

1983 - 2019: The Continuity of Art Censorship in Pakistan — The Women's Dissident Network, Two Documents, and Two Generations of Censorship Forms from a Stratigraphic Perspective

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Abstract:

Existing scholarship on Pakistani art politics conventionally frames 1988 (the end of Zia-ul-Haq's military rule) as a definitive rupture, framing art censorship as a closed chapter confined to the Zia era and post-1988 period as one of democratic transition and global artistic recognition. This linear narrative renders the 2019 Karachi Biennale (KB19) censorship incident—where artist Adeela Suleman's *Killing Fields of Karachi* was sealed and destroyed by law enforcement and disavowed by the biennale organizing committee—a “missing event” unaccounted for in academic discourse. Adopting Foucauldian eventualization, stratigraphic metaphor, and the framework of intergenerational dissident networks, this study retrieves the KB19 incident from news archives and situates it within a continuous historical stratum stretching from 1983 to the present. It argues that the 2019 censorship is not a residual echo of 1980s repression but a structural recurrence of Pakistan's women's dissident network, which originated with the 1983 *Women Artists Manifesto* and was reactivated across generations in the 2019 solidarity open letter. By comparing the two texts, this research reveals evolving modalities of censorship—from named state repression under martial law to anonymized neoliberal censorship and institutional self-censorship—alongside the persistent structural grammar of artistic dissent, including professional identity-based resistance, metaphorical political expression, intergenerational institutional transmission, and strategic deployment of silence.

Keywords:

Pakistani contemporary art; art censorship; Karachi Biennale 2019; women artists' dissident network; stratigraphic analysis; intergenerational transmission

1. Introduction: The Missing Event in a Rupture Narrative

In existing studies of Pakistani art politics, 1988 serves as a rigid temporal boundary: the death of Zia-ul-Haq in a plane crash ended martial law, restored democratic politics, and supposedly consigned art censorship to history. Syed and Abdullah's (2015) four-phase periodization defines 1977–1988 as the “institutionalization of art censorship,” while post-1988 phases are framed as democratic transition and globalization with international recognition. In this narrative, censorship is treated as an exclusive feature of the Zia era, with no place in the post-dictatorial present.

On October 28, 2019, this boundary was stratigraphically exposed. The Karachi Biennale organizers declared Adeela Suleman's *Killing Fields of Karachi* “incompatible with the ethos of KB19 whose theme is ‘Ecology and the Environment’” and refused to display it; media simultaneously reported the work was sealed by “law enforcement agencies.” No images, official archives, or judicial records remain. The event unfolded and vanished within five days—reported on October 28, met with solidarity statements on October 30, street protests on November 1—and then disappeared from public view.

This omission from academic literature is not accidental. It is the inevitable result of the rupture narrative: when censorship is essentialized as a Zia-era phenomenon, the 2019 incident

loses the analytical grammar to be recognized as censorship. It fits neither democratic transition nor global recognition, becoming an unnameable missing event.

This study aims to recover the KB19 incident from news archives and re-embed it within the continuous historical strata from 1983 to the present. It argues the 2019 Karachi Biennale censorship is not a belated echo of 1980s authoritarian control, but a structural recurrence of Pakistan's women's dissident network in the 21st century. This network emerged with the 1983 *Women Artists Manifesto* and found intergenerational confirmation in the 2019 open letter supporting Suleman. Juxtaposing these two moments reveals the intergenerational transformation of censorship's forms and the enduring structural stability of dissident grammar.

2. Theoretical Tools: Eventualization, Stratigraphy, and Intergenerational Transmission

2.1 From "News" to "Event": Foucauldian Eventualization

The first methodological task is to transform KB19 from fleeting news coverage into a rigorous object of academic analysis, using Foucault's method of eventualization developed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*.

Eventualization does not isolate or exaggerate an occurrence; it re-embeds an apparently isolated incident within the multiple conditional networks that made it possible. For KB19, this means rejecting superficial explanations such as an individual official's decision or routine censorship, and instead interrogating three interconnected questions: what knowledge classification system framed "extrajudicial killings" as irrelevant to "Ecology and Environment"; what power relations allowed law enforcement to enter the biennale space while the organizing committee disavowed the work; and what historical sediment connects the 1983 manifesto signatories and 2019 solidarity signatories as nodes within the same network.

2.2 The Stratigraphic Metaphor: Time is Not a River, but Rock Strata

This study adopts stratigraphy as a core analytical metaphor to re-conceptualize historical temporality. Rather than understanding time as a uniform, flowing river, stratigraphy conceptualizes it as the superimposition of heterogeneous sedimentary layers, each with unique material composition, formation conditions, and fossil assemblages. Relationships between upper and lower strata are complex, including continuous deposition and unconformities marked by erosion or gaps.

Bringing this geological framework to historical analysis moves beyond the crude binary of continuity versus rupture between the 1980s and 2010s. Instead, it poses a precise question: are the 1983 *Women Artists Manifesto* and the 2019 solidarity open letter consecutive upper and lower strata within the same sedimentary basin, or separated by an unconformity caused by major structural shifts?

This study argues both documents belong to the same sedimentary basin—the Pakistani women's dissident network—as continuous upper and lower strata. Clear continuity exists in their fossil assemblages, including key figures, institutions, and discursive strategies, alongside significant lithological differences in censorship forms, media infrastructures, and state power intervention patterns.

2.3 Dissident Network: An Alternative Organizational Model

This study proposes the concept of a **dissident network** to distinguish it from traditional categories of "movement" and "organization." A movement relies on a unified ideological platform, fixed membership, and a linear narrative of emergence-apex-decline. An organization

assumes formal institutional structure, hierarchical labor division, and auditable membership rosters. Neither adequately describes the historical form of women's artistic dissent in Pakistan.

A dissident network is defined by four interrelated traits: loose connections sustained by informal bonds such as personal relationships, master–disciple lineages, shared professional experience, and exhibition collaborations, rather than formal membership or political affiliation; intergenerational transmission of critical knowledge, resistant strategies, and moral legitimacy through oral instruction, demonstration, and collective practice, rather than institutionalized training; discursive recurrence, where successive generations independently develop analogous metaphorical tactics under similar structural censorship pressure, representing convergent evolution rather than direct imitation; and dormancy and activation, remaining low-visibility for long periods before rapid mobilization around triggering events, issuing collective declarations before returning to quiescence.

This model provides a foundational framework for interpreting the KB19 incident: the 2019 open letter supporting Suleman was not a spontaneous civic action, but the rapid activation of a long-dormant dissident network. The signatory list stands as the fleeting public instantiation of this network's underlying structure.

3. First Stratum: The 1983 *Women Artists Manifesto* and the Birth of the Dissident Network

3.1 Stratigraphic Background: Zia-ul-Haq's Enforced Formalism

In 1983, Pakistan was in the sixth year of Zia-ul-Haq's martial law. Syed and Abdullah (2015) characterize the period's artistic ecology as enforced formalism: the state did not outright ban art, but incentivized depoliticized genres such as landscape, portraiture, and calligraphy through state patronage, while systematically removing works with political dissent or content deemed "incompatible with Islamic values" from state exhibitions.

Kamran (2019, p. 715) highlights the regime's gendered censorship orientation: state politics centered on female sexual morality, with strict visual and performing arts censorship targeting works addressing women's oppression, religious extremism, and dictatorship. Sheikh (2017, p. 3) documents concrete cases: Jamil Naqsh's female nudes were removed for "social ethics" in the 1981 national exhibition; works by Salima Hashmi and Jamila Masood were rejected for political content; Colin David's nude paintings were consistently excluded. Censorship targeted both direct political critique and figurative representations of the female body.

Against this backdrop, fifteen women artists in Lahore signed an unpublished document in 1983, later known as the *Women Artists Manifesto*.

3.2 Close Reading of the Document: Content and Strategy of the Manifesto

Per Kamran (2019, p. 716; 2021, p. 136), the manifesto states:

"We, the women artists of Pakistan, having noted with concern the decline in the status and condition of life of Pakistani women, and having noted the effects of the anti-reason, anti-arts environment on the quality of life in our homeland. Having noted the significant contribution the pioneering women artists have made to the course of arts and art education in Pakistan. Believing as we do in the basic rights of all men, women and children to a life free from want and enriched by the joys of fruitful labor and cultural self-realization and our commitment, as practitioners and teachers of the arts, to the noblest ideals of a free, rational and civilized existence. This affirms the following principles to guide us in their struggle for the cultural development of the people to serve as the manifesto of the women artists of Pakistan."

Close reading reveals three strategic layers. First, the signatories identify as “women artists of Pakistan” rather than “feminist” or “dissident” artists—a tactical choice to claim universal civilized rights through professional identity, avoiding the local stigma of “feminist” as a Western, anti-Islam import (Kamran, 2021, p. 135). Second, it expresses concern over the declining status of Pakistani women, a silent reference to the 1983 Law of Evidence that reduced women’s testimony to half that of men, and the violent suppression of women protesters. Third, it uses affirmative statements instead of direct accusations, a form of metaphorical politics that affirms shared values rather than condemning state actions, allowing circulation under censorship surveillance. Though never publicized under martial law, the manifesto empowered women to speak more boldly against misogyny in their art (Kamran, 2019, p. 716).

3.3 Stratigraphic Figures: The List of Signatories and Institutional Lineage

The manifesto signatories form the foundational fossil assemblage of Pakistan’s women’s dissident network: Zubeida Javed, Abbasi Abidi, Salima Hashmi, Lala Rukh, Talat Ahmed, Shehrazade Alam, Rabia Zuberi, Jalees Nagi, Birjees Iqbal, Riffat Alvi, Nahid Raza, Mehr Afroz, Qudsia Nisar, Mamoona Bashir, Veeda Ahmed.

Kamran (2021, pp. 136–137) summarizes their artistic practices: Zubeida Javed’s conceptual landscape painting; Abbasi Abidi’s still life with quiet resolve; Salima Hashmi’s metaphorical work centered on windows and withered branches; Lala Rukh’s abstract lines and grids; Talat Ahmed’s figurative sculpture amid prohibitions on human imagery; Shehrazade Alam’s pottery as craft-based resistance; Nahid Raza’s abstracted female bodies through torn veils; Mehr Afroz’s small-scale gender-political paintings; and Riffat Alvi’s homeland and soil imagery.

Institutional lineage is critical. Arshad (2023, pp. 6–7) notes Anna Molka Ahmad, sole permanent fine arts faculty at the University of the Punjab, shaped an entire generation of women painters including Abbasi Abidi. Hashmi Qutub and Manzoor (n.d., p. 9) add that Mehr Afroz and Nahid Raza—1983 manifesto signatories—were long-term faculty at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (IVS). Adeela Suleman graduated from IVS in 1999 (Wikipedia, Vasl Artists’ Association), meaning she inherited dissident grammar: indirect political expression and sustained speech under censorship, not merely formal artistic training.



Figure 1 & 2. Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (IVS)

Website Source: <https://zoralnaik.com/indus-valley-school-of-art-architecture/9swyn3hx8v99laan0lv71947pru16v>

4. Second Stratum: The 2019 KB19 Incident and the Recurrence of the Network

4.1 Stratigraphic Background: The Myth of "Freedom" in the Post-9/11 Era

From 1988 to 2019, Pakistan underwent democratic transition, military coups, the War on Terror, and the social media revolution. A liberation narrative dominated the art world: Zia's dark age ended, censorship vanished, and Pakistani art achieved unprecedented global recognition. Syed and Abdullah (2015, p. 32) formalized this view, framing 2001–2011 as an era of global opportunity for socio-political art, boosted by post-9/11 international attention.

While Pakistani artists indeed entered major global institutions, this narrative is incomplete: it equates international acclaim with domestic freedom and market success with political security. The KB19 incident acts as a stratigraphic interruption, proving state violence never left the art field—it only changed its intervention mode, and censorship persisted under new legitimizing discourses.

4.2 Reconstruction of the Event: Timeline, Curator, and Actor Network

With no surviving artwork images, official archives, or judicial records, this reconstruction relies on *Dawn* coverage (October 28–November 1, 2019), Wikipedia entries for Adeela Suleman and the Karachi Biennale, and the Aicon Gallery's official biography.

4.2.1 Chronology and Reconstruction of the KB19 Incident

The 2019 Karachi Biennale (KB19) theme was "Ecology & Environment," curated by Mohammad Zeeshan. Suleman's *Killing Fields of Karachi* was an officially invited core work in Zeeshan's curatorial section, verified by the Aicon Gallery and Karachi Biennale Wikipedia entry. This is empirically significant: the work was not an unvetted marginal piece, but formally integrated into the biennale's thematic framework. Zeeshan's curatorial choice institutionally certified the relevance of "extrajudicial killings" to ecological discourse—a certification later unilaterally revoked by the organizing committee.

October 27, 2019 (Sunday)

The biennale opened at Frere Hall. *Killing Fields of Karachi* debuted as a core work, featuring 444 concrete pillars arranged in a cemetery formation, each topped with a metal withered flower. A accompanying video played testimony from Khan Muhammad, father of victim Naqeebullah Mehsud.

On the same day, Karachi Parks and Horticulture Authority Director Afaq Mirza forcibly disrupted a press conference by activist M. Jibran Nasir, tearing down a microphone and attempting physical violence—signaling state violence spilling from anonymous law enforcement to cultural bureaucrats.

October 28, 2019 (Monday) Morning

Dawn reported the organizing committee deemed the work "incompatible with the ethos of KB19 whose theme is 'Ecology and the Environment'" (*Dawn.com*, 2019) and confirmed it was sealed by "law enforcement agencies." No agency name, legal authority, or work location was provided. Fifteen to twenty unidentified individuals smashed and removed the 444 pillars; the video space was padlocked with unmarked yellow seals. The committee claimed politicizing the biennale would undermine efforts to bring art to the public and marginalized artists into the mainstream (Wikipedia).

The core paradox is clear: Zeeshan had formally integrated extrajudicial killings into the ecological framework, yet the committee's disavowal revoked the legitimacy of its own curatorial system. This was not a thematic mismatch, but a clash between curatorial authority and administrative power, a paradigmatic case of artistic autonomy suppressed by institutional self-censorship.

October 30, 2019 (Wednesday)

Images (Dawn group) reported an open letter supporting Suleman, signed by Sheema Kermani, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Marvi Mazhar, and others (Images Staff, 2019). Civil society held a “die-in” at Frere Hall, with protesters lying amid broken pillars to memorialize extrajudicial killing victims. Students and citizens attempted to reconstruct the installation. As Suleman stated: “This is not a protest, this is a memorial — we will not forget you.”

November 1, 2019 (Friday)

Dawn covered a protest at the Karachi Press Club, with signs reading “Art is not a crime” and “Freedom of speech.” No police intervention or arrests were reported (Salman, 2019).

4.2.2 Artistic Analysis of *Killing Fields of Karachi*

As a site-specific installation, *Killing Fields of Karachi* employs a highly restrained, minimalist visual language to transform public space into a site of collective mourning and political testimony. Structured around 444 concrete pillars arranged in a grid-like cemetery formation, the work uses repetitive, monotonous forms to visualize the scale of extrajudicial killings; each pillar stands as an anonymous monument to an individual life erased by state violence. The withered metal flowers atop the pillars carry layered symbolic meaning: they reference rituals of commemoration while signaling the abandonment, neglect, and collective amnesia that surround victims of extrajudicial violence in Karachi.



Figure 3. Adeela Suleman's outdoor installation, *The Killing Fields of Karachi*, 2019
Website Source: <https://hyperallergic.com/adeela-suleman/>



Figure 4. A group gathers to watch the documentary portion of *The Killing Fields of Karachi* at 2019 Karachi Biennale
Website Source: <https://hyperallergic.com/adeela-suleman/>

The accompanying video installation further intensifies the work's emotional and political charge. Focused on Khan Muhammad, father of the victim Naqeebullah Mehsud, the video uses quiet, static framing and intimate testimony to turn abstract statistics into human suffering. The juxtaposition of the cold, industrial concrete pillars and the raw, personal grief of the video creates a powerful aesthetic tension: the architectural rigor of the installation embodies the impersonal machinery of state violence, while the video restores individual humanity to the numbered victims.

Situated in Frere Hall — a prominent colonial public space at the heart of Karachi — the work intervenes symbolically and geographically. It brings the violence of the “periphery” into the civic “center,” forcing elite and mainstream audiences to confront deaths that are routinely excluded from official history and public discourse. In formal terms, *Killing Fields of Karachi* operates as both memorial and critique: it avoids sensationalism, rejects rhetorical excess, and uses the quiet persistence of visual repetition to demand remembrance — making its forced erasure by law enforcement and the biennale organizing committee all the more politically symptomatic.

4.2.3 Key Characteristics of the Event Stratum

The KB19 incident displays four distinct stratigraphic traits that distinguish it within Pakistan's art censorship history.

First is the dual reversal of curatorial legitimacy. Zeeshan's authoritative thematic interpretation was unilaterally overturned by the organizing committee, creating a vertical institutional power fracture where administrative fiat overrode curatorial expertise, making curation itself a site of censorship.

Second is the anonymization and spillover of state violence. Destroying agencies operated without identification, justification, or legal warrant, while a cultural administrator used direct physical coercion. Violence shifted between anonymous institutional force and individual aggression, creating a double bind that blocked clear responsibility attribution.

Third is the embodied intensification of dissident grammar. The "die-in" elevated 1980s metaphorical politics to corporeal expression: where 1983 signatories used torn veils to symbolize confinement, 2019 protesters used their bodies as surrogate monuments for the destroyed work. When art is erased, the body becomes the final medium of resistance.

Fourth is the stratigraphic re-emergence of the dissident network. Solidarity from Kermani, Obaid-Chinoy, Mazhar, and others marked the 1983 network's activation in 2019, representing synchronic mobilization across generational nodes rather than replacement.

In sum, the incident is defined by anonymized unaccountable state violence, internal institutional curatorial division, embodied memorial protest, and intergenerational dissident network recurrence.

The 444 pillars were destroyed and removed, their whereabouts unknown. Zeeshan has not issued a full public statement; the committee has not retracted its judgment, launched accountability measures, or revised protocols. No officials were held responsible, no policies changed, and no artwork was recovered. This is not the chapter's conclusion—it is its starting point.

4.3 Discourse Analysis: The Knowledge Politics of the Biennale Statement

The statement issued by the Biennale organizing committee is the core discursive symptom of the KB19 incident. Its key formulation deserves repeated close reading:

"With regards to the exhibition in question, we feel that despite the artist's perspective, it is not compatible with the ethos of KB19 whose theme is 'Ecology and the Environment'."
(Dawn.com, 2019)

This statement accomplishes three discursive operations:

First, acknowledging value while simultaneously disqualifying it. "Despite the artist's perspective has its value"—this is an acknowledgment of the legitimacy of Suleman's art; "it is not compatible with the theme's ethos"—this is the immediate revocation of that same legitimacy. This is a form of exclusion that does not constitute defamation.

Second, opposing "the political" to "the ecological." The statement assumes that "Ecology and the Environment" are a non-political, universal, natural category beyond conflicts of interest, while "extrajudicial killings" are a particular, partisan, political category that should not enter cultural discourse. This is the violence of knowledge classification systems: certain life issues can be named as "environment," others are named as "politics." Karachi's air and water are ecology; the corpses on Karachi's streets are not.

Third, constructing "the margin" as a pre-political position. Wikipedia reports that the organizing committee believed its effort was to bring artists "from the fringe to the mainstream cultural discourse." This formulation presupposes: the margin is a pre-political, silent position, waiting to be "brought into" the mainstream to gain visibility. It completely ignores: Suleman's work does not "speak from the margin," but rather forces the margin—the victims of extrajudicial killings, the 444 lives deprived of names and faces by state violence—into mainstream view. The Biennale's "bringing in" precisely sought to erase this act of forceful insertion.

4.4 Stratigraphic Figures: The Network Manifestation of the Open Letter

The 2019 open letter is the stratigraphic counterpart to the 1983 manifesto, marking intergenerational network reactivation. Public supporters include Sheema Kermani, a dancer and longstanding Women’s Action Forum (WAF) member advancing women’s rights through performance; Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker focusing on gender-based violence; and Marvi Mazhar, social activist for marginalized communities.

Rigorous evidentiary reconstruction confirms tangible intergenerational links. Kermani collaborated continuously with 1983 signatories Lala Rukh and Salima Hashmi as core WAF members (Kamran, 2019; 2021; Hashmi Qutub & Manzoor, n.d.). Obaid-Chinoy shares a long mentor-collaborator relationship with Hashmi, established public knowledge in Pakistan’s art community. 1983 signatories Nahid Raza and Mehr Afroz taught at IVS, Suleman’s 1999 alma mater, verified by Wikipedia and the Vasl Artists’ Association website.

A methodological caveat applies: this juxtaposition raises interpretive questions rather than proving definitive causal links. Direct academic documentation of master–disciple ties and formal collaborations remains limited. The dissident network model justifies this comparison: intergenerational recurrence does not require constant direct interaction, but is sustained by shared institutional spaces (IVS), metaphorical political discourse, and opposition to state censorship and violence.

5. Intergenerational Comparison: Two Documents, Two Generations of Networks, One Structure

5.1 Stratigraphic Comparison

Dimension	1983 Manifesto	2019 Open Letter
Triggering Event	Promulgation of the Law of Evidence, reducing women's legal testimony to half	Destruction of Suleman's work <i>Killing Fields of Karachi</i>
Form of Publication	Unpublished internal document, circulated within women artists' networks	Public open letter, disseminated via social media and news media reports
Composition of Signatories	15 women artists, all practitioners and educators	trans-sector coalition of artists, filmmakers, dancers, social activists
Core Strategy	Affirmative statements, no direct accusations, speaking through professional identity	Direct appeal holding the Biennale accountable, endorsement through public figure influence

Relationship with the State	Explicit opposition to martial law, censors had names and faces	State violence anonymized, no official names, no institutional statements
Institutional Foundation	No formal organization, platform provided by Women's Action Forum (WAF)	No formal organization, social media as platform for publication and dissemination
Subsequent Impact	Became foundational archive of women's art dissent, repeatedly cited in academic literature	No lasting institutional change, rapidly faded from public view after the event

5.2 Diagnosis of Differences: The Intergenerational Evolution of Censorship's Forms

A comparative examination of the two moments reveals four critical shifts in the morphology of censorship and resistance, marking a clear intergenerational evolution in the operation of power and the articulation of dissent.

First, censorship has undergone a profound anonymization of the censor. In 1983, the Zia-ul-Haq regime functioned as a clearly identifiable, personalized locus of censorship: its authority was publicly visible, its policies nameable, and its repression open to contestation and historical documentation. By 2019, this personalized figure had vanished, replaced by a diffuse apparatus that operated without official attribution, institutional declaration, or legal authorization. The artwork simply vanished, a paradigmatic expression of neoliberal censorship: power operates through dispersed, depersonalized, and proceduralized mechanisms, rendering violence untraceable and responsibility structurally unassignable.

Second, the art institution itself has shifted from target to collaborator, representing the internalization of censorship. In 1983, a clear boundary separated the repressive state from the censored art field. In 2019, the Karachi Biennale organizing committee did not merely comply with external pressure; it actively legitimized censorship through the claim that the work was “incompatible with the theme”—a judgment produced not by state agencies but by the art institution itself. This self-disciplinary logic pre-emptively anticipates the limits of state tolerance, meaning censorship is no longer imposed from without but enacted from within.

Third, the media of dissent has been fundamentally transformed, with lasting implications for cultural memory. The 1983 manifesto existed as a physical document, circulated and preserved clandestinely, granting it durable archival weight that continues to be cited by scholars four decades later. The 2019 open letter, by contrast, circulated as a digital text across social media, achieving rapid dissemination at the cost of ephemerality. It disappeared from public visibility within days of the crisis and remains absent from sustained academic analysis, revealing a trade-off between communicative speed and archival persistence.

Fourth, the composition of resistance has expanded through professional spillover of the dissident network. The 1983 manifesto was signed exclusively by women artists, bound by a shared disciplinary and creative identity. The 2019 open letter mobilized a far broader coalition, encompassing artists, filmmakers, dancers, and social activists. This cross-sectoral alliance demonstrates that the grammar, strategies, and moral legitimacy of women’s art dissent had been adopted by women cultural producers across fields, consolidating a more expansive interprofessional solidarity.

5.3 Evidence of Continuity: The Intergenerational Transmission of Dissident Grammar

Despite censorship's formal evolution, the dissident network's core grammar retains striking structural stability across generations.

First, professional identity takes priority over explicit political labeling, grounding resistance in artistic dignity rather than partisan affiliation. Second, metaphorical political expression persists and evolves: 1983's veils and withered forms developed into Suleman's direct yet symbolically layered memorial, upgrading rather than abandoning metaphorical politics. Third, institutional lineage transmission continues via IVS, WAF, and Vasl Artists' Association, passing dissident grammar across generations. Fourth, strategic silence operates as resistance: the 1983 manifesto's unpublished status and 2019's destroyed artwork both refuse state-defined speech conditions, turning absence into political statement. Fifth, courageous naming evolves: 1983's silent institutional references matured into 2019's direct naming of Rao Anwar, accused of 444 extrajudicial killings, turning the artwork itself into archaeological testimony.

6. Conclusion

The KB19 incident dismantles the myth of post-Zia artistic freedom in Pakistan, proving censorship has not vanished but transformed into anonymized, institutionally internalized forms under neoliberal conditions. The intergenerational continuity between the 1983 Women Artists Manifesto and the 2019 solidarity open letter confirms the resilience of Pakistan's women's dissident network, which operates through loose informal ties, institutional lineage, and recursive discursive strategies rather than formal organizational structures. While media shifts and power mechanisms have altered the visibility and persistence of dissident actions, the core grammar of resistance—rooted in artistic professionalism, indirect political articulation, and refusal to be silenced by state-imposed constraints—remains stable. This study underscores that Pakistani art's global acclaim coexists with unbroken domestic regulatory pressure, and the study of its political ecology must abandon rupture narratives to center the continuous, layered history of censorship and dissent.

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