

1. Line of Enquiry

My line of enquiry began with questioning how maps, particularly territorial mappings, have influenced my perception of the world. After drawing the world map from my memory through a series of iterations, I was drawn further towards considering the subject of why I could easily pinpoint some places while others remained hazy in my mental map. This led me to explore how the rigidity of borders intersects with my own identity and how statehood is visually and conceptually enforced through cartography.

As my enquiry evolved, I moved from the macro frame to a rather micro one in which I started investigating the relationship of these mappings with the geopolitics of my country, Pakistan, and my identity. This further raised questions against the backdrop of heated tensions between Pakistan and its eastern neighbor India about how humor, propaganda, and digital spaces metaphorically challenge or reinforce borders. I began asking how media narratives soften national images, how humor can act as anti-propaganda, and how artists like myself might respond to conflict induced by borders. Throughout, I have used critical questioning, design iteration, and mapping as my core methods, enabling me to trace the ways in which maps, once tools of control, can also become spaces for decolonial resistance and personal redefinition.

2. 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 that, "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 Exercices, 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.

References Outside the Reading List

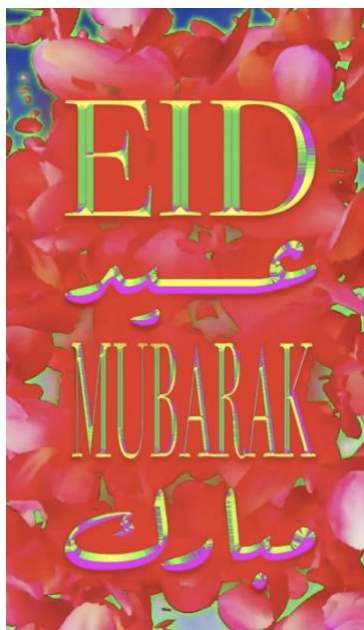
Tarar, S. (Year) *The Construction of Pakistan: Mapping Partition*. Available at: https://shaheer.info/works/mapping-partition/construction_of_pakistan.pdf (Accessed: 25 April 2025).

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 had 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 over 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.