



aftab

arts & literature

spring/summer 2019

Cover Photo by Yahya Khan
Sony HX100V

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Photo by Mariam Munawar
iPhone 6s

Dear Readers of Aftab,

Aftab's history has been one of relentless strife. Over the years, the magazine has resurrected itself, each time promising to kindle the spark of its creativity. Like its contributors, Aftab has scoured every creative corner to call home. In the end, we cannot "fit" anywhere. And perhaps this is the most frustrating rite of art. But we at Aftab take pride in this friction.

Enclosed you will find words gnashing against the pages, grazing your fingertips with haunting scars. You may find your heart stained with watermarks of the printed images. At once chaotic and serene, these pieces capture raw emotions of this harsh, chimeric world, and attempt to mold them into a morsel that allows the mind to ruminate on these experiences wholly.

The intention of this year's executive board is to take us back to our roots. Our namesake, which stems from Farsi, signifies sunlight. This issue, like every issue of Aftab sheds light on the work of artists, poets, photographers, and writers that may find themselves without a garden for their work to flourish in.

We present to you narratives of identity and explorations of culture, each gently plucked from our brave and talented contributors. Their stories, we hope, will illuminate not only discussions of art, but also foster recognition and appreciation for experiences of all kinds.

Please enjoy the Spring 2019 edition of Aftab, in all of its misfit glory.

*- Hajra Jamal
Editor in Chief*



Photo by Abdullah Tahir
Nikon D7000





Photo by Zeina Smith
iPhone SE

Passage of Time

- *Tabmid Bhuiyan*

Time is relative.

To the youthful eye, it moves ever so slowly.

To the distracted dreamer, it travels unnoticed.

To the aging mind, it accelerates by the day.

How do you perceive the passage of time?

Model Minority

- Hajra Jamal

Ripped jeans you're besharam. Jhumkey with jeans you're cliché. Hijab wrapped you're a terrorist. Turban style with hair peeking out you're jaahil. Sing along to Bollywood you're a fob. Stutter in Urdu you're angrai. Halal Guys is greasy drunk food until Trader Joe's sells desi ghee. Stares on the subway in your shalwar until H&M advertises Modest Clothing. Arabic nameplates around their necks but the Muslim Pro Adhan scares them. Malala is a political pawn and Ms. Marvel isn't even real. Unfair and lovely is a movement until you get a tan. Say your name right they won't remember you. Chop it up for them you won't answer to what your mom calls you. Model minority: you'll never be the American dream.

If You're Muslim...

- *Maha Hashwi*

If you're Muslim, why don't you wear that thing on your head?

They say "if you're muslim" as if not wearing it erases my years of practicing Islam

I tell them it is called a hijab, an Arabic word, a religious obligation,

a piece of cloth that has followed me my whole life,
from imitating my mother by perfectly pinning it around my head,

to the idea of keeping it on forever.

I tell them what my mom taught me, that everyone wears it at a different time

and it is not yet my time, that it is a decision i have yet to make
I've had this excuse lined up since I was twelve.

But now, I am twenty and the words have worn out in my mouth.

My friends ask again but the question doesn't bother me as much
as my response does

and I say I don't know

I think it is more than a piece of fabric.

I think there is a feeling that comes along with the commitment.

To me, the hijab looks like commitment, like fulfillment,
like a spotlight, and I was not created for the stage.

I mean I'm still learning my place on this stage,
learning how to speak for myself, before I speak for all Muslims.

Without the hijab, I am 'fortunate' enough to look white.

My mother tongue will only come out if I decide to let it
unlike the way others can't control their discrimination by race

I'll be honest,
It is not easy being Muslim in America.
It's not easy being told you are incomplete because you are
uncovered
or told you are dangerous because you are covered.

I don't know why choosing modesty is incorrectly translated to
being controlled or oppressed.
It is a source of empowerment
We, Muslims, are not the ones oppressing Muslims.
I am bilingual but I don't know why Muslim means terrorist in
your language

Maybe I don't want to be called a terrorist walking home from
class,
maybe I don't want to be harassed for dressing every part of my
body,
maybe I am afraid of what this world has created, I am choosing to
live in my own,
maybe you think I am not "Muslim" enough,

I have learned that religion is a flickering light
when it's on, I wake up before the sun does and thank god
I cover up my hair and body,
hold up my hands and say god is the greatest
I pray five times a day
I am blessed that most days, the light is bright and blinding
and I can feel my skin glowing like the sun is reflecting its light
onto me
I bow down as it leaves, and i believe this was meant for me

The light flickers off and I only live life as if at night
It is dark in here and hard to see where my prayer mat lies on the
ground

So I sit this one out, say "I'll pray it at home"
I should have known I would almost be asleep,
Then deeply question the meaning of life, God's intended way
My eyes have adjusted to the darkness,
but eventually, my worries leave,
and I wonder if the stars are shining just for me
before the sun rises again



Photo by Syed Husain
Sony Alpha a7

Religion is a flickering light

We are not required to have all the answers, as long as we have all the questions

In the simplest form, I have yet to wear the hijab

because women who wear it are royalty to me,
they are queens, and I—

I am still a princess.



Study Abroad

- *Victoria Provost*

This is harder than I thought it would be.
It hurts.
Because I can feel every impossible, excruciating inch between us.
I feel you breathing as you lay sleeping, as I am waking up.
I feel the ebb and flow of the sea between us as it gently erodes me away.
I feel each wave of longing as it washes over me.
I learn to immerse myself in the freezing cold.

I sit in class, in coffee shops, on hillsides dotted with sheep and stone,
And the absence of you suddenly hits me like a gale of wind on the western coast.
My eyes close unprompted and I am unable to think of anything but you
And how far away you are.

“Can you hear me?”
This is my mantra as I grip my phone like it is my heart
Held in the hands of the ring on my right hand.
I twist my claddagh ring anxiously and wait for you to call back after the call drops.
I grin and bear the burden of twenty cents a minute.
I ache under the weight of each dollar it would cost to go home,
Never mind the conversion rate.
This is nothing compared to the pang when I hear your voicemail.
I vaguely, gingerly wonder what you’re doing.
I wonder if you feel my absence as acutely as I endure yours.

Here I am, alone,
Pouring my love for you into a notebook
That I will transcribe into two, four, six-page letters
That cost €1.50 apiece to send.
It's just me and the memories that punctuate my days, and the playlist
we listened to,
The navy blue plaid shirt I wore to your house,
And a silly picture from two summers ago, Scotch-taped to my wall;
This is what I have of you.
I am here
Watching fragments of your life through the screen of my phone,
Smiling at small pieces of lighthearted summer happiness,
Knowing I am powerless to help if the pieces are ever blue with
sadness.
I say this as the fragments I send to you begin to be tinged with the
color of the sky
As I become lost in staring too long at Dublin sunsets.
You are there
And I am here.

I gaze across the Atlantic.
I think it may be the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.
It is more breathtaking because I know you are there on the other side.
If you love someone who lives in the west, all the sunsets are beautiful.
And if I look hard enough, if the mist burns away,
Maybe I will see you,
Distant on the beach where we watched the sun rise
On the day I left.
And maybe, if you are looking, you will see me standing on this cliff
On the island my family left behind,
At the edge of the ocean,
Missing you.





Photo by Mariam Munawar
Kodak 400 film

Photo by Yahya Khan
Oneplus 3



Aleppo

- *Rida Ali*

The bombs were falling down
and they were too loud
The kids covered their ears
and tried to get around

The little girl raced home in confusion and despair
She flung the front door open,
only to see that her mother was not there

She looked at the table and there were the plates
Just like her mom left it,
the dinner patiently waits

But nobody in her family would live to know the taste
Her home was in flames,
and she was too late





Photo by Abdullah Tahir
Nikon D7000

Photo by Ikra Zulfiqar
iPhone X



Narrative Medicine

- Hajra Jamal

They said I'm supposed to know:
which way your bloods flows,
from the vena cava to right atrium.
How your neurons fire when you're
afraid – trauma in your synapses.

Beyond your bones and scars,
Tell me all of your stories.
I turn your flesh and blood
into paper and ink – help me
understand your pain.

I want to be more than doctor.
You are more than disease.
If it hurts outside the wound,
I'll perform autopsies on the
mistakes Biomed left behind.

Untitled

- *Rida Ali*

The intern opens an ice cold bottle of water, handing it to her candidate as the votes are being counted. If Zara Khan wins this election, America's history would be changed forever. She would be the first woman of color to win a presidential election on a third party ticket. It would create a new, more equal and diverse system of politics which the country was lacking. Many traditional two party extremists feared the collapse of the establishment, causing security and tensions to be very high on election night.

"Are you nervous?" the intern asks, taking the water bottle back from Ms. Khan. The presidential candidate smiles at the young intern, appreciating her passion and enthusiasm for this job.

"No, I am sure that this country will make the right choice." The woman replies. Journalists and politicians stand outside, giving statements on who they're supporting in the race. Assistants crowded all around Zara Khan to touch up her makeup and ensure that she was presentable for an acceptance speech. Ms.Khan was confident in her victory. She believed in the people and the desire for change in the country. It was only a matter of moments before the last few states would report their results. The team crowded around the television, praying that success was coming their way.

"The results for Alaska and California have been verified." Paula Wilson's high pitched voice rings through the speakers, attracting all the attention in the room. All eyes shift to the news as it is being broadcasted.

"Zara Khan has won the last two states, making her the 57th president of the United States of America." The room is engulfed cheers as the commentators report more information. The new President closes her eyes, realizing that she has made history. America elected equality. Justice. Inclusivity. Change for good.

America elected her.

The President is knocked out of her trance by the intern.

“Security is waiting outside for you. You’re making your acceptance speech in exactly 32 minutes.” The young girl informs her. The New President of the United States takes a deep breath and flows out of the office with the intern. Disbelief and adrenaline is present throughout all the staffers and employees on the campaign team. After a year of hard work, their candidate has won the race.

...

The cold November night doesn’t stop the large crowd from gathering in front of the stage. Tears stream down the faces of many as Ms. President steps out of the black car. Protesters from both sides of the spectrum are present, angered by the uncertainty that lies ahead. The spotlight shines bright on the stage as Zara Khan steps up to the podium. She cannot believe her eyes. Millions of people from around the country are watching her right now. The clock reads 11:56 PM and she begins her victory speech, words booming through the speakers.

“Citizens of the United States of America, we made history tonight.”

The crowd cheers with energy and exuberance.

“This country is going to change starting now.” She continues. “America will be-”

Before the President can finish her sentence, the city of Washington goes dark. The lights sizzle out causing confusion among the crowd. Nothing can be seen. Silence fills the air.

A gunshot.

At 11:59 PM the president falls to the ground. The lights turn back on, exposing the crowd to what has just happened. Blood seeps from her body and people begin to cry out in fear. The last thing the 57th President saw before closing her eyes for the last time was a young girl holding a gun in between her hands; Her intern.

America never wanted to change.



Photo by Abdullah Tahir
Nikon D7000



Easy

- Tahmid Bhuiyan

Fasting is easy
Praying five times is easy
Reading Qur'an is easy
Being a good human is easy
Being a Muslim is not

Being a Muslim means being patient
Forgiving offenses
Being understanding
Embodying acceptance
Absolving grudges

But they call us the problem
They call us invaders
Bigots hunt our brothers and sisters
Yet the media paints us the villains

Remaining patient isn't easy
Saying "I forgive you" isn't easy
Pointing fingers would be easy
Hating people would be easy
But I am a Muslim

And being a Muslim is not easy.



Photo by Syed Husain
Sony Alpha a7



Photo by Mariam Munawar
Kodak 400 film

Eyes

- Samina Saif

I wish I could hide myself in your eyes for a while,
Swim in the visions you carry, in the colors that scream out to you.
Escape in the blackness.
Heal you from the inside when I know the water is raging.
Lie there patiently while I wait for sleep to take you,
To take me.
Forge a path through the red veins,
Woven deep into your kind eyes.
See what you saw in me that made you stop
And ask me my name.





Photo by Muhammad Saeed
Canon Rebel T1i

"Hi Mom"

- Victoria Provost

I saw my mother today
She was old
Her face was shriveled and pale
She had finally surrendered
To the glasses she insisted that she and I both didn't need
Her fraudulent wedding bands were still on display on her left hand
ring finger
Her hair was balding and dyed red
The same red as her mother's had been
The same red I dyed my hair the summer I turned seventeen
Because I knew it would make her angry

I could not stop staring at that woman's small hands
Wanting to take one in my own and squeeze it
And say "Hi Mom"
"I love you, I miss you"
And call her
And miss her
And loathe myself for being homesick for something she never gave
me

I see my mother sitting on a park bench
She looks up, expressionless, fragile as an abandoned baby
No one else sees her
No one else sees her
Or what she does even though she's not here anymore
I remember my mother
I remember my mother in the hollowed, dusty atriums and ventricles
somewhere deep inside my chest
I remember my mother in the early hours of the morning when my
heart is beating too quickly to fall asleep

I remember my mother, chiseled in my uncertain neurons
In the unrelenting reflection of my face in the mirror
as I try to convince myself that I am not who I look like

The woman with the face of my mother gets up from the park bench
She walks by me with no recognition
She brushes my knee with her pocketbook
And says "I'm sorry"
And I know she will never mean that
But the part of me that knows what it's like
To be unloved by your family
Wants to forgive her anyway
So I dam up my post-traumatic stress disorder and my hope
Except my construction is as shoddy and unstable as my upbringing
And sometimes my dam overflows
And a few drops will leak out through the hairline cracks in my eyes

I see my mother in the faces of women on the street
Women who drag their children along the sidewalk like lap dogs
Women with distrusting faces and big, heavy handbags
Women with noses and hair and faces like hers
And like mine
I see women
I see them
I see my mother
I see her
I see my mother in dreams, in nightmares, in raised voices, in the
mirror, I see her
I am seven, I am nine, I am fifteen, I am seventeen years old, I see her
I see my mother watching TV hour after hour and I wonder if I will
get to eat dinner today
I see my mother snapping photographs as I smile through makeup
and streaking tears
I see my mother breaking the locks of my bedroom and bathroom
doors and putting them on my heart instead
I see my mother screaming at the neighbors who let me spend

afternoons at their houses but never listened to me when I said I didn't want to leave

I see my mother watching me from the front porch

I see her sleeping in my father's recliner

I see my father's car backing out of the driveway as I stand behind it

I try to make him stay

Maybe this time it will work

I see my mother taking too many pills

I see my mother asleep and I know I am safe for a few more hours

I see my mother's face as I tell her I want to go on a date and I immediately wish I could sew my mouth shut, just like she taught me

I see my mother playing with the neighborhood girls, with my old dolls

I see my mother tearing up my college acceptance letters

I see my mother's face distorted by tears and rage

I see my mother's hand raised above my head

I see my best friend bring her boyfriend home for dinner and I wonder if I will ever have that luxury

I see how other girls my age are excited at the prospect of having daughters someday, daughters that will grow from every choice or mistake you make

I see Facebook posts on Mother's Day that say "LIKE AND SHARE IF YOUR MOM IS YOUR BEST FRIEND."

I do not understand.



Photo by Zeina Smith
iPhone SE





Photo by Syed Husain
Sony Alpha a7

Tears are Prayers Too

- Samina Saif

It's dark aside from the lights on the edges of the plane's interior, trails of purple glowing down on us. I can just barely see the outline of the chairs holding the heads and arms of people sitting or sleeping comfortably. I hope that the harsh light of the TV screen next to me doesn't reveal my red eyes or the tears clinging to my skin. I think I see the flight attendant hesitate, but I look away so she doesn't have the chance to ask me if I'm okay. I don't feel like answering.

I raise the cup to my lips and down the entire glass. The coolness spreads into my arms, down to my fingers, and the pain sets into my forehead. Every good cry is usually followed by a headache. A mind happy to have shed its burdens, but jaded from the physical act of pushing out sorrow in the most visible way. I have definitely made the two people on either side of me uncomfortable. It's quite difficult to hide the fact that you're sobbing when you're wedged between two bodies, who to my surprise and dismay, have not chosen to sleep during a flight that is scheduled to land at four in the morning.

When I was little, the most exciting part of traveling with my family was going to the airport. After we'd set our bags down at the gate, my brother and I would run to the McDonald's after convincing our dad to let us each get a milkshake. Then, we'd bounce on the plane, waiting for the moment that the massive hunk of metal would take off. We loved the feeling of being propelled into the sky, of the plane rushing across concrete to float in the clouds.

After starting my first year of college in New York, the novelty and excitement of plane rides grew to be less and less. I've decided I'm either in a long distance relationship with New York or with Michigan, where

I grew up. Probably both. I cheat on each of them quite often, when I'm in the city and wishing that I could bask in Michigan's greenery, or when I'm sitting in my old room, wishing that I could fly back to NY and walk amongst the skyscrapers again. Everything feels transitory. The minute I see my dad, I think about how I'll have to say goodbye in a few days. My room in New York feels temporary. I haven't even attempted to make it homey. No posters. No inspirational quotes. No plants. Just my books and my bedding and necessities. When I get tired of the dull floor or the strange smell coming from the kitchen, I start counting down the days that I'll be able to see my parents.

The first time I cried on a plane was after spring break my freshmen year when I was flying back to New York. I had just hurt my parents a great deal. They had read my journal and found out about things that I had never intended for them to know. I didn't even have it in me to be angry with them, despite the fact that they had seemingly trespassed into my mind, clambering over the pages that I had held sacred. All I kept thinking about was how much more anxious they would be sending me off to school knowing that I had hidden so much for them.

It was early morning when I took that flight. The man next to me appeared to have some sort of infatuation with Bloody Mary's and had downed several by the time I fell asleep. I had the window seat, so it wasn't hard to hide the fact that I was crying. I pretended to be asleep when the flight attendant came around to ask if we wanted anything to drink and again when she came to collect the trash that each of us had inevitably created, composed of small crinkly wrappers and folded plastic cups.

I felt guilty that morning. Guilty because I hurt my parents. Guilty in front of God. Guilty because maybe I was unable to hold my own. But what was my own? What did I believe in? Why were the things I had done so wrong in the eyes of my parents when college students did those same things all the time? I didn't even have the answers, and that was the most infuriating part of it all.

My mom had written me a letter that I read on the flight. My family and I have never been good at communicating face to face. We survive difficult

times with letters and emails and text messages. It hurts too much to look each other in the eye, so we avoid that altogether. Her letter detailed her worries, her anxieties, but first and foremost her love for me. I remember folding the letter and putting it away. I'm not sure where it is now.

For so many years, I didn't want to be part of a Muslim, brown family. It seemed as if everyone else had it better off, with fewer rules, less policing, less everything that seemed so miserable at the time. But despite feeling all this, while I was growing up, the mosque was my happy place.

I didn't have many friends in middle school. I felt lonely as I wandered the halls filled with white students who seemed to live life so much differently than I did. The other girls at my mosque felt the same way. Many of us naturally distanced ourselves from the people we went to school with at a young age because we didn't know how to navigate a space where we stood out, and we were drawn to each other because we were all either brown, Muslim, or both. After Friday prayers, we'd gather and sit in the basement playing games, talking, laughing. Throughout it all, we were growing, helping one another up because we were each other's support system, whether we realized it or not.

The second time I cried while flying, I was defeated. Utterly broken. I had left a little piece of myself somewhere in the streets of New York each day for two months prior. I had succeeded in hiding my hurt from nearly everyone I knew, refusing to acknowledge my battered mental state. Everything seemed so futile. The goals that I had once held dear seemed as if they belonged to a different woman, someone I had yet to meet, someone who I wouldn't meet until some day in the far distant future.

Thankfully, I had a window seat again, and the two people next to me had fallen asleep. It was my third semester being in college, and I had never missed my home so much. I wanted to see my dad's smile in person and I wanted to putter around the kitchen while my mother cooked.

I knew that I was crying because I was broken and alone, but it was also one of those cries where every bad thought I had ever had, every insecurity I had ever tried to hide, came alive, peeking out from inside my

soul. During these cries, sometimes the thoughts flew around so fast they weren't even whole sentences in my brain, just bits and pieces of all the reasons that I was shattering, with thousands of miles beneath me, holding me between the clouds. I realize now that I reached that state in part because I hadn't been connected to the communities that I held dear when I was a freshman. At first, I didn't have the time and then I didn't have the energy, and as I kept feeling worse and worse I broke further and further away from the spaces that I had originally loved, one of those spaces being the Muslim community at my university.

When I was starting out in college, my initial loneliness drove me to go to Friday prayers, hoping that I would find a friend amongst my brothers and sisters. Because there is an inherent connection, a bond, an intimacy that the Muslim community holds. Finding out someone is Muslim removes ten steps of formalities from the relationship. There's already a level of understanding. And for the past 19 years of my life, they've given me a full heart and days and days of laughter and comfort.

My heart has always found comfort in these spaces, even when I was certain that they were preaching something that I wanted no part of, something that didn't feel right in my small, white town. Being Muslim has shaped me. I've certainly never felt a pure, untainted connection to my faith, but I don't think most people have when it comes to religion. But faith is beautiful when it gives us something that we would not have otherwise. Islam has always given me spaces to breathe, survive, and heal.

"Can I get you anything, Ma'am?"

"Water, please. Just water. No ice."

I can barely hear myself over the hum of the plane. My words come out soft. I don't want the flight attendant to hear the pain in them.

There's something particularly lonely about flying solo. It's more than just having no one to talk to when trying to get from one place to another. It's airplane mode. All I have are music and my thoughts, and for this plane

ride and the two before it, that state has proven to be so unbearable for me that my body has just broken down. It's when you can't scroll or pass on news articles. It's when you must confront everything that is inside you, like being trapped in a vast, silent sky.

Today, on this Friday, I cry because I am heartbroken. As I hold the cup of water, not ready to drink just yet, I pray for those who were murdered in New Zealand after the shooting in Christchurch less than 24 hours ago. Over 100 bled in New Zealand. But worldwide, we all are bleeding. These are my Muslim brothers and sisters. It hurts deeply. It feels so, so wrong. The Friday prayers that I enjoyed so much as a kid, the ones I started to attend in college because I was looking for a space to call home, were the same prayers during which 50 people lost their lives. A space that I had known to be so heartwarming had been the site of a massacre.

As I look around me, my soul conjures up an irrational thought. Why isn't everyone else crying? The woman in front of me stifles her laughter as she watched Friends. The man in the row across from me sleeps peacefully. I cannot expect everyone on this plane to hurt the way I do, I know that. But my mind still goes there. When something pains you so greatly, it's even more painful to viscerally feel that no one around you understands why your soul is hurting. But this isn't their tragedy. And that's okay. If each of us hurt for every life lost, none of us would be able to go on.

Maybe the news of a massacre has made death seem all the more real. My ego shatters when I think of how God oversees not just our death, but our slaughter at the hands of the heartless. I feel an urge to comfort the widows and the orphans who are mourning halfway across the world. I feel the urge to beg God to forgive each of my sins, as I am no one amidst all of this.

I sit still for a minute, taking in deep breaths. It feels like it's just rained. That sense of quiet. The way the air feels nostalgic. A storm has subsided and my muscles ache from dancing in the wild winds. I pray for God to forgive them. To bless them. To ease the heartache of their families although I know that they will be forever broken. I feel closer to Him up here. As if I can reach my hand out the window, feel the wind, and touch his glow.



Photo by Yahya Khan
Oneplus 3



Photo by Syed Husain
Fujifilm 400 film



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِنَّا أَنشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا جَدِيدًا

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
إِنَّا أَنشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا جَدِيدًا



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
إِنَّا أَنشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا جَدِيدًا

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