

1. Annotated Bibliography

References From the Reading List

Anderson, B. (2006) 'Census, Map, Museum', in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. edn. London: Verso, pp. [115-129].

In the text, Anderson's discourse around maps being instruments of colonial control brought about a shift in my fundamental understanding of cartography. As the text suggests, "Maps, censuses, and museums... profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion—the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry." (Anderson, 2006, p. 163) I realised that maps are not neutral representations, but rather active tools in the construction and retention of authority. This was a monumental comprehension for me as it challenged my previous fascination with maps as "harmless", purely objective, and aesthetic objects. The exposure was essential to set the tone for the project, as I now investigate further as to how borders have shaped communities over the years. The text has been incredibly influential in allowing me to be attuned to how the act of mapping can reinforce or contest power structures. Anderson's analysis compels me to critically examine the origins and implications of the borders I encounter in my research, and to consider how my work might either perpetuate or disrupt these inherited lines of division.

Queneau, R. (1998) *Exercises in Style*. London: John Calder, pp. 9–16, 19–26.

Queneau's iterative experiment with language, as described in the preface in the following words:

"His purpose here, in the Exercises, is, I think, a profound exploration into the possibilities of language. It is an experiment in the philosophy of language. He pushes language around in a multiplicity of directions to see what will happen. As he is a virtuoso of language and likes to amuse himself and his readers, he pushes it a bit further than might appear necessary—he exaggerates the various styles into a *reductio ad absurdum*—*ad lib.*, *ad inf.*, and sometimes—the final joke—*ad nauseam*." (Queneau, 1998, p. 14) suggests that repetition as a method allows you to question the boundaries of meaning and perception. Drawing from the same methodology, my investigation also

incorporated repeatedly drawing the world map and the Indo-Pak border from memory. Each iteration became a site of discovery, revealing how memory, subjectivity, and even fatigue shape the act of making. With the benefit of hindsight, I can conclude that Queneau's willingness to "push language around in a multiplicity of directions to see what will happen" aligns with the treatment of my process as a form of research, one that values the journey of making as much as the final outcome. Additionally, I was challenging the fixity of borders and the authority of cartographic representation, which became a way to question how repetition, error, and variation can open up new ways of seeing and understanding, both personally and politically.

Steyerl, H. (2012) 'In Defence of the Poor Image', in *The Wretched of the Screen*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, pp. 31–45.

Steyerl's essay "In Defence of the Poor Image" offered a compelling viewpoint that both challenged and enriched my understanding of my project. Her concepts aligned perfectly with my ambition to reimagine the border through everyday narratives and personal experiences, rather than relying on official or state-approved imagery. In the chapter, she said, "the poor image exposes the decline and degradation of the film essay... enabled by the belief that cultural production was a state responsibility." It particularly struck a chord with me as it aligned with my approach to the project, where I was critiquing the state's historical role in shaping the border narrative and emphasized how a rather decentralized image-making can challenge this authoritative hegemony. Steyerl's ideas motivated me to recognize the value of raw, imperfect, and communal aspects of visual culture, viewing my project as part of a broader movement to reclaim history and identity using whatever images are accessible. This translated effectively into my creative process eventually, when I captured screenshots from the LOC project website to source images. In that way, I had truly grasped the inspiration that this reference had provided me and materialised it into my process of making.

References Outside the Reading List

Tarar, S. (Year) *The Construction of Pakistan: Mapping Partition*. Available at:

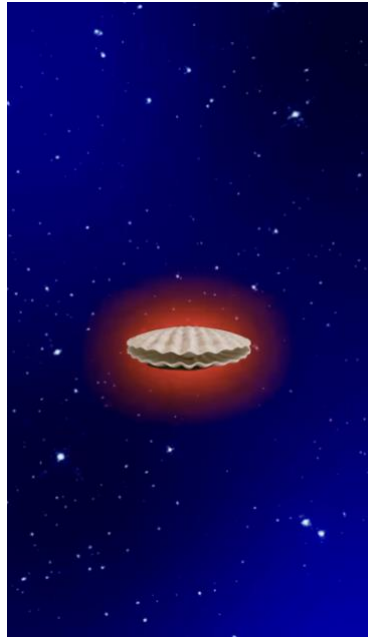
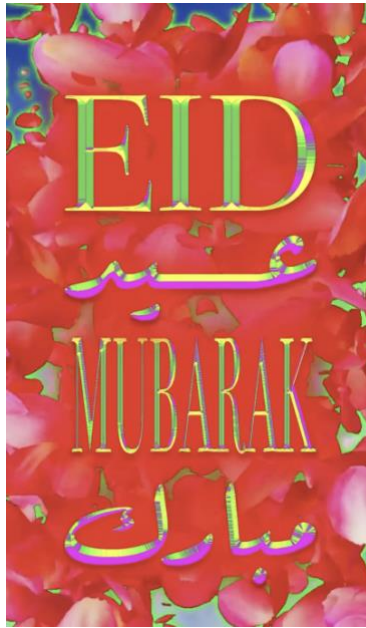
https://shaheer.info/works/mapping-partition/construction_of_pakistan.pdf

(Accessed: 25 April 2025).

Perhaps, the most profound theme in this colonial-critique laden reference was how Shaheer brought to light the idea that seemingly innocuous marks on paper, drawn hastily and with little regard for lived realities, can produce consequences of immense gravity. The text says: “However, one overt objective I do have with this atlas is to illustrate the absurdity of governing (and partitioning) vast swaths of land just using pieces of paper, and bring into sharper relief the cruelty of the imperial logics under which paper can hold hegemony over millions of people.” Since my project incorporates the usage of maps as a form of decolonial protest, in line with the investigation of the atlas, this realisation directly informed my own making: I chose to work with bare, unadorned lines in my map drawings as a form of protest and critical reflection. By stripping the map to its most basic elements, I wanted to expose the absurdity and arbitrariness of these boundaries, inviting viewers to question their legitimacy and to recognize the very real suffering they have caused.

This reference also helped me sharpen my line of enquiry. My project initially began with a broad investigation into how territorial mappings shape modern identities, but the atlas allowed me to consider the micro-level implications of borders as well. I ended up reflecting on how my sense of self is woven from multiple regional influences—Punjabi music, Sindhi fabrics, Urdu poetry, Balochi fashion, all while being ethnically Pashtun—I see my own hybridity as a living testament to the artificiality and permeability of these lines. Hence, I came to the realisation that, alongside nations, maps also influence personal and cultural identities.

Dazed (n.d.) ‘Unpacking the kitsch cyber aesthetic of WhatsApp aunties’ Ramadan greeting’. Available at: <https://www.dazed.me/life-culture/unpacking-the-kitsch-cyber-aesthetic-of-whatsapp-aunties-ramadan-greeting> (Accessed: 23 April 2025).



This article was pivotal in informing the material and methodological choices that I made while engaging with the "making" element of the brief. Alongside aiding my conceptual understanding, it also pushed me to challenge my own internalised biases against non-Western visual languages due to years of exposure to the hegemony of Eurocentric design standards. I had the chance to ponder how unapologetically the author had encouraged readers to celebrate the digital, maximalist aesthetic instead of frowning upon it. As my project explores the politics of borders and identity, I realized that the medium and style of making could themselves be acts of resistance. Consequently, I shifted from a rather minimal, publication-based approach that I had taken initially to one that incorporated digital tools and hyper-maximalist elements that focused on ornamenting the canvas with layers of patterns.

Dazed (n.d.) 'Islamic maximalism: Spirituality in design as a voice against the aesthetic design hegemony of minimalism'. Available at: <https://www.dazed.me/art-photography/islamic-maximalism-spirituality-in-design-as-a-voice-against-the-aesthetic-design-hegemony-of-minimalism> (Accessed: 24 April 2025).

The analytical framework adopted for this piece was greatly informed by the discussion in this article regarding the reclamation of Islamic maximalism as a choice of resistance to the "aesthetic hegemony of minimalism." While engaging with the reading, I was particularly moved by the focus placed on familiarity as a source of solace and identity as

it stated “Now, many years later, I can see why an Islamically decorated upbringing would prime you to feel safe when you enter a room that activates multiple sensory channels – with tribal, ethnic, or kinship patterns serving as anchors of familiarity—‘I know this pattern, I saw it in my mum’s home.’” In the context of my project, where the map of the Indo-Pakistan is repeatedly redrawn and ornamented, this perspective allows me to position my method as a form of cultural and political critique. In addition to reclaiming a lost visual heritage, my emphasis on maximalism reveals how colonial and globalising influences have influenced the idea of what is considered “good” design, and by extension, what is considered a legitimate identity. The article thus underpins my project’s critical position: that the act of adorning, layering, and repeating is not excess, but a necessary reclamation of space and meaning in a world that has long privileged minimalism as a marker of modernity and progress.

Phaidon Editors (2015) *Map: Exploring the World*. London: Phaidon Press.



In the initial phases of the project, this book offered an incredibly fresh perspective that enabled me to set the stage for the project. I've always had a thing for maps, but seeing such a huge range with some ancient, some modern, some drawn on paper, others woven into rugs—made me rethink what a map even is. The book didn't just show maps as lines on a page, but rather, sometimes they were bold, almost artistic, with dramatic landscapes or incredibly pronounced typography. What really stuck with me was how the book compared maps from before and after colonialism. Seeing how mapping evolved from being adaptable and based on local knowledge to being subject to external control was an eye-opening deduction. The realization pushed me to loosen up in my own work as I began exploring rather than adhering to a single style, repeatedly sketching the same map, playing with different forms, and letting go of the notion that there is just one "correct" way to represent a location. It made me consider mapmaking as a means of challenging conventional wisdom and conceiving of fresh approaches to comprehending our origins.

Queering the Map (n.d.) Available at: <https://www.queeringthemap.com/> (Accessed: 5 May 2025).

Engaging with this project introduced me to the idea of "counter-mapping". Instead of merely condemning the border as an immutable line, this concept prompted me to view mapping as a means of resistance and re-imagination, particularly for marginalized voices. I came to understand that highlighting individual stories and lived experiences could provide a more impactful alternative to state-centric narratives. Hence, I started looking beyond just portraying "the line" and focusing on the human experiences that surround the line instead. Through my making, I experimented with anti-war typographic stickers and photographic visuals that revolved around the everyday commonalities between people on both sides. The notion of counter-mapping provided me with a fresh critical perspective: to utilize cartography not just for recording, but as a powerful tool for storytelling and building solidarity. Ultimately, this approach enriched the purpose of my project, allowing me to confront prevailing narratives and encourage viewers to envision more inclusive interpretations of territory and identity.

Dazed (n.d.) ‘Êvar Hussayni: How authentic archiving can be a radical act of resistance’. Available at: <https://www.dazed.me/dazed-mena-100/evan-hussayni-how-authentic-archiving-can-be-a-radical-act-of-resistance> (Accessed: 12 May 2025).

Coming across Êvar Hussayni's practice challenged me to rethink the ways we resist mainstream narratives, especially concerning borders and identity. The article stated: “For Êvar, archiving is not a static, methodological act of preserving the past, but an active, radical practice of reimagining history.” which allowed me to look at my efforts of an alternative imagination of the border in the same light. Wanting to transcend the state-centric and colonial viewpoints of the Indo-Pak border and all that it encapsulated indeed was a radical idea. Although I was already delving into alternative cartographies and the significance of individual narratives, her focus on lived experiences and “authentic memory-making” as evident from her statement, “I use the archives as a methodology to figure out alternative ways of reaching a place of authentic memory-making of Kurdish existence – one that isn’t solely based on the occupation of our land, but also equality in our identity, culture, language, music... joy,” directly informed my approach to the Indo-Pak border. Her perspective really got me thinking about how I could use maps differently. Instead of just focusing on the conflict and division around the border, I wanted to create something that celebrated the culture and people who live there. Her work inspired me to see cartography, similar to archiving, as a means to promote cultural recognition, despite historical and political challenges.

Malhotra, A. (2019) *Remnants of Partition: 21 Objects from a Continent Divided*. London: Hurst & Company.

Reading "Remnants of Partition" enabled me to connect the idea of personal stories and everyday items with the border. Malhotra’s emphasis on “material memory” illuminated how tangible objects such as keys, utensils, and letters can encapsulate the complexity of migration, yearning, and loss in ways that visuals alone cannot convey. The book encouraged me to view mapping not just as a visual task but as a means to gather and

share these concealed stories, creating a setting where memories, objects, and individuals can reconnect across divides. Malhotra's insights expanded my understanding of what is achievable and introduced a new approach for me to explore: employing maps as storytelling platforms, which would facilitate the lived experience, memory, or lost connection of so many people who have once inhabited this land. And, even though I haven't been able to fully realise this thought through my making, I do see it manifesting into that form eventually.

Khanwal, R. (n.d.) 'RK x AIR JORDAN 1'. Available at:

<https://www.ramshahkanwal.com/airjordan1> (Accessed: 10 May 2025).

Khanwal's Air Jordan 1 project profoundly changed my methodological perspective by highlighting how photography can express cultural ambiguity. I had previously limited myself to graphic design to explore border politics, but the images I encountered in this project nudged me to reconsider my approach. I couldn't distinguish whether the images were from India or Pakistan, even though the artist is Pakistani. Khanwal's project didn't intend to demonstrate the visual representation of shared cultural elements in the two countries, but it did prompt me to delve into the idea of "composite culture". This insight encouraged me to adopt an image-focused methodology, consistent with the principle of "show, do not tell." Alongside that, Khanwal's work made me realise that I should remove all labels and annotations from my final compositions, creating a purposeful ambiguity that challenges viewers to reassess their assumptions about which side of the border they perceive. This strategic omission of identification became a crucial element of my personal making, reflecting my critical perspective on the redefinition of borders by demonstrating that cultural similarities often diminish the significance of political divisions. The project not only suggested an alternative medium but also provided a new conceptual framework for examining the very foundations of separation.

Mustaali & Minahil (2022) Line of Control. Available at:

<https://www.lineofcontrol.org/> (Accessed: 12 May 2025).

The "Line of Control" project significantly challenged my initial perspective on visualizing the Indo-Pak border. Rather than viewing the border as a mere physical line, the project presented a new viewpoint by examining the metaphorical border through visually similar images from both countries. The website's interactive slider, which compared these images side by side, provided me with a vital realization that conveying the sense of being divided into two could be more potent by highlighting shared cultural features instead of the dividing line itself. This revelation motivated me to adjust my focus in my own project, placing greater emphasis on the visual representation of elements that underscore commonality, while perceiving the border as a more subtle, almost delicate, separating force. The images sourced from the website, which reflect scenes of everyday life, architecture, and cultural traditions, communicated a strong sense of shared heritage that is overshadowed by division. Observing these familiar scenes split by a digital border highlighted the poignant truth: despite having much in common, a seemingly fragile line can have a profoundly significant impact. Yet, the project offered me a pathway of re-imagining the border, as I sourced images from the site to insert them in the empty land masses in some of my earlier forms of making.

2. Extended Critical Analyses

Text:

Tarar, S. (Year) *The Construction of Pakistan: Mapping Partition*. Available at: https://shaheer.info/works/mapping-partition/construction_of_pakistan.pdf (Accessed: 25 April 2025).

Shaheer Tarar's work, "The Cartographic Construction of Pakistan: An Atlas," contends that maps should not be viewed as impartial representations of reality; instead, they are powerful tools that have influenced national identities and political scenarios, especially during the Partition of British India. He argues that the hurried and negligent manner in which borders were drawn has profoundly affected countless lives, entrenching division

and violence within South Asian society.

The formal characteristics of Tarar's atlas reinforce his thesis. The visual style is stark, relying on archival maps and minimal decor, which highlights the arbitrary nature of borders. Through the use of basic lines combined with historical documents, the artist challenges the perception of maps as unbiased representations. This visual approach encourages viewers to recognize that these borders result from human choices, carrying profound and often sorrowful consequences. By integrating archival materials, the atlas contributes to a wider decolonial discourse, stressing the lasting consequences of colonial mapping practices that still hold influence.

Engaging with Tarar's work has transformed my prior view of maps as purely aesthetic objects. I now perceive them as representations of power that can either uphold or contest authority. This realisation is a reflection of how my understanding of graphic communication design as a discipline has been altered. Aspects like lines and borders can carry ideological significance now, when I look at maps. Tarar's perspectives align with Benedict Anderson's ideas in "Census, Map, Museum," which makes a compelling case for how maps play a role in shaping national identity. However, Tarar's concentration on the Indo-Pak border and the personal impact of partition makes his analysis particularly relevant to me, especially considering my Pakistani roots. Hence, engaging with it really helped me narrow down my studio practice throughout the course of this project.

Besides that, Tarar's work also interacts with other influences in my project. One of these was a Dazed article about the kitschy cyber-aesthetic of WhatsApp greetings, which encouraged me to adopt a maximalist approach in my making as a form of cultural resistance. While the atlas is minimalistic, both works challenge prevailing hegemonic narratives and push forward the idea of reclaiming visual space from colonial or Western ideologies. This balance between minimalism and maximalism has influenced my creative process, prompting me to explore both as ways to protest and reclaim.

The atlas ended up having a significant impact on my studio practice as I was engaged in a process of reading and reiterating. Tarar's exploration of how borders are arbitrary resonated with my creative approach of creating world maps and the Indo-Pak border from memory, using simple lines to highlight their constructed nature. This repetitive act

was symbolic in nature as it served as a form of protest, encouraging viewers to question the lack of meaning such borders held. More significantly, Tarar's work led me to reposition my focus and move beyond mere criticism of colonial actions. Rather than that, I began to contemplate a new way of visualizing maps, thinking about how cartography can serve as a means for decolonization. My sticker-making practice, which includes embellishing, decorating, and mocking borders, corresponds with Tarar's goal to challenge conventional narratives and reimagining them through the lens of maps.

Through the course of iterative reading and making cycles, I have found Tarar's atlas to be a central influence on my approach to both the content and the format of my making. It has equipped me with the vocabulary to express my indulgence in borders and has motivated me to use mapping as a medium for resistance and storytelling. Tarar implicitly encouraged me to prioritize lived experiences, humor, and cultural blending by enabling me to immerse myself in the discourse surrounding the violence and absurdity of partition. I perceive the maximalist and kitschy stickers to be more than mere playful interventions; they represent acts of reclamation that challenge the authority of traditional maps and shift the focus towards the celebration of complex realities that transcend borders.

Project/Practice:

Dazed (n.d.) 'Unpacking the kitsch cyber aesthetic of WhatsApp aunties' Ramadan greeting'. Available at: <https://www.dazed.me/life-culture/unpacking-the-kitsch-cyber-aesthetic-of-whatsapp-aunties-ramadan-greeting> (Accessed: 23 April 2025).

The Dazed article titled "Unpacking the kitsch cyber aesthetic of WhatsApp aunties' Ramadan greeting" explores a unique, exuberant digital visual style that has gained popularity in Middle Eastern online communities, especially through the messages exchanged by older generations on WhatsApp recently. It incorporates examples from Sarah Elawad's creative practice that revolves around this maximalist and kitschy aesthetic. While the examples in the article are primarily drawn from Middle Eastern contexts, I instantly recognized it since I had been familiarized with it while growing up in Pakistan, through not just WhatsApp stickers but advertising, print media, and pop

culture in general. The main idea of the article is that these greetings, frequently dismissed as kitsch or poor design, actually represent vibrant expressions of cultural identity, warmth, and a resistance to Western minimalistic design. Instead of viewing these images as obsolete, the article frames them as authentic, joyful, and deeply connected to local traditions.

The formal characteristics of these kitschy visuals feature vibrant colors, sparkling or animated text, floral borders, and religious symbols, which serve as visual elements that actively resist minimalist preferences. This visual richness is intentional as it represents a joyful affirmation of abundance, connection, and community. The greetings are frequently customized and widely shared in digital environments, fostering a feeling of closeness and belonging. This bold acceptance of decorative styles and "bad taste" directly contests the subdued, Eurocentric ideals prevalent in much of today's graphic design.

Interacting with this article and seeing its resonance in Pakistani culture nudged me to reconsider my understanding of what constitutes “good” design. Growing up in Pakistan, my conception of Pakistani design culture was accompanied by a sense of shame regarding it, as it did not conform to European standards that the internet had allowed me to experience. Coming across Sarah Elawad's practice, through this article, encouraged me to seek substance in the visual languages that emerge organically within communities, even if they don't align with the academic and professional conventions. In this regard, these maximalist and kitschy graphics serve as forms of resistance, asserting the validity of local customs and resisting erasure by global uniformity.

This viewpoint is reflected in other references that have shaped my project as well. The piece titled “elderly graphics: so bad that they’re good” discusses how the kitschy and sincere visuals shared by older generations on messaging apps are frequently regarded as poor design, yet they serve as meaningful manifestations of care and cultural continuity. Likewise, the article on India’s storage examines how the constant stream of “good morning” images on WhatsApp turned into a cultural trend, even leading Google to create tools to handle the overwhelming quantity. Both sources emphasize that these visual practices, while sometimes perceived as excessive or bothersome, are vital to how communities convey affection, humor, and identity in the digital era.

These insights enabled me to progress with my studio practice, especially in the development of my kitschy, maximalist sticker work. Inspired by the aesthetic of these WhatsApp greetings, I adopted a similar approach in my making by layering bright colors, animated text, and familiar motifs to create graphics that are both humorous and heartfelt. The stickers are not merely intricate visuals; they serve as a means to take back visual space, honor cultural diversity, and foster connections with others through common references. The Dazed article, along with these associated references, has empowered me to dismiss the expectation of adhering to minimalist or "tasteful" design, encouraging me instead to embrace the strength found in the aesthetics of abundance.

In conversation with other references, such as the "Line of Control" initiative and Shaheer Tarar's atlas, the Dazed article assisted me in contributing to a counterculture, stemming from the global south, that rests on decolonial and community-centered design. All of these references question prevailing narratives, whether about borders, taste, or identity, and employ visual language as a means of resistance and connection. Being able to go through these references, throughout this project, allowed me to expose myself to the worldwide resonance of this counterculture. It has eventually enabled me to view kitsch not as a deficiency, but as a source of cultural pride and creative empowerment, transforming my making into a celebration of shared culture and ways of resistance that persist beyond imposed borders. As I move forward, with respect to this project, I want to ensure that my ways of making are also decolonial and reclamatory in nature, beyond the substance that I am working with. In doing so, this art style would serve as a vital key ingredient in advancing this aspiration.