Hot

HYBRID

INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF ART, DESIGN, AND ARCHITECTURE

Hot
HYBRID
INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF ART, DESIGN, AND ARCHITECTURE

Hybrid — Interdisciplinary Journal of Art, Design, and Architecture
Published in Pakistan by Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture
ST 33, Block 2, Scheme 5, Clifton, 75600, Karachi, Pakistan

ISSN 2522-6983 (Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture)

Volume: 07 | Hot

Cover Design: Kiran Ahmad
Design and Layout: Kiran Ahmad

Printing and Binding: Topical Printers, Lahore, Pakistan

IVS

Hybrid

Interdisciplinary Journal of Art, Design, and Architecture

Hybrid is a thematic journal aimed at fostering a culture of research and writing at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and beyond. It is transdisciplinary in nature, and focuses primarily on those practices and projects that seek to apply any combination of art, design, architectural, and related genres to issues of critical, cultural, political, and educational significance, inclusion, and social justice. It emphasises praxis by providing a forum for research into the creative practices that exist within urban, academic, developmental, and other milieus, especially in the national and regional contexts of Pakistan and South Asia. *Hybrid* offers a platform for disseminating research by established and upcoming academics and practitioners as well as students, and includes sections for lead essays, a photo-essay, interview, portfolio, and a spotlight on crafts. Its objective is to bring new and multiple perspectives, grounded in Pakistan and the region, to a local, regional, and international audience, and to further pertinent debates.

Editorial

The world is *hot* and not just in the meteorological sense.

It is no longer possible to speak of heat as mere weather. It is metaphor, it is method, it is warning. The heat we live in is designed. It coils in policy, in neglect, in the calculus of who is left to burn. It is in the warming of oceans and the tightening of borders, the intimate pressure of human emotion, and the broad sweep of systemic disregard under the guise of order, security, and development.

It becomes difficult then, maybe even impossible, to talk about sustainability and climate justice when an open genocide is being carried out in Gaza—when entire neighborhoods have been flattened, families erased, and infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and water systems deliberately targeted. This is not a natural disaster but a man-made catastrophe, an apartheid, carried out in full view of the world. And yet the global response has been largely inadequate. While people across the world protest, many governments, particularly in the West, continue to frame the violence as 'collateral damage' and refuse to call it for what it is: the deliberate destruction of a people.

This silence is not neutral. It tells us whose lives are grievable and whose deaths are dismissed as inevitable. Gaza is not simply a tragedy, it is a warning. It shows how power can decide who gets to live, who gets to rebuild, and who is marked for destruction.

So when we talk about climate justice, we have to ask ourselves: justice for whom? To talk about sustainability without talking about disposability is to miss the point. To talk about infrastructure without acknowledging who it serves and who controls it, is to risk reinforcing the very systems we critique.

In this volume we ask: what does it mean to be 'hot' in a time of planetary crises and political combustion? How do embodied experiences of heat, whether physical, emotional, or metaphorical, inform our understandings of place, power, and precarity? And what do they reveal about the fragility of the systems we inhabit, the volatility of our inner worlds, and the force of our resistance? At its core, this volume is a study of both the oppressed and the oppressor, engaging with themes of resource scarcity, inequality, and infrastructural neglect. Contributors from diverse disciplines ground their explorations in histories of industrialisation

and state power, forces which have manipulated landscapes, displaced communities, and intensified ecological vulnerability. What emerges is not a single narrative but a collection of frictions, an inquiry into how systems of heat—environmental, emotional, technological, and political—shape our everyday lives.

Ali Mehdi Zaidi opens this volume with his ethnographic study of Perfume Chowk, a roadside stall in Karachi that sells counterfeit perfume. As the city's long, hot months shape daily life, he explores how scent becomes a way of coping with the pressures of urban life, in which appearance, labour, and survival intersect. Through this setting, Zaidi demonstrates how heat is not accidental but engineered, maintained by systems that insulate the privileged and expose others to precarity.

Nazgol Ansarinia's essay draws on her visual practice to explore the link between heat and absence, tracing it through Tehran's disappearing water bodies. Once central to culture and architecture, water now exists as loss—in empty swimming pools, dried riverbeds, and fading rituals. Through personal and historical lenses, she shows how water's absence embodies ecological decline, surveillance, state neglect, and longing. Scarcity here becomes political, reshaping how people remember and resist.

Danika Cooper extends this analysis and explores how constructed perceptions of emptiness, particularly in desert landscapes like Xinjiang in China, are used to justify extraction, displacement, and surveillance. Drawing on historical and contemporary cases, she shows how these voids are dense with political activity and obscured by global systems, such as land classification tools and megaprojects like China's Belt and Road Initiative. Invisibility, she argues, becomes a tool for control.

Building on themes of erasure and state violence, Aslam Kakar's essay examines political anger among marginalised groups in Pakistan. Focusing on the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement, he shows how dissent is often criminalised by the state. Kakar reframes anger as a powerful expression of injustice and resistance, pushing back against state narratives that cast it as irrational.

Mohib Hassan's essay reflects on a project he proposed to address inefficiencies in Pakistan's sugar industry. Drawing on his research and experience from a tech-based intervention, he shows how environmental stress and outdated infrastructure intersect with elite control and corruption, deepening the vulnerability of farmers within Pakistan's politically driven agricultural economy.

Shanzeh Afzal's essay returns us to Karachi but this time we look at how extreme heat operates as a slow, cumulative form of violence. Centering her fieldwork in the densely populated neighbourhoods of Lyari and Korangi, she shows how weather, infrastructural neglect, and urban exclusion wear down vulnerable communities over time, turning daily survival into a slow, grinding struggle against deep-rooted disparity.

In parallel, Marvi Mazhar offers a complimentary but critical understanding of Karachi's expanding cooling infrastructures. Through visual documentation and expert dialogue, she shows how air-conditioning units cool interiors while worsening external urban conditions. Her essay links these mechanical cooling systems to flawed infrastructure, rising urban temperatures, and ecological degradation, emphasising the relationship between built environment, heat and non-human life.

Zehra Shabbir Khan closes the collection with a turn to intimacy. Her essay captures how young people carve out moments of tenderness and autonomy in rented rooms—small sanctuaries of freedom in a city that surveils desire as much as it does dissent. By ending on intimacy, we gesture towards the small but radical acts of care that exist even in adverse conditions, offering a final, quiet counterpoint to the heat of our world in crisis.

This volume stands as a testament to collaborative effort and its foundation lies in the shared commitment to confronting urgencies of our times. The process of putting it together, giving it context and direction has been both challenging and rewarding and I am especially grateful to the incredible editorial team, whose expertise and dedication helped refine this vision; to our designer, Kiran Ahmad for bringing the work to life visually with such care and nuance; and to the peer reviewers whose critical insights helped strengthen every contribution. I'm also thankful to my friends and family who patiently lived alongside this project and offered quiet forms of support throughout.

Seher Naveed
Editor, *Hybrid* 07 | Hot

Perfume Chowk and the Smelling Class

Ali Mehdi Zaidi

The slogan of Perfume Chowk is *Khushbu Sab Keh Liye* (perfume for everyone). Perfume Chowk is actually not even a *chowk*[¶] but a small stall that sells counterfeit perfumes[ǂ]. Located in Gulistan-e-Johar, it has slowly claimed its place as one of Karachi's well-known landmarks, after a series of struggles that include being burned and robbed. Perfume Chowk's purported mission is to make perfume available to everyone but the fact that these are counterfeit perfumes sold cheaply on the roadside points to the class dimension of this mission. In Karachi, the secretion of body odour is intimately related to an inability to either escape heat or to the performance of corporeal labor, and cheap perfumes enable the consumer to hide their own smell.

I rely on ethnographic research that I conducted with the sellers at Perfume Chowk to argue that perfume is an indirect but potent heat-countering mechanism. It enables entry and movement in spaces where professionalism, cleanliness, and good behaviour demand minimal interaction with heat, which is usually achieved through the use of air-conditioning. Perfume usage then indicates an olfactory dimension to class segregation. Not only do spaces frequented by the upper classes smell a particular way, they also demand a similar olfactory profile from those who participate in them. Everyday identification of class position is first done by the nose—you smell class before you see it.

Perfume Chowk first piqued my interest because of its advertising. Around 2004, five years after the business started, wall chalkings for Perfume Chowk began appearing underneath flyovers, on curbsides, on shop shutters, above piles of trash, on benches under trees proudly claiming: Perfume Chowk - *Khushbu Sab Keh Liye*. This wall chalking was ubiquitous and it attracted attention. Within a short period of time casual conversations in various circles in the city included some collective wonder about what Perfume Chowk was and why it seemed to be written everywhere. By now this fascination has resulted in multiple news reports,[1] profiles on television,[2] YouTube interviews,[3] and even a television serial based on Perfume Chowk that aired on Hum TV.[4] According to Mursaleen Sherwani,the owner and founder of Perfume Chowk, this marketing began as a protest against his stall being burned down by those seeking *bhatta* (extortion money). In a 2009 interview with BBC Urdu he said, 'My wall chalking was not a publicity campaign. It was a protest against the powers which burned my stall ten times in ten years. If I had paid the hawker fee to Cantonment Board Faisal and my stall was legal, why

[¶] Junction.
[ǂ] The chowk takes its name after the stall.

Wall chowking of Perfume Chowk.

should I pay *bhatta*?'[¶] Every night around 2am after closing the stall, Sherwani would get on his bike, spray paint in hand, and paint the walls of the city with Perfume Chowk's iconic branding.

What began as a protest eventually turned into a successful marketing campaign that is now worthy of being taught in universities. Perfume Chowk's success can be attributed to the sense of wonder infused with guerilla marketing that operates outside the conventions of corporate brand marketing. The domain of wall chalking is often utilised by sellers of miraculous cures for bodies that are too fat or too thin, for reproductive organs that fail, or for dietary systems that handle glucose badly, and the very political parties Sherwani tussled against. Perfume Chowk's take on this kind of marketing imbues the product with a moral, rights-based claim. To say 'perfume for everyone' is to speak of something that everyone *should* have, something that is a need and not a luxury. A claim for an inherent right to have something often follows a logic of it being integral to life itself, such as 'water for everyone' because one cannot survive without water.

The first Perfume Chowk stall is located at an intersection in Block 18, Gulistan-e-Johar, a middle class area filled with ill-maintained apartment complexes and bustling with roadside vendors selling beverages, food, shoes, clothing, and mechanical services. Over time, Perfume Chowk has grown into a thriving business empire with three brick-and-mortar shops and two stalls spread across the middle to lower-middle-income areas of Pehelwan Goth, Gulzar-e-Hijri, and Gulistan-e-Johar. In addition, Perfume Chowk also offers home-delivery services using either its own riders for nearby areas or courier companies to deliver as far as Quetta or Dera Ismail Khan. Though the business has expanded, most of the fieldwork for this essay was conducted at the first Perfume Chowk stall that has officially become the name of the street intersection and the area as a whole. 'Even on official National Identity Cards this area is now known as Perfume Chowk,' Sherwani told me. Throughout this essay, whenever I refer to Perfume Chowk, I refer to this first stall. The shop is an open 9 feet by 6 feet wooden kiosk with one entry point and one large window through which the customers are facilitated. It is located on the footpath under a Peepal tree surrounded by a number of other hawkers who all attribute their success to some extent to Perfume Chowk. After all, 'prior to Perfume Chowk there was nothing here. This entire area was a garbage dump overgrown with wild plantation,' a nearby newspaper seller told me. In addition to being a shop, Perfume Chowk also operates as a bus stop with commuters using the stall's stools as they wait for their rides. My fieldwork involved becoming a *shagird* (student) at Perfume Chowk.[ǂ] While I was initially told to simply sit and observe, I eventually became one

[¶] *Bhatta* is the colloquial Urdu term for extortion money. At the time, the political party Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) had almost established a parallel state in Karachi that was funded by its extortion activities.[5]

[ǂ] All workers at Perfume Chowk are referred to as students. This borrows from a general principle where anyone being taught a craft is referred to as a student and enters into a paternalistic teacher-student relationship.[6]

The Perfume Chowk stall.

of the sellers. While Perfume Chowk does receive some female customers, by and large, most of the fieldwork for this paper was with men; they were my teachers as well as the customers I interacted with.

The temporal rhythm of the entire area around Perfume Chowk is shaped by heat. The stall opens at midday, though it never really sees peak business until around 7pm. It closes around 1am. Most shops and stalls around Perfume Chowk also operate on similar timings and do most of their business late at night. 'Everything seems better and easier during the colder part of the day, doesn't it?' said Junaid, Sherwani's son. 'Who walks around during the heat of the day buying anything?'

Though Perfume Chowk was started by Sherwani and his name and face is synonymous with the business, over time his children and other workers have joined the business and it is often they who run the stall. The walls of the stall are lined with nearly 300 glass bottles with toppers colloquially known as 'canters', likely an indigenisation of decanters, which the bottles resemble. Each canter is labeled in Urdu with both the name of the scent and its prices for 3, 6 and 12 millilitres of perfume. The scented oils are based on popular western brands like Dunhill Desire, Gucci Flora, and Ferrari Extreme as well as eastern scents like *Oud*, *Motia*, *Jannat ul Firdous*, *Janaan*, and *Ghilaf-e-Kaaba*. Perfume Chowk also sells spray perfumes which are created on site. The spray perfume is the same scented oil mixed with alcohol at a ratio of 3:2. The spray perfumes are much more expensive than the scented oils because of their quantity (30 and 60 millilitres) as well as the cost of alcohol colloquially known as T20. Most customers buy the scented oil.

When exposed to heat, perfumes lose their efficacy. As a result, owners of Perfume Chowk have to carefully regulate the quantity of perfume they can store at the shop. Too much and they risk reducing the quality of perfumes they sell. Too little and they risk not having products that the customers want. There is a constant monitoring required to ensure they can protect perfumes from the effects of heat. Perfume Chowk acquires the scented oils it sells ready-made from multiple importers. The owners of Perfume Chowk go every two to three days to the perfume market at Botal Gali to meet their suppliers. In small 60 ml bottles they acquire whatever stock is running low. While there is a makeshift warehouse that keeps changing from the Sherwani household to a rented house to their car, the owners of Perfume Chowk are careful not to buy too much inventory. In addition to the problem of olfactory inefficiency when exposed to heat, such a move also makes economic sense. In either case, a scented oil is a finicky object. If left open it'll evaporate, if unlabelled it'll get lost, if exposed to the heat it'll rot.

While you could theoretically walk up to the shop and demand a perfume by name, this is not how it usually works here. Generally, customers arrive in search of a perfume without a

The Perfume Chowk peepal tree.

Canter of Gucci Guilty with the price for 3, 6, and 12 ml.

clear sense of what they want: 'Please give us a good scent'. It is difficult to describe a scent accurately, as descriptors in the olfactory world cannot pinpoint one smell within hundreds. Sellers at Perfume Chowk often recommend that customers either bring a labelled bottle previously bought from Perfume Chowk or a sample through which they can guess what the customer needs. Scents exist at the edge of the realm of linguistic communication here.

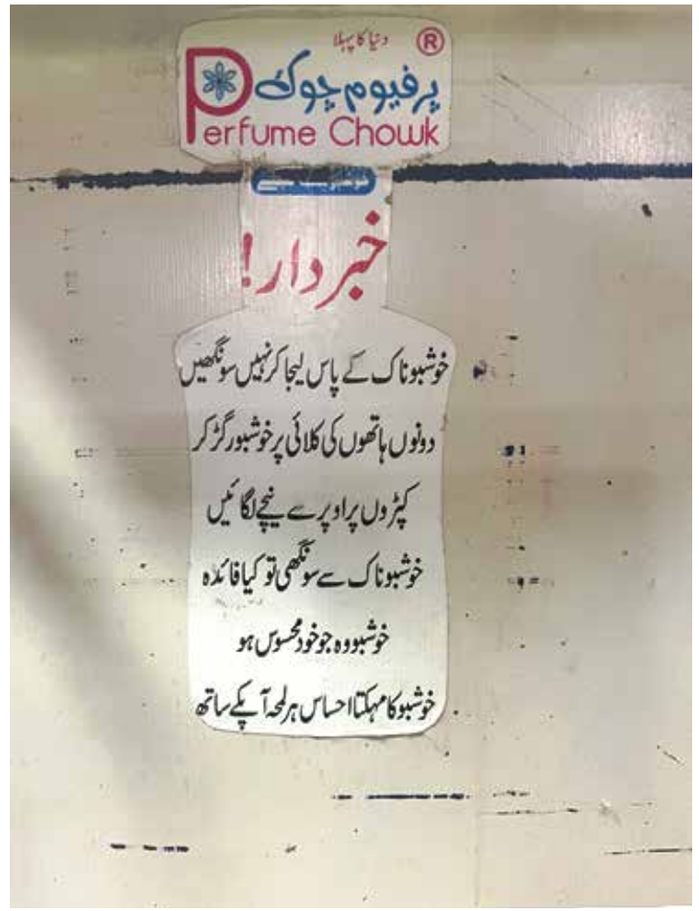
One way that sellers navigate this difficulty is by asking for the name of the customer and offering a smell based on it. Names, they insist, have effects. Deciphering a name can provide insights into personality, and therefore the scent that will suit them. In effect, the process resembles that of a healer ascertaining inner realities based on external information such as palms, faces, saliva, astrological signs, and names. When I started my apprenticeship, I was told that 'over time, this skill develops and you'll be able to identify the right smell for the customer. It is learned with experience. We cannot teach you this skill.'

Despite the difficulty of communicating smells in language, the sellers at Perfume Chowk do make some attempts. If the customer does not like the first scent offered to them based on their name, the sellers ask the customer to find some fault with it, '*Koi keera nikalo*: do you prefer a lighter scent, a stronger, sweeter or sharper smell?' Often a very basic direction provided by the customer leads to trying out more scents and eventually arriving at the right one by trial and error.

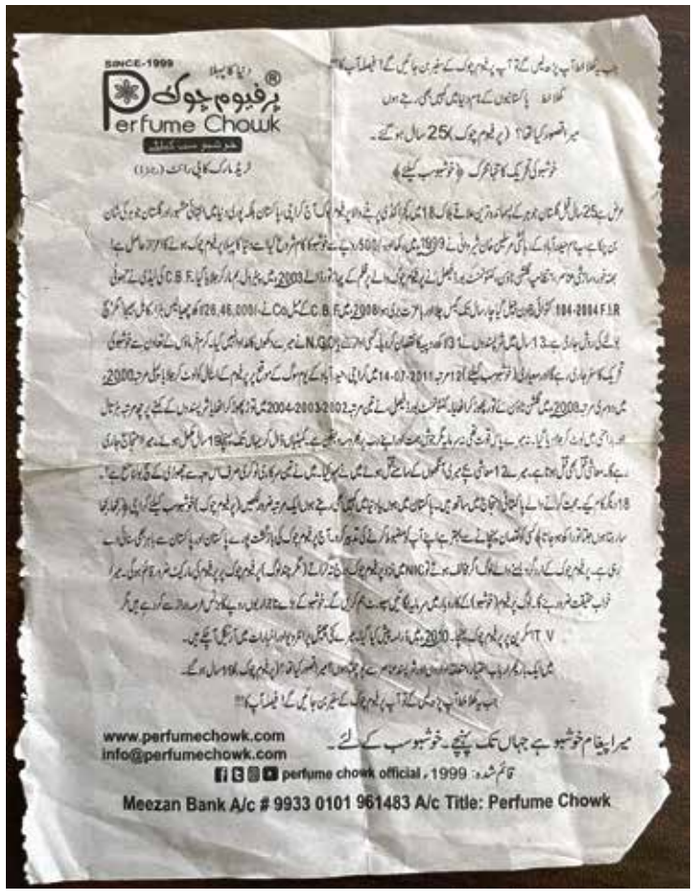
The difficulties of operating in the olfactory market do not end here. The sense of smell is especially prone to being overstimulated and sellers often remark that they themselves no longer smell anything. Buyers at Perfume Chowk are explicitly instructed by the sellers not to smell the scents directly and this instruction is also placed prominently just behind the counter. For the sellers of Perfume Chowk, it is crucial that customers *feel* rather than *smell* the scents offered to them. Beyond issues of overwhelming the olfactory system, sellers argue that a scent that has to be consciously smelt has no purpose. If it has to be sought out, it has not done its job.

When a perfume has been selected, the shopkeeper carefully pours it into the appropriately sized bottle, puts on a topper, and labels it. Once the bottle is ready, sellers will ask for the customer's name, phone number, and residential location to fill out a receipt. No sales at Perfume Chowk are made without a receipt. Sherwani and his sons maintain a record of every sale they make. They have compiled a non-digital database of customers over the past 25 years. In addition to facilitating a 'gift' system as they call it—Rs. 250 worth of perfume for every Rs.1000 spent—the data also helps Perfume Chowk reach out to former customers with new products. When Perfume Chowk sends out an advertisement via text message, it reaches nearly 22,000 phones.

Arriving at Perfume Chowk means arriving in a world with its own rules and understandings. Many customers get frustrated by the multiple demands sellers make of them. 'You guys have



Guidelines for applying the scent that draw a distinction between smelling and feeling.


SINCE-1999

پرفیوم چوک®

Perfume Chowk

خوشبو سب کیلئے

www.perfumechowk.com
info@perfumechowk.com

میرا پیغام خوشبو ہے جہاں تک پہنچے۔ خوشبو سب کے لئے۔

perfume chowk official . 1999 :قائم شدہ

Meezan Bank A/c # 9933 0101 961483 A/c Title: Perfume Chowk

Manifesto printed at the back of the receipt.

an entire science of your own! I do not get it!' said one customer as he left frustrated when asked to apply the scents in a particular way. A number of customers leave when asked to divulge their address or phone number for the receipt. 'I do not want the receipt. I am from MI [Military Intelligence]. You cannot collect my phone number,' an angry customer said. 'There is no compulsion here. If you do not want to tell us your number, you don't have to buy from us. We just can't sell without a number,' responded the shopkeeper. Sellers at Perfume Chowk, including myself, are instructed to let customers walk if they refuse to provide information for the receipt. Not only are sellers told to ensure there is a receipt, they also have to remind the customers to read it. The back of the receipt features an open letter that outlines the history of Perfume Chowk and its struggles, and details of a bank account, alongside a plea to support a cause that has been so violently and frequently disturbed. Perfume Chowk is not just a shop. It imagines itself as part of a larger mission, which is to provide 'perfume for everyone.' This mission is part of all Perfume Chowk branding and is featured on every single bottle that they sell.

The focus on feeling scents rather than smelling them allows an entry point into understanding what makes perfume important enough to be positioned as a right. While Bourdieu's framework of habitus accounts for social cues around dressing, speaking, bodily movement, cosmology, and social views it does not explicitly address smell.[7] Bourdieu put forward the concept of habitus, i.e. the notion that all social interactions have preordained social rules that dictate how people interact. Social cues around dressing, speaking, physical movement, and social views can collectively be referred to as dispositions and each kind of space demands its own bodily disposition.

By insisting that customers feel the scent they apply, sellers at Perfume Chowk demonstrate an understanding that smell is a constituent part of the overall disposition of customers.[8] It surrounds them and becomes a part of who they are. Many customers loyal to a particular scent speak of that scent becoming a part of their identity. In an exchange with the sales staff, a customer named Ahmad[¶] described his relationship with the Hugo Boss scent in the following exchange:

> Ahmad: I have been using Hugo Boss for nearly eight years now. Everyone from the guard to the cleaner knows I am coming when they smell this perfume. I have 25 bottles of the same perfume. I don't even smell it anymore but everyone else smells it.
>
> Seller: This smell has become a part of your identity now.
>
> Ahmad: Yes, my smell enters the room before I do.

[¶] All names of customers have been changed to maintain anonymity.

Smell envelops everyone and its management—either through application of scents or through various regimes of cleanliness—is a constitutive part of playing what Bourdieu calls the social game. Just as particular clothing visually indexes one's social position, smell is its more visceral counterpart. As opposed to other senses, 'odor information is relayed directly to the limbic system, a brain region typically associated with memory and emotional processes.'[9] This is perhaps why smells are so intrinsically related to social processes utilising emotions, such as fear and disgust to produce marginalisation,[¶] and smelling the wrong way can result in social censure.[10] Imagine a well-dressed man who smells of sweat, or a mosque-goer smelling of alcohol. A foul smell can alter our positive associations with a place, such as a fine dining establishment that smells like human excrement or a dinner party which smells of sewage. To smell bad is to be outside the domain of acceptability. To smell bad is to be morally flawed.

Rizwan, whose work in marketing requires him going from shop to shop to introduce shopkeepers to his company's products, came to the stall and asked for a 'strong scent.' The demand for strong smell simultaneously refers to two different qualities: the intensity of the smell, i.e. how 'strongly' it can be smelt by those immediately around you, and also how long the smell would last. When I asked Rizwan why he wanted a strong scent he said, 'My entire work is outside in the heat. I'm sweating all day and dealing with customers. It's important to make a good impression. I hate showing up to meetings feeling dirty.' The demand for a strong scent is as ubiquitous at Perfume Chowk as is citing heat and sweat as the primary reasons for the use of perfumes. Another customer, a day laborer who came with a friend, demanded a strong smell with the following reasoning: 'He works outside in the sun all day. The smell of sweat settles into the clothes (*kaproun mai bas jaati hai*). Please give us a strong scent that lasts all day.'

Humans are warm-blooded and have to regulate their temperature. Turning on an air conditioner, putting on a blanket, showering, and hydrating are all examples of actions to regulate one's temperature. Similarly, sweating is a biological technique designed to regulate temperature automatically, and there will be more and more of it as the city heats up. Sellers at Perfume Chowk are keenly aware of the particularities of sweat. They distinguish between different levels of acidity (*tezabiyat*) in sweat, with higher levels associated with stronger smell. While one seller told me that strong smelling sweat should be treated with an intense scent, another argued that doing so would merely produce a toxic mix that would ultimately smell even worse. What is nevertheless unanimously agreed upon is that perfume is one of the key mechanisms through which customers hide the effects of the body's thermoregulation.

[¶] For historical examples of this process, see Rosenblum, "A Brief History of Jews and Garlic"; Kettler, The Smell of Slavery; Tullett, "Grease and Sweat"; Kapoor, "The Smells of Caste."

For Bourdieu, each habitus is associated with a particular class position and therefore matters of 'taste' mark out distinctions of class.[11] A 'developed taste' hints at access to a particular kind of social and cultural capital. At Perfume Chowk, customers from a somewhat higher class background indexed by their clothing, ways of speaking, mode of transportation, and lack of sweat marks show a preference for lighter smells. 'I don't like these strong smells like Poison. It feels weird to be laden with perfume like that,' said Ashfaq, an office worker. These kinds of customers are rare at Perfume Chowk. Most customers belong to the laboring class and show a preference for stronger scents. They often preface their interaction by outlining their jobs like laundry man, rickshaw driver, manual laborer, gardener, or bus driver, which means that they are constantly outdoors, feeling hot and smelling bad. That is why they need perfumes.

Other factors interact with heat in complex ways. When Afzal came to the shop, clear white sweat marks were visible on his maroon clothes, a result of sweat drying on his shirt and leaving behind bodily salts. He felt the scent that was offered and then became silent. 'What happened brother, you didn't like it'? the salesman asked. 'No, I am looking for a much stronger scent. This right here is my rickshaw, I'm out all day in all sorts of places with all sorts of people. People smoke inside it, some people fart,' he laughed a little. 'There's so much smoke in this city, so much dust. If the rickshaw smells bad, customers complain and refuse to sit inside.' What is true for the rickshaw is also true for people in general. Being 'outside in the sun' refers both to the effects of heat on the body but also exposure to pollution within the city.

The fact that Perfume Chowk sells scents in 3, 6 and 12 millilitre bottles allows individuals to buy small quantities of what is otherwise a very expensive commodity. Sherwani explains:

> In the broader scheme of things, perfumes are quite an expensive commodity. Some of them sell for as much as Rs 5 lakhs a litre. This puts perfumes in the same category of products as silver or gold. Ninety percent of the public is poor. Only ten percent are millionaires and billionaires. They are not coming here anyways. I have built this for the poor. They buy small quantities but they keep buying.

Perfume Chowk's position on the footpath out in the open without any pretensions makes it accessible to everyone. According to Zafar, a *shagird* at Perfume Chowk, 'a guy riding a motorbike for forty minutes, sweating through his clothes, is not going to go into an air-conditioned, glass shop to buy an expensive perfume. *Logon ki phatt jaati hai.*[¶] We are on the footpath in the heat

[¶] People are intimidated (to go into these shops).

like everyone else. Even those on bicycles stop here.' In Karachi, a city entirely dependent on individualised transportation, your mode of transportation indicates your status. It is assumed that those already buying in air-conditioned, glass shops will not in fact be buying at Perfume Chowk. Why would they sit on a plastic stool out in the sun to buy counterfeit perfumes when they can buy the original inside a sanitized, cooled shop? It is the creation of this kind of an imagined subset of the public through negation that is central to Perfume Chowk's mission, ethics, marketing, and brand image. It is for the public that is not inside air-conditioned, glass shops. Despite their poverty, argues Perfume Chowk, they still deserve perfumes because perfume is for everyone.

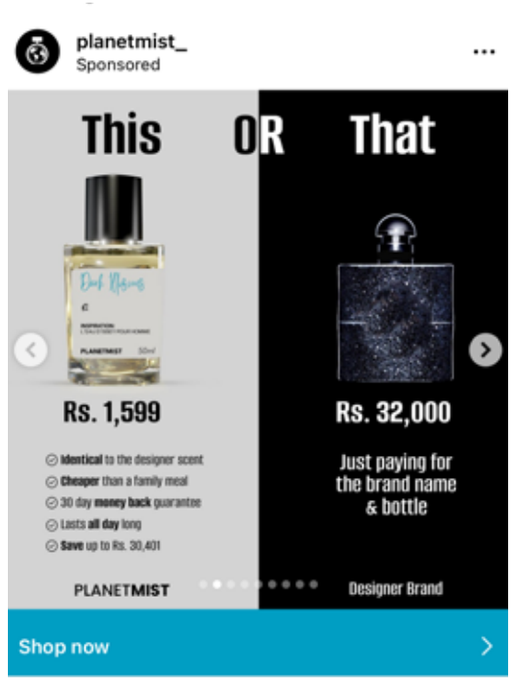
As Perfume Chowk lets you try the scent before you buy it, many customers come to the stall to simply apply the perfume and leave. One customer said, 'Perfumes are so expensive now, maybe I should just come in the morning and apply some scent before I go to the office.' A salesman replied,. 'By all means, no one will refuse you.' Many people come to the stall before they head into an office, college, or any other indoor place which could be air-conditioned, where their smell would be obvious. Perhaps the role of perfumes in facilitating access to such spaces can best be captured by the story of a young man who came to the stall wearing nicely fitted dress pants and shirt with a tie and a file in his hand. Though he looked ready to go to the office he was obviously flustered: '*Jaani*[¶], I have an interview in a few minutes. This pant shirt is making me sweat from every pore. I smell like garbage. Please apply some perfume. I really need this job.' He received his dose of perfume and quickly rushed off on a *qingchi*[ǂ]. Having to wear professional clothes that are ill-suited to the hot and humid environment of the city creates an increased need for perfumes. Smelling the wrong way can lead to subtle, but very consequential marginalization. As soon as the customer left, Zafar said to me, 'this is why I never wear pants and shirt. They make me feel so suffocated (*ghuttan hoti hai*).'

There appears to be a burgeoning perfume market in Karachi, which could be connected to the slow but significant increase in temperature. Perfume Chowk receives a number of customers seeking supplies such as empty bottles or alcohol for starting their own perfume business. 'Everyone is getting into the perfume business these days,' explained my co-worker. There are at least five different perfume sellers apart from Perfume Chowk within a ten-minute walking distance. Nearly every major clothing brand within Pakistan now offers a perfume line. There is now also a growing list of online stores selling copies of designer brands.'

¶ A term of endearment.

ǂ A shared three-wheeled taxi ubiquitous in many neighborhoods of Karachi.

As heat increases in the city, it affects all aspects of social life. As my ethnographic study of Perfume Chowk suggests, we need to think more deeply about our alienation from our environment. Why is it that in a city where sweating is so profoundly necessary for survival, we have such a visceral reaction to it? Why is such shame attached to a natural bodily activity? What is needed is a deeper socio-historical investigation of our present attitudes. Building on Malcolm X's question 'Who taught you to hate the color of your skin?' I ask, who taught you to hate your sweating bodies?



Instagram ad for a Pakistani business selling perfumes.

Notes

1. Khan, "Scents of Perfume Chowk."
2. ARY Stories, *Story of Karachi Perfume Chowk* | ARY Stories.
3. Eat & Discover, dir. 2024. *Perfume Chowk Kiya Hay ??? Gulistan e Juhar Karachi.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfhijZVs5aY.
4. Ehteshamuddin, *Perfume Chowk.*
5. Haq, "Rise of the MQM," 995; Khan, *Mohajir Militancy*, 42.
6. Anwar, "Ustaads, Shagirds."
7. Bourdieu, "Habitus."
8. Nash, "Social Explanation and Socialization."
9. Sullivan, et al. "Olfactory Memory Networks."
10. Douglas, *Purity and Danger.*
11. Bourdieu, "Distinction."

ARY Stories. "Story of Karachi Perfume Chowk | ARY Stories." YouTube video, 3:31. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38_COpPUhGQ.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste." In *Inequality*. Routledge, 2006.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Habitus." In *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, 2nd ed., edited by Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby. Routledge, 2005.

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo.* Routledge, 2002. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203361832.

Eat & Discover. Perfume Chowk Kiya Hay ??? Gulistan e Juhar Karachi. Directed by Eat & Discover, 2024. YouTube video, 9:34. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfhijZVs5aY.

Ehteshamuddin, director. *Perfume Chowk.* HUM TV, 2010.

Haq, Farhat. "Rise of the MQM in Pakistan: Politics of Ethnic Mobilization." *Asian Survey* 35, no. 11 (1995): 990-1004.

Kapoor, Shivani. "The Smells of Caste-Body, Self and Politics." In *Olfaction: An Interdisciplinary Perspective from Philosophy to Life Sciences*, 21–34. Springer, 2021.

Kettler, Andrew. *The Smell of Slavery: Olfactory Racism and the Atlantic World.* Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Khan, Mariam Naeem. "Scents of Perfume Chowk." *Dawn*, September 28, 2024. http://www.dawn.com/news/1134081.

Khan, Nichola. *Mohajir Militancy in Pakistan: Violence and Transformation in the Karachi Conflict.* Routledge, 2010.

Nash, Roy. "Social Explanation and Socialization: On Bourdieu and the Structure, Disposition, Practice Scheme." *The Sociological Review* 51, no. 1 (2003): 43–62. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.00407.

Rosenblum, Jordan D. "5. A Brief History of Jews and Garlic." In *Feasting and Fasting*, edited by Aaron S. Gross, Jody Myers, and Jordan D. Rosenblum, 147–56. New York University Press, 2020.

Sullivan, Regina M., Donald A. Wilson, Nadine Ravel, and Anne-Marie Mouly. "Olfactory Memory Networks: From Emotional Learning to Social Behaviors." *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 9 (2015).

Tullett, William. "Grease and Sweat: Race and Smell in Eighteenth-Century English Culture." *Cultural and Social History* 13, no. 3 (2016): 307–22.

Lakes Drying, Tides Rising

Nazgol Ansarinia

> Perhaps more than any other element, water is a complete poetic reality. Water is the element of dreams, the element that in helping us dematerialise the objective world inspires us to dream.
>
> – Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*

The day I decided to contribute to this issue, the temperature was 41 degrees in Tehran and the electricity was cut off between three and six in the afternoon. I had no way of cooling myself and, in pure frustration, the only thing I could think of was to make a fan by pleating a piece of paper like we used to in school.

After an unusually long rainy spring we had one of the hottest Augusts I could remember. In fact Iran's annual average temperature has risen by two and half degrees over the past 30 years, one degree higher than the global average.[1] In the face of this palpable climate change, one feels somewhat helpless as an average citizen, dependent on the comforts of modern life. We no longer have the facilities or the knowledge that for thousands of years allowed Iranians not only to survive the overall hot and dry climate of their geography but to thrive by building sustainable habitats. Seeing the incredible gardens of pomegranates, grapes and dates cultivated in the middle of the Iranian plateau using *qanat* wells—the ingenious water transportation system—one truly understands the meaning of the Farsi word *abadi* (settlement), a composite of *ab* (water) and *ad* (place suffix).

In recent decades, however, the shortage of water has become visible through frequent dust storms, regional conflicts, and migrations due to dwindling access to water, and protests in various regions of south and central Iran. Apart from global climate change, experts argue that years of mismanagement have played a bigger role in this national crisis. According to environmental scientist, Kaveh Madani, 'Excessive manipulation of the natural environment for economic purposes has pushed Khuzestan's [one of Iran's southern regions] ecosystem to breaking point'...'[L]arge rivers have been blocked by gigantic dams to store water for agriculture, industrial, and domestic uses and hydroelectricity production', driving one region water-bankrupt to temporarily satisfy the needs of farmers, industries, and large cities in another region.[2] All of the above is the backdrop to contemporary everyday life in Iran and perhaps what brought my attention to water as a 'subject,' both on a personal level and for its place in the collective Iranian consciousness.

Nazgol Ansarinia, 2020, Connected pools, plaster, pigment, paint. Photo by Lorenzo Palmieri.

Nazgol Ansarinia, 2020, Connected pools, plaster, pigment, paint. Photo by Lorenzo Palmieri.

Nazgol Ansarinia, 2020, Connected pools, plaster, pigment, paint. Photo by Lorenzo Palmieri.

Nazgol Ansarinia, 2020, Connected pools, plaster, pigment, paint. Photo by Lorenzo Palmieri.

Pools and Voids

I grew up in Tehran's first high-rise residential complex, which consisted of fourteen towers placed around an Olympic-sized swimming pool. This layout is perhaps one of the most exaggerated versions of traditional Iranian courthouse architecture where the rooms typically enclose a *hoze* or a shallow pool in the middle of the courtyard. In the mid-1980s, the complex's management allowed girls up to nine years old to use this swimming pool during the summers, and so I too jumped in and out of this pool between the ages of five and nine. But for me the sweeter experience of floating in water was at my grandparents' house in Mashhad, which had a swimming pool of moderate size on the south side of the two-story building. My grandparents' house was built a few years before the revolution of 1979. They included a pool perhaps because they had never lived in a house without a pool of water. When they married they lived in a traditional courthouse building with a *hoze* in the middle; gradually they moved to more modern houses, but every house they built integrated the element of water in its architectural form.

Their house, my childhood dream house, has been vacant for nearly fifteen years now, with its pool empty for even longer. As my grandparents grew old and the grandchildren were no longer children, the shortage of water also became apparent—it didn't make sense to fill the pool anymore. When they passed away, none of their descendants wanted to even talk about moving a single piece of their furniture, let alone selling the house. We thought that as long as we kept this house intact we could protect our memories.

We know that the moment we sell the house it will be demolished and replaced with a five-story building, its pool filled with rubble. The story of their house is an all too familiar one of the changing ways of life and the rapid development of large Iranian cities.

Private Waters

When viewing one of the modern middle-class neighbourhoods, like Jordan, from up high, the number of empty swimming pools is quite striking. According to municipality records, 1,100 shapes in this area of three square kilometres are labelled as 'private waters', representing swimming and decorative pools.

In the late 1960s, when Victor Gruen Associates worked on Tehran's master plan, they were influenced by their experience of planning for American cities.[3] The Iranian middle class also shared some aspirations with its American counterparts, some manifestations of which can be found in the architectural form of the city. In the 1950s, Los Angeles was a desert city with over a million private pools[4] and Tehran, with its long and hot summer days, also had the right climate for these features. For centuries, Iranians had built their houses and gardens around shallow pools that were both symbolic and functional. The *hoze* as a container of water is deemed sacred in Iranian culture; it acts as a mirror that reflects the sky above and symbolically connects the celestial and terrestrial worlds. Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar in their book *The Sense of Unity* describe the presence of the *hoze* as such: 'The dependent spaces within a courtyard focus on the central pools, whose full, brimming, emerald-green surfaces reflect the divine mercy.'[5] These shallow pools were not for bathing or swimming, and served as a reservoir for washing and cleansing as well as helping to cool and humidify the air. When the swimming pool was introduced as a feature of modern architecture to Iran, it was quickly adopted, as it was just a different version of a very old idea. With the growth of modern lifestyles in the 1960s and 1970s, the *hoze* became a swimming pool.

The post-1979 revolutionary culture, however, affected many aspects of life, including built space. The increasing significance of religious values over secular, and the traditional over the modern, shaped how swimming pools were perceived. These private waters became subject to voyeurism and their use was seen as a potential threat to new public morals. As the city grew in height, more and more one- or two-story buildings were replaced by five- or six-story structures, and the few remaining houses became surrounded by tall buildings. This new setting increased the possibility of being watched from the exponentially growing number of neighbouring windows. So if a pool was hidden from view, it had a better chance of containing water but if visible and exposed, it was likely to be empty.

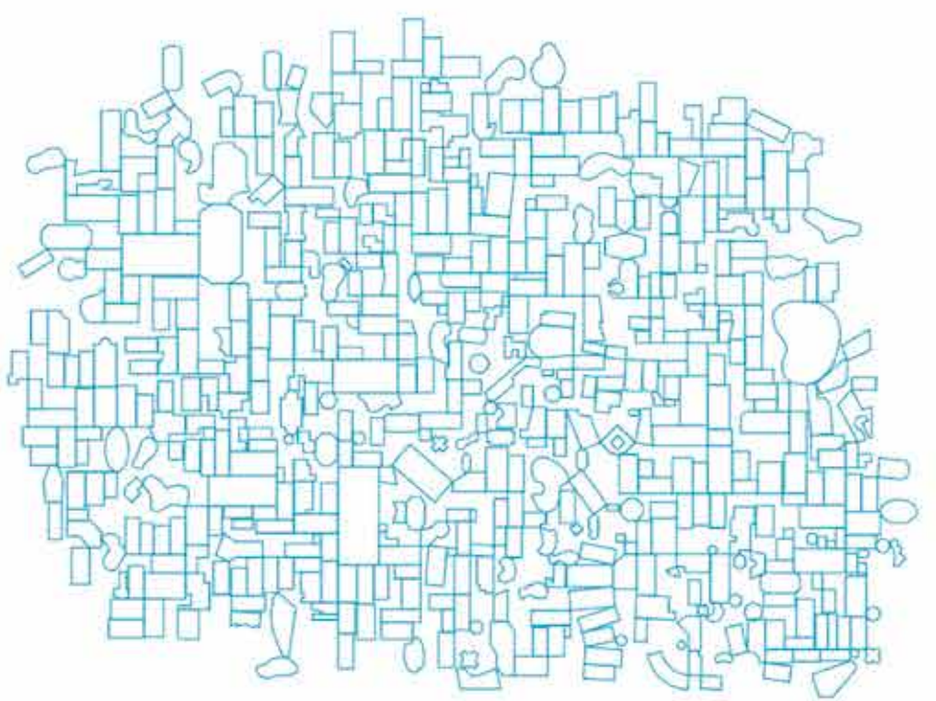
Connected pools

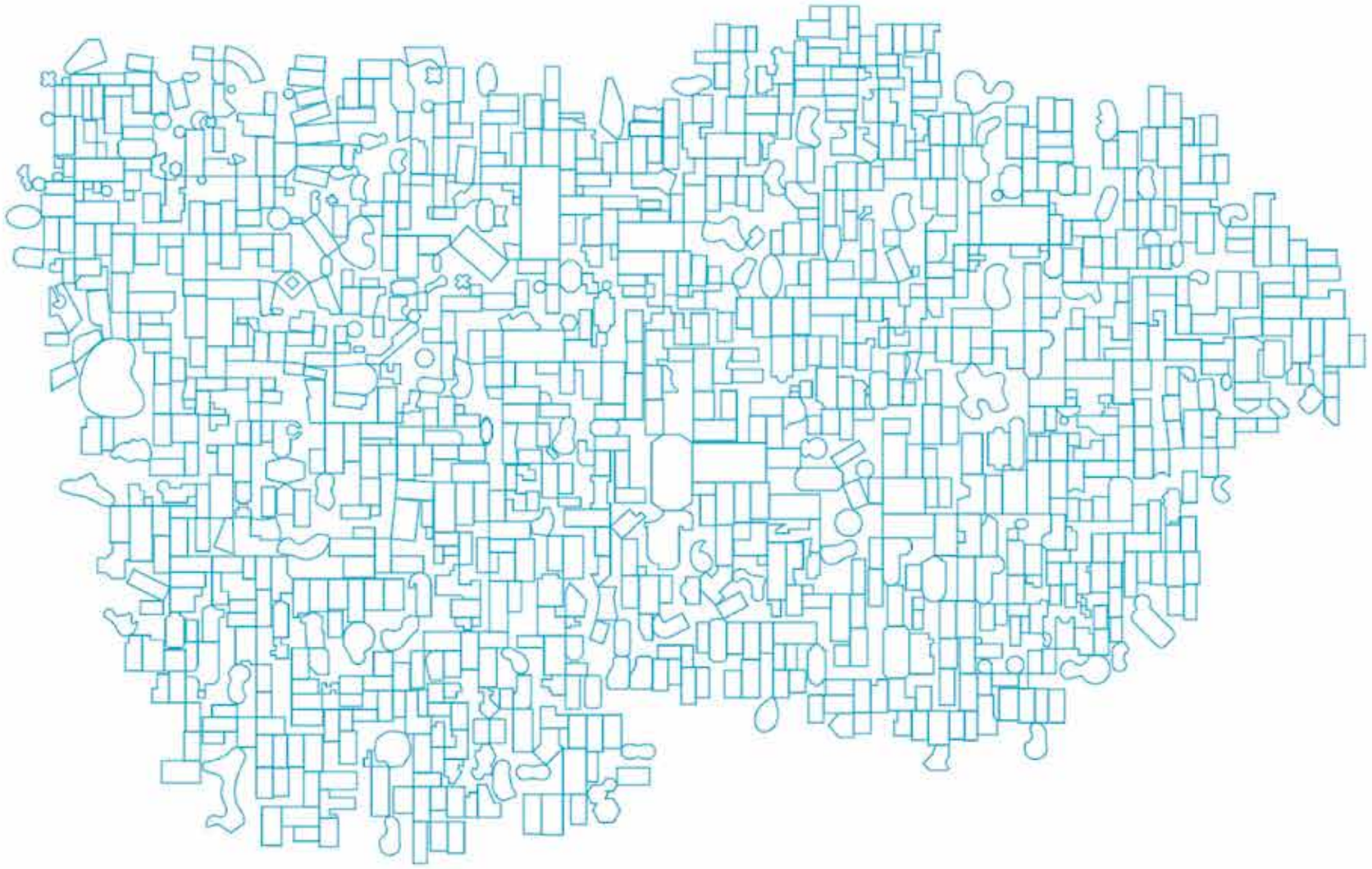
The reinforcement of moral codes combined with the gradual shortage of water has kept the pools empty and turned them into voids during the hot summers of Tehran. Yet it is fascinating that many of these voids continue to exist even after forty-five years. They have not been filled with earth and converted into parking or green spaces. In a city like Tehran where every inch is being built up, what does it mean to have these voids remain intact? Perhaps like any other object that one doesn't use but retains in the hope of using in the future, the maintenance of the empty swimming pools follows the same logic. Keeping these voids not only expresses a wish for them to contain water and be used again in an unforeseen future, but allows for holding on to the memory of them once full.

(Above) Nazgol Ansarinia, 2018, Untitled. Digital photograph.
(Left) Nazgol Ansarinia, 2021, Untitled. Digital photograph.

Nazgol Ansarinia, 2020, Untitled. Digital image.

Nazgol Ansarinia, 2019, Untitled. Digital photograph.





(Above) Nazgol Ansarinia, 2020, Untitled. Digital image.
(Page 46-47) Nazgol Ansarinia, 2020, Untitled. Digital image.

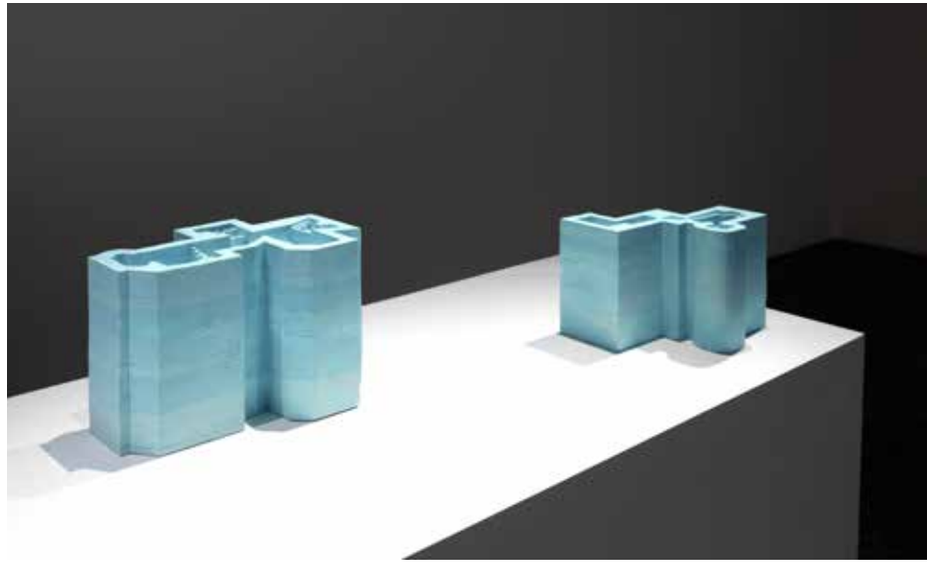
Longing for and dreaming of water in our dry lands is only natural. According to Gaston Bachelard, water is the element of dreams: 'By dissolving substances, water helps the imagination in its task of de-objectifying and assimilating.'[6] The connection between water and the flow of imagination also perhaps contributes to the continued existence of these empty containers.

Not so long ago water was such an essential and integrated part of Iranian architecture that no home could be imagined without it. This is perhaps the first time in the history of this region that houses are being built without pools of water. While its physical presence has disappeared from our modern life, allusions to it have not been totally abandoned. Its residue can still be found in the Iranian collective memory in the few remaining water-filled pools and in all the empty ones.

During the two years that I worked on the subject of the empty pools of Tehran, my personal investigation of these persistent voids pushed me more and more towards the latent collective longing underlying the individual appearance of each void and gave direction to my formal experimentation. Looking for new possibilities that the integration of these negative spaces could create, I took forms from the municipality records and gave them depth and dimension by combining them. When connected, their totality resembles that of a lake and once again allows for movement and flow. They create a possibility of streaming water, opposed to and resisting the image of the stagnant waters accumulated at the bottom of the empty pools of Tehran.

The forces draining our natural water sources in the name of development and progress, suppressing all manifestations of life, are driving our physical and social atmosphere towards aridness. The battle between wet and dry has been fought for centuries in this region; it is an actual struggle between life and death as well as a symbolic one. Water runs deep in the Iranian consciousness and depriving people of its material and imaginary possibilities will inevitably lead to rising tides.

'Water swells seeds and causes springs to gush forth.'[7]



Installation view at Green Art Gallery. Photo by Anna Shtraus.

Notes

1. Mahoozi, "Iran's Extreme Heatwave Underscores Urgent Need for Climate Action."
2. Madani, "Iran's Decision-makers must shoulder the Blame for its Water Crisis."
3. Jafari and Hein, "Revisiting the Transnational Building of a Modern Planning Regime in Iran," 461.
4. Van Leeuwen, *The Springboard in the Pond*, 165.
5. Ardalan and Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity*, 60.
6. Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 12.
7. Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 14.

Ardalan, Nader, and Laleh Bakhtiar. *The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*. 2nd ed. University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Bachelard, Gaston. *Water and Dreams: An Essay On the Imagination of Matter*. 3rd ed. Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1999.

Jafari, Elmira, and Carola Hein. "Revisiting the Transnational Building of a Modern Planning Regime in Iran: the first Tehran Master Plan and the interplay between Local and Foreign Planners," *Planning Perspectives: An International Journal of History, Planning and the Environment* 36, no. 3 (2020). Taylor and Francis Online.

Madani, Kaveh. "Iran's Decision-makers must shoulder the Blame for its Water Crisis." *The Guardian*, Aug 5, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/aug/05/iran-environmental-crisis-climate-change

Mahoozi, Sanam. "Iran's Extreme Heatwave Underscores Urgent Need For Climate Action." *Forbes*, Aug 17, 2024. https://www.forbes.com/sites/sanammahoozi/2024/08/16/irans-extreme-heatwave-underscores-urgent-need-for-climate-action/

Van Leeuwen, Thomas A.P. *The Springboard in the Pond: An Intimate History of the Swimming Pool*, edited by Helen Searing. MIT Press, 2000.

Invisible Desert

Danika Cooper

The original version of this essay was commissioned and published by New Silk Roads (e-flux Architecture and Aformal Academy, 2020). It has been slightly altered for republication in Hybrid: Hot (2025).

Desert landscapes are often described as empty, vacant, and lacking and are frequently depicted as voids, gaps, or blank spots on maps. But emptiness is not a geographical feature. Rather, it is a cultural construction and representational technique that has, both directly and indirectly, contributed to social, environmental, and economic exploitation of desert landscapes.[1] Twelfth- and thirteenth-century European definitions of the word desert directly translate into wasteland, which evolved from the late Latin *desertum*, meaning 'thing abandoned.' This designation of the desert as an empty wasteland, which has well surpassed its European origins, suggests that it has no real social, environmental, or economic value.[¶] Historian Vittoria di Palma argues that the term wasteland itself is a category of land defined entirely by absence. She writes: 'The emptiness that is the core characteristic of the wasteland is also what gives the term its malleability, its potential for abstraction; a vacant shell, it lies ready to include all those kinds of places that are defined in negative terms, identified by what they are not.'[2] It is this correlation between deserts and wastelands that has helped contribute to perceptions that the desert is worthless and in need of sweeping transformations.

Environmental sociologist Valerie L. Kuletz makes the case that contemporary environmental science research continues to legitimise discourses of emptiness and wastelands by hierarchically organizing bioregional value according to productive capacity through the universally adopted Global Land Cover system.[3] This categorisation is partly the result of land cover and land use classification systems used globally by governments to standardize processes for taxation and economic development purposes.[♯] Nearly all its categories classify lands through an association with an industry, such as urban development or agriculture. The majority of arid regions are

[¶] It is important to note that many non-European cultures have viewed deserts as spaces of rich culture and ecologies. The most seminal examples are the Hohokam people of the southwestern United States, the Rajasthani pastoralists in the Indian subcontinent, and the ancient Egyptians.

[♯] Global land cover datasets have been used since the 1970s. Since the 1990s, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) have produced the most comprehensive and widely accepted datasets that are used throughout the globe by governments and institutions to track and monitor land cover change.[4]

classified as barren land in the MODIS Land Cover classification dataset. Defined in the dataset as 'land with limited ability to support life,' barren land is characterised by many of the features of desert landscapes—'dry salt flats,' 'bare exposed rock,' 'transitional areas,' and 'mixed barren land.'[5] Given that there is no desert or arid category in the MODIS dataset, these landscapes are almost always categorised as barren land. Directly correlating economic productivity with vegetation, land cover categorisation systems frame the value of these barren geographies to primarily derive from their ability to be physically manipulated and repurposed into other, more productive land uses. These environmental classifications and the perceptions that they enable have material consequences on how desert landscapes are governed, designed, developed, maintained, and valued, and have created public perceptions that deserts are geographically remote and culturally isolated. This strategic invisibility has allowed the pursuit of activities that are out of public view and beyond the realm of judicial and civic oversight.

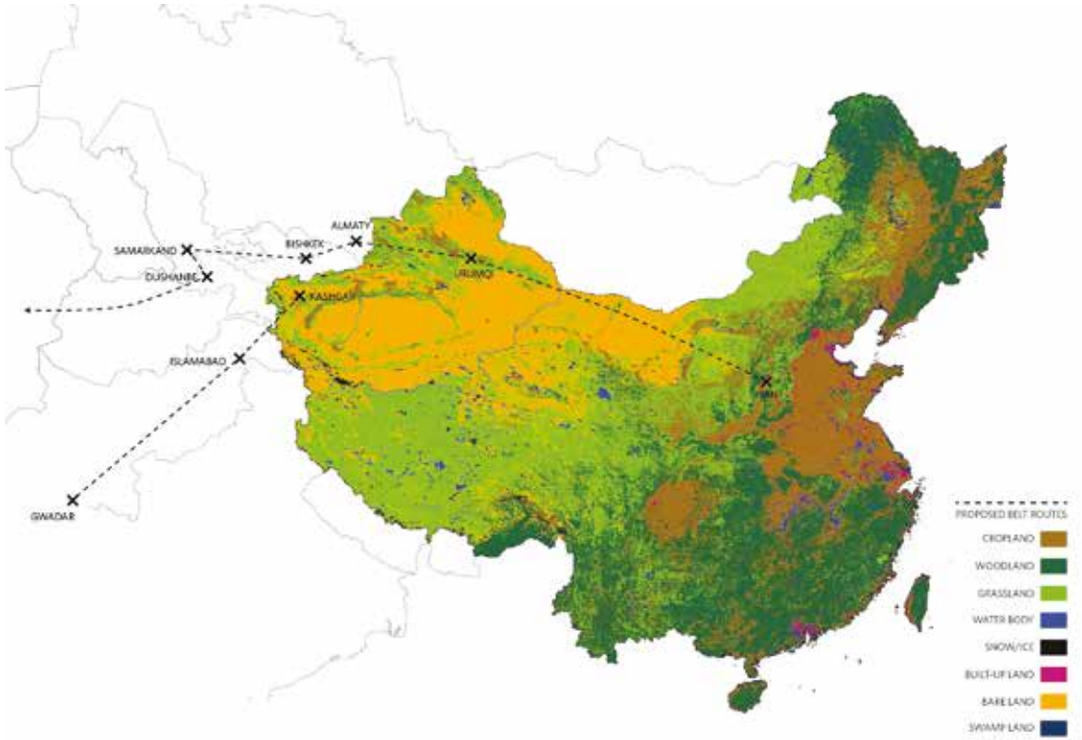
The internment of China's Muslim-minority populations in Xinjiang is one of numerous examples from across the globe in which the strategic invisibility afforded by desert landscapes has enabled the infringement of human rights to promote a geopolitical agenda. Governments, at all levels and from across the globe, have long exploited desert landscapes to relocate populations, test weapons, dispose of toxic materials, mine natural resources, and reinforce lethal borderlands. For example, during Britain, Spain, and France's colonisation of the Americas, Indigenous peoples were brutally forced to relocate to deserts in order to gain access to their land and resources. These actions continued after the creation of the United States in 1776, and their colonial legacies continue to shape Indigenous relations with the United States government today.[6] At the height of the Second World War, Japanese Americans were forcefully interned in U.S. deserts as a matter of 'national security.'[7] Not long after, those same deserts became the sites of nuclear testing and detonations, activities that continued for almost 50 years.[8] Today, the soil and air reflect the protracted environmental toxicity of nuclear colonialism.[9] In Chile, Augusto Pinochet exploited the Atacama Desert's massive scale, lack of development, and hence, extreme invisibility from the public eye to execute and bury political prisoners in unmarked, remote parts of the desert from the 1970s until the 1990s.[10] In the Negev Desert, Bedouins were forcefully removed in the aftermath of World War II to provide the newly-formed state of Israel with lands that could be irrigated for settlement and agriculture—consequences of which continue to shape global politics.[11] The commonly held, but fundamentally false, perception of deserts as landscapes of desolate and empty spaces has allowed governments, institutions, and private enterprises alike to exert intensive control over these territories, often with little regard for long-term socio-environmental consequences.

The Strategic Invisibility of Xinjiang

Hidden in the desert territory of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang) in northwest China are massive, high-security compounds currently imprisoning over a million people. The People's Republic of China (PRC) is exploiting the region's geographic remoteness, cultural isolation, and the insidious discourse of the global War on Terror to justify and obscure the mass surveillance and internment of its minority-Muslim citizenry. In the case of Xinjiang, perceptions of the region as empty and without value have resulted in transformations of the physical landscape and associated social structures over the last decade. Despite the massive scale and rapid rate at which these changes have been occurring, restricted access to and documentation of the area—especially the 're-education' camps—makes the region's invisibility altogether more profound.

Maintaining total control over Xinjiang's territory and population is a critical element of the Communist Party of China's (CCP) recent intentions to capitalise on the region's strategic geographic location and economic potential. Xinjiang is a vital geography in China's global ambitions, and the Uyghurs' cultural differences and separatist desires pose an existential threat to the state's motives. While the exploitation of Xinjiang has taken place for centuries, the CCP has sought to further reaffirm control of the region as a strategic play in the country's new global trade plan, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI, which aims to mimic the transcontinental trade economy established through the original Silk Road, depends upon Xinjiang's longstanding geostrategic role as a bridge between mainland China and Central Asian countries, Europe and, eventually, Africa. Ancillary to this has been the forced assimilation of Muslim-minority communities into mainstream Chinese culture, and in doing so, the suppression of dissent. While the BRI promotes extreme global connectivity, its success relies upon the continued invisibility of Xinjiang and its Uyghur people. Yet as the deliberate concealment of the state's treatment of the Uyghurs becomes even more imperative to their objectives, China's foreign policy and economic agenda becomes more visible to the global community.¶

¶ It is important to note that precisely because of the region's low population density and remote location that these events are able to take place and that despite increasing suspicion of human rights violations, there is limited documentation and evidence. China has been highly effective in both denying access to sites and controlling the narrative about Xinjiang to its own citizens, such that most people within mainland China are completely unaware of what is happening to the Uyghurs and other Muslim minority groups. If these same actions were pursued in high-density urban areas, keeping them hidden and secret would be nearly impossible, but the geographic remoteness of the region and the successful public intimidation of the Uyghurs keep these violations invisible. As such, I am deeply indebted to the dedicated scholarship of Adrian Zenz and Shawn Zhang, who have each painstakingly worked to expose this atrocity with almost no official data nor any physical access to Xinjiang.



Two of the most central and lucrative Belt routes proposed through China's mega-infrastructure project, The Belt and Road Initiative, rely on Xinjiang's strategically located geography and 'bare' land classification. Map data from MODIS Global Land Cover dataset (2010) and the BRI maps produced by The World Bank Organization (2018).

Unsurprisingly, the majority of Xinjiang is classified as barren land in the MODIS Land Cover classification dataset. This classification belies the fact that the region of Xinjiang contains oasis villages, towns, and cities where over 11 million Uyghur people live, work, and worship.[12] It is not only rich in coal, oil, gas, lithium, and zinc but is also favorable to grazing livestock and the cultivation of cotton, cereals, melons, grapes, and the Aksu 'sweetheart' apple—a plant sustaining a billion-dollar industry and grown exclusively in Xinjiang.[13] Ignorance of the Uyghurs' venerable and established culture is the result of strategic intervention.

For millennia, Xinjiang has been home to an ethnically Turkic people called the Uyghurs, who had been primarily nomadic, though they also built impressive oasis cities with sophisticated agricultural techniques.[14] At the height of the Silk Road's global influence, Xinjiang was a crossroads for culture and religion: At its trade centers in the oasis towns of Kashgar, Khotan, and Yarkhand, the Uyghurs were influenced by interactions with people from Persia, India, China, Mongolia, Turkestan, and Greece and were introduced to Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Manichaeism.[15] In approximately 1000 CE, most of the region's population converted to Islam, which today remains the primary religion of the region.[16] The Uyghurs remained an autonomous population until the Chinese Qing imperial dynasty conquered Xinjiang in the mid-18th century, bringing the region and the Uyghur people under Chinese leadership. Throughout the 19th century, Uyghurs made numerous, though unsuccessful, attempts to regain independence and reject colonisation.[17]

In 1955, Xinjiang formally became a Chinese 'autonomous' region, an administrative division defined through an affiliation with a particular ethnic minority.[¶] Today, Xinjiang remains strategically located, forming China's border with eight neighboring countries: Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. It is China's largest administrative region: At 1.6 million square kilometers, Xinjiang is approximately one-sixth of China's land mass, equivalent in size to Great Britain, France, Germany, and Spain combined.[18] Geologically, the region is significant for the Flaming Mountains, the Taklamakan Desert, the Turpan Depression, and the Tian Shan ('Heavenly Mountains'), all meaningful cultural landscapes to the local population. However, the region, along with the Uyghur community, has remained

[¶] In principle, this is meant to give members of that minority rights not afforded to others. There are five autonomous regions in China that are each associated with one or more ethnic minority: Zhuang Autonomous Region, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Tibet Autonomous Region, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. It is important to note that despite these regions being created in acknowledgement of ethnic diversity, these populations have been substantially disenfranchised socially, politically, and economically. Tibetans are perhaps the most well-known example of this, but they are by no means the only ones to have experienced such marginalization. It is important to note that Tibet's status as an Autonomous Region is a delineation that has been ascribed by the Chinese state but is highly contested by Tibetans and much of the international community, who believe that Tibet is a sovereign nation.

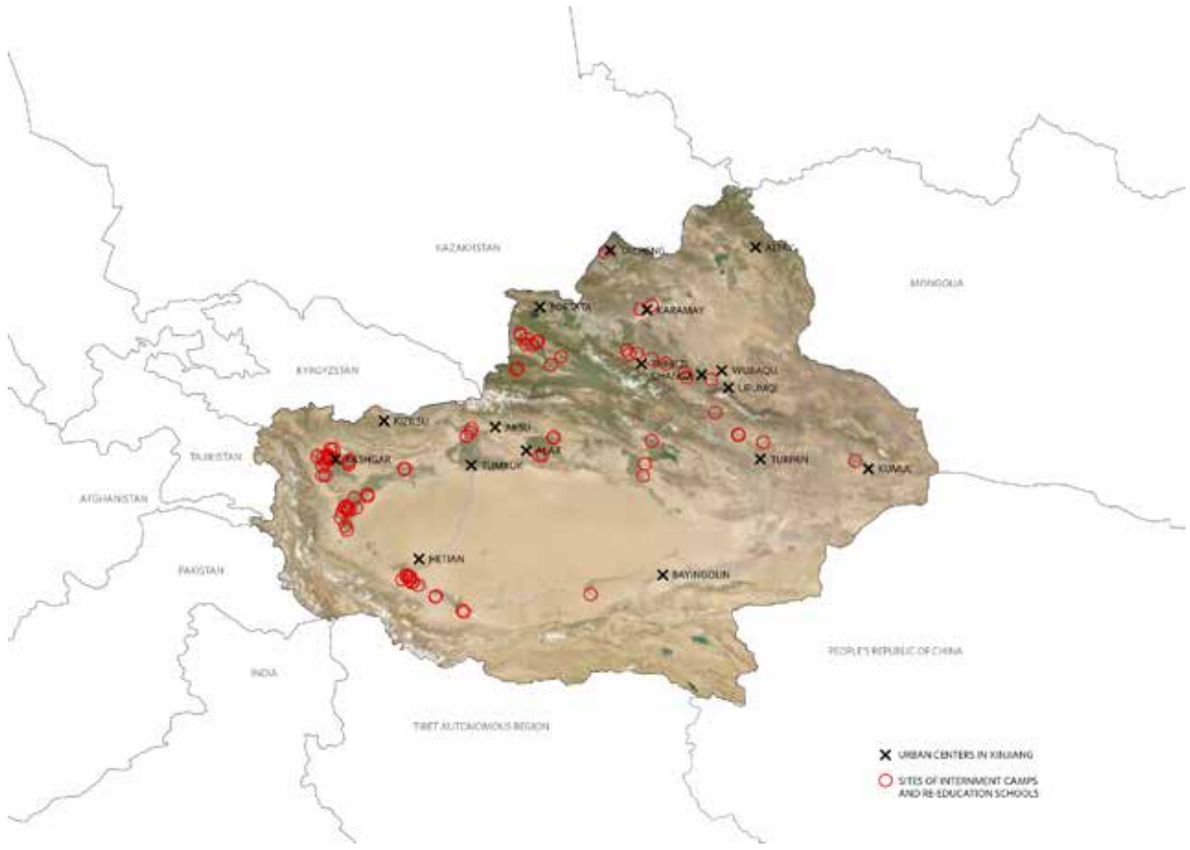
largely excluded from broader Chinese histories and Han culture. The continued separation of Xinjiang and its people from mainstream Chinese culture fortifies the concealment of activities pursued in the region.

Invisibility, Infrastructure, and the 'Project of the Century'

In January 2018, The Guardian reported that China had detained nearly 120,000 Muslim citizens in 're-education schools' deep in the Taklamakan Desert.[19] A year later, reports by Officials from both the United Nations and independent researchers estimated that 1.5 million people had been detained, without due process and without consent.[20] Satellite imagery confirms the existence of nearly one thousand massive, high-security compounds scattered throughout the region.[21] Chinese officials claim that these camps, in coordination with the intensified mass surveillance and security in the region, are necessary responses against violent, anti-state episodes attributed to ethnic separatism, terrorism, and religious extremism.[22] Critics have categorised the targeting of the Uyghurs, with the intention of eliminating their presence within the Chinese state, as cultural genocide.[23] Scholar Adrian Zenz goes further to describe the efforts by the Chinese state as a 'targeted political re-education effort that is seeking to change the core identity and belief system of an entire people.'[24]

In response to criticism, the Chinese government has remained adamant that the centers are voluntary educational centers that directly benefit the Uyghurs by providing language education and vocational training.[25] In 2018, Hu Lianhe, a top Chinese official, told the United Nations Human Rights panel that 'for those who are convicted of minor offences, we help and teach them vocational skills in education and training centers, according to relevant laws. There is no arbitrary detention and torture.'¶ China's UN Ambassador, Zhang Jun said at the 2019 United Nations General Assembly that the accusations against China are 'baseless' and a 'gross interference in China's internal affairs and deliberate provocation.'[27] Zhang went further in stating: 'Care for human rights is a hypocritical excuse employed by the United States to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. By making relentless efforts to defame China on Xinjiang, the United States aims to undermine China's stability and contain China's development. Such malicious attempt [sic] will never work.'[28] Yet evidence from satellite imagery shows the creation of the carceral architecture and infrastructure necessary to carry

¶ Despite Xinjiang only accounting for approximately 1.5 % of the country's total population, 21 percent of all arrests in 2017 were made in Xinjiang, according to the human rights advocacy group, Chinese Human Rights Defenders.[26]



Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is strategically located, linking China to many Central Asian countries, Pakistan, and India. It is estimated that there are at least 1,000 camps and re-education schools scattered throughout Xinjiang, holding close to 1.5 million Uyghurs. These new infrastructures fundamentally change the landscape of the region and redistribute the population away from urban centers and into these camps. Map data from Shawn Zhang, "List of Re-Education Camps in Xinjiang." Medium, May 21, 2019.

out such large-scale detention that has, and continues to, transform the physical and cultural landscape of Xinjiang.

The Uyghur separatist movement and their continued claim to this region as autonomous from the Chinese state have serious political and economic ramifications for the viability, stability, and international appetite for investment in BRI. The CCP's dependence on Xinjiang as the geographic hinge to the rest of the world poses an uncertainty that threatens the future of the project.[29] In order for the state to mollify this risk, political strategy necessitates that the Uyghur population either be forced to fall in line, or their challenge to state authority be made invisible. What's more is that the economic interests of China's neighbors and geo-political partners have allowed the ongoing mistreatment of the Uyghur community. For instance, Pakistan, despite being a Muslim-majority country, signed a letter in July 2019 along with 36 other countries that praised China for its 'remarkable achievements in the field of human rights'.[30] Three years later, in 2022, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a scathing report suggesting that China had committed 'crimes against humanity'.[31] Despite mounting evidence, many countries, Pakistan included, continue their partnerships with China. One cannot help but assume that such international support is directly tied to the financial and political gains that countries will incur through their involvement with the BRI.¶

The first key component of the BRI network is its land-and-sea corridor through Pakistan. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) aims to shorten the route of importing oil and gas from the Middle East to China by avoiding the existing route through the Strait of Malacca. Malacca is notoriously crowded and relatively shallow, making its crossing long and arduous. The CPEC would finance the construction of new infrastructure at the Port of Gwadar on the Arabian Sea along with an extensive rail and road network through Pakistan and into Xinjiang. In exchange, China promises to make Pakistan a key partner in the BRI and to finance and build energy and transportation infrastructure throughout the country.[32]

Global 'War on Terror' Discourse as Tool for Spatial Surveillance

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, events, the PRC began to associate Uyghur political dissent in China with the burgeoning global 'War on Terror' discourse. In November 2001, just weeks after 9/11, the CCP published an official document, 'Terrorist Activities Perpetrated by "Eastern Turkistan" Organizations and Their Links to Osama bin Laden and the Taliban,' positioning the Uyghur community as a major threat to national security.[33] The document refers to the Uyghurs as 'terrorists,' a notable shift from previous official party descriptions of them as 'separatists.' Cultural anthropologist Sean Roberts writes: 'It is likely that the state's sudden claim of a Uyghur terrorist threat was less a response to new security concerns in the region than an attempt to justify existing policies suppressing Uyghur nationalism and religiosity by framing them in the discourse of global "War of Terror."'[34] In this context, certain human rights and legal protections have been considered null and void, providing justification for mass surveillance and internment of the region's Muslim minorities.

The architect of such extreme action against the Uyghur people and other Muslim minority communities in China was Chen Quanguo.¶ His leadership as Xinjiang's Communist Party Secretary manifested in the drastic physical transformation of the region's landscape and urban centers. Under Chen's leadership from 2016-2021, Xinjiang was transformed into a mass security state, making it one of the most heavily fortified and policed regions in the world, paradoxically resulting in an enormous amount of focus being placed on the region by state officials and security personnel.[35] In cities like Urumqi, Kashgar, and Hotan, public and private spaces are continually surveilled and monitored through advanced, intrusive policing systems. A dense grid of checkpoints, police stations, armored vehicles, and high-definition cameras define the current urban form of cities within Xinjiang.[36] Facial recognition software tracks nearly every person on the street.[37] Police-related jobs increased to over 90,000 in 2016, from just over 5,000 a decade earlier.[38] Nearly 95 percent of these new positions were created to work in the extensive network of 7,500 new police stations in Xinjiang.[39] Further, the seemingly omnipresent surveillance system is a new type of civic infrastructure in Xinjiang that revolves around fear tactics and punishment. The pervasive fear of being identified as a terrorist and being sent to the camps has had a drastic spatial effect on the urban centers. Once thriving cities and towns, many of Xinjiang's population centers are now ghost towns with empty streets, shuttered businesses, and locked mosques.

In 2015, China's governing body, the National People's Congress, passed counter-terrorism legislation that criminalised Uyghur expression of dissent or religiosity and has resulted in both the police and ordinary citizens viewing many Uyghur cultural traditions as signs of terrorism or extremism.[40] The legislation also included an initiative to 're-educate' the Uyghur population.

¶The Uyghur community believes that the Chinese government unjustly colonised them and as a result, they have actively contested their control by the Chinese government. They have fought for their independence from the Chinese state unsuccessfully since the Qing imperial dynasty conquered them in the eighteenth century.

¶It should be noted that prior to his post in Xinjiang, Chen had been Party Secretary of Tibet (2011–2016) where his successful policies for suppressing dissent were widely lauded by the Chinese Community Party. Much of his tactics from Tibet have been instituted and intensified in Xinjiang.

Shown here are 96 aerial images from Google Earth Pro of sites that have been identified as internment camps or re-education schools by activist Shawn Zhang. His detailed and dedicated research has provided visual evidence of the existence of these sites, even as the Communist Chinese Party (CCP) has adamantly denied their existence. Map data from Shawn Zhang, "List of Re-Education Camps in Xinjiang." Medium, May 21, 2019. Aerial imagery produced by Google Earth, CNES/Airbus, and Maxar Technologies.




These aerial images, taken between 2016 and 2019, show how the landscape is fundamentally transformed over time by the construction of the camp architecture, transportation networks, and security infrastructure necessary to conceal the imprisonment of the Uyghur population. Aerial imagery produced by Google Earth and Maxar Technologies.




According to the Chinese government, re-education camps are intended as poverty-alleviation measures that provide opportunities for vocational skills training and language assimilation, a justification that makes any Uyghur or ethnic minority vulnerable to encampment.[ǂ] In August 2019, China's Ambassador to the United Nations Yu Jianhua claimed that China had helped lift 20 million people out of conditions of poverty in the last five years through economic progress.[42] However, Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities are forced into these programs without consent and without any indication or judicial process for why they are being imprisoned and when they will be released. Those who have been through re-education claim that they were made to memorise patriotic texts, speak exclusively in Mandarin, confess their 'faults', denounce their religious traditions and culture, and report on the activities of fellow internees. Those who do not follow orders or fail to adequately appease the guards are beaten, placed in solitary confinement, or deprived of food and sleep.[43]

Despite the CCP's denial that these are heavily policed internment camps, Adrian Zenz has compiled and published a body of governmental documents that provide evidence of the existence and oppressive purpose of these compounds. Zenz's research shows that the elements listed within the CCP bid titles for infrastructure development projects in the region are inconsistent with education facilities. Instead, they are components most often associated with carceral architecture. For instance, one bid is titled 'Convert former office building into transformation for education center.' However, the descriptions of requirements focus almost exclusively on detainment and policing infrastructure.[44] Most of these governmental bids mandate the installation of comprehensive security features that turn existing facilities into prison-like compounds; they call for surrounding walls, barbed-wire fences, reinforced security doors and windows, surveillance systems, secure access systems, watchtowers, guardrooms, police stations, and facilities for armed police forces. Zenz has estimated that as of 2019 there were at least a thousand of these camps, with up to 1.5 million people held within them, and almost all located in remote and unseen parts of Xinjiang.[45] In 2020, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) launched its 'Xinjiang Data Project' that tracks and maps re-education centers and prisons.[46] The ASPI's research found that more than 60 detention centers were expanded in scale during July 2020.[47] Most of these compounds have been identified by scouring satellite images of Xinjiang produced by open software like Google Earth. If Zenz and ASPI's estimates are accurate, maintaining the invisibility of this extensive constellation is remarkable.

Uyghur activist Shawn Zhang uses Google Earth imagery to link these CCP bid documents with the architecture of the compounds and demonstrate the rapid expansion of facilities on site.

ǂ Meng Jianzhu, secretary of the CCP and Legal Affairs Commission, said in 2018: "[Through] religious guidance, legal education, skills training, psychological interventions, and multiple other methods, the effectiveness of transformation through education must be increased, thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude."[41]

In one example, satellite imagery showed a location featuring only one building on March 6, 2017. On April 26, a Request for Proposal was published, and one month later, on May 26, construction had begun on the site. By November 30, an entire compound of buildings was nearly complete. In September 2018, additional buildings were constructed, continuing the methodical expansion of the site's facilities. Architectural components built on site included high barbed-wire fences and watchtowers encircling the 'education' center.[48] In addition to the built projects, there has been a wave of job positions advertised throughout China claiming the positions are to help run the education and training centers, but often the job descriptions and requirements fail to have any relationship to vocational skills training: Instead, they seek applicants who possess a military background or police training. Moreover, prospective teachers did not need to prove any specific degrees or documented skills.[49]

Strategic Visibility

In November 2019, hundreds of pages of official, internal CCP documents were leaked to *The New York Times*. These documents were the first piece of concrete evidence that the very top officials of the Chinese state have mandated this system of repression and imprisonment, and that the ambitions of such a system are to suppress the Uyghurs' religious and cultural freedom. The documents reveal that in April 2014, President Xi Jinping gave a series of internal speeches outlining a crackdown against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang and calling for a unified 'struggle against terrorism, infiltration, and separatism' using the 'organs of dictatorship' and showing 'absolutely no mercy.'[50]

Despite this evidence that actions pursued in the region have violated basic human rights, most global powers have remained largely silent in meaningfully condemning China for its treatment of the Uyghur population, outside of a letter published in 2019[51] and the OHCHR report published in 2022.[52] Since then, the PRC has not slowed down its 'mass arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearances, mass surveillance, cultural and religious persecution, separation of families, forced labor, sexual violence, and violations of reproductive rights.'[53] In response to the two-year anniversary of the OHCHR report, Maya Wang, associate China director at Human Rights Watch, made the lack of impact by the UN and other members of the international community explicit. In 2024, she said, 'Beijing's brazen refusal to meaningfully address well-documented crimes in Xinjiang is no surprise but shows the need for a robust follow-up by the UN human rights chief and UN member states. Contrary to the Chinese government's claims, its punitive campaign against millions of Uyghurs in Xinjiang continues to inflict great pain.'[54]

Very few countries have imposed any financial or political consequences on China that would galvanise it to heed their warnings. Reticence from the international community to enact any meaningful blows to China is largely attributable to the entanglements of the global economy resulting from China's dominance in industry and manufacturing, which is only likely to increase as the Belt and Road Initiative further strengthens China's position at the epicenter of global trade. Linking the economic benefit of the BRI with the human rights violations of internment camps has been a shrewd political strategy by China: It has forced global powers to choose between the promise of economic growth and publicly denouncing human rights violations.

Xinjiang reveals the potency and power that perceptions of landscapes have on policy with direct social and spatial ramifications, especially when places like deserts are perceived as empty and valueless wastelands. The strategic invisibility of Xinjiang's desert landscapes and the human rights violations that continue to occur in them serve the political and economic agenda of the People's Republic of China. Specifically, the BRI's visibility hinges on the continued invisibility of the Uyghurs. Simultaneously, the construction of the BRI through Xinjiang fundamentally inverts the perception of the region as empty and undeveloped, erecting new infrastructural, urban, and social systems that uphold China's global vision. In this way, the BRI project as a whole is about strategic visibility insofar as it draws attention to regions in order to produce a new set of perceptions and opportunities for prosperity, at all costs.

Notes

1. Harding, *The Myth of Emptiness*; Gersdorf, *The Poetics and Politics*.
2. Di Palma, *Wasteland*, 3–4.
3. Kuletz, *The Tainted Desert*, 13.
4. Gutman et al., "Towards Monitoring Land-Cover," 5; Gong et al., "A New Research Paradigm."
5. Anderson et al., " Land Cover Classification System," 18.
6. Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*; Blomley, "Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence"; Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*; Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*.
7. Brown, "Life in a Japanese-American Internment Camp"; Camp, "Landscapes of Japanese American Internment."
8. Masco, *The Theater of Operations*; Masco, *The Future of Fallout*
9. Stoler, *Duress*, 1–35.
10. *Nostalgia for the Light*.
11. Tondo, "'We Will Not Go Away'"; Weizman and Sheikh, *Fazal Sheikh/Eyal Weizman*; Kedar, Amara, and Yiftachel, *Emptied Lands*.
12. Toops, "Spatial Results of the 2010 Census in Xinjiang."
13. Holdstock, *China's Forgotten People*, 13; China Daily, "Man-Made Oasis."
14. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 43.
15. Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History*, 17.
16. Hansen, *The Silk Road*, 199.
17. Millward, "Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Xinjiang," 130.
18. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 4.
19. Phillips, "China 'Holding at Least 120,000 Uighurs.'"
20. Zenz, "Brainwashing, Police Guards and Coercive Internment."
21. Zenz; Mauk, "Can China Turn the Middle of Nowhere?"
22. Castets, "What's Really Happening to Uighurs in Xinjiang?"
23. Cronin-Furman, "China Has Chosen Cultural Genocide"; Washington Post Editorial Board, "Muslim Countries Joined China in Defending Its Cultural Genocide"
24. Cumming-Bruce, "U.N. Panel Confronts China"
25. Buckley and Qin, "Muslim Detention Camps"
26. Kuo, "China Denies Violating Minority Rights."
27. Reuters, "China Warns US."
28. Zhang, "Statement by Ambassador Zhang Jun on Human Rights."
29. Westcott and Shelley, "22 Countries Sign Letter"
30. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns"; Al Jazeera Staff Writers, "Potential 'Crimes against Humanity'"
31. Berlinger, "37 Signatories in Letter Defending China's Actions in Xinjiang."
32. Boone, "China President Arrives in Pakistan."
33. Communist Party of China, "Terrorist Activities Perpetrated by 'Eastern Turkistan' Organizations."
34. Roberts, "The Biopolitics of China's 'War on Terror,'" 238.
35. Zenz, "'Thoroughly Reforming Them,'" 3.
36. Millward, "What It's Like to Live in a Surveillance State."
37. Buckley and Mozur, "How China Uses High-Tech Surveillance."
38. Zenz and Leibold, "Chen Quanguo," 18.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Roberts, "The Biopolitics of China's 'War on Terror'" 246.
41. Zenz, "'Thoroughly Reforming Them'" 15.
42. Cumming-Bruce, "U.N. Panel Confronts China."
43. Zenz, "'Thoroughly Reforming Them '" 12.
44. *Ibid.*

45. Nebehay, "1.5 Million Muslims Could Be Detained."
46. Australian Strategic Policy Institute, "Xinjiang Data Project."
47. Al Jazeera Staff Writers, "China Running 380 Detention Centres."
48. Zhang, "Satellite Imagery."
49. Zenz, "'Thoroughly Reforming Them,'" 19.
50. Ramzy and Buckley, "'Absolutely No Mercy.'"
51. Westcott and Shelley, "22 Countries Sign Letter."
52. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns."
53. Human Rights Watch, "China: UN Needs."
54. Human Rights Watch, "China: UN Needs."

Al Jazeera Staff Writers. "China Running 380 Detention Centres in Xinjiang: Researchers." *Al Jazeera*, September 24, 2020. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/24/china-running-380-detention-centres-in-xinjiang-researchers.

"Potential 'Crimes against Humanity' in China's Xinjiang, UN Says." *Al Jazeera*, September 1, 2022. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/1/un-potential-crimes-against-humanity-in-chinas-xinjiang.

Anderson, James R., Ernest E. Hardy, John T. Roach, and Richard E. Witmer. "A Land Use and Land Cover Classification System for Use with Remote Sensor Data." Professional Paper. United States Geological Survey, Department of the Interior, 1976.

Australian Strategic Policy Institute. "Xinjiang Data Project," 2020. https://xjdp.aspi.org.au/map/?

Berlinger, Joshua. "North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Myanmar among 37 Signatories in Letter Defending China's Actions in Xinjiang." *CNN*, July 15, 2019. https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/15/asia/united-nations-letter-xinjiang-intl-hnk/index.html.

Bhandar, Brenna. *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership*. Duke University Press 2018.

Blomley, Nicholas. "Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence: The Frontier, the Survey, and the Grid." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93, no. 1 (March 2003): 121–41. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8306.93109.

Boone, Jon. "China President Arrives in Pakistan to Sign £30bn 'Land Corridor' Agreement." *The Guardian*, April 20, 2015, sec. World news. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/20/china-president-xi-jinping-pakistan-land-corridor-agreement.

Brown, Patricia Leigh. "Life in a Japanese-American Internment Camp, via the Diary of a Young Man." *The New York Times*, December 1, 2015, sec. Arts. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/02/arts/design/life-in-a-japanese-american-internment-camp-via-the-diary-of-a-young-man.html.

Buckley, Chris, and Paul Mozur. "How China Uses High-Tech Surveillance to Subdue Minorities." *The New York Times*, May 22, 2019, sec. World. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/22/world/asia/china-surveillance-xinjiang.html.

Buckley, Chris, and Amy Qin. "Muslim Detention Camps Are Like 'Boarding Schools,' Chinese Official Says." *The New York Times*, March 12, 2019, sec. World. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/12/world/asia/china-xinjiang.html.

Camp, Stacey Lynn. "Landscapes of Japanese American Internment." *Historical Archaeology* 50, no. 1 (2016): 169–86.

Castets, Rémi. "What's Really Happening to Uighurs in Xinjiang?" *The Nation*, March 19, 2019, sec. China. https://www.thenation.com/article/china-xinjiang-uighur-oppression/.

China Daily. "Man-Made Oasis: Xinjiang's 'Green Wall' Fights Expanding Desert," October 19, 2018. https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201810/19/WS5bc9337ba310eff3032834bb.html

Communist Party of China. "Terrorist Activities Perpetrated by 'Eastern Turkistan' Organizations and Their Links with Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban." Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN, November 29, 2001. http://www.china-un.org/eng/zt/fk/t28937.htm.

Cronin-Furman, Kate. "China Has Chosen Cultural Genocide in Xinjiang—For Now." *Foreign Policy*, September 19, 2018. https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/19/china-has-chosen-cultural-genocide-in-xinjiang-for-now/.

Cumming-Bruce, Nick. "U.N. Panel Confronts China Over Reports That It Holds a Million Uighurs in Camps." *The New York Times*, August 10, 2018, sec. World. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/10/world/asia/china-xinjiang-un-uighurs.html.

Di Palma, Vittoria. *Wasteland: A History*. Yale University Press, 2014.

Gersdorf, Catrin. *The Poetics and Politics of the Desert: Landscape and the Construction of America*. Rodopi, 2009.

Gong, Peng, Le Yu, Congcong Li, Jie Wang, Lu Liang, Xuecao Li, Luyan Ji, Yuqi Bai, Yuqi Cheng, and Zhiliang Zhu. "A New Research Paradigm for Global Land Cover Mapping." *Annals of GIS* 22, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 87–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/19475683.2016.1164247.
Gutman, G., Raymond A. Byrnes, J. Masek, S. Covington, C. Justice, S. Franks, and Rachel Headley. "Towards Monitoring Land-Cover and Land-Use Changes at a Global Scale: The Global Land Survey 2005." *Photogrammetric Engineering and Remote Sensing* 74, no. 1 (2008): 5.
Hansen, Valerie. *The Silk Road: A New History with Documents*. 1 edition. Oxford University Press, 2016.
Harding, Wendy. *The Myth of Emptiness and the New American Literature of Place*. 1 edition. University of Iowa Press, 2014.
Holdstock, Nick. *China's Forgotten People: Xinjiang, Terror and the Chinese State*. I.B. Tauris, 2015.
Human Rights Watch."China: UN Needs to Address Crimes Against Humanity | Human Rights Watch," August 27, 2024. https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/27/china-un-needs-address-crimes-against-humanity.
Kedar, Alexandre, Ahmad Amara, and Oren Yiftachel. *Emptied Lands: A Legal Geography of Bedouin Rights in the Negev*. Stanford University Press, 2018.
Kuletz, Valerie L. *The Tainted Desert*. 1 edition. Routledge, 1998.
Kuo, Lily. "China Denies Violating Minority Rights amid Detention Claims." *The Guardian*, August 13, 2018, sec. World news. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/13/china-state-media-defend-intense-controls-xinjiang-uighurs.
Masco, Joseph. *The Future of Fallout, and Other Episodes in Radioactive World-Making*. Duke University Press, 2021. https://www.dukeupress.edu/the-future-of-fallout-and-other-episodes-in-radioactive-world-making.
The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror. Duke University Press, 2014. https://www.dukeupress.edu/the-theater-of-operations.
Mauk, Ben. "Can China Turn the Middle of Nowhere into the Center of the World Economy?" *The New York Times*, January 29, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/01/29/magazine/china-globalization-kazakhstan.html, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/01/29/magazine/china-globalization-kazakhstan.html.
Millward, James A. *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*. Columbia University Press, 2009.
"Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Xinjiang." *Inner Asia* 2, no. 2 (2000): 121–35.
"What It's Like to Live in a Surveillance State." *The New York Times*, February 3, 2018.
Nebehay, Stephanie. "1.5 Million Muslims Could Be Detained in China's Xinjiang." *Reuters*, March 13, 2019, sec. World News. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-xinjiang-rights/15-million-muslims-could-be-detained-in-chinas-xinjiang-academic-idUSKCN1QU2MQ.
Nostalgia for the Light. Documentary. Icarus Films, 2011.
Phillips, Tom. "China 'Holding at Least 120,000 Uighurs in Re-Education Camps.'" *The Guardian*, January 25, 2018, sec. World News. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/25/at-least-120000-muslim-uighurs-held-in-chinese-re-education-camps-report.
Ramzy, Austin, and Chris Buckley. "'Absolutely No Mercy': Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims." *The New York Times*, November 16, 2019, sec. World. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html.
Reuters. "China Warns US: Criticism of Uighur Detentions Is Not 'Helpful' for Trade Talks." *The Guardian*, October 30, 2019, sec. World news. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/30/china-warns-us-criticism-of-uighur-detentions-is-not-helpful-for-trade-talks.
Roberts, Sean R. "The Biopolitics of China's 'War on Terror' and the Exclusion of the Uyghurs." *Critical Asian Studies* 50, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 232–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2018.1454111.
Simpson, Audra. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Duke University Press, 2014.
Spence, Mark David. *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
Stoler, Ann Laura. *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*. Duke University Press, 2016.
Thum, Rian. *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History*. Harvard University Press, 2014.
Tondo, Lorenzo. "'We Will Not Go Away': Israeli Demolitions Leave Bedouin Homeless." *The Guardian*, June 6, 2024, sec. World news. https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/06/israeli-demolitions-bedouins-homeless-negev.
Toops, Stanley. "Spatial Results of the 2010 Census in Xinjiang." *Asia Dialogue*, March 7, 2016. https://theasiadialogue.com/2016/03/07/spatial-results-of-the-2010-census-in-xinjiang/.
United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. "OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China." United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), August 31, 2022.
Washington Post Editorial Board. "Muslim Countries Joined China in Defending Its Cultural Genocide of Uighurs. Aren't They Ashamed?" *Washington Post*, July 20, 2019, sec. The Post's View: Opinion. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/muslim-countries-joined-china-in-defending-its-cultural-genocide-of-uighurs-arent-they-ashamed/2019/07/20/0a7d62b4-aa3f-11e9-86dd-d7f0e60391e9_story.html.
Weizman, Eyal, and Fazal Sheikh. *Fazal Sheikh/Eyal Weizman: The Conflict Shoreline: Colonialism as Climate Change in the Negev Desert*. Steidl, 2015.
Westcott, Ben, and Jo Shelley. "22 Countries Sign Letter Calling on China to Close Xinjiang Uyghur Camps." CNN, July 11, 2019. https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/11/asia/xinjiang-uyghur-un-letter-intl-hnk/index.html.
Zenz, Adrian. "Brainwashing, Police Guards and Coercive Internment: Evidence from Chinese Government Documents about the Nature and Extent of Xinjiang's 'Vocational Training Internment Camps.'" *Journal of Political Risk* 7, no. 7 (July 2019). http://www.jpolrisk.com/brainwashing-police-guards-and-coercive-internment-evidence-from-chinese-government-documents-about-the-nature-and-extent-of-xinjiangs-vocational-training-internment-camps/#_ftn65.
"'Thoroughly Reforming Them towards a Healthy Heart Attitude': China's Political Re-Education Campaign in Xinjiang." *Central Asian Survey*, 2018, 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2018.1507997.
Zenz, Adrian, and James Leibold. "Chen Quanguo: The Strongman Behind Beijing's Securitization Strategy in Tibet and Xinjiang." *China Brief* 17, no. 12 (2017): 16–24.
Zhang, Jun. "Statement by Ambassador Zhang Jun on Human Rights during Dialogue with Chairperson of CERD at Third Committee of United Nations General Assembly." October 30, 2019. http://id.china-embassy.org/eng/jrzg/t1711854.htm.
Zhang, Shawn. "Satellite Imagery of Xinjiang 're-Education Camp' Number 01." Medium, October 1, 2018. https://medium.com/@shawnwzhang/satellite-imagery-of-xinjiang-re-education-camp-%E6%96%B0%E7%96%86%E5%86%8D%E6%95%99%E8%82%B2%E9%9B%86%E4%B8%AD%E8%90%A5%E5%8D%AB%E6%98%9F%E5%9B%BE-96691b1a0d62.

Rage as Resistance: Minoritised Political Dissent in Pakistan

Aslam Kakar

Over the decades, Pakistan has stood at multiple crossroads of ethnopolitical contentions that have challenged its legitimacy and political stability. The primary force driving this extra-institutional opposition to the state is rage at systemic injustice, which has given rise to social movements such as the Pashtun¶ Tahaffuz Movement (PTM). In response, the state has resorted to suppression and violence, framing any resistance by the oppressed as illegal and uncivil. Drawing on insights from the phenomenology of emotion and postcolonial studies, this essay presents a theoretical study in political sociology, aiming to develop a non-pathologising framework for understanding minoritised rage in contemporary Pakistan. It highlights the contradiction in the statist narrative, which defends the use of state violence for social order but denies the oppressed groups the right to voice grievances from decades of imposed conflict. By making an analytical distinction between anger and rage, the essay contends that although the terms are often used interchangeably, it considers Pashtun resistance, such as that of the PTM, as rooted in rage—a buildup of anger neglected and suppressed by the state. Through personal reflections, interviews, and an examination of theoretical writings, it redefines rage as a potent political force for change rather than merely an emotion to be silenced.

The Pakistani State's Anger Problem: Fractures from Below

On February 2, 2019, Arman Luni was killed following a clash with police at a protest sit-in outside the Lorelai Press Club. The next day, PTM activists led by Manzoor Pashteen, Ali Wazir, and Mohsin Dawar marched toward Killa Saifullah, a city in the Balochistan province, to attend Luni's funeral. A YouTube video shows security forces obstructing the path of marchers at a military checkpoint in Dhana Sar, a town situated on the border between Zhob and Dera Ismail Khan[1]. The checkpoint, which dates back to the British colonial era, is seen manned by armed personnel with guns aimed at the demonstrators. Several defiant marchers challenged the uniformed

¶ 'Pashtun' is also spelled as Pakhtun or Pukhtun in the north, leading to variants like Pakhtunkhwa or Pukhtunkhwa. As a Pashtun from Balochistan or Southern Pashtunkhwa, I use 'sh' instead of 'kh', such as in Pashtun and Pashtunkhwa.

gunmen to shoot them as they boldly advanced. A man behind the camera can be heard saying, 'One has been killed, kill more!'[2] Pointing to a bulldozer parked on a bridge in the middle of the road, the man continued, 'First, a PTM member is killed. Then, a ban is imposed on us to attend the funeral prayer. This is how the state behaves. They are not even allowing us to go to the funeral. And then, when we say the uniform is behind terrorism, people question why we say so.'[3] Once they cross the impassable route, the same voice raises the slogan '*yeh jo dehshat gardi hai, iske piche wardi hai* (the uniform is behind terrorism)' and the chant is taken up by others. Then some marchers angrily declare, 'We will die but will not let you stop us.'[4]

Despite the state banning PTM leaders from entering Balochistan, they were able to travel to Killa Saifullah and participate in the funeral prayer. This ban policy echoes the actions of British colonisers in the 1920s, who prevented Ghaffar Khan[¶] from entering British Balochistan.[♯] During the burial ceremony, Pashteen said: 'I swear on the Quran that we will not let go, and will avenge his blood. ... [In our province,] they killed our youth, beheaded our elders, destroyed our homes, dishonored our mothers and sisters. They still chase our youth. It has reached a point where they even prevent us from attending our funerals. In such circumstances, when you block all our options and ways for negotiations, we will forcibly find a way. Then we will show you the power of Pashtuns.'[6] A week later, in an opinion piece, Pashteen wrote that on their way back from Killa Saifullah after attending the funeral, security forces fired at the car transporting him, Ali Wazir, and Mohsin Dawar, but luckily, they were unharmed.[7]

On 29 April 2019, the Director General of Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Asif Ghafoor, in a wide-ranging press conference at the General Headquarters, said that the Pakistan Army wanted to make every effort to resolve the issues faced by Pashtuns in tribal areas, but that the manner adopted by PTM to voice such grievances would no longer be tolerated. The DG warned the PTM leadership, 'You have enjoyed all the liberty that you wanted to.'[8] Referring to PTM, he said, 'Their time is up. Their time is up.'[9] Earlier that month, former Prime Minister Imran Khan, while addressing a public gathering in Orakzai tribal district of Khyber Pashtunkhwa province, had said that PTM rightly speaks about the hardships faced by the tribal areas and Pashtuns, but the manner in which they make such demands is 'not good for our country.'[10]

¶ Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (also known as Bacha Khan and Frontier Gandhi) was a leading 20th-century Pashtun anti-colonial activist who promoted nonviolent resistance and reform. A close ally of Gandhi, he founded the Khudai Khidmatgar movement in 1929, advancing Pashtun rights through nonviolence, social justice, and self-discipline. After Partition, his calls for Pashtun autonomy led to repeated imprisonments, yet he remains a central figure in Pashtun political memory and nonviolent nationalist thought.

♯ During the colonial period, Balochistan comprised a complex mix of administrative zones: Kalat State, British Balochistan, and leased regions. British Balochistan included Pushtun areas from the 1879 Treaty of Gandamak and the Marri-Bugti zone, all directly administered.[5]

The state's intolerance was apparent in former army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa's brazen demand that Ali Wazir apologise to him for criticising the military.[11] Wazir, who has lost 17 family members to violence by the Taliban in the past two decades, including his father and two brothers, responded: 'If the state expects an apology from me, it should remember that my body and flesh will melt and bones will be buried, but I will never apologise.'[¶] In a YouTube video, Wazir claimed he refused to meet Bajwa, let alone apologize to him.[12] Instead, he stressed, they should come and apologize to Pashtuns for the death and destruction they have caused them.[13]

Wazir was detained for over two years in Karachi, another corner of the country away from his home, family, and loved ones, depriving him of support and his constituency of representation in parliament. He has been jailed half a dozen times in about 17 cases since PTM's inception, on charges of sedition and provocation against state institutions.[14] All of this only deepened his rage. In a speech in the capital, Islamabad, Wazir said, 'Comrades, remember this: I am standing firm with you. Jail can't break my resolve. If deaths didn't end my resolve, if the gory corpses and funerals didn't end it, and the lost spaces in the graveyard didn't end it, how can these black doors [referring to jail gates] end my resolve?'[15] Wazir's rage is a response to blatant state-sponsored violence that claimed over 70,000[♯] lives in roughly two decades. According to the Pashtun National Jirga in Khyber,[¤] a significant majority of the fatalities were Pashtuns from ex-FATA, Balochistan, and Khyber Pashtunkhwa.

More recently, the incumbent Army Chief General Asim Munir suggested that Pakistan needs to become a 'hard state'[•] to effectively address security threats, implying that its current 'softness'—particularly in peripheral areas—may be a vulnerability. However, as Sara Ahmed

¶ Journalist Syed Muzammil Shah's tweet quoted Wazir's speech outside state parliament a year earlier, in 2022. The Twitter post included a photo of Wazir with supporters outside Karachi Central Jail after his release.

♯ The figure of approximately 70,000 lives lost in violence in Pakistan over two decades is consistent with estimates reported by various organisations and media outlets, particularly in reference to the period after 2001 following Pakistan's involvement in the U.S.-led 'War on Terror.' Notable sources such as the South Asian Terrorism Portal report 70,978 fatalities since March 6, 2000, till May 10, 2025, based on compiled news reports and are provisional. The Pashtun National Jirga, a historic gathering for the Pashtuns, took place from 11 to 13 October 2024 to address critical issues affecting Pashtun people and their lands. The event included both public and private sessions, combining data presentations, live testimonies, in-depth discussions, and the formation of a new organising committee to lead future efforts.

¤ The Pashtun National Jirga, a historic gathering for the Pashtuns, took place from 11 to 13 October 2024 to address critical issues affecting Pashtun people and their lands. The event included both public and private sessions, combining data presentations, live testimonies, in-depth discussions, and the formation of a new organising committee to lead future efforts.

• In the wake of the Jaffar Express train attack in Balochistan, the Army Chief Asim Munir in an address said that Pakistan had to become a "hard state" to fight militancy and asked how long countless lives would be sacrificed in a soft state, and how long governance gaps would be filled by the blood of soldiers and martyrs. For a detailed analysis, see, Qazi, "Hard State" and reporting, Syed, "Top-level Huddle Seeks."

explains, this 'hardness' is actually a deeply emotional reaction, not an absence of emotion.[16] For Asim Munir, the hard state meant leaving no room for empathy towards the wounds of the dehumanised other.

Despite this culture of blatant political violence, the authorities demand poise, urging the oppressed to bear their anguish with grace while denying them the dignity of frustration and public rage. The state-owned and -backed media blacked out PTM for a year after its rise in February 2018, and even when there was coverage, it showed distorted depictions of the movement as a proxy of foreign spy agencies in order to discredit it. It questioned PTM's slogans against the military, asking the movement to soften its *lehja* (tone), shifting attention from the substance to the style of speaking, in the classic fashion of moral policing. One wonders how such an expectation is moral when innocent citizens from particular groups have borne decades of grotesque violence, with drilled and bullet-ridden bodies ending up in mass graves. If rage is not an ideal emotion, how can one expect an ideal emotion from people in a non-ideal society and state, as Myisha Cherry puts it?[17] Why should this oppressive affective regime be regarded as normal and acceptable by those on the fringes of politics and power?

State violence and the persistent refusal to heed the oppressed's cry for justice have transformed the latter's anger into rage and violence. This distinction is crucial for my analysis, as it emphasises the metamorphosis of anger into rage as an instrument of opposition. Failing to address anger at perceived injustice—the primary injury—has allowed a secondary injury to take root. As Peter Lyman contends, 'the second is an injury to an expectation that one's appeal will be listened to by someone else; this is the status injury that provokes rage. The key point is that a dialogical response to anger is essential if the second injury, which provokes rage, is not to occur.'[18]

Amid widespread calls for justice, political rage is visible but largely unexamined. Instead, the focus is often on the tone and expression of rage. To move beyond superficial critiques, we must explore anger as an emotion within the context of phenomenology and affect theory, examining its ethical dimensions, philosophical foundations, and political implications. Key questions include: What is anger, and how does it differ from rage? What is its moral status in philosophy? When is rage justified, and who holds the authority to judge this? Specifically, how should we understand the political rage of PTM in Pakistan? And how can we develop a framework for understanding minoritised rage without pathologising it? This essay aims to address these questions.

Anger vs Rage: A Necessary Analytical Distinction

One key definitional issue concerns the moral status of anger, i.e., whether moral principles regarding anger are objective. The essay contends that anger is objective in a physiological and neurobiological sense: It arises from tangible biological processes within the brain and body when one experiences the emotion. This understanding is frequently used in psychology, neuroscience, and physiology to examine how anger manifests in and through the body. Unlike the physiological and neurobiological objectivity of anger, its morality or legitimate political affectivity is not always clear. However, this moral uncertainty should not lead to its dismissal; anger deserves a non-judgmental space because it could very well be valid.

Usually, anger stems from pain, humiliation, and frustration. These feelings can be real or imagined. In pre-Enlightenment Western thought from varying schools, philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Lactantius, Aquinas, and Descartes[19] have long implied that anger is a response to a wrong and that it involves a moral judgment. The Stoics broadly defined it as a desire to redress, punish, or retaliate against a wrong.[20] For instance, Seneca viewed anger as the worst emotion, one that should be eliminated whenever possible. In line with the pre-Enlightenment theorisation, Enlightenment thought emphasised logic, reason, and discipline as defining traits of a cognitively superior human existence.

According to Catherine West-Newman, the antithetical pairing of reason and emotion in Western thought underlines common law doctrine.[21] She adds that according to this logic, 'failure of reason signifies unpredictability; if human subjectivity is permitted to displace the objective, neutral rule of law, then injustice will inevitably follow.'[22] She maintains, 'if this were the whole story, then the only appropriate relationship between law and anger would be for law to control and prevent anger's socially disruptive effects.'[23] Moreover, this overly legalistic approach has marked emotion as 'disruptive and dangerous to law's project and English legal doctrine exported to British colonies takes little account of subjective feelings.'[24]

Contemporary affect theory, including sociological and psychological perspectives, has also emphasised the role of insult, injury, and offence in shaping social experiences of anger.[25] Ahmed's work, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, is regarded as foundational within affect theory: She explores how emotions such as anger influence social and political contexts, personal and group identities, and their link to power structures. West-Newman suggests that although '… justifiable anger in pursuit of justice has a long and respectable history, it is still, often, evaluated negatively within western thought.'[26] Thus, despite the recognition that expressions of anger can

be morally justifiable, scholarly discourses nevertheless deem angry displays as 'undesirable, disruptive, and even socially pathological.'[27] In contrast, Rosalind Hursthouse highlights accounts that recognise the positive potential of anger based on the Aristotelian idea that emotions are neutral and that individual choice, echoing intentionality, influences whether anger is directed toward good or bad outcomes.[28] Aquinas believed that anger is just when the revenge it seeks is just as well, asserting that anger's moral quality is determined by the contexts surrounding provocation, which may render anger virtuous rather than vicious. Thus, this view stresses proportionate punishment seen fit by law, and with a determination to redress a fault and uphold justice.[29]

According to Lyman, 'the critics of anger describe emotions as magical behaviour, self-justifying fantasies that angry people use to free themselves from the obligation to engage the real world in an instrumental manner... Anger in particular is criticised because it manifests itself as a self-righteous world-view that seeks to resolve conflict by assigning blame and exacting revenge.'[30] Lyman counters this view by acknowledging that while there might be merit to it, the critique shifts the blame onto the victim, overlooking the social dynamics and injustices that may have triggered the angry response. He stresses, 'the psychological critique of anger is an ideology that justifies domination by silencing the voices of the oppressed, labeling anger as "loss of control", as "emotionalism", or as "neurotic."'[31]

West-Newman argues that indigenous epistemologies in Australia and New Zealand do not separate reason from emotion, or exorcise either from justice and conflict resolution practices.[32] Such challenges can also be seen in Western thought as postmodern critiques of the dominant paradigm of Enlightenment rationality, opening space for the (re)location of emotions in law.[33] Empirical evidence and conceptual analysis in the works of psychologists, philosophers, and neurophysiologists now suggest that such a separation is arbitrary and that emotion does not undermine rationality. Antonio Damasio argues that emotion is integral to processes of human reasoning and cognition.[34] West-Newman adds that what underlies this apparent separation is 'instrumental rationality' in Western thought that keeps certain feelings from attaining the status of emotions to safeguard the capitalist order. She concludes, 'feelings permitted to retain the description of emotion are defined into a domain of the private and personal, safely segregated from the public practices of governance.'[35]

Moreover, Deborah Lupton argues that the emphasis on emotional expression, or 'emotionality,' emerged to resist the dominant focus on rationality and self-control.[36] Lupton contends that in response to this perceived subordination to rational control, Romanticism framed emotions as a form of freedom and resistance. It flourished in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as a literary and artistic movement that celebrated intense emotions and passions, regarding them as central, authentic sources of human motivation and action. By valuing emotion as a fundamental part of human experience, underlining inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual, Romanticism offered an alternative to the rational, restrained approach of the Enlightenment.

While a more accepting view recognises individual anger as normal, this understanding is rarely extended to collective anger, especially among marginalised groups like Pashtuns in Pakistan, who are often seen as aggressive.

Audre Lorde defends the uses of anger for political change, stating that 'anger is an appropriate action to racist attitudes, as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change.'[37] She uses 'fury' synonymously with rage: 'my response to racism is anger...'[38]; 'I cannot hide my anger to spare you guilt, nor hurt feelings, nor answering anger; for to do so insults and trivialises all our efforts. Guilt is not a response to anger; it is a response to one's own actions or lack of action.'[39] Rejecting guilt as a barrier to progress, Lorde insists that anger must be expressed to challenge systemic injustice.

Cherry defines rage as 'an intense anger in response to incessant injustice' rather than 'unbridled anger,'[40] deploying the term similarly to scholars like bell hooks, Cornel West, Soraya Chemaly, and Brittney Cooper. For Cherry, this rage does not imply irrationality or loss of control but instead mirrors a deep, justified anger, particularly in contexts of continued racial or gendered oppression. Lyman sharpens this distinction by urging us to listen to the meaning of angry words, using two key heuristic practices.[41] First, anger and rage must be distinguished as distinct but related emotional responses in political contexts. Lyman characterises anger as a response to perceived injustice, a feeling that motivates action and can be constructive when it fuels political engagement[42] as it can enable dialogue about fairness and justice within a political order. In contrast, rage is described as a more intense, uncontrolled response often arising when anger is dismissed or left unrecognised. While anger seeks recognition and correction of grievances, rage manifests as an aggressive or violent reaction to the perceived denial of a legitimate platform for those grievances and the frustration of not being heard.

Second, Lyman asserts that a political sociology of anger must genuinely consider the perception of the angry person, not cast judgments towards that perception's validity.[43] This way of understanding emotions frames them as a dynamic interaction between the individual's internal experience (the self) and the external social context (the social world), rather than as internal states. Lyman stresses that it is worth listening to angry speech because it contains a claim about the commission of injustice, which makes anger political, at least in principle. Lyman argues that liberal societies often devalue anger by characterising it as a psychological disorder[44] that disrupts social order. Rooted in a functionalist perspective, such theorisation views society's default condition as order. Alan Sears and James Cairns explain that the social

order model supposes that 'society is the crucial regulator that keeps the people from acting in their narrow self-interest without the slightest regard for others.'[45] The proponents of this model argue that 'the role of the state is to preserve social order within a particular territory by enforcing these norms, whether by punishing wrongdoers or by socializing the population so that they internalise society's values.'[46]

Conversely, theorists of the conflict model critique the fundamental assumptions of shared values and order upheld by the social order model. They argue that 'rather than a genuine consensus, these are seen as ideologies that support the ruling order and perpetuate the disadvantaged status of the subordinate groups.'[47] The conflict model presumes that the state is not a neutral referee but rather a facilitator of the uneven playing field that advances the interests of the powerful every time. According to the latter, 'the representation of the subordinate groups might create the illusion of full participation, but generally does not result in a significant change in the condition of the bulk of the disadvantaged population.'[48]

Consequently, the silencing of marginalised groups undermines their anger and stifles political discourse that could address the very conditions fueling that anger. Paradoxically, as the next section analyses, this suppression of anger may transform into rage with impacts far more threatening to the stability of state and society.

Colonial Continuities and Accumulated Anger: Why Pashtun Rage is Justified

To understand the enduring legacies of colonialism on identity, power, and resistance in postcolonial state-nations like Pakistan,¶ I draw on the insights of revolutionary thinker, Frantz

¶ The terms 'state-nation' and 'nation-state' may sound similar, but they describe very different political and sociological arrangements. A 'state-nation' usually governs over multiple national, ethnic, or linguistic groups and seeks political unity without requiring cultural uniformity, such as Pakistan or the United States. In contrast, a 'nation-state' refers to a political entity in which the boundaries of the state largely coincide with those of a single nation—defined by shared language, culture, and identity, such as Japan or South Korea—producing a relatively homogenous national community. Pakistan, while conceived as a nation-state—a homeland for Muslims of British India—functions more accurately as a state-nation. Despite its Islamic identity as a unifying force, Pakistan comprises diverse ethnic groups such as Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Mohajir, Baloch, and others, each with distinct histories, languages, and political aspirations. The state's emphasis on a singular Islamic-national identity has often led to the marginalisation of these groups, the suppression of alternative, pluralistic visions of the nation, and political conflicts.

Fanon.¶ He noted that in some developing countries, hopes were dashed within a few years of independence, leading to questions like, 'What was the point of fighting' if nothing was destined to change?[49] He claims that 95 percent of people in developing countries see independence as unchanging, with 'latent discontent which like glowing embers constantly threatens to flare up again.'[50]

According to Fanon, police and military in the colonies maintained close surveillance through direct, often purely violent means. The government openly used violence to demonstrate and enforce domination, bringing violence into the homes and minds of the colonised subject.[51] After decolonisation, the persistence of this system is what some describe as 'internal colonialism' or 'domestic colonialism.'[52] My argument similarly positions Punjabi dominance over the land and resources of ethnic minorities in Pakistan as a form of internal colonialism.

In this context, a postcolonial framing that centres the politics of resistance among the oppressed—whom Fanon called 'the wretched of the earth'—is necessary. In Fanon's understanding, 'Colonisation or decolonisation: it is simply a power struggle. The exploited realise that their liberation implies using every means available, and force is the first.'[53] In Fanon's view, no Algerian considered these terms overly violent, articulating what they felt deep inside: 'Colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence.'[54] Fanon explains that violence becomes the language of the colonised because of the obduracy of the coloniser's lies and their unwillingness or inability to engage in dialogue.

Since Pakistan's inception, colonial policies and practices have continued unabated. Violence and militarisation have been the norm in the periphery and an exception, unless absolutely necessary, at the core.¶ Economic exploitation and marginalisation are maintained through a combination of force and a colonial-style administration of civil bureaucracy loyal to the core. Moreover, through an excessively nationalistic educational apparatus and the collaboration of what Fanon called 'colonised intellectuals,'[55] the state maintains an arrangement of inclusive exclusion or coercive inclusion passed as representation. In Fanon's terms, force is the language the center uses to suppress peripheral dissent. The space for political dialogue is non-existent, at home and abroad.

¶ While there are times the state has used violence against Punjab-based groups, like the 2007 Lal Masjid operation in Islamabad and the 2014 killing of Pakistan Awami Tehreek activists in Lahore, such instances are exceptions. Its approach in Balochistan and Khyber Pashtunkhwa is very different. Violence against Pashtuns and Baloch is systematic, with frequent extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and military actions. This selective force shows the state's actions are driven by strategic interests and ethnic considerations. Its reluctance to aggressively target Punjab threats is linked to maintaining stability in a vital region where the middle classes must be appeased.

In contrast, state violence is the norm in the periphery. Securitisation is selective and primarily concentrated in specific regions, such as Balochistan and the former tribal areas in the north. Over the past twenty years, Balochistan, Khyber Pashtunkhwa, and ex-FATA have borne the brunt of militancy, leading to deaths, destruction, and displacement. The military has publicly referred to these casualties and damages as collateral damage.¶ While there have been terrorist attacks in other cities, including some in the Punjab, they have not matched the scale of what the periphery has experienced. Pashtun and Baloch nationalists question why they suffer the highest casualties and destruction but get little peace and development. The scale of violence in the periphery is whitewashed through what Stephen Bronner terms 'fabricated relativism'.[56] Statements like 'all Pakistanis have suffered' or 'Punjab has suffered too' tend to avoid responsibility, ignore oppression, or refuse to engage seriously with the other's realities.

Not only has the political rage of the living been considered profane, but mourning for the dead has also been forbidden. Movement, too, is prohibited and unlawful. Gatherings at funerals are a threat to law and order, reflecting a continuity of British colonial tactics of oppression. As a former British colony, Pakistan's dependence on an overly legalistic approach to angry protests is not at all surprising. PTM's slogan *da sanga azadi da* (which translates to 'what kind of freedom is this?') reflects the sentiments of colonised people in a postcolonial context. This idea is a recurring theme in Fanon's work, where he questions the value of independence with phrases like 'What is the point of being independent then… ?'[57] and 'What was the point of fighting?'[58] Little has changed for those on the margins of society, who continue to live under the shadow of colonial legacies.

My interviews with PTM leaders and activists, alongside secondary sources, suggest that their rage is a response to the persistent, anguished pleas that have gone unheard for decades. Their rage originates from their demands for basic rights and liberties and is not a sudden or irrational outburst. Historically, unjust and exclusionary state policies in the region since Pakistan's inception have given rise to radical demands within certain segments of the Pashtun struggle.♯ Pashtuns opposed the newly established Pakistani state on multiple fronts, for example, a limited secessionist insurgency in tribal areas¶ and the Red Shirts or Khudai Khitmatgars' civil resistance in North-West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) with simultaneous institutional opposition from the second half of the 1930s onwards. Aside from occasional armed resistance led by figures such as Faqir Ipi at Pakistan's creation and Pashtun Zalmay♯ until the early 1970s, the Pashtun struggle remained unarmed despite persistent state oppression. In the wake of the establishment of the Awami National Party¤ in 1986 and the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party• in 1989, Pashtun nationalist politics primarily focused on institutional opposition for greater provincial autonomy, recognition, and control over their land and resources, all within the framework of the constitution. Abubakar Siddique states that since 1947, there has been no major violent Pashtun secessionist movement[63]. Leading Pashtun ethno-nationalists like Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Abdul Wali Khan, and Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai participated in mainstream Pakistani pro-democracy and anti-dictatorship parties. They have long fought for representative rule, mainly demanding provincial autonomy within Pakistan. Despite facing state oppression, their preference has consistently been ballots over bullets.

¶ The former DG ISI and DG MI Asad Durrani at a talk show at the Oxford Union said that the deaths of soldiers and civilians are inevitable and acceptable collateral damage for the country's strategic interests.

♯ In its early decades, Pakistan established a state structure centred around robust, centralised bureaucratic-military institutions. These institutions were predominantly staffed by Punjabis and Mohajirs and supported by an ontology of Islamic nationhood. However, sustaining this structure came at a steep cost, as it incited ethnonationalist opposition in the western border provinces and Eastern Pakistan, where people felt marginalised and disadvantaged in their regions.[59]

¶ The secessionist insurgency was led by Faqir of Ipi from 1947 to the early 1950s. The Red Shirts initially sided with the Indian National Congress against Pakistan's creation, then shifted toward advocating sovereignty and an independent Pashtun state. The idea of a separate Pashtunistan is contested; some say Ghaffar Khan did not make it his goal, viewing it as a slogan rather than a concrete plan. It may have also served as a bargaining tool for better deals for Pashtuns in Pakistan. Similar movements arose among the Pushtun and Baloch in Balochistan, persisting despite oppression and remaining relevant today.[60]

♯ Before India's partition, Khyber Pashtunkhwa's Pashtuns formed the Zalmay Pashtun organisation led by Ghani Khan, aiming for independence but did not achieve it, as neither the Indian National Congress nor Khudai Khidmatgar supported armed conflict. In May 1970, the National Awami Party (NAP) established Pashtun Zalmay with Wali Khan as leader. Wali Khan, also NAP president, helped form coalition governments in Balochistan and Khyber Pashtunkhwa in 1972. In 1973, after Bhutto's government dissolved Balochistan's assembly, the Khyber assembly protested and dissolved itself. The Pashtun NAP revived Pashtun Zalmay to start an armed struggle, but lacked experience and guerrilla warfare knowledge, thereby ending the armed struggle.

¤ The Awami National Party (ANP), originating from Bacha Khan's Khudai Khidmatgars in the 1930s, has shifted from a leftist, secular movement to a more pragmatic party focusing on Pashtun nationalism. Dominated by the Wali Khan and Bilour families, it has evolved to support provincial autonomy and form alliances across the political spectrum, including with right-wing groups. Historically, it has faced violence from militant groups like TTP due to its secular stance and opposition to militancy. Leaders like Asfandyar Wali Khan and Iftikhar Hussain have survived multiple attacks. Today, the ANP advocates for better Pakistan relations with India, Afghanistan, and the US, promotes economic development, and supports dialogue and military actions when necessary.[61]

• PKMAP, formed in 1989 from the National Awami Party by Samad Khan Achakzai, promotes Pashtun nationalism, advocating for resource parity and maximum provincial autonomy, including support for the 18th Amendment. It opposes military interference in politics and favors impartial foreign relations, notably with Afghanistan. The party has a history of contesting and boycotting elections, supporting PML-N during crises, and occasionally backing the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement, with leaders like Mehmood Khan Achakzai. Critics oppose its stance on FATA's merger and demand for a separate Pashtun province.[62]

The 2010 Eighteenth Amendment addressed the issue of provincial autonomy, promoting democratic federalism and renaming the North-West Frontier Province as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Pashtun parties' grievances were partly addressed after the amendment, but their ability to confront problems like terrorism was limited, leading to stagnation and loss of influence due to violence and repression, such as the 2014 Peshawar school massacre. This created a political vacuum, leading some activists and parties to seek new influence, notably with PTM as a third force[¶] advocating for Pashtun rights amid ongoing militancy and repression.[64]

Although PTM originated largely from classical Pashtun nationalism, it began to differ in four key aspects. First, it is led by educated, lower-middle-class Pashtuns from the previously marginalised ex-FATA region, unlike the elite leadership often seen in classical movements. Second, PTM focuses on current issues such as displacement, ethnic profiling, violence, and economic challenges, steering clear of glorifying historical or perceived territorial aspirations. Third, it dismisses the Orientalist tropes of Pashtun courage and invincibility, instead highlighting the Pashtun narrative of victimisation over aggression. Lastly, PTM's leadership grounds its demands in Pakistan's constitutional framework, advocating for fair treatment and recognition within the state system, rather than pursuing secessionist or abstract nationalist aims.[65]

As the third force, PTM reframed the Pashtun nationalist narrative in more radical terms[♯], marking a break from the relatively quiescent Pashtun politics of the past, particularly on the issue of militancy and state aggression in Pashtun lands.[67] By employing cultural tools and logic of resistance, like *spina khabara*,[68] which roughly translates to white talk, clear talk, or plain truth, PTM's leadership advocated for honest and constructive confrontation with the state in their speeches. *Spina khabara* refers to a narrative that, as the Pashto expression goes, comes from above the tongue, not from beneath it. In other words, it represents an open and free expression, emphasising the emotional and political strength of speech in Pashtun resistance. *Tar zhāba landi ye na kawal* ('not keeping it under the tongue') signifies the refusal to hold back one's words and to speak what is on one's mind and in the heart. This phrase reflects not only personal frankness but also a broader collective defiance against enforced silence. It resonates with another powerful expression, *par haq walarh, na pategi* ('one who stands on truth does not hide'), affirming the moral courage to speak out despite fear or repression. Together, these proverbs articulate an ethical and cultural logic of resistance where speech becomes both a weapon and a duty.

PTM named state officials and agencies as well as non-state elements accused of war crimes and called for accountability under the law. Pashteen repeatedly said, '*che zulm kavi, khilaf ye yo*' ('Whoever commits oppression, I am against them'). In a fiery speech he added, 'I oppose every cruel person, whether they are Taliban, whether good or bad Taliban, as well as the "peace" committee, MI [Military Intelligence], ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence], and the Army. It was once impossible to name all these elements, but I do so proudly and honorably. You tried to scare the Pashtun with death, but death cannot scare me, just as your father cannot.'[69] Rooted deeply in Pashtun traditions of tribal honor and moral strength, Pashteen challenged forces which no one had dared to before.

The emergence of PTM in February 2018 marked the culmination of years of growing discontent and anger in response to the death and destruction caused by terrorist violence and military operations targeting the Taliban. Wazir and other PTM figures have voiced deep outrage over the personal and collective suffering their communities have endured. The movement directs its rage toward a system of internal colonialism, seething over the countless lives lost and the mass displacement of Pashtuns, an anguish powerfully captured in the term 'Intentionally Displaced Pashtuns' (IDPs), as acknowledged within Pashtun intellectual circles. In countless rallies and gatherings across the country, PTM leaders said they witnessed and gathered the shattered remains of children killed in suicide blasts and maimed by land mine explosions. As PTM founder Manzoor Pashteen poignantly stated, they have seen the unseeable. The movement's slogan against the military—*yeh jo dehshat gardi hai, iske piche wardi hai* (the uniform is behind terrorism)—was articulated against this backdrop.

The state's response to PTM's pleas has been violent crackdowns, including killing over a dozen protestors in Khar Qamar on May 26, 2019, a response that echoes Fanon's assertion that oppressors only know the language of force. This continued impunity and silencing of dissent have only deepened the sense of injustice, allowing anger to harden into rage. The truth is that suppressed anger does not simply disappear. As Fanon suggests, state anger becomes the anger of the oppressed, which, as James Scott[70] explains, first thrives in clandestine, liberatory enclaves before erupting into rage. According to Scott, subordinates retain the capacity for the anger they have learned to suppress.[71] This silenced anger, rooted in daily experiences of indignity, control, and enforced submission, accumulates over time, informing what Scott terms 'hidden transcripts.'[72] Ultimately, a pivotal moment arises when this suppressed anger is inevitably released. As Flam notes, 'And, would not anybody who lived in a repressive system

[¶] In a Zoom interview with the author on November 29, 2023, Shahbaz Sturyani,a founding PTM activist, said the two main Pashtun ethnonationalist political forces were spent, leading to a vacuum. Since 'politics abhors space,' he claimed, 'there was the need for a third force.'

[♯] PTM surpassed Pashtun nationalism's old guard through signaling and outbidding. Ethnic groups use grievances to signal strength to the state, members, and their broader ethnic community. Signaling and outbidding are radicalisation mechanisms whereby groups competing for support and resources radicalise their goals and strategies. Radicalisation may also result from generational leadership change and political quiescence. Analysts say PTM arose due to ineffective Pashtun politics.[66]

support this view, knowing from their own experience that daily humiliation, frustration and anger, sediment into a hard, heavy stone in the pit of one's stomach and cry to be released?'[73]

Pashtun youth were able to get PTM off the ground by deploying rage, after decades of violence and systematic suppression of their rights to free speech. On 26 January 2018, Manzoor Pashteen and twenty friends initiated their march against all odds. As Pashteen later recounted in numerous interviews and speeches, they faced state threats with a resolve captured by a Pashto proverb, *saruna pa las ghrzawal*, literally 'to carry heads in hands', signifying they had nothing to lose. After bidding farewell to their mothers—a gesture noted by activists[74]—they found themselves with nothing to fear. Intimidation and death had lost their power over them. Rather than adopting a dialogical, political approach, the state repeatedly dismissed PTM leaders' speeches as angry and unacceptable for the last seven years. These leaders have faced arrests on false charges, while other activists have been harassed, silenced, and even killed. However, state repression has only exacerbated the crisis of its legitimacy and stability, with the movement finding itself curtailed but with no end in sight.

PTM's choice of civil resistance is instrumental, representing a departure from Bacha Khan's philosophical stance on nonviolence. Perhaps I don't have to remind the reader of the intensity of rage witnessed in the numerous speeches of PTM's leaders over the past seven years. Some leaders, off the record, have also suggested that a violent option may not be entirely off the table if circumstances demand it. This can be a reminder for the state: if it does not adapt and instead continues with the logic and language of violence, then the most probable response, in Fanonian terms, would be within that same framework.

Toward a Decolonial Politics of Emotion

PTM has rightly identified the political pulse of Pashtuns, who seek actual integration rather than independence. Their current 'symbolic integration underlines the Pashtuns' position as a permanent minority—bound by geography, reluctant to pursue armed struggle for statehood, yet propelled by the uncertainty of alternatives and aspirations for a more equitable future within Pakistan.'[75] The ongoing state violence and intransigence could change the terms of engagement, requiring a redefinition of goals and strategies to achieve them. If Pashtuns reach a breaking point, realising they can not attain their rights and live with dignity in the existing state, nationalist violence may not be entirely ruled out.

To conclude, state violence to suppress the anger of the oppressed is offensive, while the rage of the oppressed is almost always defensive. This is the case with the Baloch and Pashtuns in Pakistan, the Palestinian struggle against Israel, the Kurds in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, and Black people in the U.S. At the very least, critics of the destructive nature of the subordinates' rage must first hold the state accountable. Most crucially, we should recognise that acts of aggression and self-defence are not morally equivalent. This essay has demonstrated that the rage of the oppressed, after persistent neglect of anger, is a non-ideal yet necessary, legitimate, and positive political response, rather than a destabilising emotion, one that has the potential to shift societies away from rigid, violent, and repressive military and technocratic control toward a more inclusive and responsive model of governance. This approach would recognise rage as a necessary element of political life, capable of alleviating social suffering and addressing structural injustices through open, empathetic dialogue.

Notes

1. PTM Voice, "Ali Wazir."
2. Ibid., at 0:04.
3. Ibid., at 4:05.
4. Ibid., at 11:06.
5. Titus and Swidler, "Knights, Not Pawns," 48.
6. Anwar, "Alleged Killing by Police Angers Pashtuns in Pakistan."
7. Pashteen, "The Military Says Pashtuns Are Traitors."
8. "Time is up."
9. Ibid.
10. "PM Imran Endorses Grievances of Pashtuns."
11. Veengas, "Pakistani State Favours Killers."
12. "Ali Wazir MNA Speech" at 04:18
13. Ibid. at 8:40
14. Khanzada, "How Ali Wazir was kept in prison for 26 months?"
15. "Ali Wazir MNA Speech" at 9:30-9:50
16. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 4.
17. Cherry, *The Case for Rage*, 8.
18. Lyman, "The Domestication of Anger," 140.
19. Averill, *Anger and Aggression*.
20. Nussbaum, "Secret Sewers of Vice."
21. West-Newman, "Anger in Legacies of Empire", 193.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 191.
24. Ibid., 193.
25. See, Averill, *Anger and Aggression*; Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure*; de Rivera, *A Structural Theory of the Emotions*.
26. West-Newman, 191.
27. Ibid.
28. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*.
29. Averill, 91.
30. Lyman, 134.
31. Ibid.
32. West-Newman.
33. See, for instance, Bandes, *The Passions of Law*; Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure*; Henderson, "Legality and Empathy."
34. Damasio, *Descartes' Error*.
35. West-Newman, 193–94.
36. Lupton, *The Emotional Self*.
37. Lorde, "The Uses of Anger", 129.
38. Ibid., 124.
39. Ibid., 130.
40. Cherry, 16.
41. Lyman, 139–140.
42. Ibid., 139.
43. Ibid., 140.
44. Ibid., 133-134, 139–140.
45. Sears and Cairns, *A Good Book, In Theory*, 31.
46. Ibid., 33.
47. Ibid., 35.
48. Ibid., 36.
49. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 34–35
50. Ibid., 35.
51. Ibid., 3–4.
52. Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution?*; Klug, *The Internal Colony*.
53. Fanon, 23.
54. Ibid.
55. Fanon, 8. Refer to chapter, "On Violence," for a detailed description of the psychology of the 'colonised intellectual.'
56. Bronner, *The Bigot*, 10.
57. Fanon, 10.
58. Ibid., 34–35.
59. Titus and Swidler, 48.
60. Titus and Swidler, 47.
61. Abbasi, "Awami National party".
62. "Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party." Siddique, *The Pashtun Question*, 218.
63. Siddique, The Pashtun Question, 218.
64. For more on PTM's anatomy, refer to Aslam, 291–332.
65. Aslam, "Ethnopolitical Movement Strategy," 292. Also, see Kakar, "Politics."
66. S Vogt et al., "From Claims to Violence," 2021, 1281–1282.
67. Aslam, 307.
68. Ibid., 310.
69. Ibid.
70. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.
71. Ibid.
72. For explanations that complement Scott's 'hidden transcripts', also see Elizabeth Alexander, *The Black Interior* and hooks, *Yearning*. Alexander's 'black interior' challenges us to imagine what's barred from view, dwelling on concerns often censored by society. Similarly, bell hooks' 'homeplace' is a protective space of nurturing and resistance within oppressive systems, especially created by black women under white supremacy and patriarchy, providing refuge and healing.
73. Flam, "Anger in Repressive Regimes," 176.
74. For instance, Sturyani, Shahbaaz. Interview. Conducted by Aslam Kakar, 29 Nov. & 2 Dec. 2023.
75. Aslam, 296.

Abbasi, Hammad. "Awami National Party." *Dawn*, April 1, 2013. https://www.dawn.com/news/799497/awami-national-party-anp-2.
Ahmed, Roohan. "Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan: An Emerging Right-Wing Threat to Pakistan's Democracy." *Atlantic Council*, January 15, 2022. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/tehreek-e-labbaik-pakistan-an-emerging-right-wing-threat/.
Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. NED-New edition, 2. Edinburgh University Press, 2014.
Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, 2006.
"Ali Wazir MNA Speech in Tarnol Islamabad." Posted 15 February 2023, posted by *Torkhowechi Waar*. YouTube, 11:17. https://youtu.be/l6facYa9MuU?si=f8rxtq3IwofMANEY
Alexander, Elizabeth. *The Black Interior: Essays*. Graywolf Press, 2004.
Anwar, Madeeha. "Alleged Killing by Police Angers Pashtuns in Pakistan". *Voice of America*, February 7, 2019. https://www.voanews.com/a/alleged-killing-by-police-angers-pashtuns-in-pakistan/4776351.html.
Aslam, Muhammad. "A Comparative Analysis of Ethnopolitical Movement Strategy: The Kurds and Pashtuns." PhD diss., Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, Graduate School-Newark, 2024. ProQuest (31562426).
Averill, James. *Anger and Aggression: An Essay on Emotion*. Springer-Verlag, 1982.
Bandes, Susan, (ed). *The Passions of Law*. New York University Press, 2000.
Barbalet, Jack, M. *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure: A Macrosociological Approach*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
Bendelow, Gillian and Simon J Williams, (eds). *Emotions in Social Life: Critical Themes and Contemporary Issues*. Routledge, 1998.
Bezhan, Frud. "Mysterious Death of Baluch Activist in Canada Blamed on Pakistan's Powerful Army." *Radio Free Europe*, December 31, 2020. https://www.rferl.org/a/karima-baloch-sajid-hussain-balochistan-pakistan-exile/31028723.html
Bizenjo, Mir Ghaus Bakhsh. *In Search of Solutions*, ed. BM Kutty. Pakistan Labour Trust and University of Karachi's Pakistan Study Centre, 2009.
Blauner, Robert. *Racial Oppression in America*. Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972.
Bronner, Stephen Eric. *The Bigot: Why Prejudice Persists*. Yale University Press, 2014. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1bh4cxb.
"Che Zulm Kavi Khilaf Ye Yo. Manzoor Pashteen's Full Speech." Posted Feb 22, 2022, by Gilaman Wazir Fan-Club. YouTube, 2:20. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yu5eZBaalNw.
Cherry, Myisha. *The Case for Rage: Why Anger is Essential to Anti-Racist Struggle*. Oxford University Press, 2021.
Cruse, Harold. *Rebellion or Revolution?* NED-New edition. University of Minnesota Press, 1968.
Damasio, Antonio. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. Papermac, 1996.
"Datasheet - Pakistan: Yearly Fatalities." *South Asia Terrorism Portal*. Accessed May 17, 2025. https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/pakistan\.
de Rivera, Joseph. *A Structural Theory of the Emotions*. International Universities Press, 1977.
Ekman, Paul. "An Argument for Basic Emotions." *Cognition & Emotion 6* (1992): 169-200. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02699939208411068.
Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, 1963.
Flam, Helena. "Anger in Repressive Regimes: A Footnote to Domination and the Arts of Resistance by James Scott." European Journal of Social Theory 7, no. 2 (2004):171-188. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1368431004041750?icid=int.sj-.
Fuchs, Thomas. "The Phenomenology of Affectivity." In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Psychiatry*, edited by K. W. M. Fulford et al., 2013. Oxford Academic. Online edition, September 5, 2013. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199579563.013.0038. Accessed June 25, 2025.
Gibbs, Anna. "Contagious Feelings: Pauline Hanson and the Epidemiology of Affect." *Australian Humanities Review*, 2001. https://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2001/12/01/contagious-feelings-pauline-hanson-and-the-epidemiology-of-affect/.
Gibson, Eleanor, and Nancy Rader. "Attention: The Perceiver as Performer." In *Attention and Cognitive Development*, pp. 1-21. Springer, 1979.
Gross, Daniel M. *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science*. University of Chicago Press, 2006. Accessed June 30, 2025. ProQuest Ebook Central.
Henderson, Lynne. "Legality and Empathy." *Michigan Law Review* 85, no. 7 (1987): 1574–1653. https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr/vol85/iss7/7/#:~:text=But%20empathy%20can%20contribute%20to,situation%20and%20experience%20of%20others.
hooks, bell. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Routledge, 2015.
Hursthouse, Rosalind. *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
Hussain, Sajid. "Dr Allah Nazar on Balochistan—An Exclusive Interview with Naked Punch." *Naked Punch Review*. https://nakedpunch.com/dr-allah-nazar-on-balochistan-an-exclusive-interview-with-naked-punch/.
Kakar, Aslam. "How PTM Exposed the Abnormality Of 'Normal' In Pakistan." *Naya Daur*, May 17, 2020. https://nayadaur.tv/17-May-2020/how-ptm-exposed-the-abnormality-of-normal-in-pakistan.
Kakar, Aslam. "Walking a Tightrope." *Daily Times*, December 13th, 2018. https://dailytimes.com.pk/332913/walking-a-tightrope-2/
Kakar, Rafiullah. "Politics: Demystifying the PTM." *Dawn*, February 23, 2020. https://www.dawn.com/news/1536068.
Kemper, Theodore D., ed. Research Agenda in the Sociology of Emotions. State University of New York Press, 1990.
Khanzada, Shahzeb. "How Ali Wazir was kept in prison for 26 months? - Aaj Shahzeb Khanzada Kay Saath." Posted 14 February 2023 by Geo News. YouTube, 3:13. https://youtu.be/zLr1N4Vj4cU?si=F6FrMPaXfVrfDFnJ
Klug, Sam. *The Internal Colony: Race and the American Politics of Global Decolonisation*. University of Chicago Press, 2025.
Klug, Sam. "The Politics of Colonial Comparison: An Interview with Sam Klug." Interview by Zachary Levenson. *Spectre*, June 10, 2025. https://spectrejournal.com/the-politics-of-colonial-comparison/.
Lewis, Michael, and Jeannette M. Haviland, eds. *Handbook of Emotions*. Guilford Press, 1993.
Lorde, Audre. "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" In *Sister Outsider*. Crossing Press, 1984.
Lupton, Deborah. *The Emotional Self*. Sage, 1998.
Lutz, Catherine A. *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and Their Challenge to Western Theory*. University of Chicago Press, 1988.
Lyman, Peter. "The Politics of Anger." *Socialist Review* 11, (1981): 55–74.
Lyman, Peter. "The Domestication of Anger: The Use and Abuse of Anger in Politics." *European Journal of Social Theory* 7, no. 2 (2004): 133-147. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431004041748.
Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes. 1st ed. Routledge, 2010. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203720714.
Nussbaum, Martha. ""Secret Sewers of Vice": Disgust, Bodies and the Law." In *The Passions of Law*, edited by Susan Bandes. New York University Press, 1999.
"Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party." *Dawn*, July 17, 2018. https://www.dawn.com/news/1402555.
Parkinson, Brian. *Ideas and Realities of Emotion*. Routledge, 1995.
Pashteen, Manzoor Ahmad. "The Military Says Pashtuns Are Traitors. We Just Want Our Rights". *The New York Times*. February 11, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/11/opinion/pashtun-protests-pakistan.html.

"PM Imran Endorses Grievances of Pashtuns, but Says Agitation will not Yield any Benefits." *Dawn*, April 19, 2019. https://www.dawn.com/news/1477157.
Qazi, Ashraf Jehangir. "Hard State, Soft State." *Dawn*, March 25, 2025. https://www.dawn.com/news/1900186.
Reddy, William M. *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
Schock, Kurt. "Nonviolent Action and Its Misconceptions: Insights for Social Scientists." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 36, no. 4 (2003): 705–12. https://doi-org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/10.1017/S1049096503003482.
Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Yale University Press, 1990.
Sears, Alan and James Cairns. A Good Book, in *Theory: A Guide to Theoretical Thinking*. University of Toronto Press, 2010.
Shah, Seyyed Muzammil. Twitter (now X), 14 February 2023. https://x.com/SyedMuzammilOFL/status/1625463611136114688
Siddique, Abubakar. *The Pashtun Question: The Unresolved Key to the Future of Pakistan and Afghanistan*. Hurst & Company Limited, 2014.
Solomon, Robert C. *A Passion for Justice: Emotions and the Origins of the Social Contract*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1995.
Spelman, Elizabeth V. "Anger and Insubordination." In *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, edited by Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall, 263–272. Unwin Hyman, 1989.
Strongman, Kenneth T. *The Psychology of Emotion: From Everyday Life to Theory*. John Wiley and Sons, 2003.
Svendsen, Lars. *A Philosophy of Fear*. Reaktion Books, 2008.
Syed, Baqir Sajjad. "Top-level Huddle Seeks Consensus to Fight Terrorism. *Dawn*, March 19, 2025. https://www.dawn.com/news/1898813.
Titus, Paul, and Nina Swidler. "Knights, not Pawns: Ethno-nationalism and Regional Dynamics in Post-Colonial Balochistan." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 1 (2000): 47-69.
"'Time is Up': DG ISPR Warns PTM Leadership in Press Conference." *Dawn*, April 29, 2019. https://www.dawn.com/news/1479183.
Veengas. "Pakistani State Favours Killers and Punishes the Innocent, Alleges PTM Founder." *The Wire*, February 21, 2022. https://thewire.in/south-asia/pakistan-pashtun-movement-military-power.
Vogt, Manuel, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Lars-Erik Cederman. "From Claims to Violence: Signaling, Outbidding, and Escalation in Ethnic Conflict." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65, no. 7–8 (2021): 1278–1307.
Voice, PTM. "Ali Wazir Mohsin Dawar PTM Leadership Traveling to Quetta Arman Loni Home." Posted February 7, 2019. YouTube, 11:46. https://youtu.be/vPOTJIJxVd8?si=G_Z2RWTJ2P33Suva.
West-Newman, Catherine Lane. "Anger in Legacies of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and Settler States."*European Journal of Social Theory* 7, no. 2 (2004): 189-208. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431004041751.

Melting Profits: Heat, Corruption, and Sugarcane Inefficiency in Pakistan

Mohib Hassan

1.

Sugar is an extremely important commodity for Pakistanis, with the average person consuming nearly 26 kg in a year.[1] Despite being among the top ten sugarcane producers in the world,[2] Pakistan ranks poorly in sugarcane productivity and sugar extraction yields.[¶] This poor performance is noteworthy given that the sugar industry in Pakistan is worth nearly $2 billion.[4] It is crucial to recognise that these low productivity metrics can be attributed not only to core factors affecting agricultural output but also to environmental and human-generated causes that further undermine the industry's performance.

Sugarcane is cultivated in Pakistan during the *Kharif* season, which begins with the onset of monsoon rains. Planting typically starts between April and June, and the crop is harvested from October to March, overlapping with the *Rabi* season when other essential crops such as wheat are sown. This overlap often leads to competition for resources, with shortages in water and labour complicating the sugarcane harvest even more.

Sugarcane has a growing cycle spanning 10 to 14 months,[5] depending on regional climatic conditions. As a moisture-rich crop, it requires substantial water, which is usually provided by monsoon rains and supplementary irrigation. However, rising temperatures and erratic rainfall patterns in the country are putting increasing stress on the sugarcane crop.[6] The crop is also highly sensitive to heat exposure, as it consists of about 70–75% water.[7] Prolonged periods of elevated temperatures, especially during the critical months leading up to the harvest, accelerate the dehydration of the cane. This heat stress severely impacts both the quality and quantity of sugar extracted, which is a growing concern in Pakistan.

2.

In 2015–16, I participated in Pakathon, a series of hackathons held at major U.S. universities aimed at encouraging technology startups to address challenges faced by Pakistan.

¶ Pakistan's sugarcane productivity averages just 64 tons per hectare and sugar extraction yields around 7.9%. In contrast, India averages 78.2 tons per hectare in sugarcane production and approximately 11% in sugar extraction yield.[3]

During the two-day hackathon at Harvard Business School, my team and I focused on developing an automated software solution to enhance efficiency in the sugarcane harvest and processing phases, with the goal of improving sugar extraction rates. To achieve this, we thoroughly investigated the agricultural supply chain and the sugarcane industry, which represents a significant portion of Pakistan's agricultural market value. Our proposal, titled The *Shakarganj Project*, revealed a complex network of inefficiencies rooted in outdated farming practices and compounded by the problematic actions of a reportedly corrupt industry.

My team and I selected sugarcane after surveying Pakistan's major crops with the greatest unrealised export potential. Our decision was driven by a desire to assist Pakistan in becoming more competitive in a sector where crop production volumes were already high but sugar extraction yields were low.

One of our key findings was the impact of time and heat on sugarcane quality. Once harvested, sugarcane must be processed as swiftly as possible to prevent the degradation of sucrose content,[8] which begins almost immediately after cutting. In Pakistan, the transportation of sugarcane faces serious infrastructural challenges.[9] A critical issue is the widespread use of open-top vehicles for transporting sugarcane, which exposes the crop to intense heat and sunlight, leading to substantial evaporation losses. Studies have shown that for every hour of delay in processing after harvest, the sucrose content in sugarcane decreases by 1%.[10] The poor state of the road networks in both Sindh and Punjab exacerbates these issues, resulting in longer transport times and an increased risk of sugarcane falling from vehicles during transit. Vehicles often navigate rough terrains, potholes, and narrow roads, which increases the likelihood of cane falling off the trucks. In some cases, up to 5–10% of the total harvested cane can be lost due to these factors.[11]

Moreover, the extraction process itself is intricate and involves multiple steps: crushing the cane to extract juice, which is then purified, evaporated, and crystallised to produce sugar.[12] There is a potential for loss at each of these stages, particularly if the cane arrives at the mill in a deteriorated state. In Pakistan, many mills operate with outdated equipment and lack the capacity to process cane efficiently.[13] Consequently, there is substantial loss of sugar content during extraction, aggravating the problem of low yield.

3.

We proposed *The Shakarganj Project* as an initiative to bridge the communication gap between farmers and mill operators through a dedicated application. The core idea was to develop a platform that would facilitate real-time communication and coordination between the two parties to optimise the sugarcane harvest and processing workflow.

The app was designed to send automated text notifications in the relevant regional languages to farmers, providing timely updates on when to start or delay harvesting based on the current traffic situation and processing capacity at the mill. This would help farmers decide when to dispatch the trucks and help prevent premature sugarcane exposure to the sun, thereby reducing moisture loss and preserving sucrose content.

To implement this, mills would need to install the simple app on their computers, allowing mill operators to monitor incoming cane and communicate directly with farmers. This system would not only streamline the harvesting process but also enhance efficiency by ensuring that the mill's processing capacity aligns with the farmers' harvesting schedules. For instance, if a mill has spare capacity for the next few hours, the app would prompt farmers to send their harvested sugarcane there rather than wait in line at a mill closer to them.

By integrating this technology, we aimed to create a seamless flow of information that would benefit both farmers and mill owners. Farmers would receive precise instructions to optimise their harvesting times, while mill operators would have better knowledge of cane arrivals, reducing delays and inefficiencies.

4.

[January 2015]
Meeting with an Embattled Private Mill Owner

With the help of familial connections, I spoke over the phone with a former proprietor of a major sugarcane mill, which had been appropriated by influential figures in rural Sindh. The mill owner voiced significant concerns regarding the monopolistic control exerted by the landowners of Sindh, who not only own the majority of sugar mills in the region but also employ coercive tactics to prevent nearby farms from selling their sugarcane to rival mills. Some of these mills came under their control through intimidation and harassment of the original owners. Such practices stifle competition and limit farmers' choices, undermining their ability to reap fair benefits from their labour.

It is common knowledge that most sugar mills in Pakistan are owned by political leaders and members of the elite class. Rural areas, therefore, become battlegrounds for political and economic interests.[14] The involvement of both the private and public sectors in this corruption is significant, as many sugar mill owners have strong political ties that enable them to operate with relative impunity. The production and distribution of sugarcane are often met with state violence at the local level, where prominent political figures try to establish sugarcane monopolies in their constituencies.

[May 2015]
Meeting with Former Agriculture Minister at Pakistan Harvard Weekend

Shortly after the Pakathon, a former agriculture minister of Pakistan spoke to us during the Pakistan Harvard Weekend about problems in the sugar industry, specifically the manipulation of environmental factors to exploit farmers. The minister detailed how mill owners engineer artificial bottlenecks in the sugarcane weighing process by intentionally slowing down the weighing procedure while simultaneously directing farmers to deliver their sugarcane. This induces extensive queues that can extend for kilometres.

Farmers face lengthy delays and risk evaporation losses, and are thus pressured into settling for much lower prices for their crop, often reduced by 40–60% from the standard rate. To minimise their harvesting costs, they are compelled to sell at these steep discounts, allowing them to offload more produce before transport trucks return. Farmers are also forced to depend on loans from mill owners to cover crop losses during adverse years and become ensnared in a cycle of debt servitude that thereby perpetuates their financial dependence and vulnerability.

5.

The Shakarganj Project was abandoned for a number of reasons. Market conditions played a significant role, as the cost of raw sugarcane turned out to be lower than expected. This meant that mill owners were able to buy sugarcane at a cheaper price than planned, leading to a larger-than-expected financial gain. We were also cautioned by the Pakathon judges that rolling out such a platform would inevitably redistribute the financial calculus between mill owners and farmers, which would not be well received and might create security concerns for us.

This experience highlighted for me that the dynamics and mechanics of wealth distribution in the country make it unlikely that a project like this might ever become viable without state backing. Many such innovative projects that could have helped unlock greater efficiencies in industry and agriculture have probably been sent to the graveyard of startups. This is probably why agricultural yield has shown little improvement over the past few decades in Pakistan.

Notes

1. Pakistan Sugar Mills Association, "Sugar Consumption."
2. ChiniMandi, "Major Sugar Producing Countries."
3. Nazar et al., "Factors Affecting Sugarcane Production."
4. VIS Credit Rating Company Limited, *Pakistan Sugar Sector Report*, 4.
5. Khan, "Sugarcane Crop Developmental Stages and Water Requirement: A Review," 1–5.
6. Government of Pakistan, *Climate Change in Pakistan.*
7. Singh et al., "Phytochemical Profile of Sugarcane," 45–54.
8. Solomon, "Post-Harvest Deterioration of Sugarcane," 109–123.
9. Khushk and Saeed, "Analysis of Sugar Industry Competitiveness," December 2015.
10. Chen and Rauh, "Technical and Economic Justification," 1990.
11. Solomon, "Post-Harvest Deterioration of Sugarcane," 109–123.
12. Singh, "Hybrid Membrane Systems," 201–220.
13. Khushk and Saeed, "Analysis of Sugar Industry Competitiveness in Pakistan."
14. Bari, "Vicious Cycle of Sugar Politics."

Pakistan Sugar Mills Association. "Pakistan Sugar Mills Association Sugar Consumption Per Capita in Pakistan." Accessed November 19, 2024. https://www.psmacentre.com/statistics.php?stid=1&type=national&status=1&link=23&tpage=sugar_consumption.
ChiniMandi. "Major Sugar Producing Countries." Accessed October 14, 2024. https://www.chinimandi.com/statistics/major-sugar-producing-countries/.
Rehman, Shafiq. *Sugar Annual: Pakistan*. Islamabad: United States Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service, April 22, 2021. Report No. PK2021-0006. https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Sugar%20Annual_Islamabad_Pakistan_04-15-2021.pdf
Directorate of Economic & Statistics, Department of Agriculture, and Farmers Welfare. *Notes: 2023-24: Provisional*. https://finance.gov.pk/survey/chapter_24/2_agriculture.pdf
DES. *Pocket Book of Agricultural Statistics 2016*. Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare, 2016. https://desagri.gov.in/document-report/pocket-book-of-agricultural-statistics-2016/
Rana, Shahbaz. "Export of 140,000MT Sugar Approved." *The Express Tribune*, October 13, 2024. https://tribune.com.pk/story/2497555/export-of-140000mt-sugar-approved.
Khan, Muhammad Ehsan. "Sugarcane Crop Developmental Stages and Water Requirement: A Review." *Pakistan Sugar Journal* 38, no. 2 (April-June 2023): 11-15.
Nazir, Adnan, Ghulam Jariko, and Mumtaz Junejo. "Factors Affecting Sugarcane Production in Pakistan." *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences* 7 (2013): 128–140.
Singh, Amandeep, Uma Ranjan Lal, Hayat Muhammad Mukhtar, Prabh Simran Singh, Gagan Shah, and Ravi Kumar Dhawan. "Phytochemical Profile of Sugarcane and Its Potential Health Aspects." *Pharmacognosy Reviews* 9, no. 17 (January - June 2015): 45-54. https://doi.org/10.4103/0973-7847.156340.
Government of Pakistan. *Climate Change in Pakistan*. Islamabad: Sugarcane Production Conference, 2024. https://scp.gov.pk/Conference2024/downloads/Climate_Chage_in_Pakistan.pdf
Solomon, Sushil. "Post-Harvest Deterioration of Sugarcane." *Sugar Tech* 11, no. 2 (June 2009): 109-123.
Khushk, Ali Muhammad, Aslam Memon and Ikram Saeed. "Analysis of Sugar Industry Competitiveness in Pakistan." December 2015. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265431871.
Singh, Rajinder. *Membrane Technology and Engineering for Water Purification*. Second edition Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2015.
Bari, Khadija. "The Vicious Cycle of Sugar Politics." *The Express Tribune*, March 26, 2020. https://tribune.com.pk/story/2176785/vicious-cycle-sugar-politics.
Javadi, Siamak, Mark Kroll, and Yu Liu. "The Dark Side of Competition in Developing Economies: Evidence from Closely Held SMEs." *ScholarWorks@UTRGV: Finance Faculty Publications and Presentations*, June 30, 2024. https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=fin_fac.

Slow Burn: Time and Waiting in Karachi's Relentless Summer

Shanzeh Afzal

'In an age when the media venerate the spectacular, when public policy is shaped primarily around perceived immediate need, a central question is strategic and representational: How can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and that star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world? How can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention, these emergencies whose repercussions have given rise to some of the most critical challenges of our time?

– Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* [1]

Introduction: Heat, Time and Climate Change

Climate change is often presented as an abstract phenomenon that is spatially and temporally distant from our daily lives. Mainstream discourse on climate change frames it as an apocalyptic ticking clock, where time will run out and catastrophe will be upon us.[2] When we talk about climate change, we conceive it as either distant and something to worry about in the long run (rising sea levels, increasing global temperatures) or immediate and catastrophic (floods, melting glaciers, and extreme heatwaves). This binary thinking limits the space for meaningful climate action, as it frames the issue either as something far off and out of reach, or as an overwhelming crisis we are powerless to address. In reducing climate change to these extremes, we fail to recognise the gradual, ongoing transformations of the climate that require us to adapt in ways that prevent disaster while still acting with urgency. Expanding our perspective allows for more proactive, nuanced responses that recognise the continuous nature of climate change and its present-day impacts.

Time, body, and space are three interconnected variables through which one may understand the changing climate: The body interacts with the space it inhabits, is shaped by it over time, but also simultaneously remakes the space. In essence, the body and the climate together are

changed, in time. An ethos for understanding climate change rooted in time would enable us to conceptualise it as a reality deeply embedded in the fabric of our daily lives. Thus, the focus of climate response and action would shift away from large-scale interventions that have so far been mostly ineffective such as the Heatwave Management Plan of Karachi,[3] which borrowed its framework heavily from other geographic regions and failed to account for certain context-specific attributes of Karachi's urban heat. It prioritised circulating flyers and text messages containing heat advisories as well as specific instructions such as staying indoors (which would be even more harmful than being outside for those who live in houses made from heat trapping materials). These interventions are far removed from the ground reality[4] and are therefore ineffective in changing the impact of heat for those vulnerable to it because it does not consider how heat impacts people over time and in their day-to-day lives.

Karachi's Heatscape

People in South Asia have adapted to heat for centuries, but the extent and intensity of this heat is now changing significantly.[5] Cities are the largest contributors to rising temperatures, driven by their central role in capitalist production. Built structures and heat-trapping surfaces in urban areas make local climates warmer.¶ Karachi is one such city, declared one of the region's 'hotspots'[♯] for climate change,[7] where rising temperatures have begun to manifest in the form of frequent heatwaves and extreme heat in the summer months leading to a significant number of casualties.

Karachi's heatwaves are a direct and immediate manifestation of climate change. The trouble with presenting highly visible manifestations of climate change like heatwaves is that they do not paint the full picture of its impacts. They are newsworthy because they are event-focused, body-bound, and time-bound.[8] In the media, the impacts of heat and heatwaves in Karachi are most often represented through severe illness, death, and infrastructural and economic harm, which simplifies climate change to death and catastrophe. This is reductive because, while heatwaves highlight the global climate crisis, the true effects of climate change in Karachi are seen in the quiet, everyday ways that heat affects its citizens, which is more difficult to represent. From the energy it takes to get through a sweltering workday to the toll on physical health, mental well-being, and productivity, the oppressive heat shapes how people move, work, and rest. It alters how we relate to time, slowing down our bodies and our days, and yet we are forced to keep going. By focusing on these daily struggles, we can better understand how heat is part of everyday life in Karachi, affecting its inhabitants in ways that may not always be catastrophic but are unrelenting. The extent of these impacts remains mostly invisible because they are temporally dispersed, since the damage accumulates slowly over time, making it harder to recognise as a crisis.

This is what Rob Nixon refers to as 'slow violence,' in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of The Poor*. Violence is usually conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into sensational visibility. Slow violence, however, is a violence of delayed destruction,' which is neither spectacular nor instantaneous but rather incremental and accretive, with calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales.[9] In this way, we can think of heat in Karachi as a slow violence that wears people down through chronic exposure to high temperatures, often leading to long-term health issues, productivity losses, and psychological strain. This essay aims to grapple with the representational and narrative challenges posed by the relative invisibility of heat as a form of slow violence by zooming into these struggles and narrating them through the lens of the most vulnerable. This will also unearth how it alters the experience of heat through time.

One way to think about Karachi's urban landscape of intense heat is to consider it as a heatscape, encapsulating various factors like climate change, exclusionary infrastructures, and the systemic inequalities of urban living that make poor people especially vulnerable to the violent heat. The rising population density, industrial activities that contribute to heat pollution, and the heat-retaining properties of concrete buildings and asphalt roads all exacerbate the urban heat island (UHI) effect. As a coastal city, Karachi's heat is further intensified by extremely high levels of humidity. With 62 % of its population living in informal settlements,[10] overcrowding, limited access to cooling resources, frequent load shedding, and inadequate infrastructure make daily life under extreme heat increasingly difficult. Access to electricity-powered cooling devices, such as air conditioning and fans, becomes crucial for survival in this heatscape. However, electricity supply is sporadic in many low-income areas of Karachi, and cooling systems remain inaccessible for much of the population that also lacks financial means to offset extreme temperatures. This infrastructural violence highlights the stark class divide in the city's ability to cope with heat.

¶ According to the IUCN, cities are responsible for approximately 75% of greenhouse as emissions and up to 80% of global energy consumption.[6]

♯ A hotspot is a location where higher temperatures cause significant reduction in living standards.

As a researcher on climate and energy justice in Karachi,¶ I have learned the importance of listening and learning from those who are most vulnerable. I draw on my work in the low-income areas of Lyari and Korangi, where the experience of heat is not just a daily discomfort but an ongoing challenge to survival. According to a study by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, there are six 'poverty clusters' in Karachi where 90% of the very poor households are geographically concentrated, and these include both Lyari and Korangi.[11] The term 'poverty clusters' helps in highlighting the extremely uneven way in which poverty, space, and subsequent exposure to heat are divided in the city. Lyari, located in the southern district of Karachi, is the smallest but most densely populated town in the city, with 158,313 people per square kilometer and an overall population of almost one million people as of 2023.[12] Korangi is a major industrial area in Karachi and employs 1.5 million workers in various industries (textile, leather, chemicals). Many of these workers are migrants from other parts of the province such as Badin and Tharparkar. It too has a high population of 1.3 million residents with 23,118 people per square kilometer.[13] By focusing on communities living in these areas, we can gain a clearer understanding of how the physical, mental, and social effects of heat are unevenly distributed across the city and how this impacts people's experiences of time differently.

A State of Slowness

I conducted fieldwork in 8 Chowk, Dhobi Ghat, a neighbourhood in Lyari, during the peak of the city's harsh summer in July 2024. Upon my arrival, I found a group of women sitting outside their homes with their children, fanning themselves as they waited for scheduled electricity load-shedding to end. They explained that power outages often last up to 12 hours a day, leaving them with no relief from the stifling heat. The infrastructure in this area is a significant contributor to their suffering. The homes are built in close proximity—often just 1 to 1.5 feet apart—that blocks natural airflow and exacerbates the heat. These houses are constructed with heat-retaining materials like concrete and cement, making the spaces unbearably hot especially when there is load shedding. Many residents add extra floors to accommodate growing families, which further obstructs ventilation. According to local building and town regulations, the amount of space between walk-up buildings (ground plus four) should be at least 30 feet. These standards are mostly enforced in planned residential areas, but unplanned areas are not protected by these regulations. During load-shedding, the lack of electricity means the homes grow so dark that it is hard to tell if it is day or night, as the buildings have been constructed so close together that they block sunlight from the windows and leave no room for proper ventilation. The combination of poor infrastructure, unreliable electricity, and heat-trapping materials creates an environment where extreme heat becomes even more unbearable, contributing to Karachi's dangerous heatscape.

For those living in constant heat without access to cooling, the day feels endless, and each hour passes more slowly as fatigued bodies struggle to cope. This slowing down of both the body and mind traps people in a cycle of exhaustion that makes it harder to get through each day. This slowness is not merely discomfort; it is a structural reality that deepens the divide between the privileged and the marginalised, shaping how time is experienced across class lines. Venus James,¶ an elderly Christian woman living in Korangi who suffers from a heart condition, said with frustration and grief in her voice, 'When it is very hot and we have no electricity, my health suffers greatly. Blood pressure increases and something happens to me—I feel faint. I know so many people who have collapsed and have had to be taken to the hospital. Those who are weak, sick and old also fall ill very often and many people have lost their lives to the heat. It is a great struggle.'

As temperatures rise, the physical toll of the heat reduces mobility and productivity, creating lethargy that slows down daily activities. Research shows that there are limits to how much heat the body can endure. When outside temperatures exceed 40°C, the body has to increase its metabolism and heart rate, exerting more energy to maintain its ideal core temperature. Under higher temperatures, the body loses its essential minerals and electrolytes and as it works to cool itself, the energy deficit impacts overall physical functioning. Basic tasks that would normally require minimal effort become exhausting under extreme heat. The energy spent on maintaining a stable core temperature depletes the body's resources, leaving little energy for work. Over time, this creates a cycle of fatigue, where each day's demands are met with less physical capacity, further entrenching individuals in a state of forced slowness. Chronic exposure to these cycles can cause heat stress and, in extreme cases, heat stroke.[14]

For many workers, particularly those on night shifts, power outages worsen this condition. Many low-income areas, like those in Korangi, face frequent load-shedding. Peer Buksh, a

¶This essay is informed and shaped by research conducted with The Knowledge Forum, especially their forthcoming video series on K-Electric called *Left in the Dark*.[12]

¶All names used in this essay are real and have been used after obtaining the consent of the participants.[16]

Muslim man in his early thirties is a machine operator in a denim factory. He told me that it is quite common for labourers to take on night shifts which usually end around 8am. Often when they reach home in the morning, there is no electricity, so they are unable to sleep. He explained, 'It can be dangerous to factory workers who work with machinery, and there have been many instances where workers have dozed off while working and had accidents and gotten hurt because of the machinery.' It takes more energy to stay awake and get the same amount of work done. Their income suffers greatly because they work on a per-piece basis, and they have to push their bodies harder to achieve the same output within the same time in sweltering heat. Buksh added, 'Workers have often fainted and had to be taken to the hospital because of heat stress.'

In Karachi, the experience of time during extreme heat in lower income households is greatly influenced by the city's unreliable electricity supply. This is called load-shedding, and it involves planned power outages that force residents into periods of involuntary slowness by disrupting their daily routines and activities. This is especially a persistent occurrence in low-income areas, where the intermittent loss of power results in a chaotic and fragmented experience of time. In an urbanised city like Karachi, where technology is deeply embedded in everyday life, the absence of electricity can be disruptive to day-to-day functioning. The absence of electricity also means that essential appliances like refrigerators and fans cannot be used, so basic activities such as cooking and cleaning become more labor-intensive and time-consuming. This technological deprivation adds to the physical and mental strain of heat and necessitates extra effort for completing routine tasks. For those in poverty, time is a precious but dwindling resource. Lakshmi Devi, a middle-aged Hindu woman and a home-based worker, supports her family by shelling walnuts. The income she earns from a single bag of walnuts is crucial—it can make the difference between her two young children having a meal or going to bed hungry. The heat slows down her pace of work, and she sometimes has to resort to charity meals to ensure that at least her children are fed. 'I have to leave my work to cook before the electricity goes out again,' she said.

During my visit to Lyari, I met Najma Maheshwari, a middle-aged woman from the Hindu community who wants to open a community centre in Lyari to educate the residents of the area. She too, like many other women in the area, engages in home-based work. She shared with me how living with unreliable electricity affects her and her family. The night before, she explained, she could hardly sleep as the electricity was out for most of the night. As her four children aged between 4 and 16 years struggled with the heat, she had to fan them by hand herself, a physically exhausting task that left her weary and spent. When the power finally restored, Najma barely got a couple of hours of rest before it went out again.

When there is no electricity, her home is in near-total darkness even during the day. Her family only eats once a day, timing their meals during the brief periods when electricity is available. She cannot store food in the refrigerator since frequent power cuts cause it to spoil. 'It feels like our entire system is disturbed because there's no electricity from morning to night,' she lamented. She tries to fit her entire day's activities into the few hours that there is electricity: cooking, helping her children with homework, cleaning, resting and working. Najma and many others in her community rely on home-based work, such as making gajras or shelling walnuts and pistachios, to earn a living. Without electricity, they must slog on even as they are drenched in sweat, as they cannot afford to stop working and their productivity is severely compromised.

In Karachi, the privileged enjoy a comfortable insulation from the city's heatscape because they have access to technological cooling infrastructures such as air conditioners, roof heat-proofing technologies, and solar-powered coolers which offer a means of protection from the effects of the intense heat in the city, a way in which heat is kept out so that their life can continue as normal undisturbed by the city's climate realities. The working classes, however, must work harder and longer hours to compensate for their reduced efficiency caused by heat-related health issues. The smooth operation of Karachi's urban life relies on the unseen and often unacknowledged struggles of its workers, whose efforts and sacrifices are critical in upholding the city's high-speed production and consumption cycles. The working classes uphold the infrastructure of speedy living while simultaneously being cast outside it.[15]

Conclusion: A Temporality of Waiting

The relentless summer heat pushes low-income communities into a prolonged, almost immobilising state of waiting without being able to alleviate their suffering in any meaningful way. The daily challenges they face—from managing exhaustion to coping with the toll on their physical and mental health—affect every aspect of their lives, limiting their ability to work, care for family, or even rest. Their days are spent enduring the effects of extreme temperatures, with the hope for relief constantly deferred.

This temporality of waiting becomes a defining feature of their reality, with each hour bringing new hardships and each day marked by an anxious anticipation of relief. Waiting for electricity, for evening breezes, for water and food, for a day without load-shedding, they live in a present

that is defined by a yearning for a future they cannot shape. This enforced waiting places them in a state where they simply endure, day by day, the adverse conditions that can stretch on indefinitely. They exist within a seemingly endless loop of suffering and hope, forced to wait for change that remains painfully out of reach.

Najma talked about this temporality of waiting: 'It's like deceiving yourself. There is electricity, there is a little bit of air [from the fans]. Then the electricity is gone, so we will feel hot. We are waiting, we tell ourselves that our bodies can handle the heat for ten minutes, fifteen minutes, we keep telling ourselves this until the electricity comes and we have some relief. But this is an endless cycle. Even when there is electricity, we are preparing ourselves mentally for it to go again. We are so used to this, we have no choice but to adjust, to fool ourselves. It kind of makes us feel far removed from our own lives, like we are waiting for a future of peace and comfort that never arrives.'

The unequal distribution of heat in Karachi vividly highlights a climate justice issue that significantly magnifies the vulnerability of already marginalised populations. The relentless heat disproportionately affects those who are least equipped to cope, further entrenching social and economic disparities. In meeting the bare necessities of the present effectively, these communities are trapped in a state of forced resilience where they have little choice but to persevere despite overwhelming challenges.

Notes

1. Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 2013.
2. Whyte "Time as Kinship." https://ssrn.com/abstract=3830025.
3. Karachi Heatwave Management Plan, 10–12
4. Abdullah and Macktoom, "Heat (In)action."
5. Anwar, "Everyday Politics of Thermal Violence."
6. IUCN, "Cities and Nature."
7. Abdullah and Macktoom, "Heat (In)action."
8. Nixon *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 2.
9. Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 2.
10. Hassan, *The Changing Nature of informal Settlements*, 91.
11. Bengali, et al., "Poverty in Karachi," 159–178.
12. City Population, "Lyari (Karachi)."
13. City Population, "Korange (Karachi)."
14. Lennon, "How Hot is Too Hot for the Human Body?"
15. Sharma, "Tempoal Labour and the Taxicab," 57.

Abdullah, Adam, and Soha Macktoom. "Heat (In)Action: The Thermopolitics of Extreme Urban Heat in Karachi." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Spotlight on Extreme Heat in Urban South Asia, August 15, 2023. https://www.ijurr.org/spotlight-on/extreme-heat/heat-inaction-the-thermopolitics-of-extreme-urban-heat-in-karachi/.

Bengali, Kaiser, Mir Anjum Altaf, Aly Ercelawn, and Abdul Raheem. "Poverty in Karachi: Incidence, Location, Characteristics, and Upward Mobility." *The Pakistan Development Review* 32, no. 2, (Summer 1993): 159–178.

Berlant, Lauren. "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)." *Critical Inquiry* 33, no 4. (2007): 754–780. https://doi.org/10.1086/521568.

Commissioner Karachi. *Karachi Heatwave Management Plan: A Guide to Planning and Response*. 2017. https://ghhin.org/wp-content/uploads/HeatwaveManagementPlan.pdf.

Davis, Heather. "Waiting in Petro-Time." *Environmental Humanities* 15, no 3 (2023): 52–64. https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-10745979.

Hassan, Arif. "The Changing Nature of Informal Settlements in the Megapolis in South Asia: The Case of Karachi, Pakistan." *The Changing Nature of Informal Settlements in the Megapolis in South Asia*, 91-108. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788973779.00011.

International Union for Conservation of Nature. "Cities and Nature." Accessed December 30, 2024. https://iucn.org/resources/issues-brief/cities-and-nature.

Lennon, Annie. "How Hot Is Too Hot for the Human Body? Study Offers New Insights." *Medical News Today*, July 20, 2023. https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/how-hot-is-too-hot-for-the-human-body-heart-metabolic-rate.

Mbembé, Achille. "Necropolitics". Translated by Libby Meintjes. *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 11–40. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/39984.

Mani, Muthukumara, Sushenjit Bandyopadhyay, Shun Chonabayashi, Anil Markandya, and Thomas Mosier. *South Asia's Hotspots: Impacts of Temperature and Precipitation Changes on Living Standards.* South Asia Development Matters. World Bank, 2018. http://hdl.handle.net/10986/28723

Neimanis, Astrida, and Rachel Loewen Walker. "'Weathering': Climate Change and the 'Thick Time' of Transcorporeality." *Hypatia* 29, no. 3 (2014): 559–575. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24542017.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2013.

Sharma, Sarah. "Temporal Labour and the Taxicab." In *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*, 95–120. Duke University Press, 2014.

Contested Atmosphere: The Architecture of Cooling

Marvi Mazhar

As a practitioner and researcher of the built environment, I am interested in documenting active mechanical objects on building façades and rooftops in Karachi, and in reflecting on their relationship with the changing urban ecology. The proliferation of these condensers and mechanical cooling towers has created a contested atmosphere, as air-conditioning units cool interior spaces and simultaneously release heat, thereby degrading the environment around multi-story buildings.

The aesthetics and maintenance of a city like Karachi are mired in a volatile mix of financial imaginaries[¶] and broken infrastructure. For more than a century, social relations in the urban metropolis have been linked to economic circulation and aspirations of becoming a global city. As many urban centres in South Asia have adopted this global outlook, the exigencies of development and urban interventions have not catered to human needs or to the relations among various living inhabitants of the city's environment.

This essay presents extracts from an ongoing conversation between a Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) consultant and me. I am the mediator between him and the city as I use a visual ethnographic methodology on my Sunday walks through parts of old Karachi. I document and send the consultant an image, along with my observation and questions, and he responds on WhatsApp via voice notes.

Recently while waiting in the back alleys of I.I. Chundrigar Road, I encountered Akbar Manzil—one of the low-rise corporate buildings from the 1950s occupied by the Jang Media Group. As I stood near the back elevation and observed multiple rows of cooling units, I felt a sheet of hot air around me and was compelled to imagine the internal environment. I noticed that these active mechanical objects were camouflaged by green vines which were drawing sustenance from air-conditioner filters and clogged drains. This juxtaposition of nature with external mechanical infrastructure highlighted the dichotomy between the inside and outside.

In my initial conversations with the consultant, I learnt how the capacity of each HVAC system is calculated using a conversion formula, and that there are two mechanisms for reducing temperatures in interior spaces: air-cooled condensers and cooling towers. Understanding heat and calculating its intensity in the built environment requires information about external parameters such as the relationship among the façade, construction material used in external walls, roofs, appliances, and lighting infrastructure.[♯]

[¶] Financial imaginaries are variously described as sociocultural constructions through which money, credit, and trust circulate.

[♯] The following formula is used to calculate how much heat a cooling infrastructure disperses outwards: each ton of air conditioning= 12000 BTUs/hour = 3.4 KW heat energy produced.

Gradually, my focus shifted towards understanding cooling infrastructure in regards to its heat impact and relation to ecology. I enquired about the problems the city faces due to heat fluctuation and the warming effects of large-scale cooling application methods, especially since climate change has become a focal point for planners, policy makers, and NGOs concerned with heat governance. He responded: 'Refrigerants[¶] contribute majorly to ozone depletion. The Montreal Protocol was signed in 1987 to phase out refrigerants of that time to protect the ozone layer. The Kigali amendment of 2016 further proposed to replace these substances with new, safer and cleaner technologies, but this still awaits implementation.'

Flawed infrastructure planning and the introduction of cooling infrastructures in a congested concrete jungle have brought the heat-exhausted city to a critical juncture. In megacities like Karachi, the responses to overheating by city planners, policy makers, and urban governance remain top-down and counterproductive.[1]

Compared to 1960, night-time temperatures in Karachi have risen by around 2.4 °C and daytime temperatures by 1.6 °C.[2] In 2015, a deadly heat wave killed more than 1,200 people in the city. Human activity has raised global temperatures by approximately 1.1 °C since preindustrial times, and studies show that nearly 70 percent of cities worldwide are impacted.[3] I asked whether central air conditioning is a sustainable response to this increasing heat. '[Its negative impact] can be reduced by using multiple sustainable techniques such as green facades, performance glass, improved lighting design, and the inclusion of generous internal courtyards and wind shafts. Air conditioning is currently the only solution available, and natural ventilation can't help because the outdoor temperature is 42 °C and indoor temperature is 34-35 °C, and it can't come down to 23-24 °C [any other way].'

My experience working with heritage buildings has made me look at construction materials used in the past with greater humility and made me appreciate regional architectural decisions. These include thick walls that naturally cool the inside from outside; the mandatory verandah or *aangan* and semi-covered corridors or courtyards that act as buffers from heat; strategically located skylights or *roshandaans* that ventilate rooms while also allowing in sunlight; lime as a core binding material that strengthens and waterproofs surfaces; and lastly, strategically placed windows that provide cross-ventilation. These characteristics, commonly found in residential buildings along with the use of *brise soleil*[♯] in public buildings, were both easy to maintain and environmentally safe.

[¶] A refrigerant is a chemical substance that absorbs heat and transfers it to another substance, typically in a cycle, to cool air or objects. These are used in a variety of appliances including air conditioners, refrigerators, and other cooling machines.

[♯] An external architectural feature through which sunlight can be deflected.

As my conversation on HVAC systems continued, the consultant verbally described the blueprint of the sophisticated mechanical infrastructure. He listed the locations of this complex technical equipment all over the building: air handling units on each floor; fan units in each window; and chillers and cooling towers in the plant room, on the roof, and in the basement. These units are spread out and require ongoing observation-based maintenance and management: split air conditioning needs filter cleaning every 15 days and deep cleaning every year; chillers need a large technical operating team to clean and maintain the heat levels on a bi-monthly basis.

As I stand on the 14th floor of a newly constructed glass-and-concrete high-rise building and look down at the deck of an adjoining building, I cannot ignore the large cooling towers. I sent an image to the consultant and asked how these are managed and maintained. Amid the vastness of a city with a population of 20 million that's facing massive problems of urban growth, I quietly watch the pigeons play in the water from the chillers—a harsh reminder of the neglected outer environment and ecology's silent relationship with mechanical infrastructure. The stark glare of the sun piercing through large glass panes is enough to make me imagine the heat outside even as my body is cooled by large vents inside.

New buildings are engineered machines, active 24 hours. In a city like Karachi where foliage is scarce, building facades are often used by birds to perch and nest, but the heat released by cooling towers is harmful for them. If these mechanisms are not regularly cleaned, the condensate they produce may become contaminated and unsafe for birds to drink. In this way, mechanical cooling objects have a direct impact on the microclimate around these high rise buildings.

Notes

1. Anwar, et al. Designed to Fail?, 5.
2. Ibid., 12.
3. Bazab et al., Summary of Urban Policy Makers, 11; Carrington, "Climate Crisis Has Shifted the Earth's Axis, Studies Show."

Anwar, Nausheen H., Hassaan F. Khan, Adam Abdullah, Soha Macktoom, and Aqdas Fatima. *Designed to Fail? Heat Governance in Urban South Asia: The Case of Karachi*. April 2022.

Bazaz, Amir, et al. *Summary for Urban Policy Makers: What the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C Means for Cities*. December 2018. https://doi.org/10.24943/SCPM.2018

Carrington, Damian. "Climate Crisis Has Shifted the Earth's Axis, Study Shows." *The Guardian*, April 23, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/apr/23/climate-crisis-has-shifted-the-earths-axis-study-shows

Credit: *Contested Atmosphere: The Architecture of Cooling*, 2025, photographs and drone images. Karachi, Pakistan (Photos by Marvi Mazhar and drone assistance by Mohib Hassan).

Desire and Discretion in Karachi's Informal Rental Spaces

Zehra Khan

I studied at one of Karachi's well-known A-Levels schools, one that has a reputation for being progressive. Yet, if two people on campus were ever seen hugging for a second too long, some staff member doing the rounds would shake their finger and shout across the ground: 'No physical!' Interestingly, this happened irrespective of the students' gender presentation. For me, coming of age was shaped largely by instances like these, when I was made aware in implicit and explicit ways that I do, in fact, have a body and my body has to exist within the bounds of a prescribed propriety, bounds which I couldn't fully understand then.

That the public sphere of Karachi is stifling is not news to anyone. While I've seen people argue, hurl curses, and even break into physical fights on the streets of Karachi, I cannot rememberthe last time I saw two people holding hands or embracing one another in public. I do not just mean streets or parks or malls, but even private spaces where others are around, such as in shared rides, social gatherings with colleagues, or family dinners where elders would raise eyebrows even at married couples if they were to display any affection. I recall that in 2012, a well-known morning show host took to Karachi's public parks with a camera crew to film an exposé of couples using those parks as dating spots.[1] Then earlier this year, a young couple was verbally and physically harassed by a mob in a public park in Islamabad on the eve of Independence Day.[2] These are just two of the numerous instances set against an unforgiving landscape where tender encounters are regularly policed.

For young people coming of age in the last decade, the internet has been a way to connect digitally with peers without having to venture out of their homes; strangers meeting online on apps like Kik or Bumble could become friends and sometimes romantic interests. With high-speed connectivity, the gig economy also experienced a boom, opening up all kinds of remote, freelancing opportunities from data entry jobs to ghost-writing stints, non-contractual positions that can easily be taken up by school, college or university students. Simultaneously, car, rickshaw, or even bike rides can be booked easily through online ride-hailing apps such as Careem, InDrive, and Bykea. Thanks to a growing social circle, greater financial independence, and increased mobility around the city, hanging out with friends and dating became easier. This newfound ease opened up the previously unimaginable possibility of informally renting a room as a teenager or young adult.

In Karachi, informal rental spaces are colloquially known as 'Airbnbs,' even if they are not rented from the official Airbnb website and are found through social connections. Over the past few weeks, as I talked to friends and acquaintances about their experiences with informal rentals, I realised that I was not alone in negotiating between the body and its freedoms. In a context where one's parents are not likely to support choices that diverge from their moral code, the risks of striking out on our own are profound for many of us.

I sit in the Prem Gali at our campus with a friend who moved out of her parents' home last year. She plays with the keys of the one bedroom that is her own, as two cups of chai steam the air between us. I ask her how long she has been renting Airbnbs.

'God, are you going to judge me? Like…five years, maybe.'

'So, what kind of areas in the city would you say are ideal for Airbnbs?'

'You have to understand, it's a delicate balance between privacy and danger. I don't want to be on, say, Sharah-e-Faisal, but I also don't want to be somewhere completely aloof from the city with a random guy. I mean, now I'm in a very stable long-term relationship, *Mashallah*…' she said with a smile. 'But when I would book these Airbnbs with people I met at parties—and even now [with my partner]—I don't want to feel completely isolated. I just think that's dangerous, you know?'

'When you say danger, what do you mean?'

'See, there are two kinds of danger. If you're too much in a really rushy [busy] place then you know, you can get caught by neighbourhood people….But if you're in, say, Phase 7 Extension where there is no neighbourhood to speak of, then what if the guy you're with turns out to be a creep?'

I am reminded of a time I felt similar trepidation when booking an Airbnb: the minutes of anxiety before finding the right building, the right gate, the right floor, the right door in an isolated area of the city completely new to me. On my phone, the host's text message read: '17-C I think…it isn't written outside, just a grey door, it's already open a little. Please lock it behind you.' My eyes flitted between my phone and the three slate-grey iron gates before me. 'Ok coming in,' I replied. As shopkeepers opened their stores and drivers wiped car windshields, I felt their eyes on me. I tested each of the three gates with my body weight until one gave way and I stepped inside into a cloud of dust, clicking the gate shut behind me.

After speaking with multiple people, I realised that a preferred 'Airbnb' is usually close to a residential area so that temporary tenants are not too conspicuous to curious neighbours and regular passersby. It is also usually close enough to a commercial area that one can step out to get snacks, medicines, or anything needed at short notice.

I am chatting with another friend in his bedroom while I drink an almost flat Cola Next. He's smoking his third cigarette with all the doors and windows closed, so technically, I'm smoking too. He tells me how an Airbnb should ideally not be too close to his own house because—and he doesn't even bother finishing his sentence because the reasons are apparently obvious enough. But, he adds, it also shouldn't be too far from his house either. 'Warna Careem pe hi saaray paise kharch hojaeyein,'¶ he said. 'Already the Airbnb I use costs seven thousand for ten hours.'

'Is this Airbnb actually from the Airbnb website?'

'Oh, no, it's a friend's.'

'Have you ever considered booking from the Airbnb site?'

He explains how informally rented spaces are sometimes owned and rented out by wealthy owners living overseas, and other times by young people trying to earn some side cash from the booming gig economy in Karachi, but rarely from the official Airbnb site itself. Airbnb is a formal platform which makes it more expensive and the rates are fixed. The space is usually owned by a complete stranger, has to be booked for at least one whole night, and also leaves a digital footprint. Instead, young people negotiating desire within the bounds of their limited financial capacities turn to their social circles and social media groups that they consider 'safe' to find relatively cheap, often unsanitary, and rundown apartments or rooms in apartment complexes on an hourly basis. This way, they are not only able to find a desirable space but also a host of their choice.

'So you'd prefer the host to always be your friend?'

'I mean, I don't know about friend, but I'd prefer the host to be young, always. Because they kinda know what I'm doing there anyway so the host knows to stay out of the way while I'm there and you know, there is a level of mutual trust and agreement, right? Like I won't tell on you and you never bring us up.'

In most cases, people prefer to be greeted by a key under a doormat or a flower-pot, along with a post-it note on the side table with the wi-fi password and directions for using speakers and air conditioning. When the host is a friend though, a casual hello precedes the handing over of keys to the place.

When the terms of the stay have been decided, the time of day has to be agreed with one's partner. Often, the time depends on the circumstances of the individual seeking a rental space—

¶ Otherwise all my money would be spent on Careem [3]

perceived safety during the day as compared to at night, the availability of transport, and the need to take appropriate leave from family without raising suspicions. In my conversations, male-presenting individuals commonly considered night-time more convenient while the female-presenting ones preferred the daytime.

I am on a group call with two of my girlfriends who have been a couple for two years.

'When do you usually go to the Airbnb? And how long would you usually stay?'

'*Yaar, yeh* tricky *hota hai* because *din mein*[¶] is too public, but then at night, I can't use university- or work-related excuses to leave the house,' one of them said.

'Yeah, and usually I do use university as an excuse…like, I go to university first and then go to the Airbnb from there. Which is why it is also close to our university, you know?'

No matter the time of day, one brings a lot of vulnerability and trust to the Airbnb and places it in one's partner and the space in equal measure. Dust may pervade the space, floors and sheets might look used or grubby, the water might run out, the air-conditioning might give up midway, but for the few hours that the air in the room is rife with affection and desire, hot and hurried, urgent and relieved, the stranger's bed, the stranger's room, the stranger's apartment is home. One may have seen it for the first time and possibly for the last, but a home is beautiful, even if it is makeshift and temporary. Whether the fleeting hours spent in the space are an expression of long-term love or a short spark of desire, they leave a mark on its tenants.

I am with another friend in the park outside the university, sitting under a tree with generous shade, my fingers scribbling notes and his fingers knotting grass.

'What does renting an Airbnb with your girlfriend mean to you?'

'You know, Zehra, I love my girlfriend, I'll marry her, I know that. *Tou, sirf woh sab nahi hota, matlab,*[♯] we make chai together, we watch a movie, *baatein kartay hain araam se.*[•]'

'Of course. I'm sorry, I never meant to insinuate that.'

¶ Dude, this is tricky because in the daytime.

♯ So, it's not just that going on, I mean.

• We relax and talk to each other.

'No, I know. But I'm just saying. That's what renting a room with her means to me. It means that…I'll tell you with dramatic effect. It means that:

Waqt ki qaid mein, zindagi hai magar,
Chand ghariyan yahi hain jo azaad hain[∞]

Informally renting a room in Karachi is about more than seeking refuge. It is about cherishing one's own agency, the bittersweet undulations of young love, and precious moments of reprieve in a city that suffocates affection. To demand the fulfilment of one's heart and flesh is an act of self-preservation but it is also an act of taking control, of saying: let anyone do what they want. I am here, I will desire, I will fall in love.

∞ *Life is bound by the prison of time, but,*
These are the only few moments of freedom.
A verse from the poem *Aaj Jaane Ki Zidd Na Karo* (Don't Insist on Leaving Today) by Fayyaz Hashmi.

Notes

1. Zakaria, "Public Spaces, Private Lives," 2012.
2. "Couple Harassed by Charged Mob on Independence Day in Islamabad (Video)."

"Couple Harassed by Charged Mob on Independence Day in Islamabad." *Daily Pakistan*, August 17, 2024. https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/17-Aug-2024/couple-harassed-by-charged-mob-on-independence-day-in-islamabad-video.

Zakaria, Rafia. "Public Spaces, Private Lives." *Dawn*, January 31, 2012. https://www.dawn.com/news/692321/public-spaces-private-lives.

Ali Mehdi Zaidi is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at Stanford University, where his research explores the social life of heat and articulates environmental catastrophe from the perspective of the third world. He is currently a Global Fellow at Habib University in Karachi, where he teaches courses on Modernity and Environmental Anthropology. His upcoming course offerings include Medical Anthropology and the Social Life of Death.

Nazgol Ansarinia is an artist whose work examines the systems and networks that shape daily life, including everyday objects, routines, and the built environment, and how they reflect broader social and economic conditions. Born and raised in Tehran, her practice reflects on the tensions between private space and structural change. Ansarinia employs a range of materials to engage with vernacular architecture and the evolving conditions of urban life, informed by her background in art and design. She holds degrees from the London College of Communication and the California College of the Arts in San Francisco.

Danika Cooper is Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research centers on the geopolitics of scarcity, alternative water ontologies, and designs for resiliency in the global arid lands. Her work foregrounds desert landscapes as critical sites for rethinking environmental and landscape architecture amidst accelerating climate change. Cooper's research and creative output has been published and exhibited across the world, and she has practiced architecture and landscape architecture both in the United States and in India. Prior to joining Berkeley, she was the 2015-2016 Designer-in-Residence teaching fellow at the Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Aslam Kakar is a scholar of ethnopolitical movements whose academic interests include the philosophy of race, ethnicity, and emotions in the political sphere. His doctoral research examined the Pashtun struggle in Pakistan and the Kurdish struggle in Turkey, with a focus on conflict strategies and resistance. During this research, Kakar studied Turkish at Princeton University's Department of Near Eastern Studies. Later, as an ARIT Fellow, he attended Bogaziçi University's Summer school for intensive Turkish, where he also conducted fieldwork as a Dean Dissertation Writing Fellow. Kakar has taught courses in Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, and Global Affairs at Rutgers, bringing an interdisciplinary lens to his research and teaching. He holds a Ph.D. in Global Affairs from Rutgers University, Newark.

Mohib Hassan is the co-founder of Open Farming, an AI technology company based in the UAE. He has previously led international franchises and held leadership roles focused on strategic direction, financial turnaround, technical innovation, and elevating customer experience. His core interest lies in developing artificial intelligence–driven solutions that address real-world challenges in the food industry.

Shanzeh Afzal is pursuing an MA in Literary and Cultural Studies at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Her research focuses on the impacts of energy, approached through cultural, historical, and literary lenses, with a particular emphasis on environmental justice. Previously, she was a Research Associate at The Knowledge Forum, where she studied energy and electricity issues in Sindh. Her essay, 'The Opposite of Colonization is Indigenization: Imagining Energy Futures through South Asian Science Fiction', was published in the ninth issue of *Tasavvurnama*. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Sciences and Liberal Arts from the Institute of Business Administration, Karachi, where she majored in Media and Culture.

Marvi Mazhar is an architect and researcher whose practice combines visual culture, spatial advocacy, and urban interventions. She serves on several advisory boards in government and non-profit organizations. She regularly writes about issues related to real estate and heritage preservation for the newspaper *Dawn*, and recently co-edited the book *Architecture for the Future* (2023, MIT Publication) with Elke Krasny and Angelika Fritz. Mazhar is currently working in Kyrgyzstan and Georgia as lead architect for developing infrastructural and management connectivity. She has a Master's from Goldsmiths, University of London, and her ongoing research focuses on the representation and production of Karachi's urban and rural coastal periphery and its ecology.

Zehra Khan is a final year student in the Fine Art department at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture. For the past year, she has been recording and archiving oral history and material memory from the survivors of the 1947 and 1971 Partitions in South Asia. She is Program Assistant of South Asia Speaks, a South Asian literary mentorship program, and is currently working on a novel centered on the 1971 Partition of Pakistan as well as a collection of short stories about cats.

ISSN 2522-6983

IVS

INDUS VALLEY SCHOOL OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE