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## THE ABOLITION OF THE UNIVERSITY

# Imperialism, Art and Pedagogy: Notes on Knowledge Production at the Frontlines

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The post-9/11 global political climate has seen an unprecedented escalation in demand for knowledge and cultural production from Pakistan. This article explores the ways in which this shift has shaped the current academic and cultural landscape in Pakistan, with a focus on the institutional space of the art school. The recent growth in these spheres has taken place alongside a simultaneous intensification in the policing and militarisation of spaces of knowledge and cultural production. We consider the possibilities of formulating a dissident art/academic practice in a sphere shaped and disciplined by the dual forces of militarisation and imperialist agendas. To this end, we explore the work of three non-institutional pedagogical/cultural/community spaces in Karachi as engaged, immersive and participatory forms of knowledge production. We find in these spaces a heightened visibility of how much is at stake in conflicts and contestations over knowledge and culture in contemporary Pakistan, as well as a realisation of the possibilities of disrupting institutionalised colonial modes of knowledge production, dissemination and circulation.

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*Karachi University, 6 May 2015*

*As we enter Karachi University (KU), the security checkpoint is more heavily guarded than usual. Driving through the first obstacle course of barriers, I count eight paramilitary rangers, fully armed. A ranger informs us that no outsiders are being allowed in today. As I show him my faculty card to prove I am a teacher here, I am hoping he will not inquire about the other people in my car.*

*We are here to attend a seminar on Baloch Missing Persons organized by KU Teachers Against War and Oppression, under the larger campaign of Unsilencing Balochistan. As we walk towards the Arts Auditorium, we are all unsure about how today's event will unfold. Sabeen Mahmud was murdered just twelve days ago for hosting a talk on Baloch Missing Persons, with the same Baloch activist guest speakers as today. While no one mentions it, we are all tense, worried for each other's safety.*

*A large group of students, teachers and staff are gathered in the arts lobby. All entrances to the auditorium have been padlocked. The KU administration had issued a warning the day before that the 'organisation of seminars related to sensitive issues was not allowed in the university premises as per policy'. The state-enforced kidnapping, torture and murder of Baloch persons was deemed an especially 'sensitive matter' by the state-sponsored public university. The dangerous and covert collusion of the university, military and state had made itself uncharacteristically visible in this particular instance of censorship and academic containment.*

*It is decided to hold the seminar in the open space outside the locked auditorium, in the sweltering heat. As we wait for the guest speakers to arrive, we are all wondering whether they have managed to escape the gaze of the paramilitary forces. I tune into the conversations happening around me. Some people are speculating that the speakers are entering under disguise, some are claiming they have been smuggled inside hidden in a car trunk, while others have deduced that they must have entered campus the night before. A teacher is upset that an entire busload of her students have been stopped at the gate. A reporter is complaining that all the media cameramen have also been refused entry. There is a man taking*

*photographs – we suspect he is an intelligence agent, documenting our faces, identities and political alliances.*

*Conversations halt mid-way. Mama Qadeer, Farzana Baloch and Mir Mohammad Ali Talpur have arrived. They begin their talk by reminding us that Balochistan was colonised by the Pakistan army in 1948. Its union with Pakistan was achieved through violence and subjugation, and present-day rule continues to be maintained through brutality and oppression. They narrate the long history of military operations in Balochistan and the continuing disappearances, targeting and torture of students and Baloch youth. Farzana tells us about her brother, Zakir, a student activist who disappeared six years ago. She has only one demand of the state, that if her brother, or any resident of Balochistan, has committed a crime, they should be presented before a court. The state cannot just disappear them.*

*Mama Qadeer tells us about the circumstances under which he formed the Voice for Baloch Missing Persons (VBMP) in 2009: the disappearance of his son. In the face of media blackout, VBMP uses tactics of hunger strikes, camps, long marches and documentation to raise awareness about the state's brutalities and demand release of missing persons. According to their record, the number of missing persons from Balochistan in 2014 is 21,000. 6,000 tortured bodies have been found in that year, others including Farzana's brother remain disappeared.*

*An hour later, their talk concludes. We all walk to the Administration Block and stand outside the offices as an act of protest. The organizers are trying to escort the guest speakers away, concerned for their safety, but they are in no hurry to leave. They linger with the crowd. In this moment, an unusual and dissident alliance has formed between students, teachers and Baloch activists. Standing together in solidarity, our collective protest against the university also translates into protest against the military-state. Within two minutes, rangers appear on the scene and we start to disperse.*

*Three weeks later, on 27 May 2015, paramilitary forces raid Karachi University. Five students are abducted and taken to an undisclosed location for interrogation. No newspaper runs this story.*

## Introduction

In the months of April-May 2015, Pakistan witnessed a series of repressive attempts by the military-state to police knowledge production in the university. One of the first widely known cases of censorship occurred at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) – a private university. The student council had organised an event on campus titled *Unsilencing Balochistan*. The panel discussion was to feature – on the home turf of Pakistan's military elite – activists from the province of Balochistan where the Pakistani army has been brutally fighting a series of separatist insurgencies since 1948. The day before the event, members of the state intelligence had walked into LUMS and demanded that the administration cancel the panel. Despite widespread student protests, the administration complied with state orders. Almost two weeks later, in response to this state enforced censorship in the university, the same event was held in the non-institutional community space of *The Second Floor (T2F)* in Karachi. That night, on her way home from the event, Sabeen Mahmud – the founder/director of T2F – was shot dead.

With Sabeen's murder, T2F transformed overnight from a liberal-elite cultural space to the growing category of alternative pedagogical/community spaces in the city that have 'mysteriously' lost their leaders. In March 2013, Parveen Rehman, the founder-director of the *Orangi Pilot Project Research & Training Institute (OPP-RTI)*, was killed in similar circumstances by 'unknown assailants' after receiving consistent threats from political figures and the city's infamous land mafia. Similarly, poet-scholar Saba Dashtiyari, founder of the *Syed Hashmi Reference Library* in Malir, Karachi was shot on his way home from Balochistan University in Quetta in 2011.

This precarious moment served as a reminder for those of us in the academic community about the workings and consequences of the academic-military-industrial complex. The relentless silencing of academic discussions on Balochistan within university and cultural spaces was clear proof of how the state continues to regulate the boundaries of what is permissible and desirable to express and discuss in these intellectual spaces. The *Unsilencing Balochistan* seminars had become the focal point of censorship and academic containment precisely because they threatened to rupture national narratives. As charged sites of dissident knowledge

production, they challenged the silence around illegal military operations and states of exception that routinely reduce Baloch citizens to 'bare life', to be monitored, contained, curtailed and, when need be, killed with impunity. This discussion exposed the military-state's nation-building project to be founded on, and sustained through, imperialism, war and violence. It became a matter of 'national security' to shut it down.

This policing of academic production extended to art schools and cultural spaces. Our engagement with questions on the nature of this surveillance and censorship, and the possibilities of resistance was also informed by our own experiences with erasure in this period of time. A project mapping state-enforced disappearances in the Baloch community was supposed to go on exhibition at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (IVS) campus gallery in May. The show was cancelled and the administration made clear to us they would never be willing to show the work. It was during this time that we wrote a public statement that led to the establishment of the Karachi Art Anti-University (KAAU). This is an on-going experiment, through which we are exploring new possibilities and pedagogies for an anti-imperialist, nomadic space for radical knowledge production and the politicisation of art. This article is very much informed by our experiences thus far with this project and the work we have undertaken for it.

What follows is a montage of notes, thoughts and attempts at clarity emerging from the fear and uncertainty of this recent political moment. We attempt to make sense of the new military-state apparatus in neo-colonial times, and what it means to produce and disseminate knowledge within it, in order to better understand and imagine possibilities and strategies of resistance. We trace the trajectories of the academic-military-industrial complex in an attempt to uncover the mechanisms and consequences of the imperial university in Pakistan with specific regard to the art school,<sup>1</sup> as well as exploring cultural and pedagogical spaces at the margins.

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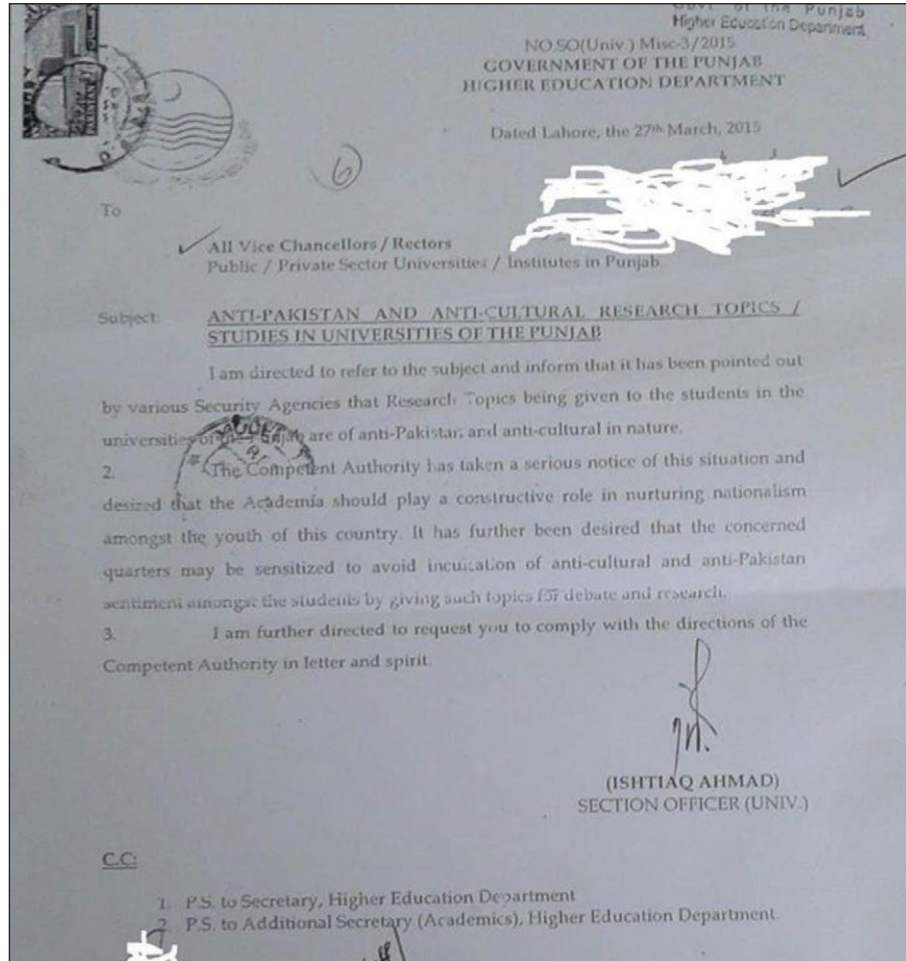
<sup>1</sup> Over the past two decades an increasing number of art schools have opened up in Pakistan. We are interested in the art school as an institutional space that has taken on a new, crucial significance in response to the growing imperial demands for knowledge and cultural production from Pakistan.

30 May 2015

First Experiment in Rethinking Art Education

Recent events in Karachi have made clear to us the need for solidarity and unity in the art community, as well as the need for a serious re-examination of our relationship as artists and art workers to the state. As artists and art educators, we feel that the murders of Sabeen Mahmud and Dr. Waheed-ur-Rehman have direct consequences for us and our spaces, and were enacted in part as messages for our community. These murders are the most recent attacks in a long project of intimidation and silencing of intellec-

tual and cultural discourse by our military establishment... This situation calls for a rethinking of the art community's usual tactics of protecting ourselves and our work from attacks and censorship, where the narrative of struggle has traditionally revolved around liberal notions of defending the right of creepy uncles to paint naked women. For such purposes, security barriers and guards may have been effective thus far in keeping away the mullahs and the unwashed masses – but the surveillance and killing machine we must reckon with now is different.



**Figure 1:** This letter was issued by the Punjab Government and circulated to all public and private universities in Punjab during the Unsilencing Balochistan. Available at: <http://arynews.tv/en/punjab-education-dept-takes-on-role-of-thought-police/> (Last accessed 10 December 2015).

### Histories of Academic Policing

The letter issued by the Punjab Government to all public and private universities in Punjab during the Unsilencing Balochistan campaign clearly demarcated boundaries of discourse that were acceptable to the state (**Fig. 1**). It censured all critical and political discussions as 'anti-Pakistan' and 'anti-cultural', and demanded that academic institutions comply with a patriotic responsibility to nurture 'nationalism'. Use of such rhetoric shows how the university is a key arena for the produc-

tion and reinforcement of patriotic citizenship and nationalist discourse. These expectations are normalised through displays of what Henry Giroux (2010) calls 'patriotic correctness' – an ideology that privileges conformity over critical learning and that represents dissent as something akin to an act of treason. The exclusionary logics of patriotism shape the systemic structures of repression, which silence those academic knowledges that threaten national consensus or the imperial nation-building project.

To better understand our own precarious positionalities within the academic-military-industrial complex, we must trace out longer genealogies through which the age-old alliance between the academy and state power can become clear. Tracing earlier instances of state regulation in the academy makes visible the historical continuities between crisis and the boundaries of containment, revealing the many thresholds of academic repression. From its early years, the state was invested in the production and policing of foundational truths about the nation-state and its apparatus of imperial violence. It had inherited from the British regime, and carried forward, a system of higher education that was embedded in colonial structures of repression and militarism. One of the earliest instances in Pakistan of violent policing on campus was during the language movement protest at Dhaka University on 21 February 1952. Students were gathered to protest against the state and demand for Bangla to be made the national language. Police opened fire at this peaceful protest, killing several students. The number of deaths was never confirmed. Less than a year later, on 8–9 January 1953, students protesting for state funding at DJ Science College in Karachi suffered a similar fate.

To legitimise these acts of police brutality, student activism was invariably cast as 'anti-Pakistani' by the state. It viewed the university with suspicion, as a dangerous breeding ground for anti-national dissent, in need of strict control and surveillance in order to contain threats from 'destabilising forces'. The Central Safety Public Ordinance, passed after the events of 1952 in Dhaka University, allowed for preventive detention of students and the arbitrary imposition of Section 144 that banned public assembly. This colonial law was resurrected in the name of 'safeguarding and protecting the freedom of Pakistan' (Toor, 2009). Using the fiction of freedom, the colonial machinery of repression

Over the past few decades, a systematic depoliticisation of the art community has taken place in Pakistan. The primary site has been the art school, where this process begins early on in the education and training of young artists. Despite nostalgic valorisations from those who run our art institutions today of an anti-military student activist movement emerging from art schools in the Zia era, the present circumstances betray a complete and systematic severing of the art world from society and politics... These circumstances are the culmination of this



same valorised anti-Zia struggle, which developed anti-climactically into a comfortable understanding between the military establishment and the liberal elite, where the prior allows the latter to go on painting nudes provided they do not ruffle military feathers. The murder of Sabeen Mahmud shows us the cost of transgressing this agreement.

We call upon all artists and art institutions to stand together in solidarity, in this crucial moment, against state violence, surveillance and censorship. Against silencing and erasure in our spaces. To turn the gaze inward

and control was imposed upon students and citizens to regulate the production of proper subjects in the new imperial nation. From the inception of Pakistan, the university was tightly placed within the network of state apparatuses of discipline, surveillance, carcerality and violence.

With the onslaught of Pakistan's first military regime under Ayub Khan in 1958, leftist student groups were banned on campuses and democratic expression was criminalised. In 1959, when students planned to organise a peaceful protest against the visit of President Eisenhower, the military pre-emptively arrested student leaders of the left, who were incarcerated for over a year. In 1961, following a mass student demonstration, hundreds were arrested and twelve students were put under trial in military courts for the first time (Gayer, 2014).

It is important to remember this early role of military courts in oppressing students, because these same military courts have recently been re-established in Pakistan in 2015 and are executing prisoners with impunity. In 1977, when the next military dictator, Zia-ul-Haq, came to power, he had witnessed the 1968–9 student uprising that had overthrown Ayub. He realised that banning student organisations and incarceration were not enough to mitigate the dangerous threat posed by students to his regime. He attempted to contain the influence of left-wing forces on campuses by patronising the opponent faction of Islamist student activists and providing them with firearms (Gayer, 2014). The Zia regime facilitated the militarisation of student politics as a strategy to silence left-wing students. However, with the US-sponsored Afghan jihad on-going, other students were also able to acquire arms in response. The arrival of weapons on campuses at Pakistani universities resulted in persistent student warfare in the 1980s, which conveniently distracted students from earlier intellectual traditions of political critique and protest against the military-state and forced them to battle against each other.

Firing and killings became a regular routine at Karachi University as weaponisation escalated on campus and throughout the city. It was against this culture of violence in public universities, that the first private universities started opening after Zia's regime granted the charter to private universities in 1983. As public universities were increasingly cast as unsafe and volatile spaces in the media,

these new private universities were marketed as privatised, securitised spaces free from both student militias and state intervention. Students who had grown disillusioned as a result of the militarisation of student politics started seeking out these safe, private environments. However, in the corporate and industrialised restructuring of higher education, politics was left outside the gates of such institutions. These knowledge factories fostered the anti-intellectualism that divorced knowledge from broader socio-political contexts and historical debates, alongside 'a natural affinity for cultural conservative agendas' (Saltman, 2014: 253). As Saltman explains, neoliberal privatisation of education sees 'education not as a public good ideally serving a democratic society but a private good primarily used for prepping workers and consumers for the economy' (Saltman, 2014: 251). In this equation schools are seen as businesses, neighbourhoods as markets, students as consumers and knowledge as a product.

In the 2000s, the next military dictator Pervez Musharraf continued to support neoliberal policies of privatisation in the university sector. In 2002, he founded the Higher Education Commission, meant to oversee, regulate and accredit all public and private sector universities. Private education became a flourishing business, as 42 new private universities opened up in this decade (Halai, 2013). Under the pretence of academic freedom and safety, these private institutions continued to closely monitor and regulate their students. As higher education became transformed into a corporate business, profit became the driving factor for curtailing student freedoms. Under no circumstances did these institutions want students and teachers unionising and protesting against tuition fee hikes or demanding higher faculty salaries. Formation of student and teacher unions was strictly prohibited, with the universities often using tactics of intimidation and silencing; and in the cases where such unions did exist, they functioned merely as perfunctory bodies. Politics continued to be anathema to the administration. Furthermore, state surveillance and policing within private institutions continued, as the growing sector of private education remained central to providing the identities, subject positions, knowledge, labour, and legitimating ideologies that placed students securely within the grip of the military-state.

and question our means of production and circulation, and our relationship to the state and its subjects. We must refuse to retreat back into our enclaves. We must face our own complicity in today's exclusion of politics from art production. We cannot continue to do the state's work in policing and disciplining these spaces. We must protect these spaces from the state at all costs. We must take seriously the epidemic of state targeting artists and intellectuals, and realise our own stakes in this.

## **The Art School: Colonialism, Culture and A Comprador Class**

The 1990s saw a surge in the opening of new art schools in Karachi. The Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture was founded in 1989 by a group of established architects, designers and artists including prominent figures such as Noorjehan Bilgrami, Aqeel Bilgrami, Shahid Abdullah and Shehnaz Ismail. IVS was the fourth private university in Pakistan to be granted a charter by the state. The Visual Studies Department in Karachi University was founded by renowned artist Durriya Kazi in 1998. Prior to this, art schools could only award diplomas, but these schools created the first generation of artists with degree qualifications. In subsequent years, neoliberal privatisation brought significant new capital to the art economy, with a mushrooming of art galleries ushering in the onset of art investment and creating a new class of art collectors. The expanding local art market firmly bound together the worlds of art and finance in new ways. In this growing neoliberal economy, production of art, and thereby art education, could not be disassociated from capital. The art school became a key site for channelling the labour of students into the exploitative circuit of capital within the art commodity system. Rather than realising their potential for developing new de-colonial traditions of art pedagogy, art schools became akin to factories, where students were trained in the skills of a market driven production of art.

However, the education-industrial complex that dominates art schools today is not simply the result of neoliberal privatisation, but dates back to the pedagogical practices enforced in colonial art schools in the second half of nineteenth-century India. These schools of 'industrial art' were opened with purely economic motivations to preserve and improve traditional art industries, through the imposition of British aesthetics and methods of instruction (Kantawala, 2012). These schools were meant to impart the skills necessary to improving the quality of Indian manufactured goods for the British market. Today, while the word 'industry' has been removed from the titles of post-colonial art schools, the foundational relationship between art and industry remains.

The National College of Arts (NCA) was established as the Mayo School of Industrial Art in Lahore in 1875, named after Lord Mayo – the viceroy of India who was assassinated

by a convict from NWFP during his visit to the British penal colony in the Andaman Islands. The first principal of the institution was Lockwood Kipling, the father of the 'bard of empire' Rudyard Kipling, who is largely credited with shaping the curriculum and pedagogical philosophy of the school. From its inception, NCA was deeply embedded in the colonial project. The context for the establishment of schools of art in India in the middle of the nineteenth century were ongoing debates in art and design education in England fuelled by anxieties over the deteriorating quality of industrial production in Europe – the emphasis now moving from liberal art education to vocational training. The Indian crafts exhibited in the Great Exhibition of 1851 were contrasted against local English manufacturing and were highly celebrated by visitors to the exhibition; meanwhile, manufacturing in India was disappearing as Indian labour was primarily being mobilised towards producing raw materials for Europe. There was now a heightened interest in, and desire for, the preservation of Indian craft (Khan, 1983).

The successful reception of Indian art at the Great Exhibition led to a burgeoning of art schools and government funding in colonial India as both private and public entrepreneurs realised the commercial potential of such institutions. However, alongside this commercial interest in works of Indian art, art schools were also driven by a desire to 'humanise' Indian sensibility. Schools became a vehicle for disseminating European taste, as part of 'the grand design for bringing progress to the colonies' (Mitter, 1994: 32). Western techniques were introduced not only to improve Indian arts, but also to 'rectify some of their mental faults' and 'instil reasoning habits' – intended to provide moral edification to the artists themselves (Mitter, 1994: 29).

As Mahrukh Tarapor notes, the early schools 'operated largely as vehicles for a kind of cultural imperialism in which curiously misplaced models of western academic art were imposed on Indian students to the detriment of any training whatsoever in native techniques' (Tarapor, 1980: 62). Despite their putative interest in preserving Indian craft traditions such as jewellery, carpet weaving and pottery, the art schools thus embodied a contradiction in their simultaneous desire to impose Victorian aesthetic tastes and traditions upon artists, and to train Indian labour in the production of goods suited to European needs:

What was produced at the Mayo School of Arts under Kipling was something quite different from traditional craft... the stated purpose of his school, i.e., “to improve the taste of native public as regards beauty of form and finish in the articles of daily use among them”, particularly since, by his own admission, he was at the same time addressing the task of enabling the local craftsmen “to fashion his ware[s] to European uses”. That he did this with restraint and with a respect for the creative aspect of craft production is beyond any doubt. Yet he was open to the idea of change and adaptation of Indian crafts. In this and in the unconcealed purpose of his presence in Lahore – that of creating a version of local craftsmanship more attuned to Victorian taste, he was successful. (Khan, 1983: 56)

In Ella Shohat and Robert Stam’s *Narrativising Visual Culture* (1998) they speak of how western chronologies of art history were violently imposed upon the global South. The countries of the global South, they argue, were denied any historical trajectory that described the development of their own artistic practices. Instead, indigenous art was narrativised within a ‘progressivist history’ in which narratives that privileged European art took central place:

A single, local perspective has been presented as “central” and “universal”, while the productions of what is patronizingly called “the rest of the world”, when discussed at all, are assumed to be pale copies of European originals... This view prolongs the colonial trope which projected colonized people as body rather than mind much as the colonized world was seen as a source of raw material rather than of mental activity or manufacture... Such a view bears the traces of the infantilizing trope, which projects colonized people as embodying an earlier stage of individual human or broad cultural development, a trope which posits the cultural immaturity of colonized or formerly colonized peoples. (Shohat & Stam, 1998: 38)

The art school played a key role within this colonisation of concepts of time, development and growth within the cultural sphere, as local crafts and traditions with

their own pedagogical methodologies and practices were absorbed into a European pedagogical system. Art forms that required lifetimes to evolve across generations of learning, development and apprenticeship – like calligraphy or miniature painting – were now reconstituted into new formulations of knowledge, pedagogy and temporality. These absorptions and appropriations not only functioned as a form of cultural imperialism and anthropophagy but also worked to create bodies of labour trained to manufacture in the service of colonial needs. The major mechanism instituted to perform this disciplining was thus the art institution.

Contemporary art schools continue to perform a similar function. The Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (full disclosure: where we both work as adjunct faculty) in Karachi was founded in 1989 during a growing culture of neoliberal privatisation. Its founders explain that the idea for this school emerged in part as a response to the growing urban violence where they felt 'an urgent need to introduce positive energy to the strife-torn city' (Bilgrami, 2003: n. pag.) IVS was envisioned as a private institution that could provide 'an environment to nurture the young, become an oasis in the parched city and help reduce the fragmentation of society' (Bilgrami, 2003: n. pag.) This oasis is today an elite, neoliberal campus-enclave; safe, secure and separate from the violence and volatilities of the city. In this privatised space, art education is framed as a consumable commodity.

Alongside this neoliberal turn, local art institutions have also been organised by the neo-colonial configurations of the global art economy and its cultural sphere (Toukan, 2010). In the years following 9/11 and the war on terror, the neoliberal turn of the local art market has intersected with, and taken place alongside, an unprecedented growth in global demand for, and fascination with, cultural and knowledge production from Pakistan. Art schools like IVS have played an integral role in preparing students for this wartime boom in demand for cultural production from Pakistan. In its most recent phase this neo-colonial relationship has taken the form of a huge influx of US and European aid to the cultural sector. This aid comes with its own wartime agendas and aesthetic presuppositions, and in recent years has flooded and saturated the cultural field in Karachi. Art schools have enthusiastically tapped into this new aid infrastructure, collaborating widely across art and design departments with these aid organisations.

2 August 2015

In his classic manifesto for decolonisation, 'Wretched of the Earth', Frantz Fanon wrote of the spatial administration and organisation of the colonial city – a 'compartmentalised world' marked by racial segregation and architectures of control and surveillance. Fanon demonstrated that there is always necessarily a spatial and visual dimension to the colonial project and so too, with the project of decolonisation – emphasising that the struggle for decolonisation as a 'program of complete disorder' also demands a complete visual and spatial re/ordering of the colonial city.

What then does it mean to decolonise education? What is the spatial ordering of art education today? One need not look far to see the ways in which it has mimicked the processes and philosophies of colonialism, as Fanon had predicted the national bourgeoisie would. Today we may read in the architectures and spatialities of Karachi's art institutions the persistence of coloniality. From the Indus Valley School of Art's bizarre appropriation and relocation to Clifton of a historical Kharadar building, to NAPA's occupation of evacuee property, to KU's strategic

One recent collaboration that has been widely covered in the media took place between the fine art department at IVS and the Karachi Youth Initiative (KYI) – a local 'funnel' organisation for USAID to sidestep the growing scepticism and fears amongst local organisations about accepting USAID money. 'Reimagining the Walls of Karachi' was a much-lauded project for which both KYI and IVS received rave reviews in the local and international press, and which covered an overwhelming number of walls in the city. Part of USAID's CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) stream, the project set out to cover over supposedly rampant 'hate graffiti' in Karachi by replacing it with aesthetically pleasing imagery. In this discourse, graffiti was framed in entirely negative terms as religiously motivated and hate mongering – while Karachi, as was often the case with KYI projects, was framed as a terror-ridden city in which the potentiality of violence lurked at every corner and was inscribed onto every surface. The goal was to fight extremism by painting over the 'hate graffiti', which was often little more than advertisements for small businesses, such as barbers or homeopaths (graffiti being the cheapest and most accessible form of advertising in the city), or simply expressed the slogans of political parties. The guidelines for artists responding to USAID's CVE call for submissions asserted that there be no text and no 'religious or political imagery' while encouraging 'landscapes/cityscapes/patterns/designs'. The result was a depoliticised aesthetic – colourful, celebratory and often orientalist in nature (see **Figs. 2 & 3**).

One of the longest stretches of wall covered by the project unfolded on MT Khan road: down the street from, and dwarfed by, a long, white, stretch of the untouched twenty-foot high blast-resistant walls lining the new US consulate. Despite these walls being used as a site for this project of aesthetic regeneration, the violence inscribed upon the walls, with snipers stationed every few feet down the road, remained unaddressed by artists. Through this collaborative project, KYI, IVS and the artists involved thus become bulwarks against the ever-present threat of fundamentalism. In these collaborations, the art school itself becomes the primary local institution through which global corporate and imperial powers calibrate art's function in line with the demands and political vision of the new world system. The art school becomes a knowledge/cultural production factory producing creative and cultural



**Figure 2:** A poster for the 'I am Karachi' walls of peace campaign showing walls painted by a group of Karachi artists called 'Phool Patti', which is a decorative art form emerging from the traditional truck art practice. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/vaslpakistan/photos/pcb.1369237576424997/1369237436425011/?type=3&theater> (Last accessed 5 June 2016).

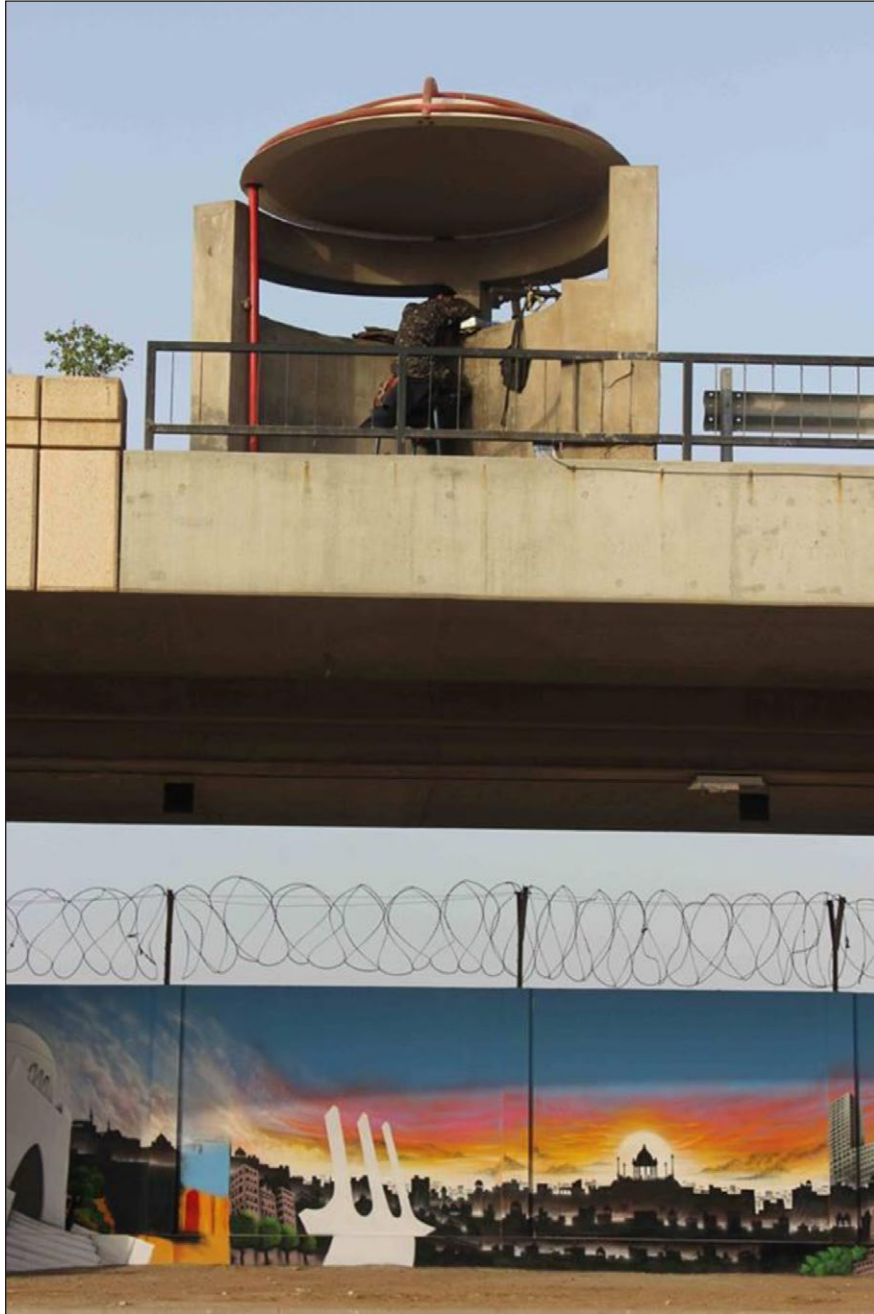
labour and capital dictated by the demands and agendas of the emergent imperial aid infrastructure.

Exactly how much is at stake in the character and the function of the art school in Pakistan can be understood by examining the unique space it inhabits within the local art scene. The role of the art school in Pakistan goes beyond simply influencing the practices of the country's next generation of artists. It is, in fact, the central institution in the ecology of the cultural landscape of Pakistan – as Nav Haq (2013) notes in his essay 'Pedagogy as Practice':

In order to be a critically successful artist living in Lahore, you must ... become involved in a pedagogical institution, and thus immediately give something back to the sort of infrastructure that you have emerged from. It is then virtually only in an international context, that your art exists within the space of exhibitions. This sort of semi-structured peer-to-peer situation posits participation as the core value of artistic practice. It does however raise questions as to whether it is possible to be a critically successful artist living in Lahore if consciously based outside of the legitimising space of the institution. (Haq, 2013: n. pag.)

location on the margins of the city so as to distance student politics and organising as far as possible from the city center. Policed by Rangers and surrounded by barriers, our art institutions today display their investment in reproducing, and subjecting their student body/student's bodies to the daily humiliations and disciplinings of, hegemonic power structures and relations.





**Figure 3:** A 2016 mural by German graffiti artist Sebastian Schmidt at Karachi's Jinnah International Airport. This mural was produced as a collaborative 'Meet the Culture' project by Goethe Institut, Vasl Artist's Collective and On the Run. Image courtesy of Julia Tieke.

Part of the reason for this positioning of the art school is the lack of other local art institutions in Pakistan, and, because of the art sector's small economy, teaching is the only waged labour available for local artists. Besides being one of the only sources of income for local artists, the art school is also the main point of access to the global art community. In this sense the art school, in collaboration with international capital, wields an extraordinary amount of power in shaping the politics and aesthetics of the Pakistani cultural sphere – not only influencing, shaping and policing the practices of its students but also those of the main body of practising artists in the country at any given time. In the postcolonial era, having been taken over by a comprador class, the art school thus remains the main mechanism in the reproduction of a creative labour that is trained in discourses and skills which service the neo-colonial project, performing a colonial educational function to this day.

### **Stepping Outside the Academy**

In May 2007, Sabeen Mahmud founded The Second Floor (T2F), a community space and café in Karachi. In an essay titled 'Creative Karachi: Establishing an Arts & Culture Centre for the World's Most Rapidly Growing City' she wrote about the political moment in which the space emerged:

By the mid 2000s, consumed by my awareness of the military-industrial complex, I was getting increasingly restless. Karachi was a cesspool of chaos, "clean-up operations", and fragmentation. People were leaving in droves, our politicians continued to make promises they had no intention of fulfilling, and the country lurched from one military dictatorship to another. (Mahmud, 2013: n. pag.)

The immensity of the gap within artistic discourse that Mahmud's community space set out to address only became visible once T2F was there. Lectures, talks, panels, film screenings, poetry readings, music performances, dance performances, theatre, yoga and rehearsals all began to flourish. T2F offered a café in which designers could work, leftists collaborate and organise, medical students meet for study dates, and queer kids could build a community. Sabeen's writings on the inception of T2F constantly

evoke the sense of non-being, the other-ness of time, in a devastated city; what she calls a sense of hopelessness [that had] engulfed the city. All my friends had gone to university abroad and had chosen not to return. I began to wonder why I was wasting “the best years of my life” (Mahmud, 2013: n. pag.). At that time Karachi was a city under occupation from its own military, which its people were leaving in droves. In fact, T2F was conceived in the days Sabeen spent waiting for a visa to arrive that would allow her to move to India – in that zone of non-being, or transition, or perhaps that moment when you feel the most grounded, the most surrendered to your nation state, this particular space emerged. Sabeen’s T2F is located unequivocally in Karachi: it is of Karachi, and could not have been established anywhere else.

T2F emerged in the post-9/11 period during the ‘war on terror’, at a time when a voracious desire for knowledge and cultural production from Pakistan was surging in Western art and academic spheres. Yet the context in which Sabeen understands the founding of T2F is unequivocally local – as was the work of T2F and its audience, the local community that it served. T2F established itself at a time when Pakistani art and knowledge was in flight, being exported to the metropolises of other countries – but Sabeen stayed and T2F grew its roots deep. This was not a space of native informants: rather it presented itself as the first space that native informants would stop off at on their trips back to Pakistan, which made them feel both relevant and at home. T2F’s programming was diverse, perhaps directly in proportion to the discursive gap its artistic community space was intended to fill; and it was rare to hear Sabeen shut down any ideas. Looking back, those of us in the Left who often dismissed T2F as liberal in its politics, its collaborations and its lack of curation, arguably mistook the radical openness of the space for a liberal openness.

It should be noted, however, that T2F was not the first of such projects in Karachi. The precedent for critically engaged radical, intellectual and cultural work has existed at the margins of this city (as well as at the margins of academia) for decades. In spaces like OPP-RTI and the Syed Hashmi Reference Library, research and the production of knowledge is undertaken directly in the service of autonomy and self-determination. Here the project of knowledge production becomes inextricably

linked to a larger project of liberation and community building. The Syed Hashmi Reference Library was founded in 2005 by the scholar Saba Dashtiyari (who was subsequently murdered) in response to state colonisation and marginalisation of Balochi languages and local knowledges. It is simultaneously a library, an archive, a community space, a publishing house and a pedagogical space for the production and dissemination of dissident knowledges – placing it directly in opposition to, and in defiance of, the Pakistani national project to enact the erasure and denial of Baloch culture and its claims to nationhood. The space survived Dashtiyari's murder by state agencies in 2011, and continues the project today under the auspices of librarian and poet Ghulam Rasool Kalmatti. The library is always packed with young Baloch scholars and researchers. It regularly hosts Balochi language workshops and courses, and publishes, translates and archives Balochi literature throughout the year. A small, two-storey building, its rooms are stacked to the brim with an ever-increasing collection of books, manuscripts and pamphlets – from hardcovers held together by tape to lovingly sourced photocopies. Among the spaces it provides for dissident study is a room housing Saba Dashtiyari's own personal library: frozen in time, replete with incomplete manuscripts, letters and his personal collection of photographs and posters. Framed on the wall, above shelves overflowing with books on all kinds of subjects from Balochi poetry to communist literature, hang the blood-stained clothes that Saba Dashtiyari died in. Just as the space archives Balochi literature it thus also catalogues the costs of such political work – a reminder of what is at stake in the struggles and conflicts over the production, preservation and ownership of knowledge and history that play out in pedagogical spaces within and outside the university.

Similarly, Parveen Rehman's Orangi Pilot Project Research & Training Institute (OPP-RTI) works to resist state marginalisation of vulnerable communities in Karachi through its methodology of 'action research' – a model of engaged, immersive, politically transformative research based on community participation. Through research and mapmaking, OPP-RTI documents and legitimises marginal communities' claims to land in a city run by corrupt and relentless

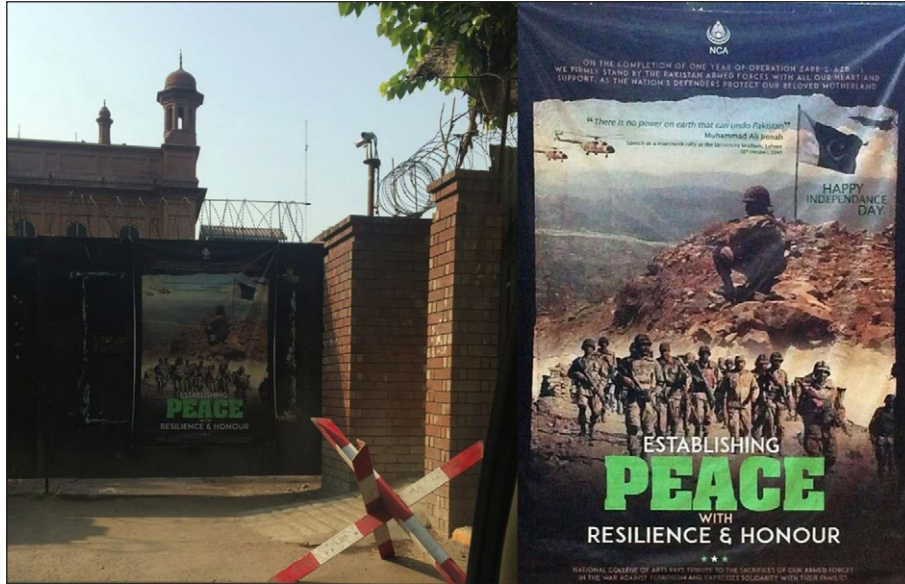
land mafias, producing a countervisuality of Karachi that threatens the status quo. Their work towards the regularisation of informal settlements in the city places OPP-RTI directly on the frontlines. In a 2011 interview Parveen described the space in Orangi in which she and her colleagues carried out their research and training:

We are sitting in the midst of fire. This is the place where maximum – June, July, August – everyday that we would try to come to office we did not know whether we would reach safely or go home safely... Except like 1–2 days, every day. We would be sitting here, maybe there's a guest coming in: "There's firing, severe firing" and then we'd get all – there's also fear. There's a lot of fear...I think the important thing is if you are scared, if you get scared – that's a strategy – then you've had it. But for us, we've been working here ages. We said, "all you can do is kill us, yeah? What else can you do? So kill us. We're not afraid of you. I think that is important". (Parveen cited in Desmukh, 2013: n. pag.)

OPP-RTI's physical location in the city, as well as their political location in producing a counter-discourse, places the group directly in the crossfire of one of the primary conflicts ravaging the city: conflict over land. In this sense their political and physical locations are inextricably linked, informing each other. In the case of the Syed Hashmi Reference Library, location is also both significant as well as poignant – the library is situated in the historically Baloch area of Malir, which has now largely been usurped to make space for an army cantonment. The geographic location of spaces such as the Syed Hashmi Reference Library and the OPP-RTI thus reifies the political position of a community under occupation: and works both to assert as well as articulate their existence.

## Conclusion

Back in Lahore, the state's agenda for disseminating soft power through art schools is evident at the National College of Arts (NCA), where the Film and Television Department is working for the Inter Services Public Relations, the PR wing for the Pakistani



**Figure 4:** Outside the gates of the National College of Arts, Lahore. Photograph taken by the authors.

military, on a new marketing campaign. This collusion with the military and intelligence agencies is visible on the surfaces of the department's walls – which have been plastered with NCA-made posters voicing support for the most recent military operation in the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas), as well as nationalist installations of images commemorating army 'martyrs' through the many years of war (Fig. 4). In this way, art education and art production is co-opted for visualising dominant state narratives that sustain existing colonial orders within the militarised nation of Pakistan.

Art schools and other universities thus continue to be mobilised for the production of discourses and subjectivities that maintain first colonial, and subsequently neo-colonial, configurations of global power. However, in the same way that sites of knowledge production, especially when institutionalised, can become sites for the perpetuation of systems and structures of governance, surveillance, colonialism, class rule, and alienation, they can also be turned into sites of refusal, sites for the reappropriation of the tools of ideology, and sites for the production of counter discourses, subversion of knowledges and the production of new radical

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The National College of Art, one of Pakistan's foremost and oldest art institutions, declaring on their barbed wire and barrier fortified gates, support for the brutal and deadly army operation that has killed and displaced millions, destroyed homes, villages and communities, and failed even one year later to rehabilitate massive amounts of refugees. This sinister and opportunistic support of the military establishment is what lies behind the art world's facades of progressivism.

subjectivities. These sites of knowledge (counter-)production are spaces of struggle, forged in conflict and demanding high stakes for all who participate within them (Caffentzis & Federici, 2009).

Alternative pedagogical spaces in the city exist not as a withdrawal from the university project, but as spaces that directly intervene and disrupt the institution-alised colonial modes of knowledge production, dissemination and circulation. They provide us with alternate pedagogical environments and critical methodologies that often situate these spaces in direct opposition to the state. As the neoliberalised universities continue to barricade themselves in from the dangers of the city's volatile streets and public spaces, giving in to surveillance and policing, these alternative pedagogical spaces are visibly becoming the battlegrounds of ideology. As arts educators, our own investment in exploring the politics of these spaces should not position us as bystanders but as practitioners deeply entrenched in the university project and seeking a fugitive path.

We started the Karachi Art Anti-University in a moment when the entanglements of the art school and military-state were laid bare to us. In a country where the national art school is undertaking the PR campaign for the military's latest armed intervention on its own people, and where the cultural field is saturated with imperialist war money, we felt an urgent need to disrupt these imperial modes of knowledge production. Through KAAU, we seek to politicise art education and create new radical pedagogies and art practices. KAAU functions as a nomadic and non-hierarchical space for shared learning, where our open sessions shift between different public spaces to allow relative freedom to engage in political critique and collectively explore possibilities for the politicisation of art in the institution and the city. Radical pedagogies that were formulated and practised in the alternative spaces of community organisations such as T2F, OPP-RTI and SHRL have been crucial for our project, to equip us with strategies that help us to address the chronic erasures at the heart of the imperial university project. As global knowledge and culture infrastructures make ever stronger demands on us to speak, to produce, and to render our populations transparent – we must look in different directions beyond the gated walls of the university apparatus. We must formulate new languages, new

methodologies, new spaces and networks of solidarity, and new alliances within, and beyond, the university.

### Competing Interests

Both authors have worked with, and engaged closely with, many of the organisations mentioned in this article. We are founders of the Karachi Art Anti-University. We are adjunct faculty at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture. SR has also been visiting faculty at Karachi University. We have both organised and participated in events at The Second Floor. We have also collaborated with Orangi Pilot Project, Syed Hashmi Reference Library and the Karachi Indigenous Rights Alliance as part of our work with Karachi Art Anti-University.

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