THE FEMALE NUDE IN ANTI-ZIA FEMINIST PAINTING

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ABSTRACT

After the 1977 coup that launched General Zia-ul-Haq's decade-long military dictatorship in Pakistan, visual arts flourished as part of many progressive movements. This essay on anti-Zia visual art explores the intersection of art and left politics. While left mobilization against the Zia dictatorship took several forms, one underemphasized but significant node of opposition was led by artists and poets. Especially underrepresented among these movements were the indelible contributions of female artists who were among the state's most persecuted. Though the Hudood Ordinances and other anti-women policies did not explicitly target artists, they effectively marginalized women from the arts by way of curbs on women's mobility and freedom of expression in society at large. Female artists resisted, refusing to take up calligraphy or otherwise change their artistic style. Depictions of the female nude became an important political symbol for artists pushing back against the censorship of, violence against, and persecution of women. Pakistani feminist artists' forms of cultural resistance through art creation have a long tradition in both South Asia and the Global South more broadly, but the female nude as the content of their resistance art warrants deeper investigation. In this essay, I recover the history of Pakistani women's resistance through the visual arts then leverage this to weigh in on contemporary theoretical debates on the depiction of the nude female body as feminist praxis. The goal of this contribution is to record Pakistani women's resistance during the Zia period so that feminist theory may learn from their actions.

KEYWORDS

Female nude; Capitalist modernity; Islamic art; Visual cultural studies; Feminism; Pakistan; Dictatorship and anti-authoritarian movements.

The female nude epitomizes the commodification of the body in capitalist modernity. Its depiction of the commodification of the body by the capitalist world-economy is what makes a nude a nude. "A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude", writes John Berger, "Nudity is placed on display."[1] T.J. Clark similarly contends that, "A nude, to repeat, is a picture for men to look at, in which Woman is constructed as an object of somebody else's desire".[2] What distinguishes the nude from mere nakedness is the commodification of the body. The nude is presented to the viewer as an object for consumption akin to a bowl of exotic fruit, a thoroughbred horse, or a merchant ship; not as a depiction of a person whose body is simply unclothed. The nude is being sold to the viewer.

The social problem of the female nude in the context of capitalist modernity is further complicated when rendered by female artists. Women in the West were traditionally excluded from studying the nude body.[3] This exclusion made the nude a less common subject matter among female painters in the modern Western context. Female artists' tendency to avoid painting nudes led many critics, and other observers, to conclude that women artists are therefore lesser talents given the central importance of the nude in the history of Western art.[4] For Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, the problem of the nude rendered by women is not solely about the exclusion of women from studying the nude model, nor its relationship to women's lack of recognition as 'great artists', but a crucial part of the ideology of capitalist patriarchy. Women, in being prohibited from rendering the nude, "were therefore excluded from both the tools and the power to give meanings of their own to themselves and their culture".[5] Barring women from painting the nude was a way of preventing women from contributing to ideology-making in capitalist modernity.

If depictions of the nude female body aid us in analyzing the commodification of the body in the context of capitalist modernity, then why was the female nude central to the resistance art of Pakistani feminist painters during General Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship (1977–1988)? For Marxist art historians such as John Berger,

1
John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London 1972, 54.

2
T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, Princeton, NJ 1984, 131.

3
Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses. Women, Art and Ideology*, London 1981, 35, 90, 115.

4
Ibid., 45.

5
Ibid., 115.

T.J. Clark, Arnold Hauser, Rozsika Parker, and Griselda Pollock,[6] the nude is a means of analyzing transformations to the class structures of modern Europe and locating the exploitation and oppression of women within those structures. Pakistani female artists of the 1980s, however, though inspired by Marxist-feminist theory, aimed to shatter hierarchies, rather than merely reflect the class and gender hierarchies of capitalist modernity. In pursuing this aim, they were not echoing the European nude, but instead, drawing on local and global traditions to create new possibilities for the nude as critique of not just capitalism, but neo-imperialism as well. In their hands, the nude was not primarily a commodified and sexualized body devised to entice a heterosexual male viewer, nor was it a mere depiction of an unclothed female body. Pakistani feminist artists presented the nude to the viewer in order to display what the postcolonial state wanted to conceal. Their contributions broaden the scope of the nude as social critique beyond European-focused scholarship, and in so doing, suggest a more comprehensive, global analysis of the relationship between the body and the modern state. While similarly locating the body as a bearer of capitalist modernity, Pakistani feminist artists offered a critique of the particular strategies through which the postcolonial state in 1980s Pakistan sought to restrict, and thereby further commodify, the female body.[7] The nudes Pakistani feminist artists painted were not necessarily created to be an object of the viewer's sexual desire, but exposed women's own desire to be seen. Pakistani feminist artists depicted a collective desire to make their bodies socially visible at a time when the postcolonial state threatened to render them invisible.

After Pakistan's 1977 coup that launched General Zia-ul-Haq's decade-long military dictatorship, visual arts flourished as part of many resistance movements. In the context of authoritarian regimes, traditional repertoires of contentious politics become a dangerous strategy for resistance movements given the increased stakes of engaging in collective action.[8] In such contexts, the visible work to be done is through arts and culture. This essay on anti-Zia feminist painting explores the intersection of art and left politics. While mobilization against the Zia dictatorship took several forms – for example, workers of the Pakistan People's Party, the Women's Action Forum, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy,

6
Berger, Ways of Seeing, 62; Clark, The Painting of Modern Life, 79; Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art, Vol. 3: Rococo, Classicism and Romanticism*, New York 1958, 34; Parker and Pollock, Old Mistresses, 115.

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For an analysis of women artists' resistance against military dictatorship in another geographic context within the Global South see Claudia Calirman, *Dissident Practices. Brazilian Women Artists, 1960s–2020s*, Durham, NC 2023.

8
Kristin Plys, The Poetry of Resistance, in: *Theory, Culture & Society* 36/7–8, 2020, 295–313.

trade unions, etc. – one under-emphasized but significant node of opposition was led by artists and poets.[9]

Culture has long played a role in left politics in Pakistan.[10] Not only did the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire support cultural expression as a means to educate the public in history and politics, but critical cultural traditions oriented to social justice were also common in South Asia during the reign of the Mughals, epitomized through Sufi poetry and other cultural expressions. In the first half of the twentieth century, the Progressive Writers Association (PWA) and *halqa-e-arbab-e-zauq* (the circle of the men of good taste) were the two major movements within Pakistan's cultural landscape. PWA took an explicitly anti-colonial stance, and although they were not the first cultural movement against colonialism in South Asia, they were distinctive. Firstly, they self-identified as 'progressive', which meant revolution and social change along with an embracing of feminism, secularism, anti-imperialism, anti-fascism, and at the fore, national independence. The PWA was rooted in a pan-communism that sought to make common cause with anti-colonial struggles across the globe. Secondly, PWA primarily saw itself as a social and political movement and was closely aligned with the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) until both the PWA and CPP were banned in 1954. *Halqa-e-arbab-e-zauq*, referred to by its members as *halqa*, on the other hand, was an 'art for art's sake' movement, but not apolitical. Their project, immediately following independence, was to recover local pre-colonial cultural traditions in the service of building a postcolonial state and culture. Though these two movements had some ideological differences, after the PWA was banned, some progressive writers worked under the banner of *halqa*. By the 1970s, new movements emerged in Pakistan's landscape, notably, the Mazdoor Kisan Party (MKP), a Maoist party formed in May 1968. For the MKP, as it was for the Communist Party before it, arts and culture played an important role in sharing political ideas, disseminating theoretical concepts, and teaching history to mass audiences. In this historical context, *Khawateen Mahaz-e-Amal* (Women Action Forum or WAF), became a critically important political movement that similarly contributed to arts and culture in Pakistan.

Pakistan's anti-Zia cultural movement (which included *halqa*, WAF, the MKP, and those with allegiances to the banned PWA working under the guise of other groups) straddled PWA poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz's dialectic of the particular and universal in service of art. Faiz contended that art should be rooted in local artistic traditions but should also be of service to global anti-imperialist movements. The cultural movement against Zia both drew on local tra-

9
Ayesha Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, Cambridge 2014, 246–247.

10
For a deeper account see Kristin Plys, Political Work on a Cultural Front. The Postcolonial Avant-garde of Lahore's Pak Tea House during the Zia Military Dictatorship (1977–88), in: *Historical Materialism* 30/3, 2022, 206–235.

ditions and had global articulations in the affinity Pakistani artists found with struggles in Vietnam, Palestine, Chile, and other places that were fighting Western imperialism and one of its common symptoms, military dictatorship. Through the 1970s, the United States, as a global force for neo-imperialism, installed and supported dictatorships across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As artists of the time saw it, neo-imperialism in Pakistan was articulated locally through Zia, but military dictatorship was a symptom of neo-imperialism across the Global South. Pakistani artists understood this, and therefore, were not solely concerned with the restoration of democracy in Pakistan, but also saw themselves as contributing to a global anti-imperialist struggle.

Feminist themes were critically important to the cultural movement against Zia. The military dictatorship transformed Pakistan's political economy, and these changes were largely played out on the bodies of women. That women's bodies bore the brunt of military dictatorship is not unique to Pakistan, but it did have distinctive features that structured the possibilities for feminist resistance against the state. The Hudood Ordinances and other misogynist policies implemented by Zia curbed women's mobility and freedom of expression in society at large. Feminist artists resisted, refusing to take up calligraphy – one of two state sanctioned subjects for painting in addition to landscapes – or otherwise change their artistic style. Depictions of the female nude became an important political symbol for artists pushing back against the censorship and persecution of women. While cultural resistance against the state is a common strategy of feminist movements across the twentieth-century Global South, depiction of the female nude as a symbol for the visual arts movement against dictatorship is a puzzle as it remains an open question whether depictions of the female nude in visual art further exploitation by reinforcing the commodification of the female body or empower through a critique of the commodification of the body.

How feminist visual artists in 1970s and 1980s Pakistan came to depict the female nude as resistance against military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq further complicates this question. Understanding the cultural meaning of the female nude as central to feminist visual culture in the context of Zia-era Pakistan involves interrogating its many facets. This includes dispelling assumptions about the iconoclastic vein of Islamic art that have led many to believe that there is no Islamicate tradition of portraying the female nude. Yet, as I will show, feminist artists in Zia-era Pakistan drew on longstanding local pictorial traditions, refashioning the female nude and in so doing reclaiming the female body against a virulently misogynist military dictatorship.

My primary objective in this essay is to explain why the female nude became a symbol of resistance against the Zia dictatorship. I begin by providing some context about the military dictatorship's policies regarding women, along with the feminist movement that was organized against these laws. I then place the anti-Zia art move-

ment in global context by looking to articulations of feminist resistance through the arts across the Global South. Next, I weigh in on theoretical debates on the body and provide a short overview of the history of depictions of the female nude in so-called Islamic art. After which, I analyze select paintings of the female nude by Pakistani artists of the 1970s and 1980s before offering some concluding thoughts.

Examining the female nude in the Pakistani context is a controversial topic. One must critique patriarchal injustices wherever they are present, but not reinforce stereotypes of Pakistan (or the broader Islamicate ecumene) as an especially hostile place for women. The goal of writing this essay, particularly given my own location as a woman of the Global North, is not to detail a 'worse' condition of patriarchy in Pakistan but to recover the history of Pakistani women's resistance through the arts during the Zia period so that (1) women facing similar structural conditions can learn from and be inspired by their actions, and (2) this recovered history can aid in contemporary global theoretical debates on the depiction of the nude female body as Marxist-feminist praxis.

I. The Women Action Forum

After Zia-ul-Haq assumed power, he began to Islamize the penal code appointing members of the conservative political party *Jamaat-e-Islami* to participate in this initiative. Both the law and the social climate had changed with the coup. As part of the Islamization process, the Zia dictatorship implemented draconian anti-women policies epitomized by the 1979 Hudood Ordinances, which limited women's participation in society and, most infamously, criminalized extra-marital sexual activity. These laws led to countless women's imprisonment under accusations of so-called 'honor' crimes, including most grotesquely, the prosecution of rape victims for 'extra-marital sex'.[11]

Two instances of prosecution under the new ordinances include the 1981 case of Fehmida and Allah Bux versus the State in which eighteen-year-old Fehmida fell in love with her bus driver leaving her natal home to live with him, his first wife, and their children. Fehmida's parents filed a police case alleging kidnapping. When police located her, she was pregnant, so police asked for proof of marriage. She produced a *nikahnama* (marriage certificate) which had been registered days earlier. While Fehmida and Allah Bux told authorities that they had a verbal *nikah* before registering official documentation, police charged the couple with *zina*[12] based on the

[11] Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, London 1987, 73.

[12] *Zina* is an Islamic legal term referring to any unlawful sexual intercourse. This can include a range of sexual activity, typically outside of the confines of marriage. See also Shahnaz Khan, *Zina, Transnational Feminism, and the Moral Regulation of Pakistani Women*, Vancouver 2006, 7–9.

pregnancy. Fehmida was sentenced to 100 lashes while Allah Bux was sentenced to death by stoning.[13] In 1983, eighteen-year-old Safiya Bibi, blind and from a poor peasant family, was raped by a local landlord and his son in whose home she worked as a servant. She became pregnant from the rape and gave birth to a child who subsequently died. Her father registered a case of rape, but the judge ruled there was not enough evidence against the landlord or his son, instead sentencing Safiya Bibi to public lashing, a year in prison, and a Rs. 1,000/- fine for adultery.[14] The cornerstone of Zia's Islamization program, *zina* became a mechanism for men to discipline the women in their lives. *Zina* accusations were used by family members to deprive women of their inheritances and by husbands to marry a second wife without permission of the first. Women's incarceration rates in Pakistan soared, and by 1987, half of all incarcerated women were jailed on *zina* convictions.[15]

In response to these new anti-women policies, Karachi-based feminist group, *Sirkat Gah*, called a meeting of women's organizations to launch a coordinated effort. These meetings spurred the formation of *Khawateen Mahaz-e-Amal* (Women Action Forum or WAF). WAF was needed, claimed its founders, to combat: the increased segregation of women, the removal of women from public space, anti-women measures propagated in the name of Islam, the rumored repeal of the Family Laws Ordinance that was hard won by Pakistani feminists of the 1960s, among other rationales. WAF was an intergenerational group involving women who were at the forefront of Pakistan's independence movement alongside their daughters and granddaughters. WAF members were often accused of being agents of US imperialism, of blasphemy, and of elitism for their opposition to the military dictatorship. "This caricature", writes Moon Charania was, "deployed as a central oppositional strategy in the 1980s" against the feminist movement.[16] But despite opposition, WAF's resistance took several forms, including hiring lawyers for women accused of *zina*, petitions for the repeal of anti-women laws, along with *jalsas*, theater, poetry, and song[17]

13
Ayesha Khan, *The Women's Movement in Pakistan*, London 2018, 77.

14
Mumtaz and Shaheed, Women of Pakistan, 103.

15
Khan, The Women's Movement in Pakistan, 96.

16
Moon Charania, Feminism, Sexuality and the Rhetoric of Westernization in Pakistan, in: Leela Fernandes (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Gender in South Asia*, London 2014, 318–322, here 318; see also Tahmina Rashid, *Contested Representation*, Karachi 2006, 141; Afiya Zia, The Reinvention of Feminism in Pakistan, in: *Feminist Review* 91/1, 2009, 29–46, here 32; Amina Jamal, Global Discourses, Situated Traditions, and Muslim Women's Agency in Pakistan, in: Ania Loomba and Ritty A. Lukose (eds.), *South Asian Feminisms*, Durham, NC 2012, 54–74, here 70.

17
Zohra Yusuf, In Her Own Voice, in: Sherry Rehman (ed.), *Womansplaining*, Lahore 2021, 53–60, here 57; Binah Shah, The Literary Feminists, in: Rehman, *Womansplaining*, 148–151.

on feminist themes which became successful means by which WAF spread its message, especially in Punjab.

Like the Communist Party's relationship with PWA, and the MKP's support for the arts, WAF was intertwined with cultural movements. Indeed, some of WAF's most prominent members were the daughters of PWA members. WAF is most closely associated with painting as a means of cultural resistance to the Zia dictatorship. In Pakistan, image-making has been seen as inferior to the high art of poetry, and therefore the visual arts have historically been the purview of women. Visual artists were a part of, but less central, therefore, to political movements in Pakistan in the past, until this critical moment of the Zia coup when the female-led visual arts movement became much more effective in raising global awareness and swaying global public opinion against the military dictatorship. Images, because they do not need to be translated into other languages to be fully understood, can circulate and translate to faraway contexts in ways that poetry and literature generally cannot.

WAF artists often exhibited their painting in London and New York among other global cities, which ignited conversations about the feminist movement against the Zia dictatorship and its Marxist-feminist politics. These exhibitions were so successful, in fact, that a secret report issued by the CIA in September 1984 (and partially declassified in 2006) entitled, "Pakistan: Prospects for Dramatic Political Change", mentioned the role that WAF artists could potentially play in regime change in Pakistan. The report, issued only to five officials at the State Department and Pentagon, describes WAF as "small, elitist liberal", but having "attracted international attention and embarrassed Zia".[18] In the five potential scenarios for ousting General Zia that the CIA laid out in this report, WAF artists were assessed as "on their own [...] too weak to pose a takeover threat",[19] but in a portion of the report that is not redacted, WAF artists feature as a potential means of mobilizing popular support in Punjab and abroad for various center-left and leftist groups who could potentially lead a movement to overthrow Zia. From the US perspective, however, the CIA was most concerned with how the international circulation of WAF artists and their work could sway global public opinion against Zia, particularly when it came to the issue of human rights, and thereby undermine US objectives in the region.

During the Zia dictatorship, feminist themes became prominent among Pakistani artists even beyond WAF. Though the Hudood Ordinances and other anti-women policies did not explicitly target artists, they effectively marginalized women from the arts by

[18] Near East and South Asia Affairs, Directorate NSC: Records, RAC Box 15, Ronald Reagan Presidential Museum and Library.

[19] Ibid.

way of curbs on women's mobility and freedom of expression at large. Female artists resisted, refusing to take up calligraphy or to otherwise change their artistic style.[20] This often meant that women failed to secure patronage as a result, but Pakistan's female artists nonetheless won international awards for their innovative work during this period.[21] Depictions of the female nude became an important political symbol for artists of all genders pushing back against censorship and the persecution of women.[22] More Pakistani women than ever began painting during the Zia dictatorship when women's resistance art flourished.

The goals of WAF artists were articulated in the *Manifesto of Women Artists*. The manifesto begins by drawing attention to "the decline in the status and conditions of life of Pakistani women" and "the basic rights [...] to a life free from want and enriched by the joys of fruitful labour and cultural self-realisation". It then delineates seven principles "to guide us in our struggle". First, was an acknowledgment of the outstanding contributions of women artists. Second, a statement of support for gender equality in Pakistan. Third, a call to women "engaged in any creative field in Pakistan to stand together for the cause of women's emancipation". Fourth, a statement of the rights of women artists to freedom of expression. Fifth, a condemnation of any attempts to restrict the role of women in society. Sixth, a condemnation of the distortion of the role of women "into an image of obscenity". Seventh, "we call upon all women artists to take their place in the vanguard of the Pakistani women's struggle to retain their pristine image of their rightful place in society". Though ratified in 1983, the *Manifesto of Women Artists* was not made public until after Zia died in order to protect the identities of the fifteen signatories: Abbasi Abidi, Meher Afroze, Talat Ahmad, Veeda Ahmed, Shehrezade Alam, Riffat Alvi, Mamoona Bashir, Salima Hashmi, Birgees Iqbal, Zubeida Javed, Jalees Nagi, Qudsia Nisar, Nahid Raza, Lalarukh and Rabia Zuberi.[23] They asserted the rights of women to be full participants in society, which includes equal participation in politics, in the arts, and in any activity that makes the world a "happier more beautiful and more peaceful place".

20
Salima Hashmi, An Intelligent Rebellion, in: *India International Centre Quarterly* 24/2–3, 1997, 228–238, here 233.

21
Salima Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*, Lahore 2003, 8–9.

22
Ibid., 11.

23
See ibid., 193–195.

II. Women's Movements and Resistance Art in Global Context

That women living under the Zia dictatorship took up painting as a means of resistance is not surprising. Women of the Global South have long articulated feminist resistance through the arts.[24] The Jamaican Sistren Theatre Collective, for example, wrote plays to retell and popularize the history of black feminism in Jamaica,[25] the poetry produced by the Somali Women's Movement opposed the military dictatorship of General Mohammad Sida Barre,[26] and in contemporary Syria feminist art collectives create video, multimedia, and performance art to resist life under repression.[27] The art created by women of Global South resistance movements is reflective of a particular politico-economic dynamic left in the wake of national independence.

Movements for national independence promised women's liberation but after independence was won, gains that women had made during the liberation movement were unexpectedly rolled back. As Maria Mies (1986) observed,

> Many have seen this direct participation of women in the guerrilla struggle as a direct contribution to women's liberation. Their reasoning is that women with a gun in their hand would no longer accept male oppression and exploitation. But the history of the national liberation wars, as well as other wars, has taught us another lesson.[28]

The assertion of national cultural identity after independence often meant returning to religiously inspired repressive gender relations of an imagined pre-colonial past. This assertion of cultural identity, which often meant a return to an imagined past in which women were subordinate to men, was itself "dialectically related to the growth of imperialism".[29] Both colonial rule and postcolonial states limited women's roles in society and forced women into assuming a limited symbolic role as virtue of the nation.

24
Françoise Vergès, *A Decolonial Feminism*, London 2021, 14.

25
Honor Ford-Smith, An Experiment in Popular Theatre and Women's History, in: Saskia Wieringa (ed.), *Subversive Women*, London 1995, 145–164.

26
Dahabo Farah Hassan, Amina H. Adan and Amina Mohamoud Warsame, Somalia, in: Wieringa, Subversive Women, 165–182.

27
Banah Ghadbian, *Ululating from the Underground*, PhD diss., University of California San Diego, 2021.

28
Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, London 1986, 195.

29
Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, London 1986, 4.

The primary reason newly independent states limited women's role in society was to utilize women's labor in the process of ongoing primitive accumulation to build a developmental economy and state.[30] Even though the gendered division of labor across the Global South was transformed through women's participation in national liberation movements, the patriarchal consciousness remained unmoved. Women, therefore, were easily restricted by the state after independence to the realm of the family, private sphere, and informal economy. Structural or overt violence (most commonly rape, land dispossession, or murder) has been used to discipline women who are exploited and super-exploited as part of an ongoing primitive accumulation of capital.[31]

In this context, in which the patriarchal forces of religion, capital, and the state rolled back the rights of the very women who participated in the fight for freedom (along with the rights of their daughters and granddaughters), WAF artists registered their opposition through resistance art, just as women across the Global South have done. WAF artists' *form* of resistance through visual culture is foreseeable, but why were depictions of the female nude the *content* of their resistance art? This warrants further examination because of ongoing and recently revived theoretical debates about the body.

III. Theorizing the Body

Capitalism has long defined women as bodies.[32] The conditions of work in the capitalist world-economy necessitate the mechanization of the body[33] which has transformed all bodies and minds so that they may better function as labor power. The female body, in particular, has been transformed beyond its function as labor power to hold a unique and subordinate role in the sexual division of labor. "Women, in capitalist development", Silvia Federici shows, "have been expropriated from their bodies and turned into sexual objects and breeding machines."[34] In addition to the capitalist world-economy and the sexual division of labor, the modern state has similarly restricted the body which in extreme cases involves, "asserting the right of the state to destroy the body of the citizen".[35] The transformation of the female body into commodity, sexual object, and

30
Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation, 197.

31
Ibid., 145; see also Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Brooklyn, NY 2004, 115.

32
Silvia Federici, *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin*, Oakland, CA 2020, 23.

33
Ibid., 83.

34
Ibid., 14.

35
Ibid., 85.

breeding machine is of ultimate benefit not just to structures of patriarchy but also to the capitalist state. Mariarosa Dalla Costa contends that the woman's body "must be imprisoned so that she can provide unpaid domestic labor that sustains the world and in this world, men above all. [...] The expropriation of women's bodies and their transformation into machines for the reproduction of labor power" benefits the state and religious authorities.[36]

Because of the centrality of the body to capitalism and its attendant structures – significantly, the state – our cultural relationship to the body remains central to the question of liberation. As Silvia Federici writes, "There is no social change, no cultural or political innovation that is not expressed through the body, no economic practice that is not applied to it."[37] Mariarosa Dalla Costa similarly concludes, "for women, in every part of the world, the construction of autonomy has meant first of all the reappropriation of their bodies".[38] While Andrea Dworkin proposed, "a first step in the process of liberation [...] is the radical redefining of the relationship between women and their bodies",[39] how this is to be accomplished remains an open question. Silvia Federici, for example, sees in androgynous models of gender identity a reaction against the sexual division of labor peculiar to the capitalist world-economy.[40] Undeniably, however, for many women the way to the freedom we've long been denied is through reconfiguring our relationship to, and decommodifying, our bodies.

Because capitalism and the state prescribe a particular role for women's bodies as machines for the reproduction of labor power, "the question of the woman's body, its place in representation and the woman artist's relation to the woman's body in representation"[41] becomes central to any analysis of the political message of art made by women. One commonality that all women face in our patriarchal world-economy is the experience of being "defined by their physical attributes",[42] and their "contribution to the modern world

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Mariarosa Dalla Costa, To Whom Does the Body of This Woman Belong?, in: Camille Barbagallo (ed.), *Women and the Subversion of Community. A Mariarosa Dalla Costa Reader*, Oakland, CA 2019, 181–196, here 191.

37
Federici, Beyond the Periphery of the Skin, 76.

38
Dalla Costa, To Whom Does the Body of This Woman Belong?, 182.

39
Andrea Dworkin, Woman Hating, in: Johanna Fateman and Amy Scholder (eds.), *Last Days at Hot Slit. The Radical Feminism of Andrea Dworkin*, South Pasadena, CA 2019, 45–75, here 59.

40
Federici, Beyond the Periphery of the Skin, 86.

41
Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London 2009, 89.

42
Ibid., 3.

[being] measured according to their sex appeal".[43] These standards of sexual attractiveness "describe in precise terms the relationship that an individual will have to her own body. They describe her mobility, spontaneity, posture, gait, the uses to which she can put her body. They define precisely the dimensions of her physical freedom."[44] As Laura Mulvey puts it, "woman = sexuality. This feminine mask is the passport to visibility in a male dominated world."[45] Women are visible in the patriarchal world-economy so long as they are "fuckable" as determined by "dominant cultural norms" and racial-ethnic, imperial, and other hierarchies.[46] To put it another way, as Andrea Dworkin writes:

> Women should be beautiful. All repositories of cultural wisdom from King Solomon to King Hefner agree: women should be beautiful. It is the reverence for female beauty which informs the romantic ethos, gives it its energy and justification. Beauty is transformed into that golden ideal, Beauty – rapturous and abstract. Women must be beautiful and Woman is Beauty.[47]

The image of a woman's body in the patriarchal world-economy is a "symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions [...] by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning".[48] The commodification of women's bodies, rooted in the capitalist division of labor, is socially expressed through gendered expectations of how women should present themselves. Whether women meet these gendered expectations, then, has consequences for how they are socially received and accepted.

The commodification of the female body through visual culture has long been a vehicle for heterosexual male fantasies, making the female body a bearer of meaning rather than a maker of meaning. Laura Mulvey famously coined the term, 'the male gaze' to name the process by which the female body is objectified in visual culture. "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance", she writes, "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure,

43
Ibid., 52–53.

44
Dworkin, Woman Hating, 56.

45
Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures, 57.

46
Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex*, New York 2021, 103.

47
Dworkin, Woman Hating, 56.

48
Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures, 15.

which is styled accordingly."[49] This heterosexual male gaze then transforms the female body into a commodity through woman's participation (whether complicit or inadvertent) in the patriarchal world-economy:

> The female body has become industrialized; a woman must buy the means to paint on (make-up) and sculpt (underwear/clothes) a look of femininity, a look which guarantees *visibility* in sexist society for each individual woman [...] It is almost as though woman herself were a factory, feeding in the means of production, painting on the mask and emerging transformed with value added in the process, a commodity ready for consumption.[50]

While the male gaze reflects the commodification of women's bodies in the context of capitalist patriarchy, women remain largely excluded from the creation of culture. As Laura Mulvey puts it, "in proportion to [women's] exclusion from cultural participation, their image has been stolen and their bodies exploited".[51] Yet by placing Mulvey's well known concept of the male gaze in the context of Marxist-feminist theories of body it reveals the larger structural conditions that are reflected through the process of looking.

These theories of the body have thus far portrayed a Eurocentric perspective of the female body in visual culture. In the Islamicate context, depictions of the female nude in visual art are instead stereotypically viewed through the lens of iconoclasm. Contemporary art historians, anyhow, are critical of these old clichés about Islamic art.[52] Wherever there have been prohibitions against figural imagery, it is not a result of dictates of scripture but from its interpretation, and that too has been variable and unevenly enforced. Furthermore, cultural theorists struggle to define so-called 'Islamic art' as having any unified position.[53] Sadia Toor locates Islamic art in historical and global context, ultimately revealing that, "there is no singular 'Muslim' approach to art, either historically or today".[54] 'Islamic art' seems to exist simply because it was once employed by European art historians to identify the visual culture of a particular

49
Ibid., 19.

50
Ibid., 56–57.

51
Ibid., 117.

52
Avinoam Shalem, What Do We Mean When We Say 'Islamic Art'?, in: *Journal of Art Historiography* 6, 2012, 1–18.

53
Wendy Shaw, *What Is 'Islamic' Art?*, Cambridge 2019, 2.

54
Sadia Toor, Art as/and Politics. Why the Attack on *Charlie Hebdo* Was Not About a "Fear of Art", in: *Social Research* 83/1, 2016, 21–31, here 27.

world region as separate from Europe, and art history continues to view the visual culture of the Islamic ecumene as a unified field despite its heterogeneity.

This fraught relationship, between the imperialist dictates of mainline art history and the "complex, transcultural, trans-geographic, interfaith, and trans-temporal"[55] culture that has been deemed 'Islamic art' by the West, has led to occlusions along with new possibilities in assessing the history of visual culture produced across the Islamic ecumene. One of the many occlusions is the neglect of studies of the female nude in the history of Islamic art.[56] Since the medieval period, depictions of the female body have been deployed by artists across the region "as symbols of divine passion and spiritual attainment. [...] the depiction of the female body is used to express religious feeling and to trigger physical desire that appears instrumental to the fulfillment of spiritual goals".[57] [Fig. 1 and Fig. 2] show images of reclining female nudes from Safavid Iran. These images from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries display nude women to stoke the lust of the male courtly viewer. Similar images of the female nude can be found in Al-Andalus frescoes, Ottoman miniatures, and in Mughal manuscripts.[58] Ironically, the nude in the English context adheres more to the stereotypes mainline art history has of Islamic art. Evangelical moral codes in Victorian England dictated that the representation of the female nude was immoral, yet British artists nonetheless found ways around these strictures drawing on "a safeguard of Englishness".[59] Whether our contemporary view of Pakistani art's perceived prudishness is remnant of an English colonial mindset rather than an inheritance from Islamicate visual culture remains an open question that art historians have yet to fully explore.

If we put the Marxist-feminist theories that animated WAF artists in conversation with a postcolonial critique of the field of Islamic art history, the strategy of rendering the female nude to

55
Shaw, What Is 'Islamic' Art?, 20.

56
In yet another social context, black female artists question racial hierarchies and Western standards of beauty through reconfiguring and deconstructing the nude (see Lisa E. Farrington, Reinventing Herself. The Black Female Nude, in: *Woman's Art Journal* 2, 2004, 15-23).

57
Francesca Leoni and Mika Natif, Eros and Sexuality in Islamic Art, in: ead. (eds.), *Eros and Sexuality in Islamic Art*, London 2016, 1–17, here 6.

58
Cynthia Robinson, Where Have All the Boys Gone? The Lady of the 'Sala de Justicia' Ceilings and Nasrid Poetics of Sacred and Profane Love, in: Leoni and Natif, Eros and Sexuality, 65–98; Tülay Artan and Irvin Cemil Schick, Ottomanizing Pornotopia. Changing Visual Codes in Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Erotic Miniatures, in: Leoni and Natif, Eros and Sexuality, 157–208; Christiane Gruber, 'To not Toil in Lonely Obsession'. Modern Persian Erotica in the Kinsey Institute, in: Leoni and Natif, Eros and Sexuality, 209–236.

59
Alison Smith, The Nude in Nineteenth Century Britain, in: *Exposed. The Victorian Nude* (exh. cat. London, Tate Britain), ed. by Alison Smith, London 2001, 11–20, here 14.

[Fig. 1]
Muhammad Qasim, Lovers' Dalliance, ca. mid 17th century, Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 13 × 21.5 cm, Middle East, Iran, Isfahan, Asian and Mediterranean Art © Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA.

[Fig. 2]
Riza Abbasi, Reclining Nude, ca. 1590, Opaque watercolor, ink, gold on paper, 11.8 × 19.32 cm, Isfahan, Iran, Freer Collection © National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

resist the military dictatorship of 1980s Pakistan is no longer a puzzle. In the long 1970s, when global politico-economic conditions led to the proliferation of military dictatorships across the Global South, the postcolonial Pakistani state restricted women's social role to wife, mother, and daughter in order to intensify the exploitation of women's labor in the process of ongoing primitive accumulation to build a developmental economy and state. WAF artists understood that women's bodies bore the brunt of the military dictatorship, and that the removal of women from public life was a strategy to further transform the female body into commodity, sexual object, and breeding machine in order to intensify the unpaid domestic labor that allows for the reproduction of labor power. Moreover, this coup, like most in the Global South of the long 1970s, occurred just after women and workers had won legal rights unprecedented in the period after independence. This reversal of the rights of workers in the Global South was born, in the Pakistani context, of a repressive state that sought to recoup capital's losses through the super-exploitation of women's unpaid domestic labor.

IV. The Nude as Resistance

The female nude in 1970s and 1980s Pakistan was resistance art. WAF artists drew on and reinterpreted the global tradition of portraying the female nude in order to take back agency of their body from Zia's anti-woman regime.[60] As Iftikhar Dadi put it,

> The Zia regime's measures were not thus simply attempting to 'roll back' existing prerogatives for women; they were also striving to exert state power to control an essentially new phenomenon, the emerging presence of women in the public arena. But the very attempt itself paradoxically amplified the emergence of the publicly visible female body as an issue that could not simply be 'rolled back'.[61]

WAF artists of this period created images of the nude female body as opposition to the regime and its repressive laws. In this section, I examine paintings of female nudes by Salima Hashmi, Nahid Raza, Sumaya Durrani, Laila Shahzada, and Sabah Husain. Then, I compare women's depictions of the female nude with Pakistani male artists of the same period.

[60] The symbol of the female nude in Pakistani modern art is not unique to the Zia period. Some female artists looked to the work of Amrita Sher Gil, the founding mother of Pakistani modern art. In Sher Gil's *Self Portrait as a Tahitian* (1934), for example, she paints herself in a powerful but nonetheless sexual pose. Her gaze doesn't meet the viewer but her erect nipples do. Her expressionless face stares into the distance and her broad shoulders confidently display her nude torso framed by her toned arms. This image is an assertion of a confident sexuality done on Sher Gil's terms, reminiscent of how she lived her life as an openly queer biracial communist woman in early twentieth-century Lahore.

[61] Iftikar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, Chapel Hill, NC 2010, 211–212.

Salima Hashmi (b. 1942) described the postcolonial Pakistani condition as, "the dual colonization first by the British and then by men [who] came to be recognized [...] by women as straitjackets for both content and form".[62] After the coup, Hashmi's "painting became both a refuge and an act of defiance. The medium struggled to become a message, as one worked around the images that permeated one's being."[63] Though involved in left politics since she was young, the social and political issues that her work expressed were explored through themes of "gender and suppression".[64] One of the ways in which Hashmi expressed her Marxist-feminist politics through her painting was by depicting the female nude. "In a Muslim society like Pakistan", she wrote, "the nude, while officially frowned upon is an acceptable feature in the work of male painters – their images being predictable as objects of desire and ornament. Women painters, on the other hand, have taken up the female nude as a symbol of rebellion, social oppression and political dissent."[65] Hashmi told me that there were:

> women who had not really worked on themes to do with the body but now this became an important theme. Certainly it took center stage with my work and I started working with the unclothed body, the nude. While before that I had not been terribly interested in doing that. It's very surprising how when you look at the use of the female body in Pakistani women's art, where the unclothed body is a strong symbol of rebellion and an act of stating that 'this is mine' as opposed to how it is used in the West where the unclothed body is considered objectifying. Here it was just the opposite. It was, 'this is mine and I'll claim it, and I'll show it or I'll clothe it as I please'. So it had a totally different meaning. And, there was the possibility of your being reprimanded, or sued, or taken to jail for this. It was absolutely very tangible. [...] The female nude became a very different symbol in this context. It was a context of stating her right to be as she wanted to be. [...] in the context of the violence of Pakistani society, the public floggings that were taking place, that kind of obscenity, and juxtaposing it with the female body which was accused of being obscene [...] society was being systematically brutalized and in deference to that the female body

62 Hashmi, An Intelligent Rebellion, 233.

63 Salima Hashmi, Ramblings of a Painter, in: *Kunapipi* 19/3, 1997, 142–147, here 144.

64 Salima Hashmi and Quddus Mirza, *50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan*, Lahore 1997, 130.

65 Ibid., 235.

> becomes even more vulnerable in its texture, its making, in its withering, in its growing old, and so on.[66]

The female nude as symbol of rebellion and dissent can be read through *Morning Paper* (1983). This image [Fig. 3] portrays a female form whose head is cropped from the frame of the image, reclining in the nude. On the upper left side of the image, newspaper clippings are collaged into the background painted over in purple and red, the same colors as are used to portray the pubic hair of the female figure. That the same colors that indicate the figure's pubis are those that cover the newspaper clippings detailing police violence against the women's movement is a way of asserting women's agency against the state that wanted to render them invisible. The postcolonial state uses violence as a means to discipline women into a limited social role within the confines of the family so that, "Their labour can thus be tapped in a process of ongoing primitive accumulation of capital which can then be fed into the building up of a modern economy and state. This is the main reason why women have to be 'pushed back'."[67] But in Hashmi's painting the use of color covering those representations of state violence is a way of asserting women's agency against the state. Hashmi has written:

> The female body, so dangerous, so challenging, – smothered and silenced, it took on fresh meanings of vulnerability and tenacity. The nudes in my work were either odes to the poetry and celebration of life or defiant witnesses flouting restraint. The image, although emblematic, was always lyrical, a counterfoil to the culture of violence. Press-clippings of police action against women and political workers were laid onto the paper in layers, with washes of water-colour and gouache, subduing their intensity, making the images go quietly into undertones. The paintings were small, reflecting the desire to be deciphered close-to. They were also easy to move in a hurry, in case of a raid on the Gallery, which was a familiar occurrence.[68]

This image contrasts stories of anti-feminist violence with the nude image of a woman whose nude form occupies the foreground, forcing the viewer to acknowledge her body despite the social backdrop of a political environment that attempts to erase tenacious, defiant women.

Nahid Raza (b. 1947) was born in Delhi and grew up in Karachi close to her two paternal uncles, Raza and Ali Imam, who are also

66
Oral history interview conducted with the artist, July 12, 2022, Lahore, Pakistan.

67
Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation, 197.

68
Hashmi, Ramblings of a Painter, 145.

[Fig. 3]
Salima Hashmi, Morning Paper, 1983, Mixed media on paper, 38.1 × 45.72 cm, Lahore, Collection of the Artist © Salima Hashmi.

painters. She attended the Central School of Art in Karachi where her uncle Ali Imam was the principal.[69] In 1972, she married a young painter she met in art school, but her imagination of what life would be like for two painters in love was different from reality. Her husband was "infuriated" by her devotion to painting over her wifely duties. When Raza's career as a painter took off in the late 1970s, she soon sought divorce. The conditions of her divorce were onerous. She agreed not to remarry to retain custody of her children, and her husband refused to pay child maintenance.[70] When Zia came to power, the degraded status of women affected Raza more than other female painters as a single mother supporting herself as an artist. These circumstances led her into further involvement with left politics. Her opposition to Zia was reflected not only in her activism but also in her painting.

In the 1980s, she painted images with titles such as *Woman for Sale* and *Divorce*. While male painters, she contended, "confirmed the female body as object", Raza strove to alternately show the viewer that, "the women's body carried an abundance of meanings".[71] Her work has been described as "a celebration of woman".[72] *Woman Series* (1986) [Fig. 4] depicts a nude woman dancing to music, though dancing was forbidden in Zia-era Pakistan.[73] This work was inspired by Raza's reading of Fahmida Riaz's poetry, particularly those poems that describe a woman who feels free despite social constraints.[74] From the moment a woman is born she is limited in her role as daughter, sister, wife, mother, and social expectations of virtue and honor. The body is the physical instantiation of these limitations. For that reason, Raza's portrayal of the nude is displayed to "castigate history, society and art itself".[75] The woman dancing in the nude in this image is free to express herself through the movement of her body. She is unencumbered by social dictates and the joy that the movement of her body brings is for her alone. With the advent of capitalism, Silvia Federici writes:

69
Salima Hashmi, The Seventies. Tracing the Dream, in: Niilofur Farrukh, Amin Gulgee and John McCarry (eds.), *Pakistan's Radioactive Decade*, Karachi 2019, 4–14, here 11.

70
Hashmi, Unveiling the Visible, 88.

71
Ibid., 89.

72
Hashmi and Mirza, 50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan, 108.

73
Hashmi, An Intelligent Rebellion, 234.

74
Akbar Navqi, *Image and Identity*, Karachi 1998, 669.

75
Ibid., 671.

[Fig. 4]
Nahid Raza, Woman Series, 1986, drawing on paper, 12 × 10 in., Lahore, Collection of the artist © Nahid Raza.

> the body was imagined and disciplined according to the model of simple machines, like the pump and lever. This was the regime that culminated in Taylorism, time-motion study, where every motion was calculated and all energies were channeled to the task. [...] Our struggle then must begin with the reappropriation of our body, the reevaluation and rediscovery of its capacity for resistance, and expansion and celebration of its powers, individual and collective. Dance is central to this reappropriation. In essence the act of dancing is an exploration and invention of what a body can do: its capacities, its languages, its articulations of the strivings of our being.[76]

Dance, as Silvia Federici sees it, is a way of reappropriating the commodification of the body by capital. Depicting that is an assertion of bodily agency.

Sumaya Durrani (b. 1963) is known for her offset lithographs that deliberately remove the artist's hand from the image. She became involved in the feminist movement in reaction to worsening conditions for women in 1980s Pakistan. "It starts when there are obstacles and when there is a struggle, when you are affected and people are affected around you", Durrani explained, "Now I'm far more aware of being a woman. I see how the image of a woman is exploited and it makes me angry."[77] In *Faceless Nude* (1995) [Fig. 5] Durrani uses images of the female body found in mail-order catalogs and pairs these images from advertisements with paper doilies, cutlery, and tablecloths in collage. John Holt (1996) describes Durrani's work as depicting "'tasty morsels' of what seem to be images of western women, [...] served up on tables set for male consumption".[78]

Durrani's collages rework signs and images used by male op-art artists leading the viewer to reflect on how the female body has been objectified through the male gaze. "The whole idea of being a woman and an artist, how do you communicate that?" Durrani asked, "For instance, the female body as it has been used in art; you elevate it and you subjugate it at the same time."[79] Her work instead positions the viewer as, "woman viewing man viewing woman".[80]

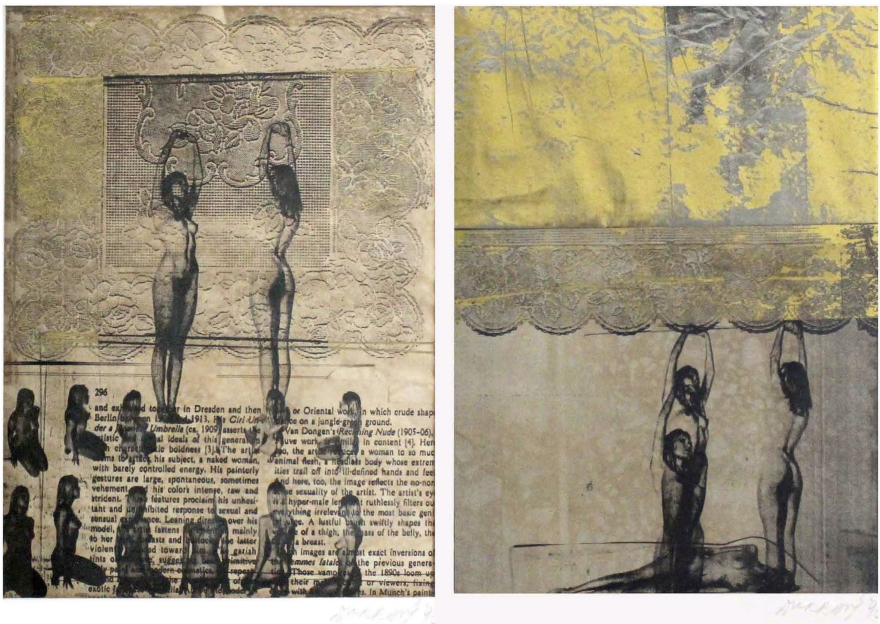
76
Federici, Beyond the Periphery of the Skin, 122–123.

77
Sumaya Durrani quoted in Hashmi, Unveiling the Visible, 110.

78
John Holt, Tampered Surface, in: *Third Text* 10/36, 1996, 87–90, here 87.

79
Sumaya Durrani quoted in Hashmi, Unveiling the Visible, 111.

80
Hashmi and Mirza, 50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan, 140.



[Fig. 5]
Sumaya Durrani, Faceless Nude, 1995, offset litho print and mixed media: gold leaf and acrylic on paper, 14 × 10 in. each.

Durrani's play with gendered voyeurism[81] leads to a reevaluation of how one sees the female nude. "The female figures I have used", she stated,

> are the idealized figures in male fantasy. These are perfect bodies. They have not gone through childbearing, for example. The fact that they are blond and white also includes the postcolonial attitudes [...] The colour that I am using, sepia, refers to the past. But the images I am using are of the present.[82]

By distorting the viewer's sense of past and present, in other words playing with not just gendered looking but also our sense of time, Durrani emphasizes the ongoing sexual objectification of the female body through colonial standards of femininity.

Laila Shahzada (1930–1994) began painting in Karachi during the 1960s. Her paintings are a synthesis of natural and geometric forms. Her paintings of reclining nudes have a sculptural feel mainly resulting from her influences in the work of Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth. In *Untitled* (1979) [Fig. 6], a sculptural form of a female torso and thighs is depicted in bright purple against a hot pink background. Even though the figure is evocative of a sculpture, it also appears soft to the viewer and the sinewy lines reinforce the figure's tenderness. Shahzada described this and other sculptural female nudes that she painted at this time as a product of her "quest for peace"[83] in the immediate aftermath of former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's hanging on April 4, 1979.

Sabah Husain (b. 1959) was an active participant in WAF since her third year as a student at the National College of Arts. She began her studies at NCA in 1978 and soon thereafter the impact of Zia's anti-women laws and ordinances further drew her into feminist activism. She demonstrated against the Law of Evidence and many of her student paintings were statements against the misogyny of the military dictatorship. "My thesis work had a lot to do with women as its theme", she stated, "police brutality, the family laws [...] all these things combined".[84] Depictions of the female nude were featured in her thesis paintings even though she was fully aware of the resistance she would likely encounter in displaying them. In an etching from circa 1982 [Fig. 7], Husain depicts a nude female figure kneeling, touching the ground with one hand and reaching up to the sky with the other. This image not only

81
See Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures, 213.

82
Sumaya Durrani quoted in Hashmi and Mirza, 50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan, 140.

83
Salwat Ali, *Laila Shahzada*, Karachi 2005, 37.

84
Sabah Husain quoted in Hashmi, Unveiling the Visible, 119.

[Fig. 6]
Laila Shahzada, Untitled, 1979, in: Salwat Ali, *Laila Shahzada. Exploring an Inner Landscape*, Karachi 2006.

[Fig. 7]
Sabah Hussain, Composition No 5, 1982, etching and aquatint, 17.5 × 12.5 in., Lahore, Collection of the artist © Sabah Hussain.

celebrates the female body, but also expresses an optimism in the reaching upward, which gestures to an openness to possibility. As Maria Mies contends, many feminist movements have:

> the aim of preserving the human integrity and dignity of women, in the context of which these colonizing divisions were transcended, at least tendentially, and the prospect of a new solidarity emerged. This solidarity is not based on the narrow self-interest of the respective groups, but on the recognition that capitalist patriarchy destroys the human essence, not only in the oppressed, but also, and perhaps even more so, in those who apparently profit from this oppression.[85]

The gesture of this figure in the image epitomizes this optimism for asserting the dignity of women and finding new solidarities and possibilities. Husain told me that this figure, and other renderings she created of the female body,

> was very much where we were, what was happening around us, what we were exposed to [...] It was a celebration and it was about a counter-narrative to the males looking at that form. But it was a form that was more familiar to me than it was to them because it's about me so why couldn't we use it? But of course it's executed in a different manner.

For Husain, "The celebration of beauty [...] is a counter narrative to violence."[86]

Representations of the female nude were not solely the domain of female artists of this period. Colin David (1937–2008) painted images that adhered to conventional depictions of the female form, creating sexually provocative images of beautiful women that catered to the male gaze. In one of Colin David's untitled paintings, which appears to be set in a bluish-gray void, a nude woman reclines on her stomach, clutching a bright green pillow. Her legs are ever so slightly spread apart, leading the viewer to imagine what lay between them, and her one visible eye is closed but lined with thick *kajal*. The body's musculature and hands are tensed but there is a seeming unawareness of the viewer, so much so, it seems possible she could be dead. The pose of the female figure in this image is reminiscent of a common pose found in pornography produced during this period (see [Fig. 8]). In a more recent painting (see Colin David, *Untitled*, 2003, Oil on canvas, 29 3/4 × 29 3/4 in., private collection, last accessed December 14, 2023), David uses a nearly identical pose, but in this work the figure is partially clothed. Known for

85
Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation, 230.

86
Oral history interview conducted with the artist, June 2, 2022, Lahore, Pakistan.

[Fig. 8]
Images of pornography common in the period.

painting "sexy" nudes,[87] Colin David has stated, "I think the female form is one of the most beautiful forms, and that's the reason why I prefer to paint this quite often".[88] David and his paintings were targets of the Zia-era state and *Jamaat-e-Islami*, the far right Islamist party with which General Zia aligned himself. Shahid Mirza, who was a student at the National College of Arts in Lahore during the Zia coup, recounted to me a story of what happened when Colin David tried to hold an exhibit of his female nude paintings in the basement of his Lahore home:

> It was so difficult to have any art gathering from '77 to '87–'88 til Zia ul-Haq died. This was the time when Pakistan was bringing in Mujahideens from all over the world [...] You couldn't exhibit! [...] At that point [after the Zia coup] only, figurative artists couldn't display their work, so suddenly you just had hundreds of people doing calligraphy, which is just writing Quranic verses [...] Nobody else could actually exhibit. We used to have this professor, Colin David, at the National College of Arts, a wonderful artist, and he used to paint nudes. So he did an exhibition at his home, in his basement. Because he was doing figurative work and he couldn't display it, so he just invited a few people. He just had a small party for that thing. *Jamiat* guys got hold of the invitation card from somewhere and somehow they knew that there would be nude paintings there. So a bus from Punjab University came to his house, and broke everything in his house including his paintings and the refrigerator and TV. Everything! And then the police come, and after a few hours the police bring those kids there and say, 'What do you want us to do to them?' He said, 'Why would I want you to do anything to them? Just take your legal course. They have done something illegal. Why have you brought them here?' And they said, 'No, we can't really do anything to them, but if you want us to beat them up, teach them a lesson, they're young people why do you want to spoil their careers and their academic thing, because they're all students and they were emotional and they did something stupid.' So they [the police] started beating them [the students] up. He [Colin David] said, 'please don't do that. I don't want that.' So even those kind of exhibitions that you would do in your

[87] Akbar Navqi criticized Sumaya Durrani for having "berated" Colin David for choosing the female nude as "his favourite genre" despite depicting female nudes in her images. Navqi describes Durrani's work as having a quality of "adolescent romance" and that her images simply portrayed, "female domesticity which is her domain". See Navqi, Image and Identity, 699. If there was contempt for Colin David's nudes among female artists of the time, it was likely because while the objective of female artists was to subvert the male gaze, David's work reinforced it. Furthermore, David claimed that his images of nudes came solely from his imagination, but yet, they conspicuously conformed to poses common in pornography during this period.

[88] Colin David quoted in Hashmi and Mirza, 50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan, 62.

> home couldn't happen. It was so pathetic! He changed his style after that. He just started painting these strange landscapes.[89]

While Colin David's nudes conformed to patriarchal modes of portraying the female form, Ijaz ul Hassan (b. 1940) leveraged the image of the female nude as a political statement against American imperialism. Hassan took inspiration from "the Vietnam War, the Palestine Movement and in Pakistan by the working class movement".[90] In *Freedom* (1978)[91] [Fig. 9] he depicts a nude American hippie woman removing her bra and holding up a peace sign necklace in front of an unclothed and starving Vietnamese child. Hassan's nude, like the nudes WAF artists painted, is a statement against imperialism and its gendered articulations.[92] This contrast reveals the hypocrisy of American conceptualizations of freedom. American freedom, as Hassan depicts it, is one that sexualizes women, telling them that this objectification is, in fact, freedom, and purports to value peace as typified by hippie subculture, while US imperialist wars cause the starvation of Vietnamese children whose inability to be clothed is certainly no freedom.

V. Conclusions

The feminist artists who were at the forefront of the cultural resistance movement against Zia show us that "the spectacle is vulnerable. However intricately planned it is, a handful of people can disrupt it and cause chaos in a seemingly impenetrable organization. The spectacle isn't prepared for anything but passive spectators."[93] It is similarly significant that these struggles take place in what Maria Mies terms, "the sphere of body politics. A combination of struggles and actions on the part of feminists in overdeveloped and underdeveloped countries can expose and undermine the double-faced policy of international capital towards women."[94] WAF artists, along with the feminist male artists who aligned with them, reclaimed the female body through portraying the nude in a moment when women were violently forced by the postcolonial state to become invisible. Their assertion of a right to their bod-

89
Oral history interview conducted with the artist, April 26, 2018, Lahore, Pakistan.

90
Ijaz ul Hassan quoted in Hashmi and Mirza, 50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan, 74.

91
See also Musarrat Hasan, *Ijaz ul Hassan*, Lahore 2012, 80; Hashmi, The Seventies, 7.

92
See Jayawardena, Feminism and Nationalism, 255; Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation, 39.

93
Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures, 5.

94
Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation, 232.

[Fig. 9]
Ijaz ul Hassan, Freedom, 1978, Oil on Canvas, 72 × 48 in., Collection of the artist © Ijaz ul Hassan.

ies transformed art into "a forum from which women question the whole social and political order".[95]

As feminist painters of Zia-era Pakistan show us, new feminist culture can reinterpret and redefine the body even as it depicts the nude female form as stereotypically feminine. There is a subversive quality in asserting one's bodily feminine sexuality in the context of a society that wants women to be invisible. In so doing they opened up a new category of the nude in depicting their own desire to be seen. This strategy of depicting the nude female form can reclaim not only women's body autonomy but also their joy and beauty as long as it is done on the artist's own terms and not to satisfy the male gaze. Feminist artists of the Zia period admired, appreciated, felt desire for, and made visible their bodies, at a time when politics threatened to render them invisible. By rendering in images what the state attempted to conceal, Pakistani feminist painters asserted their bodies' right to be female and to have a full social existence.

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[95] Hashmi, An Intelligent Rebellion, 237.