la pandémie de Covid-19 en 2020.21 dans le l'hémisphère nord. Plus précisément, j'attire l'attention sur le rôle des représentations personnelles et artistiques des corps féminins asiatiques qui constituent à la fois une résistance à la haine, dans le contexte de la pandémie, et une affirmation de l'héritage ethnique et racial et de l'appartenance de soi en Amérique du Nord. À travers l'engagement des hashtags #stopasianhate et #haterisavirus sur Instagram, je découvre le rejet de la violence raciale et sexiste qui est historiques et contemporaines, le harcèlement, la xénophobie et l'altérité qui émergent à travers l'activisme visuel et la performativité personnelle et artistique en ligne. Je me concentre sur l'interaction entre la poli-

tween body politics and anti-racist feminist digital activism in order to understand how performativity of the self through photography and art can empower Asian-American female bodies.

tique du corps et l'activisme numérique féministe antiraciste afin de comprendre comment la performativité du soi à travers la photographie et l'art peut renforcer le corps des femmes asiatiques-américaines.

INTRODUCTION

In this research, I study the digital resistance to Asian-American hate, isolation, alienation, and "othering" visibilized during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021 in the Global North. Specifically, I draw attention to the role of personal and artistic representations of Asian female bodies that perform both a resistance to hate, in the context of the pandemic, and an affirmation of ethnic and racial heritage and belonging of the self in North America. Through the engagement with #stopasianhate and #haterisavirus hashtags on Instagram, I uncover the rejection of historic and contemporary racial and gendered violence, harassment, xenophobia, and othering that emerges through visual activism and personal and artistic performativity online. I focus on the interplay between body politics and anti-racist feminist digital activism in order to understand how performativity of the self through photography and art can empower Asian-American female bodies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anti-Asian Hate during the Pandemic

The global spread of COVID-19 has exacerbated hate crimes and discriminatory acts against Asian-Americans who have been "burdened with mounting anxieties and heightened racial tensions, microaggressions, verbal attacks, physical violence and harassment" (Gover et al. 648). According to the Stop AAPI Hate campaign, more than 1700 anti-Asian hate crimes have been documented since the beginning of the pandemic (Jeung). Asian-Ameri-

cans have been perceived as dangerous (Gover et al. 648) owing to the racialized origins of the coronavirus in Wuhan, China, and the "COVID-19 crisis has been misappropriated to reinforce racial discrimination and anti-immigrant rhetoric" (Devakumar et al.1). Therefore, the spread of the virus occurs in tandem with "the spread of racism, and the fear and 'othering' of Asian bodies in the United States" (649), and perpetuates the characterization of Asians as "foreigners, stigmatized groups, and other minorities" (Li and Nicholson Jr. 5). The increase in the production of polarized echo chambers has further inflamed violent crimes based on "perceived race, colour, religion, nationality, country of origin, disability, gender or sexual orientation" (649). According to Angela Gover et al., the practice of othering and hate in the North is deeply imbricated with histories and hierarchies of colonial racism, racial superiority, and privilege, thereby emerging as a xenophobic response to the global pandemic (750). Although Asians have recently become targets in Anti-Chinese sentiment owing to false stereotypes, they have always been considered foreigners, and "perceived as unassimilable" in the North (Li and Nicholson Jr. 2-3). Yao Li & Harvey L. Nicholson also note the linkages between otherization and the historic exoticization of Asian groups in the west (3). Furthermore, scholars have contextualized Asian-American identity in relation to the dominant and hegemonic structures of white supremacy, "non-white" settler colonialism, and systems of capitalism (Brock; Nakamura).

Several incidents from "boycotting of Asian restaurants, bullying of Asian American children at school, to verbal and physical assaults of Asian-Americans in public spaces" have been documented during the pandemic (Gover et al. 748-749). Women and the elderly are most affected by this pervasive violence and the interlinkages between micro aggressions and macro structures of power produced by colonialism and white supremacy. The recent mass shooting of six Asian women in Atlanta by Robert Aaron Long, a 21-year-old white man, brought to the fore the risk of physical assault and battery that female Asian bodies carry. In this context, therefore, women have found a safe space on digital platforms to engage in discussions of racism, hate crimes, and gendered violence, and participate in a

process of sharing in order to subsequently de-"otherize" their own bodies, and legitimize their belonging and cultural heritage through digital photography and art. The body politics of Asian-American women, here, also underscores the intersectional connections between their racialized and gendered identities, and intersectionality becomes a "space for coalitional possibilities" for the reassertion of the self through digital representation (Collins and Bilge 133-134).

Visual Activism and Representation - Instagram as a space for Resistance

Visual media and visual practices, according to Olu Jenzen et al., "have become a vital part of political and protest communication, and gained importance in the study of social movements and digital activism" (419). Danielle Kilgo & Rachel Mourão contend that visuals carry powerful messages that we process faster than verbal and/or textual cues (581). According to Aidan McGarry et al., images leave a "trace of social identities, processes, practices, experiences, institutions, and relations" (22). In this context, visual activism is "aimed at catalysing the social, political and economic change" (Demos 87) through the repurposing of images, politicizing of resistance, and creation of new meaning making online (Jenzen et al. 419). Furthermore, visual protest culture fosters mobilization, communication, and participation among users, and engenders the creation of an affective network of "feelings of engagement, belonging and solidarity" (Papacharissi 4). The visual platform has continued to redefine the "production of protest imaginaries," (Jenzen et al. 416) as artists, creators, and designers find an avenue for personal and collective empowerment (Lotfalian 1377) through the medium of digital ecology. Emiliano Treré's term "media imaginaries" (108) illustrates how social media is visually represented by artists and employed by protesters to both "mobilize and communicate their ideas, identities and emotions across diverse social spaces" (Jenzen et al. 415). Instagram, in recent years, has become a "central presence in the media landscape," (Caldeira et al. 1073) and in the production of visual activism and other "aestheticized forms of political expressions," (Lotfalian 1371) shaping "visual contemporary culture, aesthetic values and photographic conventions" (Manovich 73). McGarry et al. define the aesthetic of visual protest culture as encompass-

ing "slogans, art, symbols, slang, humour, graffiti, gestures, bodies, colour, clothes, and objects" (18) that can be shared across diverse platforms such as Instagram. In this context, Treré argues that visual cultures produce "counter-hegemonic imaginaries pushed forward by social movements" for marginalized communities (110). The platform, therefore, creates the space for mobilization and resistance against exclusion, inequality, and injustice, and enables the representation and visibilization of subaltern minoritized communities in the digital public sphere (Fraser 67). Furthermore, Instagram has also been studied in relation to digital self-representation, particularly in the context of fame, visibility, gender, and selfies in popular culture (Caldeira et al. 1073). A global and vibrant culture of image production, "curation, archiving, organizing, and dissemination" including photographs, selfies, and art has become an important practice in visual activism (Senft and Baym 1588; Caldeira et al. 1077-78) and guides visual strategies of representation. Sharing self-portraits and photographs on Instagram empowers individuals to connect, form affective communities, create narratives, and share their personal stories. Similarly, the emergence of "art works, relational aesthetics, cultural ecology," (Silva 177) and artistic installations demonstrates a "low barrier to artistic expression and civic engagement" (Kang et al. 2) online. As Jian Kang argues, Instagram is now a powerful medium to "discover, promote and critique art, and enables the emergence of a highly interactive process" (2) in citizen participation. Activist art brings a feminist and decolonial perspective, and enables the coming together of social and political spheres in order to establish equality and justice for racialized bodies. However, as the raging pandemic creates more othering and inequalities through polarization, new forms of visual protest are emerging on digital platforms. At this juncture, this study aims to fill the gaps in scholarship by putting Asian feminism in conversation with empowerment through the female body politic and visual aesthetics on Instagram. I consider it important to contextualize anti-Asian xenophobic othering during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the historically situated racism towards Asian bodies in the Global North, and to examine

their conscious act of empowerment, resistance, defiance, and self-assertion on Instagram.

Visual Feminist Activism—Body Performativity

Rachel Kuo states that Asian communities have been historically "excluded from dominant discourses thereby preventing cross-community solidarity" (8). Therefore, digital participation and engagement of Asian bodies through hashtags on Instagram both discursively and visually produces mobilization and affective solidarities among Asian women. Basia Sliwinska expands on Judith Butler's performative aspect of female bodies that ensures empowerment through a collective struggle on social media platforms (3; Butler 4), and functions as both a personal and a political gesture to express belonging in the country. Asian women, particularly in the pandemic, have collectively mobilized and located their own bodies online in order to effectively resist racial hate. Sliwinska adds that the "assembly, embodiment and mobility of bodies in space becomes a vehicle for activism," (4) and that the spatiality of feminism works to bring their narratives to the forefront of their cause (7). In this context, body politics and performativity create spaces for feminist and racist emancipation through an active process of decoloniality of both gender and race (Makhubu 214). Therefore, the digital photographic and artistic reflection of the self against the "other," occurs through self-representation and performativity of female bodies against the "materiality of the patriarchal, racist, ethnocentric" reality of the pandemic (3-4; Grosz 15).

METHOD

In order to determine the common themes that emerge in the personal and artistic performance of belonging and rejection of racism for Asian women, I conducted this research using a visual qualitative analysis of Instagram posts collected on the anti-Asian violence movement. I engaged specifically with #stopasianhate and #hateisavirus hashtags on Instagram using a critical feminist framework and decolonial visual praxis. Out of 535,924, 51,671 and 13,063 posts yielded by #stopasianhate and #hateisavirus respectively on In-

stagram, I manually selected 80 images that depict the self-representation of Asian women, as well as artistic designs for the movement made for/by Asian women in the Global North. Since Instagram is a private platform, I conducted data extraction using data scraping techniques. To collect Instagram content on the #stopasianhate movement, I downloaded posts using the specific hashtags on the Instagram webpage using the Selenium Project (2019) and Beautiful Soup (Richardson) libraries in Python. Following this procedure, I manually screenshot Instagram posts to include the image. I collected the text and the date separately. All original posts are in English, and were collected in the timeline of seven months between April 1 and October 8, 2021. As personal stories are more likely to be shared on private or highly visual platforms such as Instagram, I selected uniquely relevant and personal posts in comparison to posts made by organizations. Here, to understand the relationship between Asian-American body politics and digital resistance, I examine various images that showcase the multiplicity of voices in Asian-American bodies. With respect to artistic representations of Asian-ness during the pandemic, I primarily investigate the work of multidisciplinary artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya (@alonglastname) with her permission.

Decolonial Visual Framework

I study the Instagram posts using decoloniality/a decolonial framework that is produced by structures and matrices of power following colonization and settler colonialism. Therefore, a decolonial framework helps uncover racialized and gendered bodies and knowledge of belonging that has been erased by the forces of modernity and colonialism. Thus, I employ the decolonial visual praxis as a means to rediscover, acknowledge, and validate Asian-American lives and recenter their lived experiences in the hierarchies of racial privilege in the Global North. In this context, the process of decolonization occurs through the engagement with anti-racist hashtags; through the sharing of personal stories bearing witness to their resilience; through self-representation of female Asian bodies on social media platforms to communicate their belonging; and through the depiction of art to visibilize the Asian-American experience in the North.

BODY POLITICS AND REPRESENTATION OF ASIAN WOMEN ON INSTAGRAM

The gendered and racialized body of the Asian-American is defined as the "other" and the minoritized outsider, and the history of racialization in the Global North otherizes them either through a process of exoticization, or through discrimination, hyper-surveillance, and violence enacted on their bodies. In this context, the female body functions as the "key site of feminist visual activism," (Baer 19) and performs a personal and political gesture of empowerment and resistance using a bodily form (Sliwinska 4). The process of appropriation, infiltration, and self-insertion of Asian-American women on Instagram "combats racial oppression," (Baer 19) produces dissent, and disrupts dominant infrastructures. Their bodies emerge as the site of resistance and are constantly being reshaped and repurposed to define their identities and assert their belonging in the North. The visuality of their bodies online creates a counter-hegemonic space against normative hierarchies and power structures where they can produce an agency over and alternate interpretations of their own stories and perform resistance. Their corporeal presence on Instagram and engagement with the #stopasianhate hashtags on digital spaces underpins a sort of precarity, vulnerability, and comfort for these women (Sliwinska 9). The material reconfiguration of public and digital spaces, in fact, allows them to recenter their personal stories through the practice of vulnerable sharing. In this case, photography becomes a powerful medium of creating and disseminating narratives of violent and xenophobic othering. Out of the 80 images collected, 34 are characterized as photographs, self-portraits, or photoshoots that depict the defiance of female Asian-American bodies and the desire to reclaim public and private spaces through their "Asian-ness." Here, I contend that digital resistance in photographic and personal representation emerges on Instagram in the following ways:

1) Resistance against Asian-American hate founded on historical otherness,

2) Opposition to forced stereotypes of "Chinese-ness" thrust on all Asian-Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic,

3) Navigation of personal identity and voice as an ethnic Asian, and

4) Intergenerational memories of racism and unbelonging

For instance, an Instagram user states:

> "Growing up, I've always told myself to be quiet when people make **racist** jokes to me. I've always told myself to ignore those who only see me as being able to say they've 'been with an **exotic** woman.' To this day I struggle to speak up for myself when people say **negative** comments. This photo is one part of my final project for my studio class this past spring. I wanted to provide a visual for how I've truly felt and how much I've grown even just through the pandemic. I've officially lost count of how many times I've been told to go back to my country, or how many times people have blamed me for the pandemic. The COVID virus is not the 'Chinese virus,' and no, I'm not Chinese. Although I always want to be quiet, because peoples ignorant comments reflect more on them than on me, I'm starting to slowly come out of that. I need to speak up for myself. They believed what they were saying, but it hurt. It still hurts. But I'm thriving, and I'm growing. **Silence** truly does kill."

Through visual representation of the self, the above user engages in decrying racism against Asian-Americans, the violent exoticization, and the negative remarks and assumptions of being "Chinese" directed at her during the pandemic. According to her, she carries the negativity and otherization in silence. However, she breaks through her silence, and, through the sharing of her personal stories of alienation, struggle, and isolation, she creates a space for personal as well as collective emancipation for Asian-Americans. Simultaneously, her body becomes the battlefield where Asian-American resistance is performed. In order to challenge hate against her community, she etches the letters "S" and "H" that denote "Stop Hate" throughout her body for a visual and performative display of the everyday struggles and violence her community faces. Therefore, digital feminine em-

Figure 1: Image posted by @megan.keun

bodiment constructs the ability to negotiate agency and visibility for both the personal and the collective, as well as performativity in opposition to online and offline oppressive structures (Gajjala; Bhatia). In addition to the resistance, she displays immense vulnerability and precarity in her post that emerges in her desire to speak for herself, and in her admission of shame and hurt caused by otherization in

Figure 2: Image by @joeyunlee

her country. Similarly, the post below also stands for the collective Asian-American resistance against the dominant structures of whiteness.

The user asserts,

> "Asian Americans throughout the nation have been facing hate, and harassment from many people. We stand with our Asian counterparts and want to #stopasianhate. Please look into how you can help stop Asian hate in your communities."

Again, the participant engages with the #stopasianhate hashtag to declare solidarity with the movement. Despite the positivity and

collectivity that is established in the posts, the performativity of their Asian-American identity in the image lays bare the fragmentation and disruption in the face of everyday assault and harassment against members of the community. The presence of various skin tones and colours on the user's face is a testament to their inability to exist simply as an Asian-American, and their desire and/or pressure to constantly fit in the mould of whiteness. This portrait of self-representation allows the user to navigate and wade through the various identities that Asian-Americans must construct for themselves in order to eventually validate and acknowledge their voice in society. Furthermore, through the visual imagery, the creator establishes the struggles behind otherization of Asian- American bodies: a feeling of never being "at home" in the Global North; of always being broken and fragmented; of being forced to carry multiple sides in their hyphenated Asian-American identity; and the constant disconnect that Asian bodies are being subjected to in the country. Similarly, another user (below) shares her personal story, and speaks to how she gravitated towards whiteness while constantly being exoticized by non-Asians. This fragmentation of identity along with the discomfort produced in a non-white body is an inherent and direct manifestation of hierarchies and privileges attached to whiteness. She says,

> "I feel quite vulnerable posting this, but I'm more than willing to join the voices that demand equality ?
> I grew up in a diverse, but predominately white neighbourhood. I am Filipino and Japanese and thankfully never received blatant racism in my face as a child. But I always knew I was **different** and sadly often wished I was **white**. Going into my teenage years, I was seen as unique and sometimes even exotic... but I didn't feel that way. I felt **disconnected** on all fronts and wasn't '**enough**' Japanese, Filipino, or American. I never knew anyone who could directly relate to me and as an only child I was alone. I grew up completely aware of the fact that Asians have historically been **discriminated** against and stereotyped. Yes, I do still get spoken to in Chinese or Korean by non-Asians assuming we're all the same. It will continue to be a lifelong process of embracing my culture, but I'm 100%

Figure 3: Image posted by @alicynreikoart

> committed to it! I love how rich my background is and the food is GREAT!"

In her narrative, despite an active lack of otherization, she states that she knew she was always different. The production of dislocation and non-belonging, therefore, are a result of whiteness around her.

Furthermore, much like the above post, she struggles with the navigation of multiple identities, and finds it difficult to embrace the Filipino and Japanese cultures she was born into as her own. This post, in its vulnerability, performs her eventual acceptance of her own culture and assertion of her belonging in the Global North through fashion. Another point to note is her contention that Asian-Americans are viewed as a single entity in the west. Otherization here exists in binaries of white versus non-white where the non-white is simply labelled "Chinese or Korean," as the post states. The user rejects an essentialist categorization of Asian identity that is detrimental to the process of personal identity building as part of a multicultural family. Her argument is that Asians come in many forms, and carry a multitude of diverse identities, particularly as part of the Asian diaspora in the west. Ironically, for the Asian-American community, collective solidarity is rooted in the binaries of essentialist categorization that is necessary in the building of a coalitional movement of resistance against hate. Here, the essentialist "Asian" identity created through the process of otherness is usurped by the community as a collective political identity and statement. Asian-Americans come into this identity through an act of subversion that occurs through, in this case, engagement with the hashtags and the visual aesthetics of protest.

Finally, self-representation through photography emerges also in intergenerational memory and identity for the Asian diaspora in the west. The user below expresses her nostalgia, and relates her intergenerational memory, invoking multiple generations of her family in Taiwan.

> "It's just really nostalgic, since it's picturing multiple generations of my family from when I was young. I saw it sitting in my aunt's house last month on the day of my grandmother's funeral, so it just seemed like … a fitting one. I read Joy Luck Club when I was very young—actually randomly picked up a second-hand copy in Taiwan when I was like 12. The stories of the mothers and the daughters aren't very similar to my family, but the idea of having to listen to your family while also staying true to yourself resonated with me."

Figure 4: Image posted by @henrikmeng

In this image, the production and the assertion of the self occurs through familial attachments and the memory of belonging in her native land that the user carries with her at all times. Her ties to her mother, grandmother, and other members of the family, as well as her memory of important events such as funerals and weddings create familiar threads of personal identity. The image above displays an al-

most ethereal diasporic and corporeal tether to her identity through an act of "remembering," and her memory helps her embrace herself completely.

ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION OF ASIAN WOMEN ON INSTAGRAM

The philosophy of both street and digital art encompasses a "strong sense of activism" (Alpaslan 53), and through its visual aesthetics performs an anti-authoritarian and anti-oppressive function (Taş and Taş 326). As Oĝuzhan and Tuĝba Taş argue, street art in its various hybrid forms is a form of political statement with the potential to reclaim public spaces, forge new spaces, and negotiate visibility through dissemination (328-329). The aesthetic imaginaries enable the production of "a counter-spatial intervention in the dominant public sphere" (328) that brings necessary self-affirmation, healing, reparations, and acknowledgement of the historic trauma for the members of the community. In the context of Asian-American hate and violence, digital artistic representations employ visual performance art and public installations that also find an avenue on digital platforms such as Instagram. Here, protest and resistance against hate occur through the public presence of Asian-American figures on the street, or as part of magazines and other popular media that subsequently ensure representation for the Asian-American community and instill a feeling of belonging in the dominant public sphere. In order to study artistic resistance in the #stopasianhate movement on Instagram, I examine the work of multidisciplinary artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya (@alonglastname). Amanda, born to Thai and Indonesian immigrants, is a multidisciplinary artist based in Brooklyn, New York City. She primarily employs a feminist and decolonial framework in her art, and works to reclaim community spaces through her construction of art and art installations in museums, subways, highway tunnels, buildings as well as street graffiti around the city. Her art has also been featured on prominent magazines including the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine.

Figure 5: Instagram Images: Courtesy of Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya (@alonglastname)

The above image showcases various installations across the city as well as a magazine cover that prominently features Asian-Americans as well as Pacific Highlanders through art. For one of the city's many installations, represented by the first image above, Amanda writes:

> "These guardians are at Water x Maiden **proudly declaring our belonging in Tagalog, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean and Japanese**, according to the stats we saw, the groups most impacted by anti-Asian bias incidents, though everything is underreported. Help me tell folks they are there ☺Thanks @nycimmigrants for helping with the translations.

> This installation was created in partnership with @nyc-chr @nyculture. Grateful to partner with @nyc_dot and @nyc_dotart on this vibrant rebuke of the violence and harassment against our communities that has too often happened on public transit."

Amanda's art captures the resistance to physical violence, harassment, and assault directed towards the Asian-American community in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the representations of multiple Asian women in her installations, she invokes the ancestors from "Tagalog, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese" backgrounds to "proudly declare Asian belonging in the city," and bring awareness to the racial and gendered otherization of Asian women's bodies. As the NYC public transit saw a number of reported incidents of hate and harassment against members of the Asian community, Amanda's creation serves as both an homage to Asians in the city, and a platform to generate visibility for Asian bodies at the site of hate and harassment. She has also created several murals across the city, shown in the images on the right in the above post, that serve not merely as an active form of resistance but also as a "reminder of strength, resilience and hope," for the community. Therefore, her artistic creations are imaginaries of resistance, love, hope, healing, reparation, belonging, and courage that emerge through visual and textual activism online. As she poignantly states in another post: "It was a process **of collective healing, a ritual to hold space for our self-care and catharsis**, and a **celebration of our courage**. It was also a collaboration at a time when it was difficult to connect and be with our friends and loved ones in-person."

Amanda questions what it means to be Asian through an artistic performance of protest, and engages with #stopasianhate and #hateisavirus to bring attention to the struggles of otherization in her community. In this context, her art becomes a "ritualistic space for self-care and catharsis"; a space that implies ancestral protection; a place to heal as a community from personal grief and collective trauma derived from historical and violent oppression. She brings her artistic creations to life in order to connect with others who identify

as Asian-Americans while providing a space for community building. Her art performs a reclamation of public space, and begins the arduous process of recentering the Asian-American narratives. Furthermore, she locates a deep personal vulnerability and trust in her artistic performance. Using her Instagram posts, she shares her personal stories of growing up in the Global North, and being "burdened with childhood scars" caused by dislocation and a sense of unbelonging. She says:

> "I am the proud daughter of Thai and Indonesian immigrants, and a proud Asian-American. Every year when Moon Festival rolls around, or as I call it, mid-Autumn Festival, I experience the same giddy excitement as I did when I was 5. This is a time where we get to gather with loved ones, gaze contemplatively at the moon, give gifts, release our hopes and burdens with lanterns, eat all kinds of delicious food and stuff ourselves silly with mooncakes. One year in elementary school. I brought moon cakes to school to share with my classmates. I was so excited for them to embrace the sweet and salty goodness of these treats! It didn't quite go as planned. Watching them try a bite and then spit it out in disgust was like a stab in my little heart. I remember thinking, it's fine if you don't like it. More for me. But I also stopped bringing any Asian food for lunch for a while and begged my mom to let me eat McDonald's so that I could be more like the other kids. It's a curious thing how these childhood scars run deep and how these experiences often grow up with us and turn into micro aggressions in the workplace or more explicitly anti-Asian bias incidents or outright hate. Despite this, I'm hopeful for change."https://www.instagram.com/nycimmigrants/

In the above post, Amanda employs her art as a tool for sharing her story that speaks to the production of guilt and shame in relation to her non-whiteness, and of the countless micro-aggressions she and others like her have faced. Therefore, her artistic imaginaries become an intentional form of visual, personal, and collective protest that brings awareness to anti-Asian bias, and everyday micro-aggressions against the community.

DECOLONIZING THROUGH VISUAL ACTIVISM

The Asian-American experience in the Global North has been historically shaped by the matrices of colonial power that have perpetually otherized, exoticized, and racialized predominantly non-white and feminine bodies. The history of Asian-Americans in North America abounds with exclusion, exploitation, and misrepresentation, and has set a precedent for distrust of Asians that the COVID-19 pandemic has both visibilized and exacerbated. The colonial narrative of whiteness that defines East, Southeast, and South Asians as "perpetual foreigners" who are inferior owing to the difference in their ethnic and cultural identity plays an important role in the production of guilt, shame, and identity confusion for Asian-Americans. Therefore, visual activism through #stopasianhate and #hateisavirus in the context of the pandemic, as well as the use of Asian-American women's personal and artistic imaginaries on Instagram, is a veritable act of decolonization that emerges in the digital resistance of hate. In this context, digital decolonization also occurs through the acknowledgement and visibilization of the histories of oppression for Asian-American people, through the creation of affective networks and community building, and through the construction of decentralized counterpublics of collective resistance, survival, care, healing, and resurgence through activism. Visual protest, in this sense, creates a space for rewriting colonial history with collective histories and genealogies of vulnerable and oppressed communities and forges the means to dismantle and recenter the foundations of colonial knowledge through the use of hashtags. A decolonial praxis in the form of anti-racist hashtags here illuminates the previously invisible narratives of the Asian-American community, and amplifies the voice of the racialized and gendered subject. As the visual and textual discourse above demonstrates, users employ the #stopasianhate hashtag on Instagram in an attempt to connect with their culture, their ancestors, their language and food. Through this process, they both reassert their belonging in the North as well as embrace their own identity as an "Asian." Thus, decolonial strategies on social media enable the forging of their new identities and resistance of hate through decolonization.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I contextualized digital hate of Asian-Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the historic otherization of Asian communities in the Global North. I argued that the digital resistance to hate emerges through visual protest and the use of anti-racist hashtags on social media platforms such as Instagram. Through photographic representation of and artistic intervention by female Asian bodies, the embodiment of feminist visual activism on Instagram bears witness to the historic oppression of Asian-American communities, enables the insertion of Asian bodies, the assertion of belonging, and constructs networks of intergenerational memory and culture and affective communities that build resilience, hope, healing, and reparations for the Asian American community in the future.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Instagram image posted by Megan Keun (@megan.keun).

Figure 2: Instagram image posted by Joseph Lee (@joeyunlee).

Figure 3: Instagram image posted by Alicyn Reiko (@alicynreikoart).

Figure 4: Instagram image posted by Henrik Meng (@henrikmeng).

Figure 5: Instagram image posted Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya (@alonglastname). Photo credit: @alonglastname.

'INFIDELS' ON THE INTERNET: PAKISTAN'S SOCIAL MEDIA 'CANCEL CULTURE' DURING THE PANDEMIC

SADIA UDDIN

This paper explores how the pandemic intersects with religious nationalism in Pakistan and isolates vulnerable groups through the use of its colonial-era Blasphemy Laws. Using the August 2020 case of a music video shoot inside a mosque, the paper emphasizes the role of social media 'cancel culture' in mobilizing these laws to persecute 'wrongdoers' in the name of 'Islam'. The paper confronts power relations and creates new knowledge to challenge prevailing hegemonic structures by exploring the selective applicability of cancel culture and the Blasphemy Laws.

Cet article explore la façon dont la pandémie s'entrecroise avec le nationalisme religieux au Pakistan et isole les groupes vulnérables en utilisant les lois sur le blasphème de l'époque coloniale. En s'appuyant sur le cas du tournage d'un clip vidéo à l'intérieur d'une mosquée en août 2020, l'article souligne le rôle de la « cancel culture » des réseaux sociaux dans la mobilisation de ces lois pour persécuter les « malfaiteurs » au nom de « l'Islam ». L'article confronte les relations de pouvoir et crée de nouvelles connaissances pour remettre en question les structures hégémoniques dominantes en explorant l'applicabilité sélective de la cancel culture et des lois sur le blasphème.

INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok have served as an outlet for users to express and entertain themselves and to gather and disseminate information and knowledge. With an increased usage of social media platforms,

it can be observed that some governments of postcolonial states in the Global South are actively policing these online spaces using laws that are rooted in their colonial past. Pakistan is one such example where the state actively seeks to enforce ideological conformity in its online spaces to align users with its religious nationalist identity and to maintain a hegemonic order. Online moral regulation has become more apparent during the recent COVID-19 global pandemic, and the impact of colonial laws in shaping social, political, and cultural production can be clearly observed.

This paper will explore the August 2020 case of social media "cancel culture" involving Pakistan's media artists Bilal Saeed and Saba Qamar who faced backlash for shooting a music video inside a mosque. Their artistic expression, which allegedly included the playing of music inside a mosque, was perceived as a desecration of an Islamic place of worship and was therefore deemed religiously and culturally unacceptable. The case problematizes the use of Pakistan's colonial-era Blasphemy Laws of 1860 in regulating artistic expressions that allegedly challenge Pakistan's religious identity. In March 2020 when the pandemic resulted in lockdowns that forced people to stay home, the usage of social media increased in Pakistan. As more people shifted to online spaces to express themselves, the state of Pakistan became more active in monitoring social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. The Blasphemy Laws were thus used to regulate and punish any individual who shared content on social media that was considered to be digressing from Pakistan's religious nationalist identity.

The case of Bilal Saeed and Saba Qamar's music video shoot in Wazir Khan Mosque will be used as a focal point to analyze the usage of social media in inciting religious fanaticism and mobilizing the law to persecute individuals with allegedly questionable religiosity. Using discourse analysis, quantitative research methods, and qualitative examination, this paper will draw upon promotional visuals including photo images and videos shared mainly on the Instagram accounts of both celebrities. This will offer insight into how Pakistani social media users, as "cultural consumers," engaged with and responded to the visual content and documented their reactions through on-

line comments. Using qualitative examination, particular attention will be drawn to the hateful, misogynistic, and abusive comments alleging that the video shot inside a mosque defiled a religious space and was therefore anti-Islamic. This ultimately prompted an apology from both Saeed and Qamar. Furthermore, a critical feminist approach will be used to underscore how "cancel culture" disproportionately impacts women in Pakistan. Those opposing the video continuously called upon the State of Pakistan to persecute the duo for blaspheming against Islam under the contentious colonial era Blasphemy Laws of Pakistan. However, this paper will also examine another case from August 2020 that involved a seminary teacher molesting a student inside a mosque to illustrate the vastly differing legal outcomes of the two cases. The paper will also highlight the disproportionate social media attention the molestation case received in comparison. This will highlight the selective applicability of the Blasphemy Laws, which have increasingly been used to curtail the freedom of expression of anyone who appears to be digressing from Islam and Islamic values.

INTERNET ACCESSIBILITY AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE IN PAKISTAN

Internet accessibility in Pakistan and the overall usage of social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter has increased over the course of the COVID-19 global pandemic. While these statistics seem to indicate social and technological advancement, a closer exploration is useful in discerning how social media users, and by extension, the "consumers" of social media visual culture changed during the pandemic. It is worth noting that in January 2020, the population of Pakistan was estimated to be approximately 218.7 million people (Kemp). The population had increased by an estimated 4.3 million people or roughly 2 percent, since January 2019. In 2020, 76.38 million Pakistanis were classified as Internet users while 37 million individuals were also classified as active social media users. Additionally, 164.9 million Pakistanis were known to have access to mobile devices, which is roughly 75 percent of the total population. The number of Internet users in 2020 had increased by 11 million, or

17 percent, when compared to the previous year. Since 2019, the number of social media users also increased by 2.4 million people, which demonstrates a surge of approximately seven per cent by 2020. Furthermore, platform-specific data reveals that the monthly traffic of Instagram users was approximately 3,543,000 in January 2020 (Kemp). By March 2020, when lockdowns were implemented, the number of Instagram users nearly doubled to 6,786,000 users ("Instagram Users", March 2020). These statistics reflect the upward trend in internet accessibility and social media usage over the course of a year, but also indicate that social media presence increased during the pandemic. Yet, having access to the internet and social media platforms has not necessarily translated into progressive social change given that Pakistani society is still dictated by some archaic policies that severely limit the space for creative expression. Furthermore, the strong national tendency to religiously and morally police celebrities, and particularly women, has increased through social media platforms and has created a hostile online environment for some users.

ONLINE ACTIVITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

When examining the impact of social media usage in Pakistan, it is imperative to distinguish between cultural consumption and the "cultural consumer" in order to explore their interrelated relationship. Anneke Meyer describes cultural consumers as "those who consume cultural texts or engage in cultural practices involving consumption." Over time, the mediums for engaging with culture have evolved, and technological advancements have contributed to the development and dissemination of new media as well as information and communication technologies (ICTs) (68). Thus, cultural consumption by cultural consumers has also increased with the prominence of social media applications like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok, et cetera.

Steve Katz observes that prior to 2020, the world was not accustomed to worrying about contemporary global pandemics. However, once lockdowns forced everyone indoors beginning in March 2020, there

was a significant increase in social media usage. These two factors can simultaneously be used to explain the rise of "cancel culture," and the subsequent takedown of popular personalities and iconic brands, et cetera. (34). Penny Andrews similarly notes that global lockdowns forced people into spending time in their "bubbles" at home, which resulted in anger or a general sense of frustration (905). However, the lockdowns merely contributed to intensifying already polarized conditions in online spaces of politics and activism (902). This anger and resentment demanded an outlet so that people could vent their frustrations somewhere. Subsequently, online social media applications provided the ideal platform for some Pakistanis to channel their anger and frustration during the pandemic.

LOCATING PAKISTAN'S BLASPHEMY LAWS IN ITS COLONIAL PAST

The present-day state of Pakistan was formerly a part of the Indian subcontinent, which was colonized by the British Empire until 1947. In 1947, the event known as the Partition created the two independent states of India and Pakistan, with Pakistan identifying itself as an Islamic homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent. Although Pakistan emerged as an independent postcolonial state, it retained the British Indian Penal Code as a part of its own legal system. Under the newly renamed Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), many of the contentious colonial laws, including the Blasphemy Laws, were subsumed into Pakistan's mode of governance. Over the course of time, several political shifts closely aligned Pakistan with the religious right, and Pakistan's state institutions began to project a more prominent "Islamic" identity. As a result, the colonial-era Blasphemy Laws, which were previously nondenominational, were now used to govern and regulate society in order to uphold the respect and sanctity of Islam—the official religion of the state.

"Faith, Unity, Discipline" is the national motto of Pakistan and provides a litmus test for determining a sense of patriotism that is deeply linked to religious nationalism. For one to remain loyal to Pakistan and maintain a sense of nationhood, they must adhere to this motto

as a guiding principle. Identifying markers such as "Pakistani" and "Muslim" are often used interchangeably, despite Pakistan's population not being religiously homogenous. Any transgression that offends nationalist or religious (i.e., Muslim) sentiments is considered morally unacceptable and is often accompanied by consequences. In the age of social media where communication is expeditious, these consequences may be felt instantly and impactfully through what has popularly come to be described as "cancel culture."

WHAT DRIVES "CANCEL CULTURE"?

Rob Henderson describes "cancel culture" as an attempt to end the career or negatively impact the prominence of any individual who is deemed as having engaged in immoral behaviour (37). Thomas S. Mueller further describes it as the "withdrawal of support" from any individuals whose actions "related to social media, viewership, or the purchase of products or services" are considered unacceptable. The prevalence of cancel culture on social media has "opened up a portal where individuals become the collective and can act as judge, jury, and executioner of others" (1). Thus, the act of "cancelling" serves as an accountability measure through which people demand an apology from those who have transgressed or taken part in unacceptable behaviour. At times, appropriate action is also sought from those who might be placed in higher positions of power over the individual who has committed the unacceptable act (e.g., an employer, manager, religious leader, etc.).

Cancel culture has gained a lot of traction in the recent past, which makes it worth interrogating why participating in it becomes so appealing. Cancel culture provides an almost immediate boost to one's own social ranking at the expense of others. If one is seeking validation through social media platforms with a significant online presence, it may be more impactful to broadcast and amplify the actions of others (Henderson 36). Pulling someone else down may also boost one's own online image and following. As this paper will further highlight, Bilal Saeed and Saba Qamar, the celebrities involved in the alleged blasphemy case, were easy targets because they already had a

social rank due to their established social media presence with a sizeable following. Thus, their social rank had the potential to be easily impacted.

Pakistani society largely adheres to a collective sense of religious nationalism, and online cancel culture has provided a venue for forming community along similar lines. When social media users unite to single out and target anyone who has allegedly committed a "moral infraction," they are mobilizing around shared or common values, which also strengthens their loyalty to one another (Henderson 38). In the case study that follows, loyalty was shown towards Pakistan's "Islamic" identity through the blatant use of death threats, profanity, cyberbullying, misogyny, and abuse, despite this being an obvious transgression against Islamic values, which promote kindness, forgiveness, and most importantly, respect towards women. However, Henderson suggests that "pointing out the flaws of an individual or of society demonstrates one's moral credentials" (37). An individual may also desire to highlight themselves as a better person; therefore, they may exhibit a strong urge to isolate and condemn the "wrongdoer" (36). These features of cancel culture can be better illuminated through the online case of alleged blasphemy in Pakistan.

THE MUSIC VIDEO AND THE MOSQUE

In late July of 2020, a duo of Pakistani artists including a singer named Bilal Saeed and an actor named Saba Qamar, were working on a video shoot for Saeed's upcoming music video titled *Qubool*, which was scheduled to release on 11 August. The venue chosen for this shoot was the historical and widely popular Wazir Khan Mosque located in the Walled City of Lahore in Pakistan's Punjab province. *Qubool*, which literally means "to accept" in Urdu, was intended to portray a couple's Islamic marriage ceremony, or the *nikkah*. Saeed and Qamar were depicted as a newlywed couple, and the pair dramatized a scene in which Saeed clasped his bride's hand while she twirled around him.

The pair took to social media and shared photo stills from their video shoot to promote the upcoming project. Bilal Saeed was the first to

share a black and white image on his Instagram on 31 July with the caption "*Qubool Hai"* (I accept). This post, which shows an image of Saeed and Saba Qamar in the backdrop of the Wazir Khan Mosque, generated 111,000 views and 1171 comments on Instagram (Saeed, "Qubool Hai"). As Eve Ng indicates, comment threads serve as a "location for qualitative examination through which user engagement can be analyzed" (624). Initially, there was confusion surrounding the image, and the post received mixed comments ranging from speculations about Saeed's second marriage, as he was already known to be married. The majority of users, however, had caught on that the image was promotional and criticized Saeed for defiling a religious space. As the varying reactions to this post indicate, cultural consumers are not homogenous, and thus a unified message or response is never apparent (Meyer 68). It is also expected that factors such as political orientation or who the target audience is will determine how online media is interpreted, and what type of attention it will receive (72). In this case, the positive comments were shared by Saeed and Qamar's fans, who genuinely appreciated the artists and were looking forward to their forthcoming project, while the negative comments were shared by those with religious nationalist leanings.

On 1 August, Saeed shared a colour image of the pair on Instagram with the caption "Eid Mubarak from us to you all" and tagged Saba Qamar as well as the photographer and designer of his outfit (Saeed, "Eid Mubarak"). The post was viewed 121,000 times, and while the 1029 comments mostly speculated Saeed and Qamar's relationship, they also contained abusive language towards the pair. One comment in particular was optimistic about both of them receiving a just punishment in the near future for violating religious boundaries. A loose translation of that user's comment in Urdu states, "God willing, you will be rightfully punished for your actions very soon" ("Eid Mubarak").

A day later, Saeed shared another colour image with a banner detailing the name of the forthcoming music track (Saeed, "One Two Records Presents"). By this time, the online sentiment towards Saeed and Qamar had taken a turn for the worse, and an angry cyber-mob

Figure 1: Instagram image posted by Bilal Saeed (@bilalsaeed_music). Photo credit: @clickbysawaiz

was now readily abusing the duo and shunning them for disrespecting Islam through the defilement of a mosque. Although the Instagram post generated 86 700 views and around 751 comments, most of them were charged with abusive and profane language ("One Two Records Presents"). One Instagram user openly questioned whether

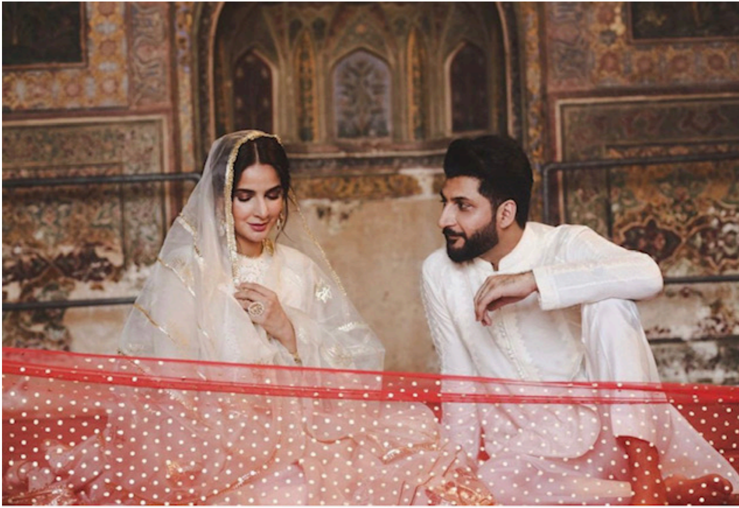

Figure 2: Instagram image posted by Bilal Saeed (@bilalsaeed_music). Photo credit: @clickbysawaiz

Saeed and Qamar were even Muslim. Ironically, while some comments were hurling abuse at the artists, they were simultaneously trying to exude their own sense of piety and respect towards Islam and Pakistan. To share an example, a user named Hamza suggests that the duo's unacceptable act is a way to increase their followership amongst Indians, "Increasing Indian followers RIP [Rest in Peace]" . Another user named Suhail taunts the artists by commenting, "Now Govt [government] and People of Pakistan doing prank on u.." ("One Two Records Presents"). This user was referring to the online cancel culture that had begun mobilizing against the pair in addition to the government's efforts to punish the duo and their team for committing blasphemy.

Despite the growing outrage concerning the images shared on Instagram, Saeed and Qamar posted video stills from their behind-the-scenes (BTS) shoot through Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to build anticipation prior to the official launch of the *Qubool* video.

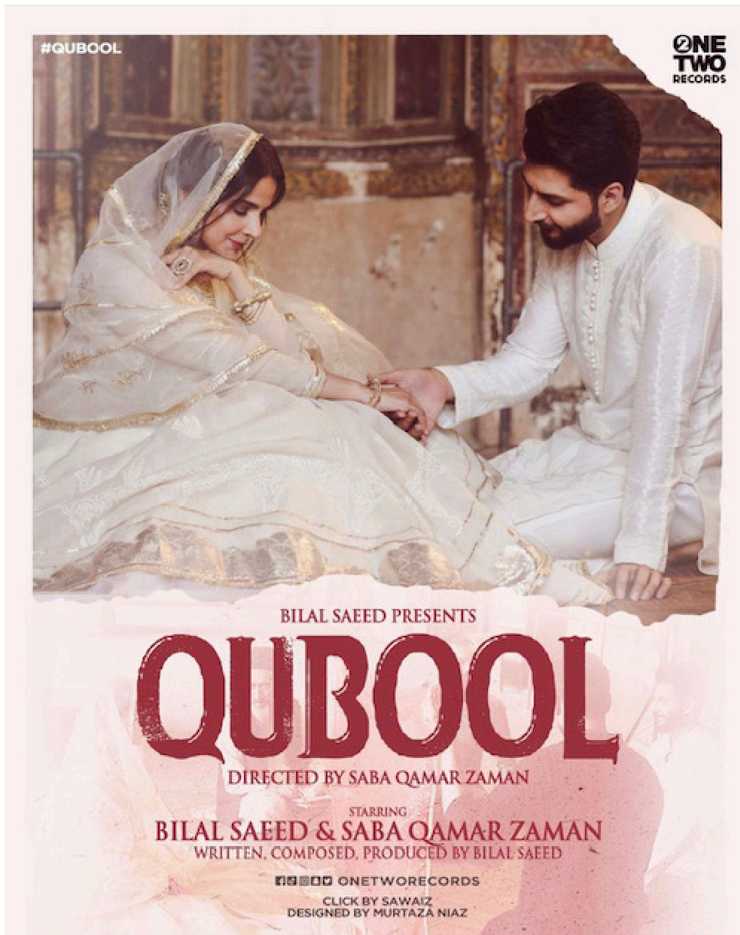

Figure 3: Instagram image posted by Bilal Saeed (@bilalsaeed_music). Photo credit: @clickbysawaiz

However, the video segments went viral and generated severe backlash. Now even more Pakistani social media users identified the setting as Wazir Khan Mosque. Subsequently, Saeed, Qamar, and the entire production team were aggressively targeted for desecrating an Islamic religious space by playing music inside the boundaries of the

mosque. With nearly 9,315,000 users on Instagram in August 2020, Pakistani consumers of online visual culture quickly exhibited their anger through "cancel culture" and predominantly used Instagram and Twitter to demand blasphemy charges against the pair. Interestingly, the majority of these Instagram users were men and made up 65.7 percent of the total number of Instagram users ("Instagram Users," August 2020). At the same time, it was noted that Saba Qamar's name had become a top trend on Twitter, and demands for her to be charged for blasphemy continued to grow ("Historic Mosque's Manager"). What remains interesting about this Twitter trend is that between Saeed and Qamar, it was Saba Qamar who was being pinpointed as an alleged blasphemer. These actions demonstrate targeted cyberbullying and abuse against a woman, which was noticeably driven by misogyny.

A SERIES OF APOLOGIES

Within days, Qamar used Twitter and Instagram to issue an apology, while Saeed recorded a video apology on behalf of himself, Qamar, and the entire video production crew, which was then shared on all social media platforms associated with the celebrity. It is worth noting that both Saba Qamar and Bilal Saeed shared relatively similar posts on 8 August 2020 just three days prior to the official release of the music video. The statement posted by Saba Qamar read:

> "Presenting the first teaser of 'Qubool'. This is the only sequence that was shot at the historical Wazir Khan Mosque. It's a prologue to the music video featuring a Nikah scene. It was neither shot with any sort of playback music nor has it been edited to the music track. I won't explain any further as the full video comes out on 11th of August. The BTS video that's making rounds on social media was just a circular movement to click stills for the poster of 'Qubool' depicting a happily married couple right after their Nikah. Hurting or offending anyone or being disrespectful to a holy place is as unimaginable and unacceptable for me as for any decent human being. Despite this

> if we have unknowingly hurt anyone's sentiments we apologise to you all with all our heart. Love & Peace! #Qubool releasing on 11th of August" (Qamar, "Presenting the first teaser" 2020).

In the fifty-five-second teaser video that Saeed and Qamar both shared on 8 August, the pair are shown sitting across from one another inside the mosque (Akbar). The video does not include any background music; the listener can, however, hear the audible chirping of birds as they both utter "*qubool hai*" to solemnize their marriage in front of a *nikahkhwaan* (clergyman) (Akbar). Although both artists shared similarly worded posts to clarify their involvement in the alleged defilement of the Wazir Khan Mosque, Bilal Saeed received 242,000 views and approximately 1687 comments on his Instagram post (Saeed "Qubool Teaser"). Many of these comments contained profane and abusive language towards Saba Qamar and specifically targeted her with misogynistic abuse. Qamar's post on the other hand, received 1825 comments shortly after she shared it on Instagram. Since the BTS video went viral, Qamar faced the most backlash. Due to the nature and magnitude of the online abuse Qamar experienced, she has now removed the aforementioned post from 8 August as well as all earlier posts related to the *Qubool* project. Thus, it is not clear how many views the same video received. However, the video posted on Saeed's account was viewed 242 824 times ("Qubool Teaser"). Despite Qamar's involvement in the project, the artist decided to make her art and labour invisible to protect herself and to avoid further online abuse. Qamar's actions thus indicate a defence mechanism through which she opted for self-regulation as a way to remain safe from misogynistic abuse in a virtual setting. It is also important to indicate that the video for *Qubool* was Qamar's directorial debut, which was caught in a literal web of controversy from the outset. Even though the video was eventually released on the scheduled date, the scenes shot within the mosque were edited out.

Saba Qamar previously suffered backlash for acting in a Bollywood film titled *Hindi Medium* (2017). There is an apparent tendency

amongst Pakistan's hyper-nationalist social media users to question one's loyalty to Pakistan or Islam, especially if the individual is affiliated with the field of entertainment. At times, both Pakistan and Islam are considered interchangeable, and subsequently, Qamar's loyalties to Pakistan were called into question when she opted for acting in an Indian film. Much of the anger and resentment towards her as a celebrity, and therefore, as "public property," was already driven by her perceived lack of patriotism. However, it is worth noting that the Indian film found an extensive audience in Pakistan irrespective of the initial disapproval Qamar received. This is not uncommon amongst Pakistani viewers who share a complicated relationship with Pakistan's political archenemy, India. Bollywood films are eagerly viewed despite ongoing political tensions between the neighbouring countries. A point worth considering is that while social media users are quick to attack and cyberbully Pakistani celebrities like Saba Qamar, they oscillate between politically demonizing India while simultaneously being receptive to its film and culture. The only catch is that liberties such as viewing or appreciating Indian content without calling *their* loyalties to Pakistan into question do not extend to Pakistani celebrities. Thus, Pakistani artists are and continue to be open to cyberbullying and abusive attacks for partaking in Indian projects, which raises questions about their patriotism. Qamar was already vulnerable to attack due to her previous film project and was made the focal point of another targeted campaign that doubted her respect towards Islam.

Andrews' usage of "digital dissensus" is an appropriate way to understand this growing wave of online cancel culture in Pakistan. Andrews advances the idea that digital dissensus describes an era of politics where the liberal consensus of the 1980s and beyond collapsed, only to be replaced by one where the Internet and social media emerged as the preferred venues for "noisy debate and extremist voices" (902). To develop this idea further, the scope of cancel culture can be considered through the "two-step flow theory," in which information distributed through social media results in a transformation of messages into actions (Mueller 2). Opinion leaders such as religious or political personalities, who would otherwise not be as ef-

fective when isolated, maintain their power by appealing to structured social groups (Mueller 2).

This is particularly true of Pakistan, where there is an already pronounced religious right that openly confronts those segments of society that adhere to ideals considered too "secular" or "liberal." The tweet of a religious scholar named Syed Adnan Kakakhail provides a relevant example. Kakakhail immediately took to Twitter after the *Qubool* controversy gained attention and called upon law enforcement and relevant actors to immediately arrest everyone involved in creating the video. He further appealed to all Muslims to unite and demand the arrest of the perpetrators involved in this "forbidden" act (Kakakhail). Kakakhail's Tweet aptly describes criticism against cancel culture, which argues that it is deeply polarizing, divisive, and thrives on limiting spaces of social discourse, which then imposes ideological conformity (Mueller 2). Furthermore, it has been argued that cancel culture encourages mob rule, and established legal processes are often bypassed in favour of shaming individuals through "unmoderated character assassination" on social media platforms (Mueller 2). Kakakhail's tweet serves as a good example for highlighting a deliberate attempt to humiliate Saba Qamar and Bilal Saeed. In his Tweet, he refers to Qamar as a *raqaasa* (dancer) and Saeed as a *bhaand,* which loosely refers to a performer or a fool in Urdu (Kakakhail). Both of these terms may be considered harmless through a Western lens, but in the context of South Asian culture, and particularly Pakistani society, these terms have negative connotations and are therefore considered offensive.

PLAY TO THE AUDIENCE OR PERISH

It has been observed that "lockdown social media has been riddled with pained apologies and 'repentance' messages from high status individuals who have been cancelled or feel wronged" (Andrews 905). Similarly, a day after the video teaser of *Qubool* went viral on social media, Bilal Saeed issued a clarification and apology through a video that was shared on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram on 9 August. The two-minute and fifty-second video appears on In-

stagram with a caption on behalf of Saeed and his team stating, "We as Muslims, as decent human beings and as artists will never ever trivialize or condone disrespect to Islam or any other religion, race, caste, colour or creed," followed by "Please find the video below as a sincere apology from myself, Saba Qamar and the rest of the team" (Saeed, "Apology"). Interestingly, Saeed stepped in to represent Saba Qamar and also issued a direct apology on her behalf, since she had limited her online presence. As a woman who faced severe misogynistic backlash for her previous role in an Indian film and now the *Qubool* project, Qamar was the least likely candidate for issuing a video apology that could purposefully defuse the controversy.

Saeed appears in this video dressed in a cream-coloured *shalwar kameez*, which is the national dress of Pakistan and includes a long, loose-fitted shirt and trousers. In the video, Saeed converses in Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, and begins with the Islamic greeting *Assalam o Alaikum* ("peace be upon you"), which immediately positions Saeed as both a patriotic Pakistani and a Muslim (Saeed, "Apology"). Saeed then proceeds to share how grateful he is to be a Muslim and proudly acknowledges that he was raised in a Muslim household. It is imperative to emphasize how serious a blasphemy charge is in Pakistan, so it can be reasonably presumed that Saeed felt compelled to underscore his own Muslim identity and that of his family to protect them against any physical harm or abuse from a cyber-mob. Some of the comments on Saeed's previous posts had also questioned his religious beliefs by referring to him as a "Hindu" or an "Indian," which serve less as markers of identity and more as pejoratives in the psyche of Pakistan's often hyper-nationalist social media.

Saeed uses the video as a platform to further assure the audience that the management of Wazir Khan Mosque can also be contacted to corroborate that no music was played inside the mosque. He then mentions that the stills shared on social media were merely part of a promotional photoshoot, which has historically not been uncommon for the mosque in question. Despite the clarification that they did not shoot a dance sequence or play music inside the mosque, Saeed still admits to an "unintentional fault" on his part and that of his

Figure 4: Image still from Instagram video posted by Bilal Saeed (@bilalsaeed_music).

team members. However, he emphasizes that just like everyone else, they, too, are human, and to err is human. Saeed further reassures his

viewers that he and his team repent to Allah and quotes the Quran, the holy book of Muslims, which states that Allah is pleased with those who repent (Saeed, "Apology"). He specifically references verse 222 from the second chapter, *Al Baqarah* (The Cow) which states, "*innallaha yu'hib'bul tawaa'been*" (Surah Al-Baqarah 222) or "Allah loves those who are most repenting" (Taqi Usmani).

Saeed then takes responsibility for his actions by acknowledging that he and his team have hurt the sentiments of Muslims and Pakistanis, and being a Muslim himself, he would have felt the same if he were in their position. This is a clear attempt to appeal to the religiously charged social media cyber-mob and encourage them to show compassion. There is a calculated effort to highlight a common thread between his team and online social media users, which is their Muslim identity. In that moment, Saeed is emphasizing an unintentional mistake and advocating that if his sentiments were hurt in a similar way, he would have opted for forgiving the individuals involved, because that is what Allah, their mutual creator, would also encourage and be pleased with. Saeed assures his audience that after learning from his mistake, he has decided that the entire sequence shot inside the Wazir Khan Mosque will be edited and removed from the video before it is released on 11 August. Finally, Saeed concludes by stating that although he never imagined himself to be caught in a controversy of this nature, he can guarantee that he will never be involved in anything like this for the remainder of his life. This is worth noting because Saeed uses it as a strategy to remain relevant amongst an audience that clearly has the ability to either make or break his music career. Thus, he has to remain on their good side and undo the effect of "cancel culture" while also dodging the possibility of physical harm and legal persecution. Saeed's desperation is also understandable given the likelihood that his work would potentially not resonate with the audience two days later had he not conducted himself in this manner.

Saeed's apology video received 399 093 views and 4152 comments on Instagram (Saeed, "Apology"). The comments once again ranged from being unforgiving to those attacking Saba Qamar. In the entire video apology, which lasted nearly three minutes, Saeed reiterated

that he was a Muslim approximately five times. Despite the profuse apologies and an overt display of Islamic and patriotic symbolism through language, dress, and Quranic references, Pakistani social media users from all strata of society demanded more accountability by insisting that the celebrity duo be punished under Section 295 of the Blasphemy Laws.

"CANCEL CULTURE" AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Since the actions of the mosque's management were also called into question, the Punjab Auqaf and Religious Affairs Department (i.e., the board of trustees for mosques and religious spaces) announced that Ishtiaq Ahmed, the manager of Wazir Khan Mosque, was suspended as of 9 August 2020 when the video teaser for *Qubool* went viral on social media ("Lahore Police"). Ahmed was interviewed by a local news channel, and he confirmed that music was not played inside the mosque and the artists did not perform a dance, either. However, he stated that the now viral video had undergone editing after the shoot was completed . While Ahmed appeared to be more aware of the technicalities of post-production editing, Sahibzada Saeedul Hassan, the Punjab Auqaf Minister, assured the media that strict action would be taken against those who had allowed the use of the mosque for the purpose of filming a music video ("Lahore Police"). Understandably, Hassan was responding to the mounting political pressure on relevant authorities to punish those involved in defiling a mosque and hurting the sentiments of Muslims. One of the most prominent figures calling for action was Usman Buzdar, the Chief Minister of Punjab, who took notice of the matter and escalated the issue. In the chain of accountability, Buzdar was also responding to pressure from the Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q), the ruling party's political ally, as well as religious clerics who had begun protesting on the streets of Lahore ("Historic Mosque's Manager").

Inevitably, "cancel culture" succeeded and a First Instance Report (FIR) was filed against the duo on 13 August. The complaint was filed by Advocate Farhat Manzoor Chandio at the Akbari Gate Police Sta-

tion in Lahore (“Lahore Police”). The FIR followed after social media and religious scholars united in demanding that a blasphemy case be registered against the pair (Saqib). The Lahore High Court eventually accepted the charge against Saeed and Qamar under Section 295 of the Pakistan Penal Code for “violating the sanctity of the mosque” (Saib). Section 295 is enshrined under the wider category of “offences relating to religion” and broadly prohibits “injuring or defiling place of worship with Intent to insult the religion of any class” (“Pakistan Penal Code”). The statute further states:

> “Whoever destroys, damages or defiles any place of worship, or any object held sacred by any class of persons with the intention of thereby insulting the religion of any class of persons or with the knowledge that any class of persons is likely to consider such destruction damage or defilement as an insult to their religion shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both” (Pakistan Penal Code).

Interestingly, the language of Section 295 of the Penal Code suggests that the sanctity of “any” religion is to be protected and that the defilement of “any class or religion” is considered a punishable offence. However, tracing the trajectory of the Blasphemy Laws as a colonial relic furthers an understanding of how these laws have been used as a tool for personal vendetta against anyone deemed to be outside the parameters of acceptable “Muslim-ness.” It must also be pointed out that the concept of “blasphemy” does not have validity in Islam, and that it has been (mis)used as a tool of political and social appeasement, especially since the problematic statute makes the offence of blaspheming against Islam punishable by death in most cases. Even in the case of the *Qubool* debacle, religious and political circles had a strong reaction to the viral video and joined forces to bring the alleged perpetrators to justice.

READING BLASPHEMY INTO VISUAL CULTURE

Henderson outlines a recent study conducted by David Levari of the Harvard Business School in which participants were asked to view and determine the colour of blue and purple dots that appeared on the screen. Initially, the dots appearing on the screen during the trial were an equal mix of both colours. As the trial progressed, more purple dots were introduced, which resulted in the participants expanding their definition of what they considered "blue" and they began to identify some of the purple dots as blue. In the second part of a similar experiment, participants were asked to view expressions on faces that ranged from "neutral" to "threatening." The experimenters manipulated the trial and gradually decreased how often a threatening face would appear on the screen. Intriguingly, it was observed that due to the lack of threatening faces, the participants eventually began to describe neutral faces as threatening in the same way they had previously started to identify purple dots as blue. A key finding of the study suggested that when people are looking for signals, they tend to broaden their definition of any given variable so that "more observations fit" (Henderson 38). This particular finding of the experiment is useful for understanding how the scope of "blasphemy," and specifically blasphemy towards Islam, has expanded to include even the most innocuous acts. As Anneke Meyer notes, the prerequisite to cultural consumption is that consumers have to make sense of products, and thus, they can be described as the producers of meaning (68). In this case, it can be argued that blasphemy was "read into" a situation where the artists merely posed for a photoshoot inside the mosque. However, it was considered a transgression against Islam, which was then amplified through social media and came to represent blasphemy against an entire religion and its followers.

During a global pandemic like COVID-19, it can certainly be argued that access to religious spaces should not have been granted to a video production crew in the first place. However, those demanding harsh punishment for Saeed and Qamar overlooked the fact that many such photoshoots had previously taken place in the Wazir

Khan Mosque as well as the historic Badshahi Mosque, which are both popular religious sites in close proximity of each other. This indicates that religious spaces have previously been rented out for monetary gain by the Punjab Auqaf and Religious Affairs Department. Yet this common practice had not garnered as much attention as *Qubool* because it was not widely publicized on social media. Therefore, the news pertaining to the prior use of the mosque space was perceived as being less offensive than a brief scene portraying a newlywed couple inside the vicinity of the mosque. There was also a recent case of a *Qari* (religious instructor) who was caught on video while molesting a young child in the precincts of a mosque in Pakistan's Sindh province in August 2020. But that particular incident resulted in considerably minimal social media criticism, which points to obvious fault lines in Pakistan's social media consumption, thus making it difficult to gauge which indecent acts cause more offence to "Muslim" sensibilities in Pakistan.

MOLESTATION IN THE MOSQUE

In August 2020, a seminary teacher named Maulvi Ghulam Abbas Sehto, also known as Qari Abbas, molested a 12-year-old boy inside a mosque located in the Buddak village near Kandiaro, Naushero Feroze District, Sindh (Bhatti). On 7 August, when the child's mother went to the mosque where her son received Quran reading lessons, she learned that Qari Abbas had molested him ("Seminary Teacher"). A former student at the seminary reported that he heard the sounds of crying from the mosque and was able to record a video of Qari Abbas as he was molesting the child (Bhatti). The former student revealed that he was also molested by Qari Abbas several times over the span of the two years that he had previously spent at the seminary. Although he reported the issue to his parents, no legal action was taken, and he eventually discontinued his Quran lessons at the mosque (Bhatti).

The video in which Qari Abbas can be seen molesting his student was shared on social media and started to circulate on Twitter. When the child's mother registered a FIR against Qari Abbas at the Kandi-

aro Police Station for raping her son, a local court granted him bail (Bhatti). Rehan Hussain Wassano, the Station House Officer at the police station, admitted that although video footage of the indecent act was reviewed as evidence, it was ultimately determined that the accused was merely "carrying out unethical acts" and had not actually raped the child (Bhatti). Although the hashtag #ArrestQariAbbas briefly trended on Twitter in August 2020, it did not generate nearly as much attention as the incident involving Bilal Saeed and Saba Qamar. As one Twitter user questioned on 16 August, "If on one side someone gets charged for blasphemy for shooting a video in Mosque, really interested to know what charges would this moron would be tried for. If this aint disrespect of a mosque then what is? #arrestqariabbas" (Bhatti). This tweet, like a few other similar ones, was only "liked" by two users and was unable to generate any retweets to amplify its message; a stark difference can be observed between this tweet and Kakakhail's, which generated 17 700 "likes" and 6735 retweets. What remains obvious, however, is that social media has been used both relentlessly and selectively as a mechanism for targeting certain groups and individuals. While the Qari who molested a child escaped the law and whose indecent act is all but forgotten from collective social memory, Saeed and Qamar both remain the focus of scrutiny as they continue receiving death threats. At the time of writing, Saeed and Qamar are still involved in an ongoing legal battle. Despite having pled not guilty to the charges against them, the courts have still ordered a monetary fine for both and issued their bailable arrest warrants (Bilal).

By specifically outlining quantitative data such as statistics for Internet usage and specifically Instagram usage in Pakistan before the COVID-19 pandemic as well as after March 2020, this paper documents the increase in social media usage in Pakistan during the pandemic. This is effective in exploring the behavioural consumption patterns during the pandemic and the subsequent attitude formation in the Saeed-Qamar debacle. In addition, the qualitative examination of a selection of responses by Pakistani social media users collected from Instagram and Twitter was used to highlight the perceptions of the social media audience to assess why the Saeed-Qamar debacle

instigated religious tensions, and how the outcomes in two separate cases involving the use of mosques disproportionately affect media artists and not a seminary teacher.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper has been to assess the overall capacity of social media to contribute to religious and nationalist ideological conformity. It can be observed that online mobilization has also contributed to positive change in some cases, a significant example being the Black Lives Matter movement that was driven by direct action through active online spaces (Andrews 903). This led to forced accountability and allowed participants involved in online activism to call for the removal of problematic names, symbols, and statues, and even prompted apologies from various organizations, institutions, and companies involved in the marginalization of Black people (903). However, using Pakistan and the Saeed-Qamar incident as a case study shows that increased social media usage is not necessarily accompanied by positive engagement. Instead, the remnants of colonial statutes like the Blasphemy Laws severely undermine how far modes of visual culture can extend in Pakistan before some artists are forced to scale back in expressing their craft. In particular, the selective outrage reserved for celebrities and especially women promotes a "cancel culture" which has intensified during the pandemic when social media has been used more readily as an alternative form of entertainment and communication during the lockdown.

More specifically, this paper used the recent Pakistani case of alleged blasphemy registered against media artists Bilal Saeed and Saba Qamar to highlight the problematics of using social media in Pakistan. Since Pakistan is a state still governed by the colonial-era Blasphemy Laws of 1860, these laws continue to be used selectively to enforce uniform ideas of Islamic acceptability on members of Pakistan's pluralistic yet constrained society. Therefore, anyone considered to be outside the legally established ambit of Islamic religiosity can be punished through incarceration, fines, or even state-sanctioned

death penalty in extreme cases. A case like this points to the limitations of visual culture and pronounces the disproportionate conventional power structures in Pakistani society which have contributed to the isolation of certain individuals. During the pandemic, these groups have become even more vulnerable and are increasingly finding themselves on the margins of society. Thus, interrogating how a rise in social media driven "cancel culture" has contributed to this increased vulnerability and challenging hegemonic power structures in online spaces becomes an important prerequisite to confronting colonial laws and decolonizing knowledge production in a postcolonial Pakistan.

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Image Notes

Figure 1: Instagram image posted by Bilal Saeed (@bilalsaeed_music). Photo credit: @clickbysawaiz [July 31, 2020].

Figure 2: Instagram image posted by Bilal Saeed (@bilalsaeed_music). Photo credit: @clickbysawaiz [August 1, 2020].

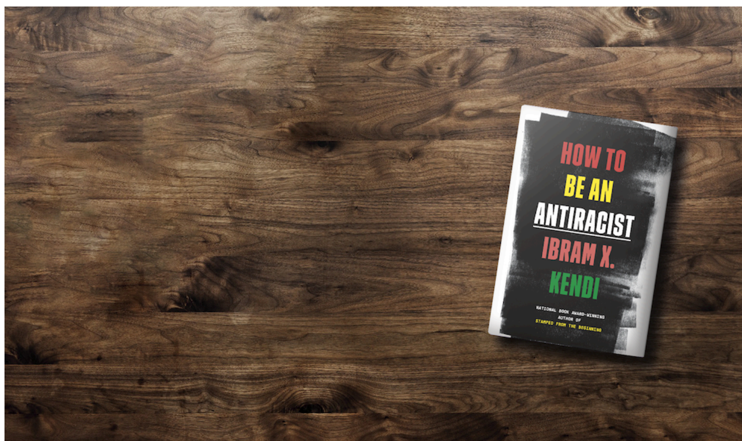
Figure 3: Instagram image posted by Bilal Saeed (@bilalsaeed_music). Photo credit: @clickbysawaiz [August 2, 2020].

Figure 4: Image still from Instagram video posted by Bilal Saeed (@bilal-saeed_music). [August 9, 2020].

MAKING ROOM FOR DIGNITY: A REVIEW OF IBRAM X. KENDI'S *HOW TO BE AN ANTIRACIST*

ALI AHMED

In illustrating the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, Frantz Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* that "the feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior" (93). Writing a little over fifty years later about how power and policy maintain racial disparity and the need to commit to opposing it, Ibram X. Kendi begins *How to Be an Antiracist* with Fanon's phenomenology of otherness by wondering "if it was my poor sense of self that first generated my poor sense of my people. Or was it my poor sense of my people that inflamed a poor sense of myself?" (9). This question embarrassed me; I wondered if my poor sense of the people where I was born—poor enough that I would not call them "my people" nor willingly name the place—meant that I am racist. But while that word has become a label, Kendi suggests that it is only a descriptive term that applies from one scenario to another, not an absolute and essential marker. This, he believes, can be an invitation to come to terms with one's racial biases, as we are too quick to cower behind the line "I'm not racist"—a phrase he wants to remove from our vocabulary.



Kendi's argument is simple: once we overcome our fear of acknowledging our potential racial biases, we must commit to overcoming disparities between racial groups, the most prevalent one in his study being that of average household income between the White population and that of racial minorities in the United States. What is much more complex, however, is the landscape of conversations amidst which his argument appears. The comments sections of his talks on YouTube are filled with disparaging remarks about him being a "race-peddler." And some Black intellectuals, like John McWhorter—Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia, who argues that anti-racism is a new religion as harmful as racism itself—question Kendi's intellectual credibility. Critics like McWhorter and Coleman Hughes push back against the culture of political correctness and "wokeism," and Ibram Kendi appears to them as someone who supports the surveillance of thought. While they admit that racism is real, race itself is not the primary issue for them as it is for Kendi, and they are wont to suggest that disparities are caused more by varying cultural conventions than racial prejudice. But the argument of culture—which extends to the claim by some factions that "Black-on-Black" crime is a product of said culture—is passionately rejected by Kendi and Ta-Nehisi Coates, both of whom retort that that violence is perpetuated by *en*culturation, predicated on structur-

al racism, rather than culture, as Fanon, too, suggests in his study of colonial Martinique.

I believe there is relative merit to both sides—those of Kendi and of Hughes, who makes the argument against the privileging of race as a category much more effectively than McWhorter. And as divergent as they might seem, there is real possibility for reconciliation. What complicates matters further is how their respective claims are abused by corporatism—corporations adopt slogans such as "Black Lives Matter" while continuing to exploit labour—on the one hand, and White supremacists—who rephrase that slogan, deny racism, and hide their privilege behind colourblindness—on the other.

How to Be an Antiracist reads more like *How I came to Be an Antiracist: And Why You Should Be One, Too.* Kendi's narrativization of his early reckoning with what Fanon calls "the fact of Blackness," and then his navigating through fear, hatred, and disappointment, ultimately leading to a not uncalm denouement, could be replicated by almost any member of a racial minority. And perhaps that is the point. But what I find particularly worthwhile is his committed anti-essentialist stance. "Race is a mirage," Kendi points out in a section that perhaps his critics have not noticed, "but one that we do well to see, while never forgetting it is a mirage, never forgetting that it's the powerful light of racist power that makes that mirage" (51). What powers that light? Self-interest, as he suggests near the end. In short, being an antiracist means to accord the other the dignity they deserve, and that dignity demands that we treat people as ends unto themselves, not as synecdoche of a category; only thus do we prevent reifying the mirage of race, useful though it remains for identifying structural inequality.

There are few thinkers in the Western tradition who, within and through their existentialist projects, have thought about alterity as profoundly as Fanon and Kierkegaard. While Fanon articulates the anguish of the colonized other, Kierkegaard lays out a poetics of being that addresses the despair of each individual. In his *Works of Love*, he suggests that "the differences of life are only like the player's costumes, or like a travelling cloak…but in actual life, one fastens the

upper garment of [their] difference so tightly that it completely conceals the fact that this difference is an outer garment, because the inner glory of the likeness to others never or so very infrequently shines through, as it nevertheless should and ought to do" (72). Kendi makes a somewhat Kierkegaardian turn, but for him, "terminating racial categories is potentially the last, not the first, step in the antiracist struggle" (75). While I agree with the sentiment, I do not think the struggle is a linear one. The case for anti-racism—a subset of the argument for the dignity of all life—will need to be, in varying degrees, continually made against the forces that commodify and colonize life.

These last two years, what with the deepening of multiple crises, have been a particular strain on our moral imagination, dividing us even more into ideological positions pre-generated by the logic of power. But we know that what might pass as mere fact is not necessarily true, and a world of dignity is never just given but requires deliberate moral commitment. *How to Be an Antiracist* should thus, I believe, be read in conversation with its critics, but also Kant's defense of the fundamental moral law and Fanon's trenchant critique of colonization, among other works. Because without the courage to meditate on one's own prejudices, the whole project of what Judith Butler calls a livable world would be unconceivable.

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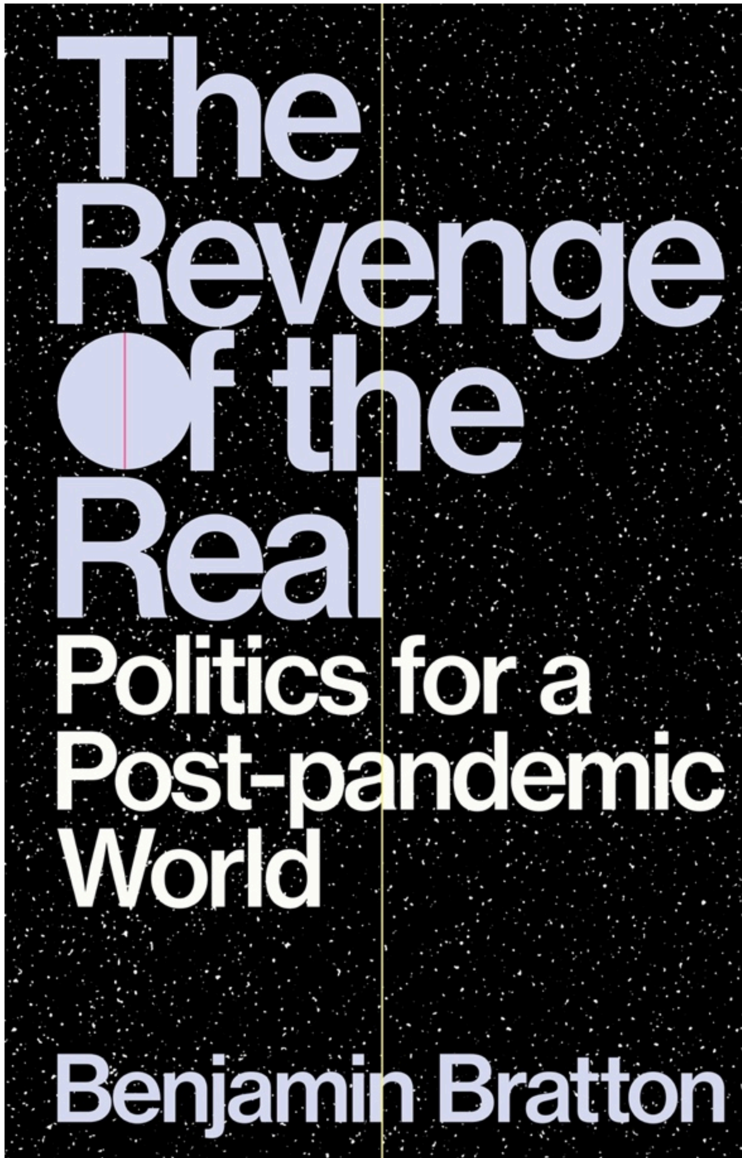
REVENGE OF THE REAL

JAQUELINE MCLEOD ROGERS

In this short book, Benjamin Bratton addresses all that has gone wrong as the pandemic has spread around the planet without meeting organized resistance. Weak governance in the West in particular has failed to mobilize any systematic defense. Apart from being unprepared by geopolitical compartmentalization, states continue failing to imagine a way forward; too few hear in the success story of viral spread a call for governance based on planetary-scale rationalism aimed at deliberately composing "a world that consults both reason and compassion"(5). Bratton points out that the virus should teach above all else our common biological circumstances, and with this, the need to overcome "subjective cultural divisions and associations" (33). In place of critiques aimed at liberating individuals from state interference or disempowered groups from oppressors, we need to devote shared energy to the project of devising a model of equitable, managed, and responsive planetary governance. Division weakens us; we need cooperation and shared information to be more effective at healing our wounded species in a wounded habitat (142). He argues that healing requires the formation of a positive planetary politics: "An integrated, available, modular, programmable, flexible, tweakable, customizable, predictable equitable, responsive, sustainable infrastructure for sensing, modeling, simulation and recursive action" (145). Of course, his optimism for the prospect of humankind working together to build something new and shared is tempered with fear that we will more likely return to our former ways and selves as soon as the virus clears.



For Bratton, the pandemic is an opportunity to face our failed governance strategies and philosophical perspectives based on inflated

notions of individualism. He reimagines good governance on a planetary scale, urging a biopolitics aimed at promoting the health of citizens and planet. His "epidemiological" social model adjusts current conceptions of citizen subjectivity to realistically reflect the principle of connectivity—so that public transmissibility and responsibility (33) trump individual rights and desires. Our moment demonstrates the need for deliberate action guided by competence and science and for citizens to surrender personal data in support of authoritative imaging of contagion and effective medical response. Apart from the pandemic, other global realities like climate degradation and social and resource inequity require collective address. To deal with these real and world-wide challenges, Bratton argues we need a new form of planetary-scale governance (162).

To battle pandemic spread, we needed the organizational competence of "a real world health organization" to furnish science-based information and global plans—not the whispered suggestions of the current WHO as backdrop to our default position of "resorting everyone back to their country of passport" (144-45). Once divided by geopolitics, citizens then received uneven resources and advice, depending on where they landed. Bratton points out that some authoritarian countries in the East, like Taiwan, provided orchestrated, clear, and effective pandemic responses; while he is not advocating the spread of "Asian technocratic" governance (26), it serves as an instructive contrast to the flabby populist resistance to governance that ruled the West. In place of taking direction and cooperating with state-run programs for disease control—utilizing technological tools at hand to conduct sensing, modelling, and tracing—resistance ranged from flat-out denying the disease to critiquing the organizational efforts of authority—authority being out-of-hand equated with unfair oppression (14).

"Populism" in Bratton's view is not progressive—not to be confused "with the political and/or cultural project of the working class" but devolved to "folksy scapegoating, simplistic emotional appeals, fear mongering and boundary policing, empty theatrics and sham symbolism" (9). Expertise or competence is rejected for experience (73); affect is privileged over reason; narrative and spin define reality.

Combining these with “the myth of individual autonomy” (12) has spawned factionalized blaming in a war of words and shows of protest, making politics all rhetorical and aesthetic. For Bratton, the March on the Capital shares commonalities with the campaign to defund the police. Neither is a viable political response to human and planetary crisis: both provide venues to perform the belief that government is oppressive and obedience is submission.

Alike in the West, the Right and Left harbour work against governance. The Right claims unbridled personal freedoms and are as far as possible ungovernable. Yet, as Bratton relentlessly demonstrates, the Left also damage the commons by resisting government and conducting “endless critique and constant dismantling” (12). Imagining government as the source of propaganda and panoptic power, they struggle against it, using “prisoner’s dilemma tactics” (14) rather than taking advantage of opportunities to forge cooperative plans that recognize our planetary connections and responsibilities. He suggests the Left has laboured under a misreading of Foucault that inaccurately reads control as corruption, whereas in reality “[control] is also a means of protection from, composition of, form giving, structure making, enforcement of, and the freedom not to die early and pointlessly” (146).

Bold in Bratton—and likely to offend colleagues devoted to equity projects aimed at dismantling systemic power—is his call for abandoning critique in favor of developing new cooperative alliances. Pandemic times have made it something of a trope to talk about a new sense of collectivity and solidarity—to praise movements like MeToo and Black Lives Matter as pinnacles of empathy that promote universal improvement. Yet for Bratton these protests are irrational, narrow, and even parochial, and he calls instead for more broad-based coalition and transnational politics.

In his view, there is an ethics to accepting a view of self as object among other objects (103). Bratton as architect and educator never loses sight of humans as makers and sees the sense of putting tools and machines to good use to promote health and order—rather than ignoring or hating what we have made. We are not locked into a

fixed algorithmic grid, for computations can be adjusted as multi-levelled data provide new information. For Bratton, the planet is not pre-programmed and inflexible world, but a "model-driven recursive composition" (163). The governance he envisions is not by law and edict but responsive to data-informed "decisions," in a system always open to remaking (163).

Bratton barely constrains his outrage in the face of our confused and dangerous response to real crisis: the deliberate ignorance and mis-information and the maintenance of siloes of privilege. As some of the source quotes will have shown, his anger spawns dark-humoured prose, making readers laugh out loud—before sighing—as he recites the ludicrous inefficiencies of current practices that have done every-thing but put the common weal first. For fearing the wrong things, Giorgio Agamben is a particular target, skewered for his "all-encom-passing post-structuralist medievalism" (118).

Yet tragedy sounds in the final chapter when Bratton shares his fear that post-pandemic times will find us attempting a return to business as usual. In a future of "evolved stupidity" (164), we will ignore col-lective for individual needs and rights, leading some to protect their health by practicing social distancing and paying for shopping ser-vices and delivery of wellness gadgets and potions; in opposition, others will make a show of fellowship with hugs and handshakes. If we continue with nationhood and capitalism, we will reset class-dri-ven inequities that allow one group to thrive, another to serve, and those left to fail. Here's how Bratton describes the threatening new normal: "Those who are able will attend to themselves with renewed abilities, and those who can't will provide attention as a service to the former or risk becoming themselves unattendable" (166). Brat-ton is not calling for computation and design to win out over com-passionate human and life principles, but notes that equity and ease are enabled by computation and control. Whereas some post-colonial theorists (like Kate Crawford in *Atlas of AI)* argue the inter-activity and -culpability of capitalism, computation, and control (227), Brat-ton advocates for computation, the smart use of data, and social con-trol as indispensable to remaking a safe and reasoned society—"how

any complex, adaptive system recognizes itself and its own capacity for deliberate self-composition" (146).

To avoid a same-but-worse future scenario, Bratton calls for something new, for "something like a long-delayed next beginning" (20). There may be, he fears, few takers—his new world order contradicts values and practices ingrained in Western culture. Yet other speculative theorists have offered similar blueprints proposing deliberate wholesale change: Marshall McLuhan comes to mind, with his insistence on the need for humans to understand and control technologies in the environment (McLuhan, *Playboy*, 22). In a vision corresponding to Bratton's, McLuhan imagined as the only positive way forward an interdisciplinary human cohort managing technologies to support a responsive programmed environment (McLeod Rogers, 67).

Indeed, amongst those who write about technology and responding to crisis, there is support for Bratton's overall claim that the best way forward is to control what we have made by crafting environmental conditions optimal to both human and planetary life. Writers who take up this position tend to come from design fields and recognize the design principle as essential composite, not as artifice; they acknowledge we have created and loosed technology as a force and now need to attend to managing, adjusting, and redirecting it. Holly Jean Buck writes convincingly of engineered solutions for planetary recovery—we need to use and cultivate the science at hand for good and healing outcomes. James Bridle also makes the case that the range of technologies shaping the present reality should not be wished away but managed as "life support systems" (252). Those calling alongside Bratton for design and management to control technologies are not craven optimists—but better described as realists pleading with citizens and states to work with and attempt to save the world we have.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Ali Ahmed: What good is life amidst the recurring questions, their poor results, and the endless cynicism of our age? Walt Whitman once asked. In the end, he offered the briefest and profoundest of consolations: "That you are here – that life exists and identity; That the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse." And if with our verses we can affirm the dignity of others, perhaps the morrow will be a little less alien for all of us. My studies as a doctoral student in the Department of Humanities at York University aspire towards just such a deliberately naïve vision.

Ali Ahmed: À quoi sert la vie au milieu des questions récurrentes, de leurs piètres résultats et du cynisme sans fin de notre époque ? s'est demandé Walt Whitman. À la fin, il a offert la plus brève et la plus profonde des consolations : « Que vous êtes ici - que la vie existe et l'identité ; Que la pièce puissante continue et que vous pouvez contribuer à un vers ». Et si, par nos vers, nous pouvons affirmer la dignité des autres, peut-être que demain sera un peu moins étranger pour chacun d'entre nous. Mes études de doctorant au département des sciences humaines de l'université de York aspirent justement à cette vision délibérément naïve.

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