

NAKED PUNCH

AN ENGAGED REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND THOUGHT

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FAZAL BALOCH

MUBARAK QAZI

HAZARAN RAHIM DAD

MIKE LEIGH

FEATURING A DOSSIER ON THE BALOCHISTAN MOVEMENT



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Poem by Shankha Ghosh

Translation and comment by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Art by Anwar Saeed - Evening of the restless spirits II, 2025, Acrylics on Fabric on Plywood (24 X 36 inches)

EARTH

SHANKHA GHOSH



This magnolia bloomed with just my hand's affection
Any grass held just my foot's print in flesh
Ajay's water woke up alongside no one but me
Dropped yet again with only my glance's touch.
On broken pillar at noon in that cornered hall
My breath alone let pigeons raise their voice
At Mahfil's end in this free field past Sal woods
by my side it was that the puja-start moon lay still.
My foot was also gripped with all your steps
You never knew, never looked back to see
Now look both ways all the bridges are broken
If now you tell me to leave what place do I go?

Dusk-colored scaffold, muezzin calls a little way off,
Sitting on this stoop, I think the world's my guest
The firecode still wants tests
that this earth's mine how prove that fact before them all.

Within the tremendous destruction of citizenship in India today – through the deployment of such absurd acts such as the Citizenship Amendment Act, or instruments such as the National Citizen's Register, geared to the Islamophobic goal of constituting India as a Hindu nation, that lie behind the events in the name of which I speak, a poem written by Sankha Ghosh more than a decade ago has re-asserted its power for this future: "Mati" or "Earth." I remind the reader of Marx's conviction that revolutionary content comes from the poetry of the future.

The protagonist of "Mati" is de-human in our sense – not just– a victim, but a carrier of the essence of democracy – other people. You will hear it in the line translated "the world is my guest" – duniya amar mehman – toward the end of the poem. Sankha was a caste-Hindu. By line 7 you realize, with the word "mahfil," that he is speaking as a Muslim. And, right at the end, bringing in the metaphor of society as a trial by fire where the protagonist would have to prove a relationship to the earth in open court, there is a distinct feminization of the poem's voice as a Muslim Sita, on fire trial by Ram, the king of Modern India. There is a sal forest in the poem, and a mention of the river Ajay. This is an area where I have been active for a few decades, even when Sankha was composing his poem.

Sankha's protagonist is not representative. She is no part of the large and ceaseless number of asylum seekers and labor for export that is produced by the conjuncture. She is not looking for citizenship as a protection rather than a set of rights, within a collectivity, but claiming citizenship as the world's host, attempting to reclaim the ordinary, experience of the impossible in the literary.

NOTES TO MYSELF AND MY OTHER PRIVILEGED FRIENDS MONICA DOGRA

Here are some things that I haven't been able to deny, when I check in with myself;

I was lying in bed unable to sleep
And I remembered
The intro of this song
My friend DJ Zakham used to play
at an underground party,
called Mutiny in New York City;
"AZADI KIS NEY LA-KAR DI HY?"
I know, it's questionable, my Hindi,
I remember asking my dad, "Papi,
what does that mean?"

See what's unique about my perspective
As a privileged person in India
Is that in my birth country my upbringing, was not;
Here I am Hindu, and in many ways
a part of the majority,
But there I was first generation, one
of the first and only Indians in the
town I was raised in;
Also, I grew up with rampant racism,
So, at parties like Mutiny
People like me
Othered Unaccepted
Heart-opened we'd gather,
Asians, South Asians, Jamaicans,
Haitians!

We'd dance at venues like the
'frying pan' – in celebration of
radical expression,
We had an obligation – to be so
loud with our fringe identities,
Then, phrases like holding space
or creating space,
Those phrases didn't exist
We were smack in the middle of
times
Trying to prove that who we were
Was legitimate!

Papi replied:
"Who brought you this freedom?"

Since, I have become a loving
participating
Citizen of India,
I have learnt some hard truths,
One that just won't erase itself
From my memory;
I lived in a village where rents
were lower
We often would not have water,
Mind you! I lived in one of the
wealthiest metros,
But often we were one of those
without,
Electricity, Running water,

One internet connection illegally
split between every single neighbor;
So, what was the answer?
When I was seeking a way, to shower
and do the dishes,
Amidst the schedule of a manic
multi-tasker;
To Install an illegal pump,
To make sure my tank is filled, before
the rest of the town's
Poor people's tanks were filled,
was the solution,
Suggested to me not only by the
plumber!
But also surrounding good Samaritan
folks in the society!
Why? Coz that's what everyone
does
Are there any other options?
None that won't take you year upon
year to tackle
And the government doesn't really
have a history of actually listening
to its people!
So, thoughts like 'greater good'-are
not really a part of our patterns,
No! We figure out what solves
things for us!
Forget about causing a ruckus-and
healing the root of the issue,
A. No, No, that'll take too long!
B. It'll probably never happen be-

cause
C. The ones who ought to have
civic responsibility
Are too busy being wealthy o care!
And often it seems too large to be
able to systematically breakdown
And improve,
So, what's the use?
I know I paid for the pump and I got
on with my life
And now for the first time I look
back
And now I, regret it;

AZADI KIS NEY LA-KAR DI HY?
Who gave me this freedom?

How much can we fight? What is
the real destination?
Can't tell you how many times I've
seen brilliant artists and innovators
Vent their frustrations, about the
end goal just being
To leave this country behind!
Because it doesn't get any better
and
An eye for an eye and the whole
world goes blind!
So, what have been our solutions?
What possible endeavor,
Could heal, could appeal,
To transforming this collective consciousness,

Gayatri C. Spivak is a scholar, literary theorist, educationist and critic. She is based between the United States and India. A “practical Marxist-Feminist-Deconstructionist”, Prof. Spivak has contributed heavily to Postcolonial, Feminist, Subaltern, Deconstructionist and Marxist theory with important texts including the “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, her translation of Derrida’s “De La Grammatologie”, “Selected Subaltern Studies”, “Woman in Difference” and “A Note on the New International”. As a scholar and educator, she has influenced “tens of thousands of activists and scholars” and continues to do so.

Sankha Ghosh was a poet and critic from India. Born in Bengal, he studied there for his higher education and then taught at various institutions, mainly in Bengal but also in other states. He is known as one of the five literary

figures who transformed contemporary Bengali literature and was the recipient of several prestigious awards including Hall of Fame Life Achievement Award by the World Forum for Journalists and Writers, and the Jnanpith Award by the government of India. He left this world last April after testing positive for Covid-19 and suffering from several comorbidities.

Oscar Guardiola-Rivera is a Colombian philosopher, scholar, writer and activist. He teaches International Law and Globalization and is the Assistant Dean of the School of Law at the University of London, Birkbeck. He is the author of “What If Latin America Ruled the World”, which won the Frantz Fanon Prize by the Caribbean Philosophical Association, and the critically-acclaimed “Being Against the World: Rebellion and Constitution”. His forth-

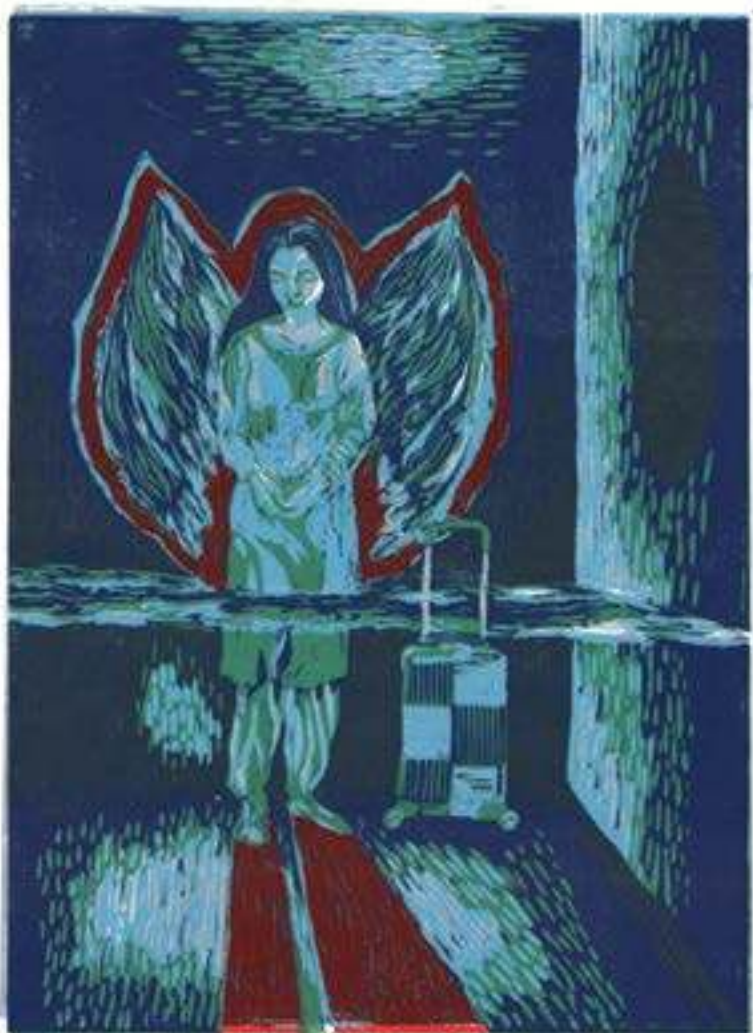
coming book is a poetic novel titled “Night of the World”. He is on the Editorial Board of Naked Punch Review, among other journals.

Monica Dogra is an actress, musician and poet based in the U.S. and India. She holds a Bachelors in Music from New York University and is the co-founder of the electronic rock band/duo Shaa’ir+Func. She has released 6 albums so far proving her mettle both as a singer and writer/poet. Although she had first appeared in a minor role in the 2008 movie Rock On, she made her Bollywood debut in a leading role in the 2011 movie Dhobi Ghat and has since worked in 5 other feature films as well as the recently released web series “The Married Woman”.

Hazaran Rahim Dad is a Balochistan-based feature story writer. She holds an MA in English Literature from the University of Karachi. Her work builds on lives of Baloch amidst war, violence, enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killings in Pakistan.

Ivana Hoffman was just 19 when she died in a battle against ISIS in Northern Syria. Comrade Ivana was an internationalist and a member of Turkish-Kurdish communist group Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP). She was martyred fighting for people’s freedom, for humanity and she is the symbol of women’s power against fascist forces. She lives in our revolutionary struggle.

Mike Leigh is a multiple academy-award



Acquire enough wealth to bypass
archaic laws that ought to be re-
vised!
Why?
Because that has been the word
from the wise!

When we raise our voices,
They shut down our webs-the in-
ternet is
The nuclear warfare of the youth!

We communicate to each other,
Our truths;
This way, we bypass the censor
boards that control what we watch,
This way, we access each other with
our hunger to live,
In a nation that is
Secular!
Where we are welcomed for
Our Diversity

AZADI KIS NEY LA-KAR DI HY?

If only we knew the richness of our
country’s history!
But here, we are now,
It is a critical time,
And we are being treated like hav-
ing a voice is committing a crime;

So, we are obligated-to ask-that
pivotal question!
Do we want to live in a world,
Where freedoms only go to those
who can afford them?
Or can we be a people who care for
our brethren?
Diving to the foundations,
The beauty of the preamble of In-
dia’s constitution,

AZADI KIS NEY LA-KAR DI HY?

“We, The people of India
Having solemnly resolved to con-
stitute India into a
Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Dem-
ocratic Republic;
And to secure for each of its citi-
zens,
Justice – Economic and Political,
Liberty of Thought, Belief and Wor-
ship,
Equality, of status, and of opportu-
nity,
And to promote among them all,
Fraternity,
Assuring the dignity of the indi-
vidual,
And the unity and integrity of the
nation”;

AZADI KIS NEY LA-KAR DI HY?

winning filmmaker based in the UK. He is known for films focusing on the British working-class and for period/historical films. Most of his films and plays involve development of the script through collaborative rehearsals with actors. Some of his most well-known films include *Secrets & Lies* (1996), *Peterloo* (2018), *Happy-Go-Lucky* (2008) and *Another Year* (2010). He has served as the Chairman of the London Film School for 18 years and is also a Fellow of the British Film Institute.



We dedicate this issue to our art director, Sadaf Chughtai, and our consulting editor, Peter Weibel. With their love in our hearts and in the memory of their many virtues we continue:



**Peter Weibel
March 5th, 1944-
March 1st, 2023**

**Sadaf Chughtai
1979 – May 8th,
2021**



THE ODYSSEY OF “NAKO” MAYAR AND HIS FAMILY

These aren't roads in the true sense—they are raw, rough, uneven tracks, where every bump tests your patience and endurance. In some places, signs of ongoing construction appear, but they offer little hope to the weary traveler.

I had heard of “Nako” (Uncle) Mayar, who was looking for his missing son and to write his story I had to travel to the village Gilli in Tehsil Buleda. Buleda Tehsil is a peripheral region in an already peripheral province of Balochistan surrounded by mountains on all sides. It is located about 45 to 50 kilometers north of the capital city district, Kech, with a challenging, mountainous road.

A small village, Gilli, is one of the most underdeveloped areas in the region, lacking electricity, roads, and mobile network coverage. Educationally, it stands out as one of the least literate areas in Tehsil Buleda. Government schools are nearly non-functional, and private schools have been burned three times, further hampering educational development in the area. Economically, the area can be categorized into three main groups: a small number of labor migrants working in Gulf countries, limited agricultural activity, and the dominant reliance on border token systems for monthly income. Due to

the lack of markets and reliable communication systems for agricultural goods, brokers or third parties manipulate prices, which discourages people from relying on agriculture. As a result, many have turned to temporary income from the border token system.

The journey from Turbat to Buleda, a route that should ideally take half an hour, stretches far longer due to the poor condition of the roads. These aren't roads in the true sense—they are raw, rough, uneven tracks, where every bump tests your patience and endurance. In some places, signs of ongoing construction appear, but they offer little hope to the weary traveler.

As you drive, you notice more than 13 military checkpoints perched atop the surrounding mountains, their connecting roads branching off the main route. These checkpoints dominate the landscape. For first-time travelers, navigating this route is fraught with uncertainty. It's easy to take a wrong turn towards one

of these checkpoints, and in such a scenario, the consequences can be daunting. Without any mobile network coverage until you reach Soorap, travelers must rely on chance—waiting for another vehicle to pass by to confirm the correct path.

Midway through the journey, you come across a Zamyad (vehicle) stranded near a mountain. Two women stand beside it, their faces marked with exhaustion. The vehicle has broken down, and with no phone network, the driver is left waiting for another traveler to offer help. It's a scene that encapsulates the harsh realities of this region—an area where isolation and a lack of infrastructure turn minor inconveniences into significant crises.

When you finally reach Soorap, you get a brief glimmer of network, signaling your entry into the region of Buleda. However, the network fades away as you continue your journey forward. The road's condition improves only slightly, and while the network





returns briefly, there's no internet, and it vanishes entirely once you move past Soorap. What should have been a simple 30-minute drive has now stretched to an hour and a half. The delay is not just frustrating but also indicative of how much the lack of basic infrastructure has held the region back.

For those traveling onward to the Gili area of Buleda or Menaz, the ordeal continues. The road—if it can even be called that—reverts to being a rough, shaky path. One glance at the terrain reveals another looming threat: the devastation caused by rainfall. The plains would flood entirely, making travel impossible and cutting off entire communities from the outside world.

To reach Gili, one must pass through several other areas. These areas too are shrouded in isolation, and as the sun sets, the entire region of Buleda becomes eerily calm. The bazaar shuts down, and residents retreat indoors unless an emergency forces them out.

The journey itself is arduous. Suffocating clouds of dust seep into the car, even with the windows tightly closed. Traveling at night presents a different kind of challenge. Dust kicked up by the vehicle hovers in front of the headlights, obscuring the view. In those moments, you can't help but hold your breath, hoping no oncoming bike or car appears out of the haze.

Infrastructure is non-existent. There are no hospitals, no reliable roads. A local traveling with us summed up the plight of the region, saying, "They didn't give us roads, but at least they could have built a hospital. On these shaky paths, if a pregnant woman needs help, it's nearly impossible to take her to Turbat. Every bump becomes unbearable."

Traveling from Soorap Buleda to Menaz, Alandoor, and finally Gili reveals a landscape of dust-covered homes, palm trees, "Drug-Free Buleda" chalkings fading on the walls, and military camps. The roads—or rather, the lack of them—are the greatest challenge. Without a local guide, losing your way is almost inevitable. Even at night, locals themselves often struggle to navigate the confusing routes, making the journey even longer compared to daytime.

As you pass through the villages, it becomes clear that the distance between areas isn't the issue. A drive from one point to the next should take only 15 to 20 minutes. Yet, the absence of proper roads stretches this to over an hour. Adding to the difficulty is the lack of network coverage, which makes finding specific houses even more challenging.

Once you finally reach Gili, you stop at a small shop to ask for directions to an old man named "Nako" Mayar. The shopkeeper's response is immediate: "The one whose son is missing?" You nod,

and they point you toward his home.

Mayar's residence is unmistakable—a single mud hut with a small kitchen beside, shaded by a solitary tree. As you approach, you step into the modest, dusty hut, where Mayar's story quietly awaits.

Stepping into the hut, the first thing that catches your eye is a newly furnished motorcycle. On its back, a picture is displayed prominently - featuring Dr. Mahrang, and Sammi Deen. The cracked, muddy walls of the hut tell their own story, but your attention is drawn upward to a makeshift mud shelf. It holds a few glasses and plates, and nestled among them is a small framed photograph labeled Fateh Mayar. Surrounding the picture are five medal-like cups, their metallic gleam softened by dust.

Noticing your gaze, Nako Mayar smiles faintly and says, "There used to be more - over a dozen. But the rest were taken by the naughty children in the village."

Nako Mayar is a 74-year-old shepherd who spent decades herding goats and sheep to support his wife, Paryatoon, and their five children. However, everything changed on June 14, 2023, and now his 14-year-old son, Shajan, has taken over the herd. Mayar abandoned his herd, and Shajan left his school, all for the same reason: Fateh.

Fateh, Mayar's eldest son, completed his matriculation through private exams at Alandoor Government Primary School, which lacked proper schooling facilities. Earlier, he had studied up to class 5 at Saach School Gili Campus, a private school established by a local businessman in Buleda. The school offered free education to deserving and underprivileged students, and Fateh was one of them.

After school, Fateh would tutor junior students at the same school. He would return home around 2 o'clock, and after having lunch, he would teach other children at his house. The small amount of money he earned from teaching served as his pocket money.

In his native town, Fateh was known as a sensible, serious, and hardworking child. He often helped other children with their studies, earning their respect and admiration. Fateh made his pocket money by tutoring students, and even after school, he continued teaching children at home without charging them.

According to his mother, Fateh never stepped outside the house premises after sunset, nor did he ever indulge in fun or other activities. "I have always seen him immersed in his books," she recalls.

One day, during a function at Saach School, Fateh delivered a speech on creating a drug-free Buleda. His words left a lasting impression, earning praise from both the school principal and the

school's owner.

A week after the program, the school announced that it would take 15 bright students on an all-Pakistan tour. Being one of the brightest students, Fateh was asked by the principal to nominate two friends to join him, and he gladly did so.

Excited about the trip, Fateh told his mother to pack his clothes. She gathered them and placed them in a shopper (plastic). Seeing this, Fateh hesitated and said, "I'm going to the city on an all-Pakistan tour. If my clothes are in a shopper, people will laugh at me." He then urged his mother to borrow a bag from a neighbor. However, she replied softly, "I would be ashamed to ask the neighbors for a bag."

Instead, she handed Fateh two thousand rupees from her own savings and suggested he use the money he had saved from teaching. Fateh had already saved two thousand rupees, which was just enough to buy a bag.

"I have enough money now! I'll also buy a pair of sandals for father—Eid is near," Fateh said eagerly.

Fateh, along with his two friends, Shay Mureed and Abdullah—whom he had nominated for the trip—headed to Turbat City for their shopping. They bought the necessary items for the tour, including a bag for Fateh. Afterward, they went to the house of one of their friend's uncles to eat a meal. Once they had eaten, they prepared to return to Buleda.

"Curse upon me for allowing him to get an education... or else he would never have disappeared." And God's wrath upon those forces who took him away from me." fighting for yourself and other women, it brings out something powerful in you.

As they got ready to leave, one friend started the bike, another opened the gate, and Fateh stood waiting outside. Suddenly, a white Toyota Corolla car arrived, and someone inside signaled for Fateh to come closer. Thinking they needed help, Fateh approached the car. Though at a short distance, three Frontier Corps vehicles were stationed. However, as the car window rolled down, Fateh sensed danger and turned to run back to his friends. Before he could get away, Frontier Corps personnel arrived and apprehended Fateh. His friends protested, asking why he was being abducted, but the Frontier Corps detained and enforcedly disappeared them as well.

After seven days, both Abdullah and Shay Mureed were released and returned to Buleda, but Fateh

never came back.

Paryatoon, his mother, now weary and feeble, sits in her old, faded Balochi doch. The once-vivid embroidery has dulled, covered in dust. Haunted by regret, she murmurs, "I wish I had set my embarrassment aside and gone to ask for a bag. At least I wouldn't have lost my son." Tears well up in her eyes as her voice falters under the weight of her grief.

"I used to collect 10 rupees and sometimes even borrow, just to let Fateh get an education," Nako Mayar expressed, with a loud cry shaking anyone's conscience. "Curse upon me for allowing him to get an education... or else he would never have disappeared." And God's wrath upon those forces who took him away from me."

His wife then tells him not to curse anyone. "My flesh and bones curse them," he replies, his voice breaking with a loud burst of cry. Anyone sitting around him would feel the weight of guilt from hearing his cries, or they would be moved to tears themselves.

"May they rot the way they have rotted my old heart," he says, his voice cracking with pain as he wipes his tears with his Balochi chador.

Nako Mayar says he doesn't know whether his son is alive or dead. "It's been 18 months, and no one has provided me with any information about him," he says, his voice heavy with despair. "His two friends who were released told me nothing except that they were in separate cells but could hear each other's voices in the dark."

Fateh was just 16 years old when he was forcibly disappeared. He didn't have a CNIC as he was under 18 and only had a B-form. "Though he grew a beard early

and looked older than his age, he was still just a boy," says Nako Mayar.

Soon after Fateh's enforced disappearance, Nako Mayar went to Bit, Buleda's police station, but his son's disappearance case was not filed.

Whenever a person is released, whether in Turbat or Buleda, Nako Mayar visits them at any cost. Whether he can afford the travel or not, he somehow manages to go and ask about his son. "I ask them if they have seen him, and knowing it's very dark there, I ask if they have at least heard his voice. They always say, 'No.'"

When Balach Mola Baksh was killed in a fake encounter in 2023 by Counter Terrorism Department (CTD), the old man borrowed money from his neighbors and went to Turbat, fearing they might do the same to his son and joined Baloch Yakjehti Committee's sit-in at Turbat.

"They were all saying that a long march would be carried out across Balochistan and then to Islamabad," Nako Mayar recalls. "I told them, 'I only have 2,000 rupees; how will I manage to march to Islamabad with you?' They said, 'Nako, you just come with us, don't worry about travel expenses.' So I went to Islamabad and returned with the same 2,000 rupees."

As soon as the Baloch Yakjehti Committee's march reached at Tool Plaza Islamabad, they were stopped by a heavy presence of Islamabad Police. The police didn't allow them to proceed to the press club and started beating and arresting the marchers,





including women, children, and men. Amidst the chaos, a student arrived with a taxi and took Nako Mayar to the Islamabad press club, where other families of missing persons were already protesting.

Then the police stormed the press club as well. "Above all, they scattered the tent and threw it upon us. We all fell on top of each other; we didn't know who was falling on whom—men, women, and children were all trapped under the tent. We were helpless," Nako Mayar remembers.

"According to our Baloch tradition, we men respect women and always try to protect them," Nako Mayar says. "But here, we could do nothing. They fell upon us, and the women were dragged and arrested while we watched in shock, helpless."

It was the first time Nako Mayar had stepped outside of Turbat, now finding himself in the capital of Pakistan for the safe release of his son. "I saw women being beaten, their chadors falling to the ground, and the police stepping on them. At that moment, I wished the Earth would open up and swallow me whole... My eyes couldn't bear this humiliation."

When the police used water tankers in the cold weather of Islamabad, showering the protesters, Nako Mayar still couldn't believe

his eyes. He remembered leaving his children and wife all alone, believing that in Islamabad, their loved ones would be released, and their voices would be heard. "We were so hopeful, and upon reaching, they dismissed all the hopes of us poor people who had never stepped outside of our homes before," he says with a heavy heart.

He remembered that in the middle of facing the freezing cold water, he was shivering to the point of collapse. Most of the people were arrested, and more police vans were on their way to make further arrests. At that moment, a police officer noticed Nako Mayar and asked a nearby Baloch student who was helping him. Though Nako Mayar didn't understand Urdu, the student later told him what had been said. The officer had asked why old people like him were there. The student replied, "Their loved ones are missing."

Nako Mayar reflects, "They don't even know that our people are disappeared, and that's why we have come this far. Or else who would leave their homes behind, travel so far in this freezing winter, and endure such treatment?" As soon as the student relayed those words to Nako Mayar, he too was arrested.

"I was amazed at what was happening. I didn't know what to do. I saw the police arresting women, students, and children, throwing

them into the police buses."

In the midst of the chaos, two Baloch students managed to take Nako Mayar to an apartment. Afterward, the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) set up its camp in front of the Islamabad Press Club. "The camp lasted for a long time; we sat through cold days and nights, but nothing happened."

This was not the only protest he participated in. He has been part of various protest camps in front of the Turbat Deputy Commissioner's office and Fida Chowk. The last time they set up a camp was in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office in July 2024. On the 25th of July, an FC officer and Hothman, the district chairman of Kech, assured them that if they called off the sit-in, their sons would be released. "But I believe it was a deliberate attempt to stop us from joining the Baloch National Gathering," he said.

During the July sit-in, the children, men, and women endured various skin diseases due to the scorching heat of Turbat. "We would faint, stay awake the whole night and day because of the heat waves, but nothing happened. May the torment of our hearts fall upon those who play with our pain," he expressed.

"Fateh was a sensible child," Paryatoon says, tears welling in her eyes. "He would never step outside the house after sunset, nor

had he ever been out of the city. His only fault was that he wanted to help us by getting an education." She pauses, her voice trembling. "One day, one of Fateh's friends asked me what kind of magic I had done to him, that he never indulged in any bad habits or addiction. I just smiled and felt proud."

Now, Mayar carries the guilt of not taking Fateh to herd goats and instead encouraging his education. His mother, Paryatoon, regrets not asking the neighbors for a bag. His brother, Shahjan, blames himself for not stopping Fateh when he saw him delivering a speech against the drug mafias, fully aware of how powerful those people are. Together, they recall every little detail of Fateh's life, clinging to their memory. In their small, humble hut, Fateh lives on through a framed photo surrounded by the small trophies he had proudly won in school competitions.

Fateh Mayer was finally released after 828 days.



THE BIRTH OF NECROPOLITICS: HOW THE RIYASAT OF PAKISTAN GOVERNS BALOCHISTAN

On a late summer evening, my eyes vary from life itself; it's often the case, a cloudy malady. I was on the hunt for writers on Balochistan when I came across a blog by a journalist. It was 2013, the blog was called Terra Incognita. I read the biographical note on the blog first:

Sajid Hussain Baloch

A journalist trying to tell some of the events of an untold story from terra incognita, Balochistan. After working for Daily Times and The News International for six years, I now work as a freelance journalist, contributing articles for newspapers and news agencies. I mainly cover the war-torn region of Balochistan. Wartorn and terra incognita, Balochistan was in 2013 and is so today.

The Baloch live in Balochistan, which today is a province in Pakistan; they also live in Iran (in a province called Sistan-Balochistan) and many in Afghanistan. One tribe in the 1920s, inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution and Lenin, moved to Central Asia, fought on the Red side in the civil war, and they settled and live there. Like the Kurds, with whom there is a historical relation, the end of European empires left them divided between nations, without one to call their own. This was not the case at the time of Partition of India. The Baloch had a state, named Kalat State.

In 1947 Pakistan and India came to form new states that had no prior historical existence, but Kalat State simply reverted to self-rule of the pre-British period.

The Baloch, since the 1930s, had been preparing for the departure of the British and had a considerable Jacobin population that fought and won a written constitution and parliamentary system with an upper and lower house and a symbolic head of state in the Khan of Kalat (the Khan of Kalat had been the ruler of confederate Balochistan before the British conquest).

Kalat State in 1947 was unique in South Asia for having founded a constitutional system that shared power between the different class groupings. They had come to a settlement on the internal order of society and each group had decided to share power - something still not achieved in Pakistan. The constitution kept the Khan of Kalat happy with symbolic power as head of state; it kept

Guerrilla warfare, or "taking to the mountain," has been an ancient and persistent form of rebellion by the Baloch and continues today.





Families of Baloch missing people protesting for their release.

the sardars (mostly British loyalists) happy with a place in the upper house of parliament; but the Jacobin socialists wrestled for the first time power for themselves in an elected lower house. Nowhere else in the former British Empire was there a Jacobin constitution worked out, settled upon, and operating with consensus of the population in 1947. Neighbouring Pakistan, led by Governor-General Jinnah, liked neither the Baloch constitution—it set a bad precedent—nor the Jacobin socialist Baloch and least of all the independence of Kalat State. In March 1948, the Pakistani army made its way inside Kalat State and Jinnah strong-armed the Khan of Kalat to sign a treaty of accession. While the Baloch had political idealism and intellectual ability, they lacked the cunning of Odysseus or the overdeveloped military of Pakistan.

Not wanting, in the words of the Khan of Kalat, “a fraternal war,” the Khan gave up sovereignty and signed a treaty of accession of Kalat State to Pakistan against the vote of both houses of parlia-

ment. Jinnah put an end to Kalat State’s democratic traditions and started ruling as governor-general and sent out Pakistani political agents to rule different parts of Balochistan—just as the British had. Since 1948, Balochistan has been ruled from the outside by the Pakistani army and state. The Baloch have seen their gas, coastline, gold, copper, and land taken for a dime. The loot comes about and is maintained with a superstructure of violence all too common in the Third World.

Balochistan is terra incognita, indeed, and with all such spaces it is made so. The history noted above isn’t taught or known, books that talk about it are banned, primary sources kept behind lock and key, Baloch intellectuals murdered and journalists likewise.

That night, I read every article on Sajid’s page, every sentence, and many paragraphs a few times. I even lingered at the generic WordPress blog menu, hoping to find more words of Sajid. There was beauty and weight to the articles, and some paragraphs car-

ried themselves as whole stories, like Eduardo Galeano’s writing. Sajid wrote stories of people of Balochistan with a literary slant of Gabriel García Márquez. The chain of influence on Sajid’s writing was clear to me; it travelled by Márquez’s committed journalism and magical connection to his land and culture through the literary ironic humour and fatalism of Pakistani journalist/novelist Muhammad Hanif, who himself cites Márquez as an influence. I loved the style. Like Hanif, Sajid was primarily a journalist, engaged with the people but not of a political party. He had taken up a philosophy, nonetheless: one of solidarity and sympathy with ordinary Baloch - like Fanon, he reported on the lumpen-proletariat. The former drug addict turned guerrilla fighter, the veterinary turned animal-rights advocate even in the midst of guerrilla war, the unbending uncle who despite torture continued to be political - the stories, writing style and subject matter were simply breathtaking. Sajid could write about it all because he was born into it. The activists he wrote

about were his neighbours, his relatives, and in his social habitat.

Everyone, for a time, in Awaran, where he was from, was an activist. In schools the flag of Balochistan flew, the Pakistani anthem was banned and students aligned with Balochistan Students Organisation-Azad, a famous student organisation, arranged book festivals, study circles and held themselves up as model citizens, they were not allowed to take drugs or smoke, they were seen with books in hand, often were the top students in school. Parents, noting this, encouraged their children to be like them. They wore a beret with a red star to align with the look of Third World decolonial thinkers such as Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Che and Fanon.

Sajid too joined BSO-A. The founder of BSO-A was Dr Allah Nazar, a veterinary doctor turned student leader. After devouring the articles of Sajid, I wrote to him through the contact form on his blog. I told him about Naked Punch and how I wanted him to





Voice for Baloch Missing Person camp with pictures of missing person

write for us on Balochistan. He replied a few days later and said he would. We agreed on two pieces, both on the middle-class nature of the Baloch movement, both on guerrilla fighters.

The first was about Muhammad Bux, whose *guerre de nom* was Jagoo, a drug addict turned militant fighter from Kech. Jagoo was from the Sheedi community of Balochistan, descendants from Africa. Balochistan and neighbouring Sindh have the largest population of people of African descent in South Asia (nearly a million). Many Sheedi members have in recent years joined the guerrilla war, and Jagoo was one of the most famous. The article, titled "Balochistan's Leaderless Resistance," showed that unlike previous rebellions of the Baloch, this current one did not have elite leaders but was horizontally led. Sajid tells us of how Jagoo joined Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF):

Jagoo belongs to a new breed of Baloch guerrilla fighters: those beyond anyone's con-

trol. For the first time in Balochistan's history, the nationalist movement is not being controlled by tribal chiefs, or even by the much-hyped middle-class leader Dr Nazar, the head of the BLF. The Baloch have fought five wars against Pakistan security forces since Balochistan's forcible annexation in March 1948. But the previous four insurgencies had been fought in the isolated tribal areas of eastern Balochistan.

Previously, the insurgencies were led by tribal elders. Tribesmen would pick up arms at the behest of their sardars (chiefs) and lay them down when the sardar said so. But this time leadership rests with an educated middle class whose participation is based on ideological grounds, and not tribal allegiance," said a Baloch writer on condition of anonymity.

Guerrilla warfare, or "taking to the mountain," has been an ancient and persistent form of rebellion

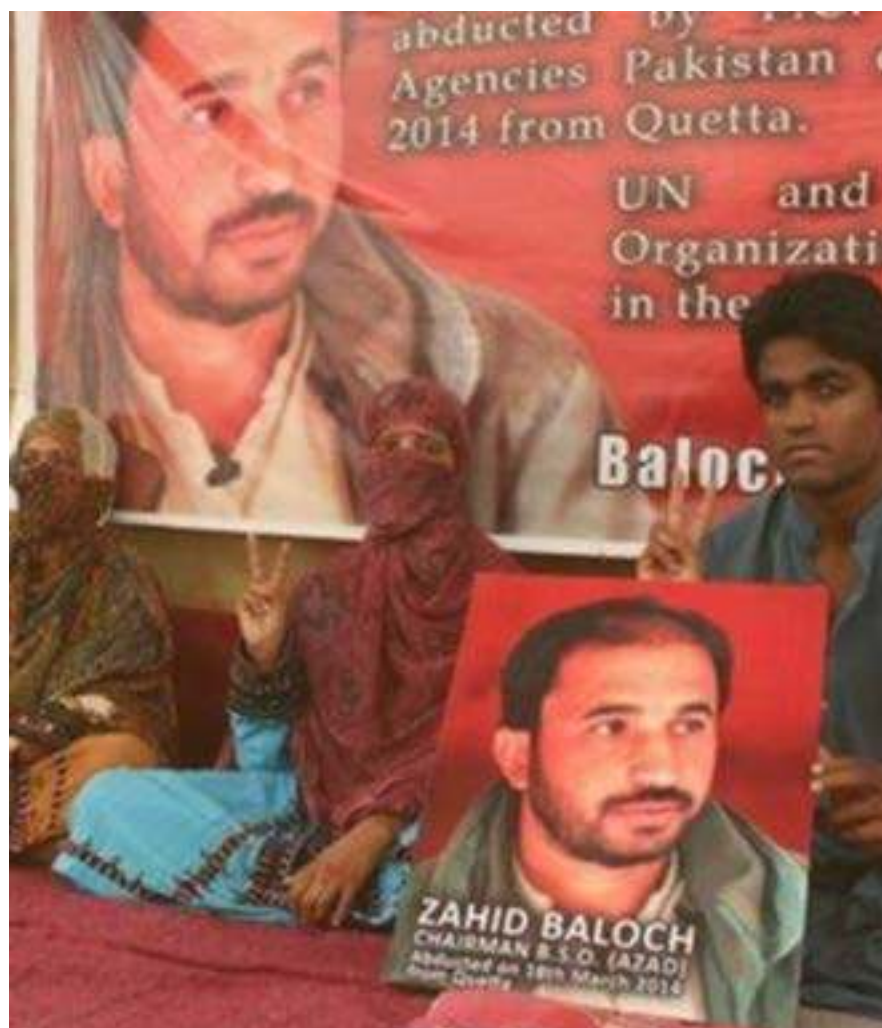
by the Baloch and continues today. The first such resistance started the day Pakistan annexed Balochistan. It was led by Prince Abdul Karim, the younger brother of the Khan of Kalat. The second was that of Nouroz Khan, against the administrative amalgamation of Balochistan with the rest of Pakistan in the 1950s. The third was that of Sher Muhammad Marri in the 1960s, for similar reasons. This was followed by a near-decade-long and highly organised rebellion of the Baloch People's Liberation Front in the 1970s. This issue features an interview with Mir Muhammad Ali Talpur, a famous activist of that movement. We publish rare photos from his archive from the mountains and from Afghanistan, where they later went into exile. The 1980s and 1990s saw a lull in guerrilla warfare, but in 2006, Nawab Akhtar Bugti, head of the Bugti tribe, aggrieved by the state's extortion of Baloch resources, again took to the mountains. His camp was bombed and he was killed. His death sparked a new wave of guerrilla movements that continue until today.

The grievances of the Baloch throughout have been the same. They are ruled over by Punjabis and are not citizens in any meaningful way. Elections are rigged, their resources of gold, copper, gas, oil, the sea and its treasures are sold to international capital or taken to Punjab in the case of gas, with the Baloch receiving nothing. It is, though, ultimately, a simple question of sovereignty. In theory, Pakistan is a federation with provinces given autonomy over many issues. In actual fact, Pakistan is structured on a racial/ethnic hierarchy that sees Punjabis at top and the Baloch at the bottom.

There is a historical reason for how this hierarchy came about, which I have outlined in detail in my forthcoming book, *People's History of Pakistan* (Leftword, India).

In summary, the Sikh Khalsa Army, consisting largely of Punjabi soldiers, was defeated by the British Indian Army (which at that time included a significant number of soldiers from the Bengal





Lateef Johar Baloch in 2014 during his 40 long day hunger strike demanding the release of extra-judicially abducted members of BS0-A

Presidency) in the First Anglo-Sikh War, which concluded in 1846 at the Battle of Sobraon. After the defeat, these soldiers were demobilised.

Yet, a mere eleven years later, the sepoys of the Bengal Army rebelled in 1857 (the Indian Mutiny/War of Independence). The British enlisted soldiers from Punjab (including Sikhs, Punjabi Muslims, and Punjabi Hindus) and used them extensively to suppress the freedom fighters. The military recruitment proved useful and successful for the Empire, and the British then embarked on transforming Punjab into the central hub of military recruitment for the British Empire.

Punjabi soldiers were rewarded with land and, effectively, bond-

ed labourers from low-caste Punjabi workers upon service and retirement. The land grants were possible due to the millions of acres brought into cultivation through colonial canal colony projects in the Punjab. Punjab was perhaps the only place in the British Empire where substantial rewards were given not only to the created ruling elite but also to the lower peasantry. Loyalty, it was hammered home, meant land and all that owning land implies: dignity, status, wealth, upward mobility, and the labour of low-caste Punjabis.

Punjabi soldiers fought in the First World War and the Second World War; they were in Burma, and horses and camels reared on military farms in Punjab were sent across the Empire. Punjab

and the Punjabi soldier, then, were central to the coercive apparatus of the British Empire. The rewards for service and loyalty were substantial. For example, in one canal colony project, over 40,000 acres were reserved for rewarding spies. Langley had taken note. Millions of acres were rewarded to soldiers and spies, thus deeply altering the consciousness of many strata of Punjabi society.

By the time of the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the Punjab- and Punjabi-dominated army was by far the strongest organised grouping in the nascent state, wielding coercive power and ready to take over not just the military but the country. A famous joke goes: "Every country has an army, but in Pakistan,

the army has a country." To really understand Pakistan, you have to add that the army is Punjabi—or, more accurately, upper-caste Punjabi. My analysis is not novel; it is shared by activists of the time, from Sindh to the Kalat State. They were well aware of the Punjabi domination of the state apparatus and the dangers it posed to their culture and land. To jump ahead, Pakistan was not and still is not a federation. It is, however, a physical space that encompasses many civilisations and nations. The domination of the army and the upper-caste Punjab does not, therefore, sit well with this civilisational history. The Baloch resist because they are one such civilisation - they have a culture, language, and histories that span centuries and motivate them to fight. They don't forget, and their poets don't let them forget.

This issue features the poetry of Mabarak Qazi, who, like Jagoo and Sajid, was from the Makran coast and drank the same water of defiant artistry. Qazi is a poet of the lumpen-proletariat Baloch. His portrait adorns many trucks, walls and streets of the working class. At Karachi airport car park, I was delighted to see a van that had his portrait on its wing-mirrors and his poetry written on the body of the van, which the driver proudly recited to me. You see his portrait wherever the Baloch live, be it Gwadar, Dubai, or Karachi. His son, a political activist, was extra-judicially killed by the Pakistani army, and the pain never left him or his pen. It pours out in poems - individual and collective pain, but not surrender. In fact, his personal misery rightly translates instead into political defiance rooted in Baloch actions, history, and soil.

Jagoo was kicked out of the BLF for animal abuse. The BLF, founded - as noted by a veterinarian - did not allow members to ride animals or overload them. Jagoo did both. Once kicked out, he created his own organisation, the Balochistan National Liberation Front. Sajid's point was to note that the insurgency was not centralised or controlled by tribal heads. Jagoo illustrated his case.



The other piece Sajid submitted was an interview with the most wanted person in Pakistan by the state - then and now - Dr Allah Nazar.

After founding the BSO-A in 2002, Dr Allah Nazar made it the pre-eminent organisation of Balochistan. The state was not happy, and he was abducted along with six other Baloch activists from Karachi. He was tortured for months and released in a fragile condition - no one thought he would survive. He did. He went into hiding and re-emerged as the head of the BLF. Sajid somehow got in touch with him, requested an interview, and waited a month until Dr Allah Nazar called him from a satellite phone. The interview was brief but unique. The first question focused on Sajid's main theme: that the Baloch struggle was no longer an elite-led movement but one led by the working class:

Sajid Baloch: When you decided to turn to militancy, why, instead of joining the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), did you and your comrades form the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF)? Many believe that you wanted a middle-class organisation, as the BLA was being led by a tribal chief.

Allah Nazar: Not really. For now, our struggle is for national independence and it's not class-based. At this time, we need unity among all the classes to get our independence. We are all—be it a sardar or a common man—slaves. Once the Baloch get their independence, they will be free to choose a social and political system for themselves through a democratic process.

I agree that the tribal system has lost its significance in today's world. The current tribal system is not the one our ancestors practiced. The Baloch cultural tribal system was distorted by Robert Sandeman during British rule. He introduced a new system by allocating absolute powers to sardars in order to control the Baloch masses.

After the withdrawal of the British, Pakistan nourished the so-called Sandeman System. Authorities used sardars to counter the Baloch uprising against Balochistan's forcible accession to Pakistan. Still, most Baloch tribal chiefs, except for Khair Bux Marri, are the stooges of the ruling establishment. So people have lost faith in this system, and tribalism is dying a natural death. In many

areas of Balochistan, it has vanished for good.

A few months after the interview and article, I wrote to thank Sajid and tell him how well received both pieces had been. He replied that many journalists had contacted him to get access to Allah Nazar. Over the subsequent months, Sajid was often quoted in international papers as an expert on Balochistan. I was delighted that he was getting the

attention his talents deserved. He founded Balochistan Times, a much-needed magazine covering all things Balochistan. This attention, however, also drew the gaze of the Pakistani state agencies. They had harassed him out of his job as a journalist and eventually out of Pakistan. He was living in Sweden and about to undertake further studies when we first learned of his disappearance and, later, his



Activists of Voice for Baloch Missing Person during a long march from Quetta to Islamabad in 2014. They walked for 106 days demanding the release of family members.





death. Newspapers reported him to have drowned. The Swedish authorities remained quiet and formal.

It didn't feel like suicide. I asked his roommates and others who knew him in the days leading up to his death, and none felt it was a suicide. They suggested criminal elements had been hired to murder him.

His death occurred in April 2019 in Uppsala, Sweden. This followed the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018 in Istanbul, Turkey. That set an international precedent that governments could and would assassinate dissenters, even in exile.

The method has become clearer over the subsequent years. They hire diasporic criminal elements and pay them to carry out murders. Only a few months later, Karima Baloch, a former leader of BSO-A and another leading Baloch voice in the international media, was also found drowned. She went for a walk in her country of exile, Canada, in December 2020, never to return. What was

happening to the Baloch in Canada and Sweden was not unusual for the Baloch - except only the geography of it.

THE BIRTH OF PAKISTANI NECROPOLITICS

Karima and Sajid had both been members of BSO-A and are among hundreds of its former and current members extra-judicially killed. They made it to their thirties. Most are killed while still students. Locally, this form of governance is known as 'kill and dump' and the 'missing persons issue'. It has a pattern: a person is abducted by plainclothes or uniformed men - usually in pickup trucks with dubious number plates. Most often, the abductors are from Military Intelligence (MI), Frontier Corps (FC), or Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The victim is taken to a black site. There, they are tortured. The agencies use a colour-coded system: green for release, amber for continued torture and interrogation, and red - for indefinite detention or death. It is a brutal system that dominates governance in Balochistan.

In academia, we can call this mode of governance necropolitics, a concept developed by Achille Mbembe.

You find necropolitics wherever people are reduced to disposable bodies: Black men in the US killed by police, those droned in Waziristan, Palestinians bombed and besieged, victims of genocide, Pakhtuns extra-judicially murdered by Pakistani policemen, and those tortured in black sites during the "war on terror."

To be governed by necropolitics is to be abandoned by all institutional recourse. You do not exist as a citizen. Courts do not respond to you but merely gaslight you. The media does not report your truths. Intellectuals who might speak for you have themselves disappeared. Bureaucracies deny your existence. What remains is a dark state architecture: surveillance, checkpoints, spies, secret prisons, black markets, and—as a local rights activist, Manzoor Pashteen, put it—"Vigo dala rule" (the rule of a Toyota pickup truck used by the intelligence agencies).

Necropolitics in Balochistan is a contemporary invention of the Pakistani state. It is the state's primary technology for governing Balochistan. Its victims number in the tens of thousands. This issue has a report from Harazan Baloch of one such 'missing person'. She visits the family of the 'missing' and details the effect on the community and family of necropolitics. The article also illustrates how pervasive, random, and overarching 'kill and dump' and 'disappearing' the Baloch is.

Two earlier victims of necropolitics were Qambar Chakar and Ilyas Nizar Baloch.

Qambar Chakar had been a student leader in the BSO-A. A friend of mine met him years ago at Balochistan University, in a study circle on the campus lawn. "He had fire in his eyes," my friend told me. "He knew he would be killed, but he refused to stay silent. He said, 'I will speak my truth for the homeland.'"

Qambar had laid out the Baloch position:



"We never agreed to be part of Pakistan; we were forced to join. Since then, we've been ruled like a colony. Our natural resources are plundered. Our leaders, poets, and professors are killed: Akbar Bugti, Lala Munir, Habib Jalib, Saba Dashtyari. The Pakistani state has murdered them all."

He continued:

"We demand independence. And while comrades say that would make us pawns of US imperialism, I ask—are we not already slaves of slaves? Pakistan follows the dictates of the US in the War on Terror. Let us at least choose our own slavery, if that means independence."

Ilyas, too, was a member of BSO-A. He mentored younger students and edited Darwart, a Balochi children's magazine. On December 21, 2012, while traveling to Turbat from Quetta, he was dragged off a bus at a security checkpoint.

Later, I interviewed Sangat, who knew both and was present when their bodies were discovered. He recounted:

"I'd seen many dead bodies dumped on Mard Road. They usually came in sacks, with tags to identify them. When I heard two more had been found, I feared the worst—it had to be Ilyas and Qambar. I didn't leave the van. I was too afraid. The ambulance staff went to collect the bodies. They were tortured beyond recognition. We found tags in their clothes. It was them."

I asked Sangat, hesitantly, to describe what was done to the bodies, for necropolitics only allows us tangled bodies by which to understand its workings:

"Qambar's upper body was torn apart—his chest was ripped open by repeated gunfire at the same spot. He had 28 more bullet wounds. His body had burns. Ilyas had also been tortured. He had been shot in the head and chest."

Qambar and Ilyas are just two of



Sajid Hussain Baloch

the 700 BSO-A members killed between 2009 and 2017. Why were they killed? Because they belonged to a peaceful student organisation that demanded Baloch rights. They were killed for advocating for better education, for basic facilities, and against land theft and disappeared persons, and for Baloch self-determination. Much like Palestinian groups, Kashmiri rights movements, or the Scottish and Catalan independence movements. Bar Israel and India, other countries tolerate such movements. Some even allow referendums. Pakistan does not.

But why does the state of Pakistan use this necropolitical technology rather than allow democratic disagreement? The Pakistani state creates for Baloch a Zone of Non-being. They are the colonized 'other' of the Pakistani state. To understand what happens in Balochistan is to understand the nature of the Pakistani state stripped of its self-proclamations - proclamations that unravel because of the contradictions between what is

announced and said and what is done on the ground.

This shaky ideological apparatus of the State of Pakistan collapsed after the assassination of Akbar Bugti in 2006. Since then, many Baloch have aligned with the discourse of the Baloch National Movement. The state tried arrests. It tried using feudal lords. It tried torture-and-release. It didn't try changing itself; it didn't try negotiating. So, of course, nothing worked. Then it created its version of necropolitics.

Necropolitics was formally unleashed on 3 April 2009. Baloch activists consistently refer to this date as the beginning of the systematic use of kill and dump. That day, Lala Munir, Ghulam Mohammad Baloch, and Sher Mohammad Baloch—key activists in Turbat—were abducted by men in plainclothes belonging to state agencies after being released by an Anti-Terrorism Court. They were taken from the office of Advocate Kachkol Ali.

Five days later, their bodies were

found 40 km from Turbat. Tortured. Shot. It is a method of rule that has been systematised, and once invented in Balochistan, it is now the go-to method of rule by the state for all political movements it disagrees with.

To end this crisis, Pakistan must abandon necropolitics. It must initiate a new social contract with the Baloch—one that is drafted by the Baloch, not imposed on them. A good start would be to release the thousands of imprisoned and missing Baloch activists.

It is our collective responsibility to speak out on 20,000 or more 'missing persons' in Balochistan and the thousands extra-judicially killed. As we protest Israel's necropolitics in Palestine or India's necropolitics in Kashmir, we must also protest Pakistan's necropolitics in Balochistan.



FIVE POEMS OF MUBARAK QAZI

Mubarak Qazi (1956-2023), is the most prolific and the most loved modern Balochi poet. He was a nonconformist who lived an eccentric life guided by his own principals.

Qazi gained love and respect across Balochi speaking world.

He enjoyed a cult status. The reason behind such unimaginable popularity is his unwavering commitment, and unshakable determination to uphold truth and liberty which he enshrines in his timeless poetry.

His poetry played a pivotal role in creating a sense of political awareness amongst the masses, especially the younger generation.

Mubarak Qazi made poetry touch the masses, by using vernacular language. In other words, Qazi is people's conscience, who addresses them in a language which they easily comprehend and decipher.

He conveys his sentiments in a simple and unembellished language.

In a literary journey that runs around five decades, Qazi has been a household

name synonymous with his unwavering stance against repressive and tyrannical regimes.

He was incarcerated and persecuted for his stand against tyranny and oppression. An unyielding man as he was, Qazi never minced his words while defying the oppression of his people. He was never afraid to pay the heavy price for his beliefs and ideals.

Qazi left behind a vast and timeless body of poetry, compiled into twelve anthologies, two of which were published posthumously.

TWO SITUATIONS

O breeze!
Hear my cries and laments
As you sweep past the beautiful bowers,
Where dwells my exquisite "spring blossom",
My coquettish and fairest maiden.
With her soul-mates, flower-featured,
Whisper softly in her ear:
"Your wretched lover lives in utter despair".

O breeze!
Listen to my proclamation
As you pass through the city
Of masters and chieftains,
Where the king of the day
Holds his court,
And dwells the self-proclaimed saviour
With his henchmen and courtiers.
Let them hear
With a call that rends the heavens:
"The days of tyranny draw near their end".



A CHILD FROM PULLABAD

Every day, a little child from Pullabad
Asks her mother:
When will father return from work,
Bringing news of better days,
And food to quell the fire of our hunger?

Every day, a little child from Pullabad
Asks her mother:
When will father return from work,
With new clothes and shoes for Eid?
We will dress in finery, slaughter a sheep,
And settle what we owe to time.

Every day, a little child from Pullabad
Asks her mother:
When will father return from work,
And mend our crumbling hut, shield us
from rain,
So little Dutto can sleep in peace,
And we shall ease our hard days

Every day, a little child from Pullabad
Asks her mother:
When will father bring us pens and books,
So we can go to school like the Chief's
children,
Learn the lessons of honesty and truth,
And tell the good from the wicked?

Every day, a little child from Pullabad
Asks her mother.

This magnolia bloomed with just my
hand's affection
Any grass held just my foot's print in flesh
Ajay's water woke up alongside no one
but me
Dropped yet again with only my glance's

touch.
On broken pillar at noon in that cornered
hall
My breath alone let pigeons raise their voice
At Mahfil's end in this free field past Sal
woods
by my side it was that the puja-start moon
lay still.
My foot was also gripped with all your steps
You never knew, never looked back to see
Now look both ways all the bridges are broken
If now you tell me to leave what place do I
go?

Dusk-colored scaffold, muezzin calls a little
way off,
Sitting on this stoop, I think the world's my
guest
The firecode still wants tests
that this earth's mine how prove that fact
before them all.

Before Dawn

Before the crack of dawn,
As the gentle breeze blows,
Sea waves and birds chant madly,
Freshly blossomed roses mourns
And the distressed nightingales wail.

In every yard,
In every house, mourning reigns.
Everywhere,
The sacred blood of martyrs has been spilled,
In mountains, vales, and dales,
Corpses piled upon corpses.

All shelters, shacks, and huts ablaze,
A strange strain echoes from termite-eaten doors,
Each window of the crumbled houses mourns;
Who will wipe time's bewailing eyes
Before the crack of dawn?



THE MUSICIAN (IN MEMORY OF CHOPIN)

O, musician! Master of the string!
Wait a while, hold on, my friend,
It's just the beginning,
The night has just set in
O, musician! Master of the string!

Rest your wounded fingers for a moment,
Play on till dawn with songs of merriment,
Strum your fiddle's tune, touch the chords
Of the heart, so cruel so tyrant
O, musician! Master of the string!

Let the melodies unfurl and pour forth,
A long night waiting ahead of you,
Go on with your unyielding strings and strum,
The vast wilderness of time lies ahead of you,
O, musician! Master of the string!

Witness the twists and turns of time,
Feel the sorrow and pain of mankind,
Mute are the days, be it spring or fall,
In helplessness, a world you'll find,
No bound to pleasure in pain, after all,
O, musician! Master of the string

In a trance, when you bow to your strings,
The world's ailing heart begins to bloom,
Mists drizzle on parched, arid plains,
Barren fields turn verdant, trees green again.
A magic spreads all around,
Everyone forgets their sorrow and pain,
O, musician, master of the string,

Spring graces the earth in jubilant sway,
Silver dawn reveals its glowing face,
O, musician, hold not your blood-stained fingers,
Let your call echo everywhere,
O, musician, master of the string!

A RAINBOW ARCHED OUT IN THE NORTH

In the distant sky,
A trail of lightning, without clouds,
Flashes bright, harbinger of prosperity.
Today, after two hundred years,
It graces me with kindness,
Illuminating my eyes with delight.
Time stands still for a moment,
After a long slumber,
My somnolent luck has awakened.

It's the flash of lightning
That illuminates the path to freedom
For the wretched and oppressed.
The caravan, seeking its destination,
Without a leader or provision,
Guided by the very trail of lightning,
Sets aflame each castle of tyranny it encounters.



AN INTERVIEW WITH A GUERRILLA FIGHTER OF THE BALOCHSITAN PEOPLES LIBERATION FRONT



The Balochistan People's Liberation Front was a leading guerrilla organisation fighting for Baloch rights from the late 1960s to the 1980s. Inspired by the Baloch tradition of resistance, which involved taking to the mountains, and by the national liberation movements' use of guerrilla warfare from Vietnam to



Cuba, it began setting up camps in the mountains for a possible guerrilla war in the late 1960s and was active by 1972. We interviewed a leading Baloch rights activist and participant in the Balochistan People's Liberation Front's camps, Mir Muhammad Ali Talpur, about his time there. We also present his photo archive from the camps.



Qalandar Bux Memon:

How did you come to join BPLF?

Mir Muhammad Ali Talpur:

I was a student of journalism at Karachi University. I had quit my education. I was doing a Masters in Journalism and lived with a doctor relative and had picked up the basics of medicine by practice and from books with the intention of being able to serve people wherever I may be working. I was contacted by Muhammad B who was my friend and had got in touch with Babu Sher Mohammad Marri and Nawab Khair Bakhsh for working in the Marri area. He was in the Marri area with a couple of friends and none of them had any knowledge of medicine and he, Muhammad, asked me if I could come and be of use to people. It needs to be mentioned that there was no fighting yet and the work was educational and political only.

QBM: Talpur Sahib, could you describe a typical day in the mountains.

Talpur: The people in the mountains wake up early at around dawn and we too would wake up at that time. The person responsible for the 'Nangri' i.e. the cooking place would start making

bread for all those in the camp and a friend would prepare tea for us. This was our lunch and breakfast because in the afternoon there was only tea and again the 'Nangri' would be active before sunset to prepare bread and on alternate days we had lentils or kidney beans produced locally with our bread. On the days these were not cooked we would eat bread only; some of us ate the bread with a piece of 'Gur' [made with sugarcane]

As I had knowledge of medicine, I would treat

persons [local Baloch] who came there for medicine [to the camp] or if there was someone too sick to come, I would go to treat the persons at their homes. We at times took walks to get used to the mountainous terrain as we were plains people.

We had books there on politics and history and read according to our taste. I would often read the book 'Principles and Practices of Medicine' by Davidson to keep in touch with diseases and their treatment.

We slept not long after sunset but before going to sleep there was always a 'Muchi' (gathering) where stories of the past, anecdotes, jokes and experiences were shared.

We friends did also shoulder the responsibility of keeping watch at night as lookouts. The person leaving the watch would wake the next assigned person.

This, in short, was a typical



day of ours at the camp in peacetime.

QBM: Talpur sahib you came from the cosmopolitan city of Hyderabad, how were you received by the Baloch guerilla fighters?

TALPUR: I was an outsider in some respects, especially in terms of language. It did make communication difficult but not in any way relating to them. Our political consciousness and the social ethos that I had lived in made integration and assimilation easier and smooth once the obstacle of language was overcome as in a couple of months I had picked up enough proficiency to freely communicate with people. It took me about 3 months to get the knack of the Balochi

language. Once I mastered the language, I never spoke a word of Sindhi there so as not to give away my origins.

QBM: One of the propagandas against all historical communities after which imperial or internal colonizers go after is that they are led by 'tribal elders' against the will of the local population. Can you comment on this myth of 'hierarchy' in Baloch culture.

TALPUR: It is wrongly believed that Baloch society is strictly hierarchical for among the Marris, at least, the Sardar is only Primus inter pares. The change towards hierarchy became prevalent as relations of production changed from tribal to feudal. The tribes, as long as they were tribal, respected equality. A Marri

Mukhadam or a Wadera or even the Sardar will never dare to use foul language against a Marri. Therefore, there was nothing much we could really instil in them about equality that they didn't already know.

Yes, we did keep talking about experiences of people of other countries just to reinforce the already present sense of equality. It is primarily for this reason that the Marri Baloch who has a strong sense of equality and freedom that he has been a major player of nearly every struggle that the Baloch nation has been involved in.

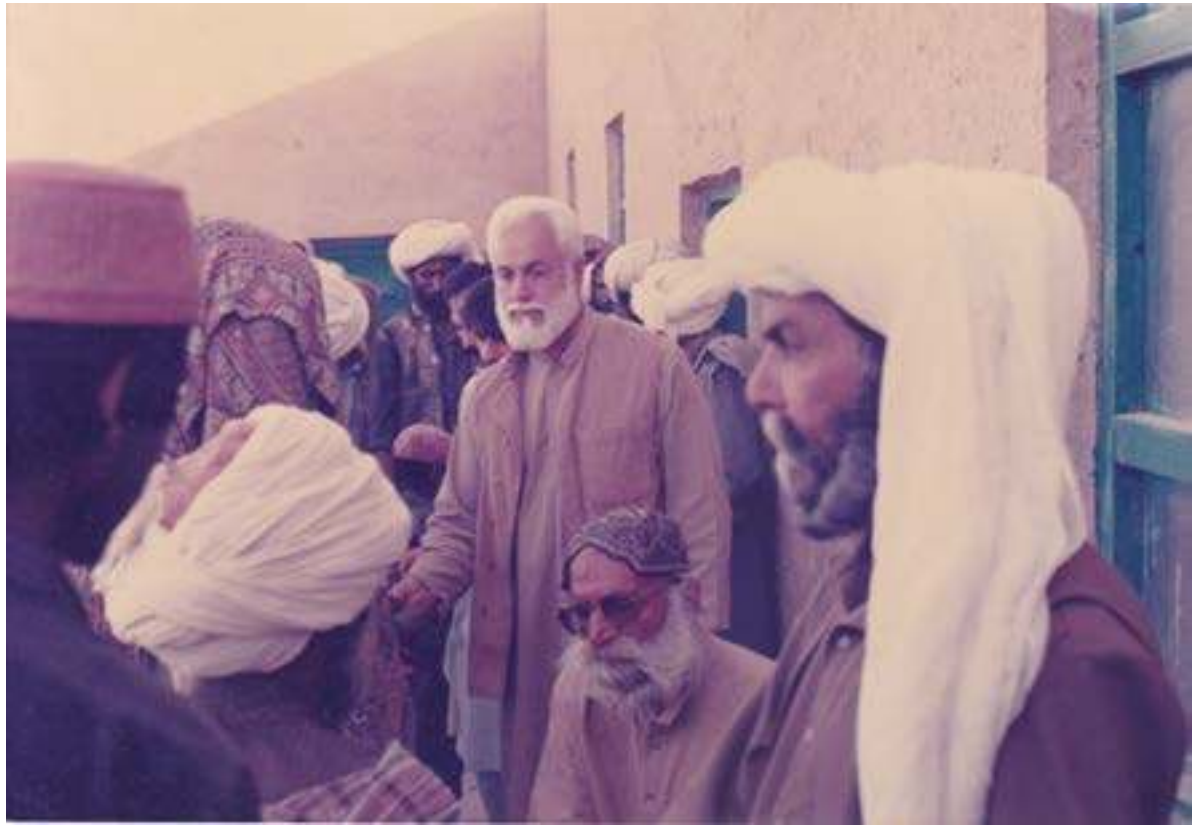
QBM: After 1978, you left with many fighters and their families to camps in Afghanistan, could you tell me about that period?

TALPUR: In Afghanistan too, as I stayed in the refugee camp, I woke up soon after dawn and had my tea and









soon people would start coming for medicine. I dispensed the medicine available with us and for medicines we didn't have I wrote out prescriptions with which people bought medicine from the nearby city.

During this time, I also taught a group of children because though quite a few people came for medicine I could pay attention to those children's lessons also.

I took lunch soon after noon and then took a nap during summers but not in winters as the days are short. At around 3:30 pm I would go to our school building which was built with mud by the students themselves to teach students who studied at Afghan School in the city in the mornings. The students who were taught at our school ranged from age of 4 to 40 and all were anxious to learn.

As there weren't many well educated people around to teach except myself and another person, so we assigned the teaching of the lower classes to students who were in slightly upper grades. This teaching was divided on a rotation basis among the students with higher grades.

An hour or 45 minutes before sunset we would end classes as there was no electricity in the camp and we would play football or volleyball where two teams of students competed against each other. The teams were never the same as the captains had to choose from among the players with one winning the toss getting to choose first. We played till sunset and then I would go to my place to wash up and rest a while before dinner.

People often used to come and wake me up for



medicine for their sick ones as I was the only doctor in the camp and the treatment was for free. There was no bar of timings of work for the purpose of being there was to serve the people in the best way one could. The task for an activist is to live up to the expectations of the people and not force people to do things convenient for yourself.

I was with the Baloch people for a period of 20 years and the least I will say about my relation with them was that there never was any harsh word ever exchanged and it was a synergetic relationship which was based on the fact that I served not for any monetary or material

benefit or favours but as revolutionary duty to people. This relationship is the reason that though I am from Sindh but have a place in the heart of Baloch to the extent that icons like Banuk Karima, Mahrang Baloch, Sammi Deen, Dr. Sabiha and so many other selfless workers of Baloch resistance honour me with the word Baba. It is an honour conferred by them. I consider it my good fortune of having had the chance to serve people who were and are brave to stand up for their rights despite the brutality and the depredations of the State against them.





IVANA HOFFMAN: **A TRIBUTE TO** **THE LIFE OF A** **REVOLUTIONARY** **BY BIAGIO** **MASTROANNI**

Ivana Hoffman was just 19 when she died in a battle against ISIS in Northern Syria. Comrade Ivana was an internationalist and a member of Turkish-Kurdish communist group Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP). She was martyred fighting for people's freedom, for humanity and she is the symbol of women's power against fascist forces. She lives in our revolutionary struggle. Biagio Mastroanni pays tribute to the anti-fascist fight of Ivana Hoffman.









"I will find out what it feels like to hold a weapon in my hands and fight for a revolution, against imperialism. I will feel life differently, more intensively and more ordered. Perhaps I will meet my limits and fall behind, but I will never give up my spirit to fight and move on."

BIAGIO
M. ASTRANNI
2020

FREE PALESTINE.

END GENOCIDE.



A POEM ACCOMPAN- ING SOME THESES ON (DECOLONIAL) HISTO- RY

Bass-Soaked Delay (A Rhythm
on Fanon's Renewal of the
Formula)

I
Consider the rhythmic overlay
Between
Qhipnayra uñtasis sarnaqapxa-
ñani
and
The meticulous realisation of
our dream's desire.
A bass-soaked overlay
that reverb saturates,
the line of succession
of temporal orientation
towards an apocalyptic end,
opening an interval in
timespace.

II
The lowest rhythmic interval
becomes music or a wave.
An axion mass scale wave,
which sometimes acts as if
it is made of billiard ball-like
particles
and other times as if it is slosh-
ing like watery waves.
The waves add together in a
rhythmic overlay
to create one super wave
that no archive can place

in a final resting place.

III
The revolution will not be
televised,
But the protest will be sam-
pled.
A bass-soaked overlay
That reverbs saturates
Dark matter
Black matter
Black (Lives) Matter
opening
La frontera border en el fin
a void vortex
an open wound.

IV
Heridas abiertas
con
Venas abiertas
Voidoid vórtices
vorágine
whirlpools of water
from where everything comes
to which everything returns
for there's no loss
Neither beginning
Nor end. But
base suspense,
bass-soaked relay
outside of today's visual array.

V

Consider this arrested image:
"US-headquartered companies
bought the
rights
to water in other countries".
South of the border.
"These companies are
strangers to the gods of those
waters, were
not
formed from them, have never
said Gracias
to
those waters, never prayed to
those waters
have never been cleansed by
those waters".
Is there any chance the gods
may be angry?

VI
That is why we protest.
Not the humans we
are not.
The thirst protests.
The hunger protests.
The lack of air protests.
That is why we protest.
We know
The revolution will not be
televised,
But the protest will be sam-
pled.
Cut-up, cut-in and overlaid,

intervals between imaginings
as in the film Now!
Or
Rhythmic sound overlays
to
seehear
and
sensethink
Not to contemplate
But to axion.

VII
Therefore
no wonder here
and
no fear
but word cinemas,
dwelling
and
wandering.
We trans move
Our feet pointing backwards
Backwards
we dancewalk
Forwards.
Searching in futures past for
the light
of what is to come
but not yet.
We walk
Together
In alliance without allegiance

Rhythmically
but not straight
In bass-soaked intervals
Until we reach the crossroads
where the old has died but
hangs on zombie-like
and the new wants to be born
But not yet.

VIII
This is where the future begins,
back back
back to the heart
back to the womb
back to the matter
of futures past
which never stop
if we stop
thinking metamerically,
then we may distinguish
diametrically concentrically
vertiginously
The light of lighthouses
From the lanterns of those
wreckers
wishing to lure us aground
to loot us
and slave us.

IX
Our bodies.
We may not want to know it
But we can't shake it off



The feeling
that
We must break free from these
chains.
Shed this body.
For it is not so much that the
body is a kind of clothing,
But rather that clothing is a
kind of body.
It as the poet says:
"Take my body and make of it-
A Nation".
But without confession.
For it presupposes the homog-

enous body of the Nation.
"An American way of forgetting
Natives.
Discover them with City.
Crumble them by
City.
Erase them into Cities named
for their
Bones, until
You are the new Natives of your
new Cities ...
Who lies beneath streets, uni-
versities, art
Museums?"

X
Let's instead cross the border in
the opposite direction.
Go south
at sea
to see
really see
seehear
A rhythmic overlay
A bass-soaked relay
That reverb saturates without
delay
For we can no longer wait.

MAKING FILMS ABOUT THE WORKING CLASS

Interview with Mike Leigh

Qalandar Bux Memon: Let's start with your film, *Peterloo*. I read it as an essay on a social movement. It wasn't focused on a particular character, of course. There was no hero, it explained how unity was built by working-class activists across divisions to demand their rights. It focused on the movement, my first question is how did you come up with that method for that particular topic?

Mike Leigh: What method do you mean?

QBM: The method of decentering the story away from 'heroic' leaders or simple narratives.

ML: Oh, I see. You know that looks after itself. It is in the nature of the subject or the territory. In other words, your question is why it is that when I normally make films with very much central characters, this film does not have a central character? Frankly,

I never thought about it for two seconds. This story is, put very crudely, about a lot of people. It is about society, it's about the ruling class, it's about the fight, it's about individuals, it's about collective action and it's about law. You have to see all of that. You see when you read about the Peterloo massacre, and I am sure you have, you can read a perspective which is about the orator Henry Hunt, a major figure in this story. However, if one were to say let's make a film about orator Hunt, that is not a film that I would have much interest in because it would quickly and inevitably evolve into the film that we now have because it is not just about him. So, there was never a decision to take a broad perspective view that the film has. That is a natural and organic way of telling the story.

QBM: Okay. I read it more as an essay on a social movement.

ML: Well it is. Whether it is an essay or not in academic terminology may not be relevant.

I mean it is not a documentary. It is like all of the other historical films and other films that I have made, which means that it is, hopefully, very well researched in all sorts of ways and areas. It is not a documentary but a dramatization or a distillation.

I mean, apart from anything else, historically and therefore narratively, the film performs an enormous sleight of hand or cheat. It starts with the battle of Waterloo which was in 1815 and it ends with the Peterloo massacre which was four years later in 1819. Now, there is no way that when you are watching the film you think that 4 years have gone past. You don't think about it at all. If you did think about it, it certainly won't be four years. If I was to make a film containing everything that was relevant to the history of those four years, it would be a very long and somewhat tedious and impossible film to make. There would be no reason to make it. All

"...the big issue that we're up against is this brainwashing of a large proportion of the world's cinema-going public into the notion that 'films is Hollywood'."



XXXXXXX

sorts of other things happened, not least the blight of Europe in the summer of 1816 arising from the catastrophic volcanic eruption in the Indonesian area. It left the whole of Europe and much of the western world blacked out. There was no summer, things didn't grow, and that affected everything and anything. Also, there was a previous major attempt at a demonstration which was put down. Those things, and loads of other things too.

When you see Hunt coming to Manchester for the first time, historically it wouldn't be the first time. So, this is just to explain that the film is just a distillation and a dramatization. And of course, there is, apart from anything else, a huge combination of character portraits, with greater or lesser degree of accuracy, of actual people who existed and a whole bunch of characters who were invented to tell the story. Not least, the central working-class family. Look at the example of the soldier who is finally killed at the end. There were survivors of Waterloo at Peterloo and one of them was killed at the latter event. There was a famous inquest which the authorities abandoned because too much was being revealed etcetera. Those are simply the jumping points for my eyes, you know.

So, that's what it is. I am saying all of these things in response to your suggestion, and a legitimate suggestion, that it is an essay. It is a dramatic, poetic, subjective and objective analysis or distillation of the event.

QBM: How do you feel about the subjective element? I mean you are dealing with history and you are dealing with people's history. How do you feel, for example, as you mentioned that Hunt had gone before to Manchester but the film shows it as his first visit? How do you feel about that subjective element? How do you decide?

ML: Well, you know I am a dramatist. So, I make decisions. I am a story-teller. It doesn't matter what the subject is. Or whatever film or play it is. There are some basic things that you consider when writing an article and there are some that I consider when putting together a play or a film, for example, that we don't want to say that thing twice. You have to see whether something preempts another or if it is going to be more important at some other point. These are ordinary decisions of distillation or story-telling. For example, Hunt went

to Manchester or made a trip to Manchester, previously or only less than a year previously. Unless, you are actually concerned with a detailed exposition of him, it is irrelevant. What is important is the essence of the experience of him being this so-called celebrity. Without a question, he was an extraordinary and brilliant speaker, a very loud orator and a massive self-publicist with an ego of massive proportions. We've got that. To simply dissipate focus by ponderously wading through stuff just because it happened is not the point.

On the other hand, it would be perverse to make things happen. I mean there are a lot of historical films that don't have any sort of historical accuracy at all. Obviously, the job with how to deal with Mr. Turner is to create, with integrity and seriousness, a reality that is with what we feel is in some way accurate and is resonant of the truth.

QBM: I guess, that was my question about historical accuracy. Now, as you say the essence is important.

ML: Yeah, but on the other hand, I

mean take a film like the 'Favorite' – it's a historical film about Queen Ann. The decisions there were, "let's not make them talk in period language? Let's make them talk in contemporary 21st century language?" "Let's not make the costumes completely accurate? Because: let's make them a bit sexier and more modern etcetera?" Now, for me that, apart from anything else, is like throwing the baby out of with the bath water really. We took the language very seriously. Not only the language of the period as spoken by educated upper classes but also the vernacular language of the Lancaster working-class people. We took that risk – I mean they even used words which are no longer in our vocabulary. The costumes are absolutely accurate. Everything that you see visually or otherwise. Even though, we just talked, in this conversation, about the freedom to distill, you know in the end – irrespective of what the film maybe – you want the audience to believe that this is the real world. You don't want them to be suspended in disbelief. All those things are complex and sophisticated but they all are a part of the necessary processes.

QBM: You talked about 'The Favorite'. I can't watch that stuff



but I watched a few clips. It connects with all of the other things that are going on; like the Crown. What I really enjoyed about Peterloo is how you showed the ruling classes for what they are...cruel and able to use extreme violence against the working classes to maintain there power. The reason is that there is a normalization of the aristocratic order that is the function of things like the 'Favorite' and 'Queen', in a huge way, that is just not accurate.

ML: Absolutely.

Let's go back and pick up on what we talked about history. Towards the earlier part of the film you see those three magistrates. You see each of them sending down people for the most minor offense – to be hanged or to be sent to Australia and to be whipped. Now those are portraits of three actual magistrates, thoroughly researched and properly cast. Each of those cases was an actual case tried by the respective magistrate. We haven't invented anything there at all, except, the immediate dramatization in the moment. In one of the cases, a guy is convicted and sentenced to be hanged for stealing a coat. One may say that is just over the top. It happened. Such things used to happen all the time.

So, what I am saying is that some of that outrageous kind of behavior of the ruling classes you just don't distill it, it's there. Towards the end of the film, when the governor visits the prince regent, that we quote the letters he wrote commanding the prime minister asking the magistrates in Manchester to be commended for the way that they have maintained peace. I mean it is unbelievable, bollocks basically. We didn't have to distill, invent, heighten, caricature, dilute or anything. That's what happened and it is there.

QBM: Yes, it is not hard for me to believe that. That those moments came out of historical documents. But given the juxtaposition of The Crown, The Favorite and all these other things like the Queen and the King's Speech people are going to think that's not true, that the aristocratic order is humane and like us, its sexy and they are normal people dealing with issues of love but they aren't they are responsible for historical acts of systematic violence and oppression... you know what I mean?

ML: Yeah of course. This is very

interesting because for many years now, I am committed to making historical films which reflect the contemporary world. I don't know if you have seen this other film 'Topsy-Turvy'. That was my first historical. It was made 20 years ago, and it was about it's about the Victorian theatre. It's about the comic opera world of Gilbert and Sullivan. Now, apart from wanting to turn the camera around on, we who make entertainment and take it seriously for the films on one level and apart from a delight in that particular kind of world of work and music and stuff, it was also a reaction against period dramas – costume dramas – from that time. To some degree, Merchant Ivory was one of those. I've had a lot of respect for those guys. For me, it was a reaction against the chocolate box or let's say a chocolate box kind of period stuff, which is what you're talking about.

QBM: Yes.

ML: Again, if you have seen my film 'Mr. Turner', it is a period film and that was to some degree the same thing [reaction against the chocolate box kind of period

films] but also a reaction against quite a lot of films about painters. However, there are some great films about painting. I'm merely saying that to some degree, you know, the things one does are at a certain level and only at a certain level a reaction to other things as much as they have to do directly with the content.

QBM: Right. So why Peterloo now? I mean why recently? Maybe because of Corbyn coming into leadership? Was it connected to your...

ML: Well there a number of basic things or reasons. First of all, there has never been a film about it [Peterloo Massacre]. And it had occurred to me quite a while back that there ought to be one.

At a very minor level, I actually grew up in Manchester and didn't really know about it because it wasn't talked about very extensively. Then we knew that if we made the film, when we made it, it would be made in time for the bicentenary of the event, which was last August.

But most importantly and relevantly – and your question is correct - we decided to make



we need *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*...

the film in early 2014, and almost as soon as we started to prepare it and research into things, we started to find ourselves saying "you know what this is becoming increasingly prescient and increasingly relevant".

I think, by the time you get to Trump being elected and the Brexit referendum and a whole bunch of other things happening around the world, we're already well into preparing the film said and it was ahead of the game in that sense.

I mean the film is about democracy and, of course, questions of democracy are on the slab, full stop.

QBM: Right. I think the film stays and it does its work. For me, because I see myself coming from that tradition of Peterloo – the organizing tradition and of people coming together collectively to try to change things – it stays as an inspiration – almost a tool kit. I think these types of films have their moment as an intervention, but then they have this longer history which you just can't account for. Thank you for making it, is what I am saying. We really need the *Battle of Algiers* and we need Peterloo,

A friend of mine who is a filmmaker wanted to ask this particular question and it's perfect. She asks, how can we make radical films with the existing distribution? Do we need to then reconsider how we distribute? Because...

ML: Well, history is itself answering that question and solving the problem. Even this film, was backed by Amazon Studios, which meant that after a certain point in time, it was no longer available for theatrical distribution. It was going to go up on Amazon's platform. is still available, whatever you want to watch it on Amazon. And in a way, although this isn't politically or ideologically, in the spirit of your friend's question, the truth is that there are now alternative means of wider distribution in the world that exists, which are digital platforms. Although, this film was not distributed theatrically in France or Germany, a large proportion of people in France and Germany have watched it on Amazon.

I think your friend's question is still very relevant and legitimate. Although, there are some relatively radical distribution

outlets that distribute a wider range of international cinema and so on. Part of the answer to that is that no matter what we do, we are up against the monster-behemoth-giant corporations of Disney and all the big companies who dominate. Historically, we know that during the First World War, the Americans spotted that they could actually create markets for movies. After all, movies could travel more easily at that time because they didn't have a language problem, they were silent. They could get into the world market. That world market has been dominated and monopolized by Hollywood ever since.

Apart from anything else, in the context of your friend's question the big issue is that what we're up against this brainwashing of a large proportion of the world's cinema-going public into the notion that film is Hollywood. The fact that world cinema exists and that all kinds of stuff is happening everywhere in the world, which has got absolutely fuck-all to do with what happens in Hollywood, is very important. But it's a battle because throughout the world film is Hollywood, film is popcorn

film. It's the movies.

QBM: So, my question is about the language involved in telling the stories of the working classes. For example, the shots in council flats. How did you develop that? For example, I'm thinking in *Meantime* or even in some of the films I have seen, for example, *Secrets and Lies* where it seems like a suburban area outside London somewhere with the barbecue scene at the end of the film. How did you develop that language? You tell stories in spaces off the working class. Because I relate this to your point about Hollywood and the conditioning.

ML: Let me just show you, from a different angle. When I was a kid, I used to go to movies a lot. This is in the 40s and 50s, particularly, in the 50s. I used to sit in the cinema and I only ever saw Hollywood or British movies. I never saw a film that wasn't in English until I came to London at the age of 17 to be a student artist. You just didn't see so-called foreign language movies. So that's why there's a lot of serious cinema I didn't know about. I am talking about growing up in

a post-war working-class urban industrial greater Manchester environment. I used to sit in the cinema thinking, "wouldn't it be great if you have a film where the characters in the film were like real people as opposed to the usual people in the movies?" Therefore, instinctively I look at the real world, just like so many artists, novelists, photographers and filmmakers. You start from looking at the real world and then using the tools of the medium to 'capture' and, as we say, 'distill' and 'express' and 'tell stories' about the real world. That is the short answer to your question. Again, there's an implicit reaction, as I mentioned a few moments ago, to some film conventions of a decadent nature.

Regarding your question about the film-language of looking at those environments, we make location films, we create real environments and we take the camera into real environments. Now, of course I have had the good fortune, the privilege or luck to be able to make films at the BBC. For quite a number of years, before you could actually get a feature film made, – because there was a time when it was virtually impossible to make serious indigenous feature films in Britain – there was great freedom in television, particularly at the BBC and especially at the BBC. A number of people, most particularly Ken Loach, were making films that – without being documentaries but made alongside documentaries – had

the same kind of film crews who were used to going out there and filming news documentaries.

I was in a film when I was 19. I was in a British movie, an old fashioned British movie called *Two Left Feet, No Consequence*. Only a tiny bit of it was shot on location, but mostly it was shot on built sets. And they were built sets that you'd never build otherwise. Now we couldn't find a real place.

Part of the joy of filmmaking is being out there with your fictitious world, with your actors in real places, breathing real air, with the real world going on. The problem with making period films, of course, is that you can't just roll out into the street and have your actors walk up and down filming with real things happening around them, because it doesn't exist. So, you have to create the whole thing. That, of course, is a whole different ball game. Nevertheless, we bring to the period film, the criteria, the practice, the philosophy and the spirit of the contemporary and the real. So, the answer to the whole question you appear to be asking me regarding film-language is that it looks after itself because you get out there and you respond to what you feel and see and smell – and the

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camera is there to capture that. The organic integration of our fictitious characters with the real world is part of the buzz and on the point of what it's all about.

QBM: So, I mean, maybe I'm just, you know, because I'm I think you're being a bit modest, in my view, if...

ML: Well, I would say that sounds like a legitimate thing to me.

QBM: I think you've innovated quite a lot in terms of film language.

ML: Well, that's fair enough. However, that's a different question. At least, that is not the line of thought that your question provoked. What you are now clearly talking about is a personal-idiosyncratic view of the world. Well, that's just sitting with me and my view of the world. I mean, there is a tragicomic dimension to what I get up to. I mean, you've obviously seen 'Meantime'.

'Meantime' began four years into Thatcher's regime and the government was introducing these bullshit schemes to make it look like they were doing something about unemployment

and about young people. They were like, "people will find themselves on the scheme for three weeks" and were made fuck all. Therefore, I just started with the premise of an unemployed family. Of course, within that, you've got some very idiosyncratic characters. Additionally, at the time, the Skinhead Syndrome was on the rise as well. So, there were different levels. It is kind of idiosyncratic and it comes from my view of life, my sense of humor, my sense of humanity and all that stuff, which is what you are very generously alluding to. That informs the way you look at stuff. However, in artistic or creative processes, you don't necessarily know what you are doing. You don't follow it on an analytical basis.

The other thing which is important about filmmaking, apart from anything else, is that it is a collaborative process. The relationship between the director and the cinematographer, not to mention the designer, quite apart from the performers, is a very particular thing. The same cinematographer Dick Pope has shot all my films since 1990 starting with *Life is Sweet*. We have an evolving language and we're constantly pushing the

boundaries but we definitely have a rapport of a very particular kind. There is no question that what you see on the screen in all of the films we have made is my vision but it's his vision too. I think that the collaboration of a number of people is an important aspect not only of filmmaking but of any complicated and sophisticated process where you are creating fiction in the real world or which interfaces with the real world.

QBM: That concerns another question that I had about the democratic process. I'm being provocative here, when I ask that to what extent do practices in film-making involve a transactional relationship between the director and other people? I mean, how do you feel about it?

ML: If I were to say to you that it is completely democratic and that nobody is in-charge and everybody can decide, you wouldn't believe me. Basically, I would be shooting you the most ridiculous line, because you have already insisted that what we were talking about was a particular Mike Leigh imprimatur. So therefore, plainly, somewhere along the line, I'm definitely in charge – the boss – and making the decisions.

On the other hand, you don't make films by yourself and the art of the medium, and the same in true for theater, is to know how to get it all to work so that

everybody is contributing in a completely fulfilling way for them and at the same time serves the main purpose, which is my responsibility. That's all there is to it. So, there's no doubt who's boss. There's no doubt who is the fascist dictator, which is me. But it is always very friendly and it is always very collaborative. It is not nasty and people always want to come back for more and love doing the work because it's fulfilling for everybody. It is because of the way we all approach each other.

QBM: I asked my friend, the filmmaker, that I mentioned earlier, her name is NoorAfshan Mirza, about what she thought of this question. She said 'yeah but filmmaking can also, as you also pointed to, be very much like a social movement', in the sense that people are coming together for a common thing and there is collective work and collective healing in that process.

ML: Without a doubt, only with

rare exceptions which always have a very particular reason and which have to do with somebody's private problem of some sort, I look back on a whole bunch of extremely special periods of time when people came together and they didn't want it to stop. And it's like a family breaking up when the work ends and then families carry on. There are people that I usually work with, a whole bunch of people. We have worked together for years and years. They are all doing other films all the time but they all want to know the dates for our next film. They are always going to be there and they'll turn down big projects to be there. All that stuff, you know.

So, she's right, it's great and it's a special thing.

I aspire artistically, in my work, to the condition of novelists, painters, poets, composers and everybody else, in the sense that I spend months before we shoot anything, working with actors to build the whole world.

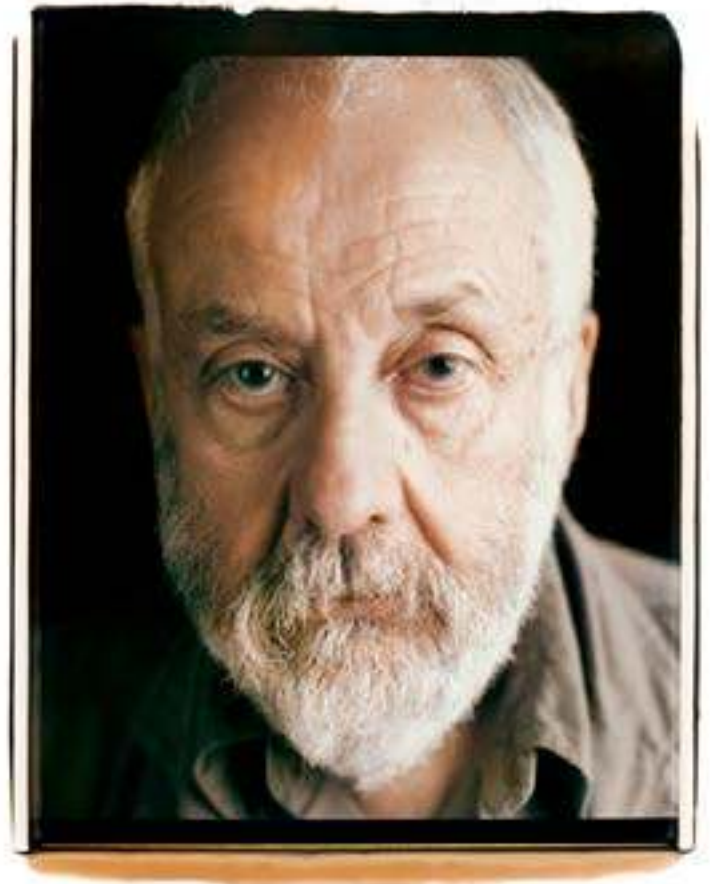
One of my problems (but not currently) is that, traditionally, most of the films I made, except the historical ones, I've said: "I can't tell you anything about it, I don't know what it's going to be, we just want the money, we're not going to discuss casting, we're not going to do it, we're just going to go out and explore and arrive at the film". So, we made most of the films like that.

I'm going to do another one, which is starting now, and it has been a real battle to raise money for it because the climate has changed. Now, people will say: "well, we need to know what it is?" and "who is it starring?"

What I wanted to say is that many movies suffer from the fact that massive numbers of people are involved in endless decision-making about every last detail from the cast to the script and the locations of things and so on and so forth, before anybody shot anything.



We had a massive improvisation with the actors in character for 10 hours and they all came around. The actors didn't know who Hortense was and all the other stuff because their characters wouldn't know at that point. Out of that, we then deconstructed this improvisation and reconstructed the structure of the scenes and rehearsed them in the location and arrived at the resolution. So, we created all that and then we shot it. Now, a) I couldn't have sat in my room and written that sequence in a million years, and B) we couldn't have constructed it in a rehearsal room or something. It had to be in the location with the actors in character in real time, in costume, with real food, but improvising with the crew and then allowing an organic reality to live.



Whereas, what we do is we literally make it up as we go along. Very often I've shot three quarters or four-fifths of the film and we don't know how it's going to end even. But that's what novelists do when they write novels and that's what painters do when they paint. So, I aspire to those artistic conditions.

That's what it's all about, and to do that, in what is also a collaborative process, you have to have people who are on the same wavelength. This includes actors. I mean, there are actors who say, 'If I don't know what it's about – or what the character is or what the part is or how big it is or if I don't have an overview of the film – I can't take part'. Well, I am not interested in that sort of actor. There are actors who are ready to go on with it and to go on an adventure with me while I can only know what my character ever knows and discover things organically and so on and so forth. That is what results in the

work that you see on the screen in my films.

QBM: There is a bit of confusion in my mind because there's the idea that the rehearsals generate the script.

ML: The rehearsals generate the premise, right at the end of which I do write a kind of skeletal picture of possibilities. But then we build the film scene by scene, location by location, sequence by sequence through rehearsal to improvise anything through the rehearsal in the location and build the film up as we go.

QBM: So, you allow for chance.

ML: Yes.

QBM: You allow your methodology of not having a detailed script and letting the location and the actors...

ML: Yes, I can't write a scene until I'm in the location – the detailed scene. And this is the way I answered your question about the way what's evolved about ways of looking at things. For example, you mentioned the climactic sequence in *Secrets and Lies*, where we had shot four fifths of the film or whatever it was. We then stood the film crew down for ten days or something. In the house, in the location in north London...

QBM: Was it Hertfordshire?

ML: No, it was Southgate. In the House – which was completely dressed for the characters and we had already shot stuff – we had a massive improvisation with the actors in character for 10 hours and they all came around. The actors didn't know who Hortense was and all the other stuff be-

cause their characters wouldn't know at that point. Out of that, we then deconstructed this improvisation and reconstructed the structure of the scenes and rehearsed them in the location and arrived at the resolution. So, we created all that and then we shot it. Now, a) I couldn't have sat in my room and written that sequence in a million years, and B) we couldn't have constructed it in a rehearsal room or something. It had to be in the location with the actors in character in real time, in costume, with real food, but improvising with the crew and then allowing an organic reality to live. That isn't to say that, what we put on the screen was exactly that. It only gave us the starting point. We then had to negotiate it and just glide it so that it made dramatic sense. So that's what happens, right.

QBM: I haven't read much about the process of editing in your work. How much of your work comes together in editing? We have talked about the rehearsals, but can we talk about editing a bit as well?

ML: All films are made in the cut-

ting room. No matter what the film is or however organized it is, you only shoot the raw material when you shoot a film. Again, however constructed or organized it is, it is raw material. The film is made in the cutting. During the cutting, as you know and I do, you can put it together and you see what the audiences would see. Then, you can rearrange it backwards, forwards and sideways. You can take bits out, distill it and all the rest of it. That is a fact – a technical fact. So that is part of the answer to your question.

Now, my work is not of the kind, and there exists a lot of work of that kind which ought to be very exciting and interesting, where massive amounts of ad lib material is created and only a tiny bit of it winds up in the film. Mostly, what I shoot is in the film proportionately. I mean, we might cut the odd scene or short it or decide that this, that or the other is redundant or repetitious or not interesting or whatever. But for the most part, what I shoot is what's in the film.

However, that doesn't alter the fact that what you do with that material in detail, needs to be very precisely and expertly edited. I don't edit myself. I know the editors. I work with an editor and again, it's absolutely the sort of collaboration that we were talking about 20 minutes ago. If you look at the massacre scene in *Peterloo*, we shot that over a number of weeks and we prepared it, and then we let things happen. We also did shoot with three cameras. If it weren't for the fact that I've got a brilliant and fantastic editor, although nothing in the film is what I wouldn't want, it takes a guy who would say to me, "go away and come back in three days and just leave me to it". They would say "I will sit and really do the detailed stuff and then you should come back and I can change things if you want". And so that's fantastic. That is

how it is. That is what it is about. So, editing is the critical part of all filmmaking.

QBM: Have you ever re-shot, something? In case, you think you haven't got enough and then maybe get everyone back together for the re-shoot?

ML: Very occasionally. I don't do that very much. It's very interesting. Somebody else asked me the other day.

Hardly. I mean, there is a scene in *Secrets & Lies*. It was unfortunate. I had an actor playing a guy who in this scene goes to see a social worker to trace something. Part of it was played by an actor who was, for reasons that had nothing to do with anything, just useless. We shot the scene and it was just an embarrassment. We completely finished the film. When we look at it, it sticks out in the middle of the film. You've got a terrible gaping hole in it. I went and met Lesley Manville, whom I have worked a lot with, and she happened to be free. Well, I thought I won't insult the actor who fell apart by getting another guy, rather, I'll get a woman. She really researched for a week and then we rehearsed it for a week and we just slotted that in. It ended up being a brilliant scene.

That is an exception. It happened because of somebody not being up to the mark. The short answer would be, mostly not.

QBM: Some of your work is inspired by cinema that uses non-professional actors. I mean some of your cinema is inspired by world cinema which uses non-professional actors. On the other hand, you have also worked with actors who are sort of the pro-

fessional league players of cinema.

ML: I don't work with non-professional actors.

QBM: Why?

ML: Apart from anything else, what I ask for is sophisticated. First of all, one of the most technical facts about the acting in my films is that it is about character art. People are not doing themselves. They are doing characters that aren't them. That's a sophisticated thing. There are many actors in many movies who play themselves all the time. In the sense that it is always a small version of themselves. That's not what my actors do. There are all sorts of very sophisticated things involved. I have to draw actors from specific disciplines. That is just not possible without professional actors. That's it, basically.

QBM: So, what is your understanding of the teaching of acting, the techniques of acting and the role of actors within filmmaking and theater?

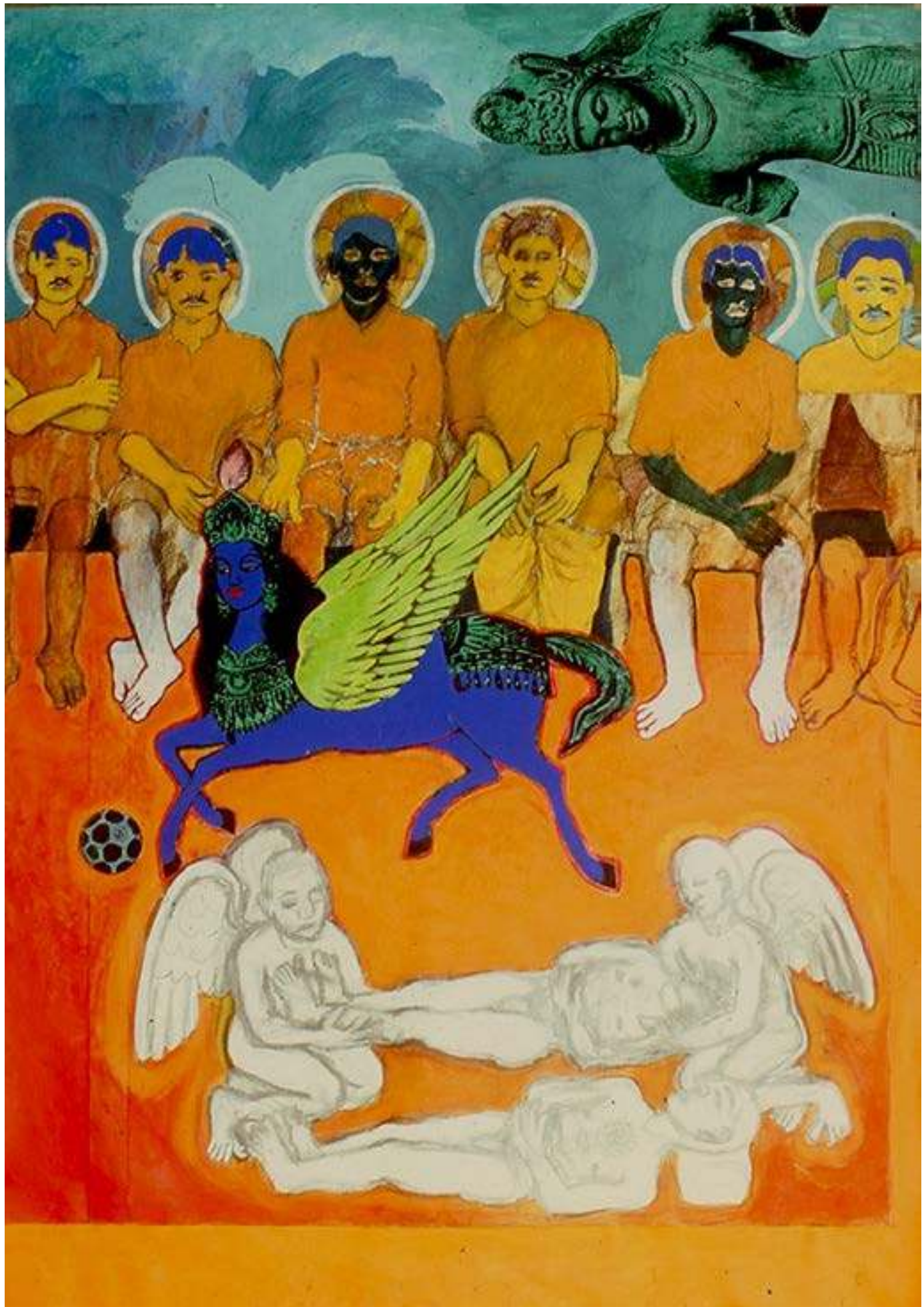
ML: To begin with, my criticism of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, which I attended in 1960-62, a long-time, in fact, 60 years ago. At that time, which is absolutely not true now because currently this place is very good, it was a very mechanical, externalized and superficial kind of acting. There is nothing to say about the

teaching of acting. I mean, I went to art school and not film school in the beginning. In the end, you cannot make anybody be able to act if they didn't know how to act before anymore than you can make anybody draw if they couldn't draw before. What you can do is create an environment in which they can explore, investigate and think about all sorts of different things and try things. And take on board, some of the technical disciplines of whatever medium you are working with, be it painting or acting or any other thing.

QBM: I just want to say something before I take leave. Looking at your works, the ones I have been able to get for free, I would say that two things happened for me. First, your work got me not stopping at the end. If that makes sense. I didn't stop at the end of *Naked* saying yeah it was nice, no, the characters are still with me. That stays with me, along with the characters and the story. For example, *Secrets and Lies*, I love it. For *Peterloo*, I had to google things. I just had to find out who Hunt was.

So, that's one and the second thing which I think is very valuable, is that I grew up in a working-class area in Colindale near Burnt Oak, you might know that area. I could see how I could visualize things in my house, cinematically from your films. That is why I was saying you are being modest because you have created something for us – the grounds to begin to tell those stories which took place in our houses - working peoples houses, working people's stories, working people's lives. Not those palaces and estates of the Queen and the bourgeois elite. You chose the angles, the lighting and everything which we can learn from. I don't mean we can directly imitate but we can take away that from your work. It is a great body of work that will help us as a class.

(Mike Leigh and QBM get up and say goodbye)



Angels Putting Soul of the Man Back into his Body - by Anwar Saeed
Acrylics, Pencil and Collage on Paper, 2002.