كاغرى كشتياں কাগজের নৌকা

Paper Boats The Pakistani Bengali Story

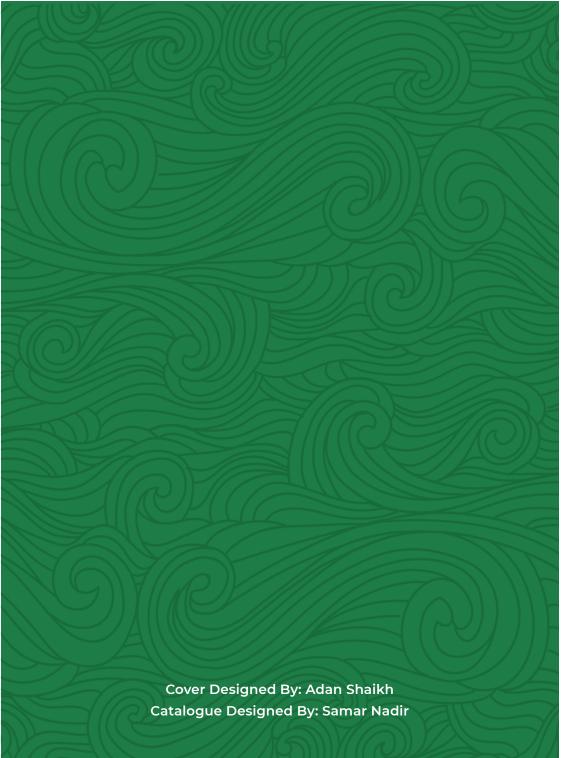


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Exhibition Catalogue for: كاغذى كشتياں- কাগজের নৌকা , **Kaghazi Kashtiyan (Paper Boats):** The Pakistani Bengali Story.

Curated by:

Dr Humera Iqbal Axel Lucas Adan Shaikh Dr Anushay Malik

An exhibition based on research from the research study: **Partition of Identity:** An exploration of Belonging in Pakistani Bengalis, 1971- Present.

The research is led by:

Dr Humera Iqbal (Associate Professor of Social Psychology at University College London (UCL), UK) Dr Anushay Malik (Assistant Professor of History, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan) Dr Maria Rashid (Research Fellow, Politics, UCL)

Partition of Identity:

An exploration of Belonging in Pakistani Bengalis, 1971-Present.

An Introduction to the Research

By Dr Humera Iqbal, Dr Anushay Malik and Dr Maria Rashid.

Who are the "Pakistani Bengalis" that this exhibition focuses on? They are a group of people estimated to be up to 3 million strong in Pakistan. Many of them have worked in fishing and garment work, but there are also lawyers, doctors and business professionals. The history of this community tied to the city of Karachi, where many are based, is part of Pakistan's story. This exhibition focuses on Machar Colony, but interviews for the project were also conducted in other neighbourhoods where Pakistani Bengalis are concentrated including Musa Colony, Orangi Town, 100 quarter, Taisar Town and Zia-ul Haq Colony.

In 1947, Pakistan came into being as two separate regions: West Pakistan (present-day Pakistan) and East Pakistan (that later became Bangladesh in 1971). Many Bengali speakers from East Pakistan worked in what is now West Pakistan, as government servants or businesspeople, and within agriculture in Sindh. After 1971, some had family join them, some moved to Bangladesh temporarily and then returned to what was once their home while others came from former East Pakistan to West Pakistan for economic reasons. However, the Pakistani state had erased this history, by instituting measures related to citizenship that allows officials to declare all those with links to Bangladesh as outsiders. This resulted in many Pakistani Bengalis, even those born in Karachi, facing uncertain access to nationality and citizenship.

So far, there has been no record of the migration and settlement of this minority group. The Partition of Identity (POI) project follows the story of this group and highlights the voices of the community.

The project takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on social psychology and history and using arts-based methods which allows for the unearthing of stories that have previously not been given as much attention. It explores published and archival documentary sources relating to Bengalis in Pakistan and creates a new archive of 85 oral history interviews from a diverse sample of the Pakistani Bengali population.

This story is important in and of itself, but also because it draws attention to a group whose struggle for recognition aligns with many of the other struggles that minorities in Pakistan face today. Discrimination in Pakistan manifests on the basis of class and region and this project shows how these, alongside religion, need to be taken into consideration in any movement for social justice that may be imagined in Pakistan.

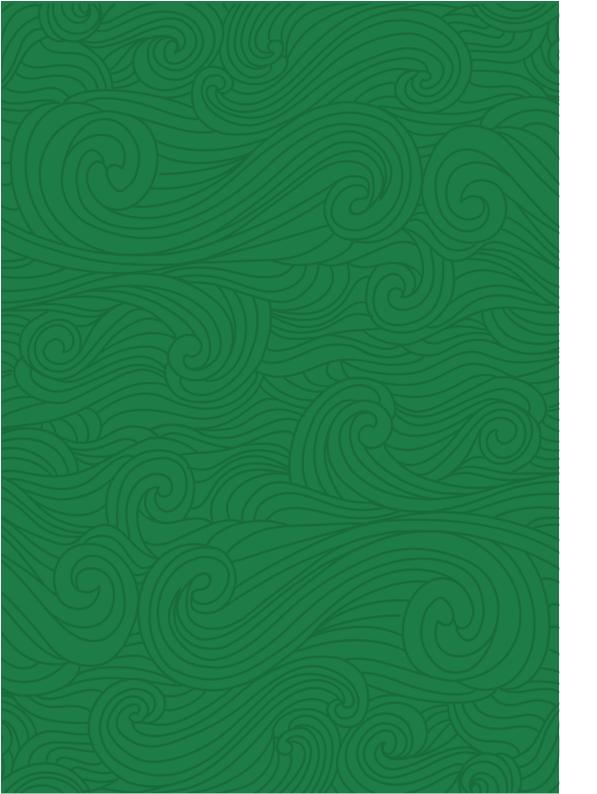
The research is led by: Dr Humera Iqbal (Associate Professor of Social Psychology at UCL), Dr Anushay Malik (Assistant Professor of History, LUMS) & Dr Maria Rashid (Research Fellow, Politics, UCL). Find out more about the study here: https://poistudy.com/ or scan below



كاغذى كشتياں- কাগজের নৌকা, Kaghazi Kashtiyan (Paper Boats): The Pakistani Bengali Story.

Kagazhi Khastiyan opens up a window into the experiences of the Pakistani Bengali community. This community has long roots based mainly in the city of Karachi and spread across a variety of neighbourhoods. "Kaghazi Kashtiyan" refers to the connection of the community to the sea, through the work that many of them do as fishermen, but it also refers to the precarious, paper-like fragility of their legal status in Pakistan because of challenges that they face around documentation and citizenship.

The artists featured here have drawn inspiration from community visits but also engagement with research from the study: Partition of Identity: An exploration of Belonging in Pakistani Bengalis, 1971- Present. This three-year project is based at University College London, UK and the Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan. It is the first in-depth study capturing the everyday life, stories and history of the Pakistani Bengali community. Each of the artists reimagined the rich academic scholarship in creative, accessible, and evocative ways.



Curatorial Team:

Dr Humera Iqbal (Associate Professor of Social Psychology, UCL), Axel Lucas (Visual artist), Adan Shaikh (Visual artist) & Dr Anushay Malik (Assistant Professor of South Asian History, LUMS)

Contributing Artists:

Abdul Rehman Abdullah Khan Adan Shaikh Areeba Aslam Axel Lucas Kremena Dimitrova Nabiha Rehan Syeda Yumna Fatima



IDENTITY & CITIZENSHIP

An important issue faced by Pakistani Bengalis is around Statelessness and citizenship struggles within Pakistan. These can impact families across generations, limiting access to education, livelihoods and services and affecting individuals' ability to thrive. Each of the artists featured here, attempt to capture some of the emotional, geographical and political aspects faced by the community and associated with citizenship.

Artist's Note:

Captured Displacement focuses on the stories and lives of the Pakistani Bengali community including the challenges they face relating to citizenship and displacement. The installation depicts some of the key localities where the community live as pockets on the map of Karachi.

The work is made from recycled plywood. Using a laser engraving machine five shapes have been cut from the wood to represent Pakistani Bengali colonies in Karachi, including Musa Colony, Zia ul Haq Colony, Bilal Colony, Ibrahim Hyderi and Machar Colony. I chose these specific places to highlight historical and contemporary patterns of settlement. The colonies shown are developed to scale, with Machar Colony, which is one of the largest in size, dominating the space compared to Musa Colony. The work highlights how many Pakistani Bengalis settled near the coastlines of Karachi as many in the community are linked to fishing.

The net pattern engraved on all the five mapped areas symbolises how many Pakistani Bengalis are trapped around issues of citizenship.



Captured Displacement Axel Lucas Recycled Plywood, 6ft x 8ft, 2022

About the Artist:

Axel Lucas is a Karachi based multidisciplinary visual artist. His work centres on identity and control in the educational system, particularly linked colonial and postcolonial authority. His practice is expressed through installations and large-scale wall drawings. Working with different mediums, he is interested in creating visuals of restriction, repetition, conditioning, and the idea of critiquing authority. Axel recently received the Emerging Artist Award at the Karachi Artfest 2023.



Artist's Note:

The Others is an animated social commentary that depicts the impact of having one's identity taken away. The animation explores issues of 'othering', citizenship, and statelessness faced by members of the Pakistani Bengali community living in Karachi including those from Machar Colony. Everyday struggles such as accessing education and employment opportunities are shown. The film also delves into the impact of being considered foreign or 'alien', labels often associated with this group. Throughout the film, characters disappear, leaving their surroundings desolate, highlighting the ongoing issue of statelessness that has impacted generations.

The Others

Adan Shaikh Digital Animation, 3 mins, 2022



The plot centres around three stern-looking men playing a game similar to Ludo, depicting the control and power of decision-making held by higher authorities over common people. Each move they make strips away the identity of individuals, emphasizing the loss of identity that statelessness causes. The repetition of certain scenes in the film creates a complex and distressing connection between the characters' experiences. Additionally, the depiction of fish in the film acts as a poignant and vulnerable symbol that is deeply intertwined with the community's way of life.

About the Artist:

Adan Shaikh is a Karachi based illustrator, new media, and visual artist who works with both digital and traditional art mediums. Her artistic practices primarily focus on gender, class, and identity discrimination prevalent in Pakistan. As a South Asian woman, Adan documents and navigates the lack of safe public spaces for women and the role of women in a patriarchal society. She currently works around the themes of home and displacement. She graduated from the Indus Valley School of Arts and Architecture in 2022.

A collection of works Syeda Yumna Fatima

Artist's Note:

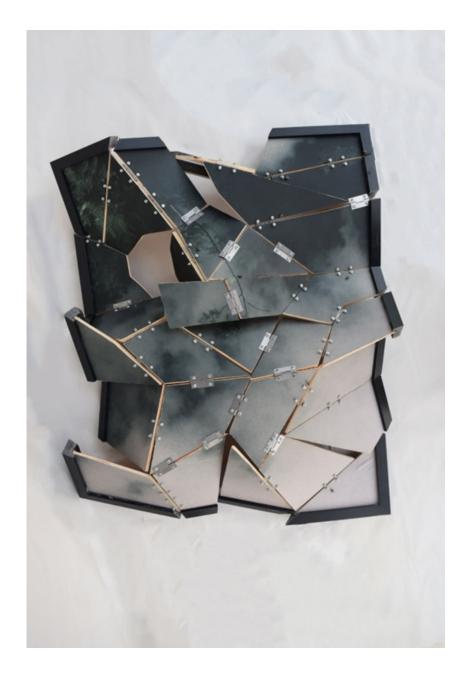
This collection of 3 pieces by Syeda Yumna Fatima offers a social commentary on different aspects of life experienced by Pakistani Bengalis living in one of the largest informal settlements in Karachi - Machar Colony. The 3 pieces in the collection are made from wood and hinges and images.

Machar Colony covers about 4.5 sq.km with a density 4-7 times higher than that of the majority of Karachi. The population is between 800,000- 1.3 million.



Piece 1: 'Seascape' Mixed Media, 22"x 29", 2022

The sea is a key source of income and life for many from Machar Colony. Fish is a staple food and central to livelihoods. For fishermen, the journey of going out to sea on large wooden boats can be long and challenging. The crew is often at the mercy of nature and the vast expanse of the sea. Local folklore, music and fishermen's tales passed down to families, also capture the mysticism of the sea. In my piece I have tried to capture the many dimensions of the sea in the lives of Machar Colony dwellers.



The dark imagery here depicts the challenges faced by many Pakistani Bengalis living in Machar Colony, particularly around citizenship, but also around access to infrastructure and basic resources. These challenges impact entire families and generations. In the piece, with a little focus you can see that there is a tree branching out, symbolizing the notion of family, genealogy, and connection.

> Piece 2: 'Broken but in dreams I believe' Mixed Media, 32"x24", 2022



Piece 3: 'Save me or it will be the end for both of us', Mixed Media, 18"x 24", 2022 Adjacent to the densely populated area of Machar colony lie the mangroves which provide flood protection from the Arabian Sea. Poverty has forced some to build homes on stilts here, resulting in deforestation and outwards expansion into 'The Jungle'. This piece provides a reminder of the strong but also fragile connection between man and nature, particularly of the impact of climate change on rising water levels, the aquatic ecosystem and in turn the number of fish in the water.

About the Artist:

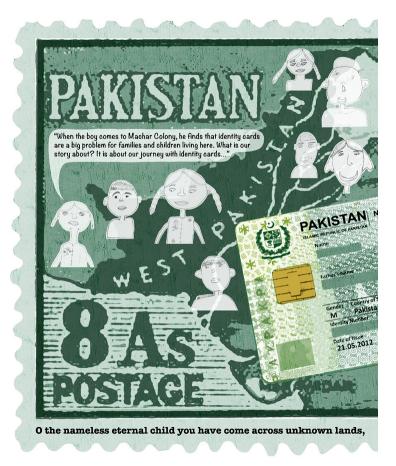
Syeda Yumna Fatima is a 4th year fine arts student from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture based in Karachi Pakistan.

Artist Statement:

This work is a preview of a 15 double-page limited edition comic book on Statelessness that will be released later this year. It involves a collaboration between social psychologist Humera Iqbal and illustrator-as-historian Kremena Dimitrova.

In May 2022, Humera ran an arts therapy-based workshop with teenagers from Khel School in Machar Colony and each young person developed individual stories around a core topic, in this case, "My Life in Machar Colony."

From each of these individual narratives, a collective narrative was developed by group members. Kremena used these accounts to write a script which she brought to life by interweaving the young people's original drawings together with archival material to co-create a graphic narrative, allowing for the voices of the teenagers to be seen and heard. Traversing the personal and the political in imaginative ways, the carefully constructed affective, yet playful, comic book and educational resource, is available in both English and Urdu.



'Think in your heart first, think' A comic book on Statelessness. Kremena Dimitrova and Humera Iqbal Online and Print publication, 2023

About the Artist:

"I construct new stories from old, In ways that are contemporary, socially engaged, and sometimes rather bold... I marry words with images, which I'm often told, Bring to light, map, and celebrate, Histories that would otherwise remain hidden, sidelined, or untold..."

Kremena Dimitrova is a London based illustratoras-historian, lecturer in Visual Culture, and practicebased PhD researcher in decolonising history through comics at the University of Portsmouth in the United Kingdom. She specialises in socially engaged and sitespecific creative interventions and visual storytelling in the cultural, heritage, and education sectors. Kremena often works with archives and collections and uses a mixture of artistic approaches, such as character development, humour, rhymes, words, and images to bring hidden and marginalised narratives to life.

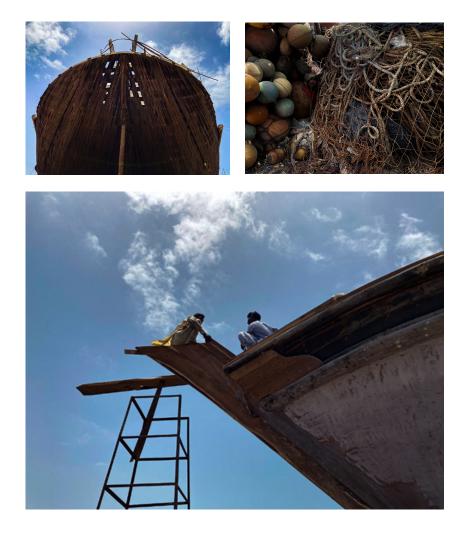
About the Researcher:

Dr Humera Iqbal is Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Psychology at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, University College London. Her research centres on the identity, historical and lived experiences of migrant and minority families and young people. This includes citizenship experiences and statelessness, social representations, and social activism. Another strand of her research interrogates the influence of culture, nature and the arts on wellbeing and belonging. Humera uses mixed methods, arts and film-based methods in her research. She is Principal Investigator of the international AHRC funded study: 'Partition of Identity: An exploration of Belonging in Bengalis in Pakistan, 1971- present with Dr Anushay Malik, LUMS.



CULTURE AND FOLKLORE

Bangla is a rich and expressive language which has been the vessel for poetry and music for centuries. Within Pakistan different dialects of Bangla are spoken, based on individual migration histories. Folklore and story telling also form an important part of Pakistani Bengali culture with tales passed down across generations. Each of the artists featured here have been captivated by the vibrancy of this culture and showcase it in their work.



Boat Building, a photo series Abdullah Khan 2022

Artist's Note:

This photo series is inspired by the Arabian sea and the beasts that chart its rough waters. Hands that blister and reveal open wounds craft these very beasts. The ships portrayed in this piece are made by hand, measured by careful approximation showing the true power of what man can achieve when our differences are set aside, and we work as one.

About the Artist:

Abdullah Khan is a Pakistani independent filmmaker whose work deals with exploring unconventional topics and creating an impact for viewers. Khan's aim is to explore narratives that seem simple from the outside but at the same time hold a complex structure within. Abdullah started a career in filmmaking to tell stories about childhood, silenced voices, and unnoticed traumas, using a naturalistic style. He graduated from the Indus Valley School of Arts and Architecture in 2022.







'Aamai Bhashali Re', performed by Pakistani Bengali musician – Abdul Haleem Abdullah Khan and Nabiha Rehan Film, 5 mins, 2022

Artists' Note:

The following performance is a rendition of the popular poem by Bengali writer Jasimuddin. 'Aamai Bhashaili Re' captures the importance of the rivers and seas to sailors and fishermen across the subcontinent, many of whom belong to the Pakistani Bengali community. The song is performed in Bangla by musician Abdul Haleem, with English subtitles below.

About the Artist:

Abdullah Khan is a Pakistani independent filmmaker whose work deals with exploring unconventional topics and creating an impact for viewers. Khan's aim is to explore narratives that seem simple from the outside but at the same time hold a complex structure within. Abdullah started a career in filmmaking to tell stories about childhood, silenced voices, and unnoticed traumas, using a naturalistic style. He graduated from the Indus Valley School of Arts and Architecture in 2022.

Nabiha Rehan is an independent filmmaker who likes to explore themes related to the complexity of human thought and emotion. Her work follows a naturalistic style and aims to give a new perspective on challenging topics. She graduated from the Indus Valley School of Arts and Architecture in 2022.

Artist Statement:

This piece was inspired by the connection between human-beings and the sea. While drawing a human figure and thinking of the fishing and the sea, I was able to merge the two together to create "jalpari".

About the Artist:

Abdul Rehman is a self-taught artist based in Machar Colony, Karachi. He attends school at Imkaan Welfare Organization's learning and recreational centre, Khel.



Jalpari Abdul Rehman enamel on slate, 8"x6", 2022



Monsters Behind Vines: A Collection of Tales Areeba Aslam Online and Print publication, 2022

Artist Statement:

Storytelling conveys the culture, history, and values that unite people together. Given this, my approach for this work was to collect tales either imagined or shared by children from the Pakistani Bengali community. While speaking with students from Khel school in Machar Colony, I heard accounts of jalparis (mermaids), jalparas (mermen), jinn and bhoots (ghosts). The stories they told, bear invaluable information about their spaces and culture. My work aimed to illustrate the imaginations of their creative young minds.

About the Artist:

Areeba Aslam is an illustrator and designer who graduated from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture based in Karachi Pakistan in 2022. Her interest lies in visual storytelling, with a focus on children's literature.





Partition of Identity is a cross-university study between University College London and the Lahore University of Management Sciences.

The research is led by Dr Humera Iqbal (Associate Professor of Social Psychology, UCL), Dr Anushay Malik (Assistant Professor of History, LUMS) & Dr Maria Rashid (Research Fellow, Politics, UCL)



Project partners:

Imkaan Welfare Organization Citizens' Archive of Pakistan Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture

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Arts and Humanities Research Council