Untitled [Tree]
Shruti Parekh ’10
Collage (paint, paper, ink)
Dear reader,

Hello, hello, hello. Welcome to the 2006 winter issue of Awaaz. This, our second publication, is certainly the best yet! On behalf of the Awaaz Staff, I hope you enjoy the new collection of art, photography, poetry and prose as it relates to the South Asian experience here at Brown and beyond.

This semester has been all about growth. From a modest staff of 3, we proudly feed off the energy and hard work of 13 new, dedicated members. We have added 3 editorial positions to the board, 3 teams and elicited the invaluable help of our new Treasurer. The expansion of the Awaaz family has brought, in keeping with the spirit of the journal, a fresh perspective and a new goal.

In our last publication, the editing team wrote to you: “Awaaz hopes to create a safe space for the Brown community to intellectually discuss South Asia and the modern South Asian experience…” This year’s staff recognizes that any discussion about South Asia cannot be limited to the Brown community alone, so we have begun reaching out to the greater Providence area (including the Rhode Island School of Design) and contemporary South Asian artists and writers.

This semester’s submissions not only included the work of RISD students and Providence community members, but also a piece by the highly regarded, South Asian writer, Sunaina Maira. Maira, Associate Professor of Asian American students at UC Davis, is the author of: Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City and the co-editor of Youthscape: The Popular, the National, the Global and Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America (winner of the American Book Award in 1997). According to the Journal of Asian American Studies, she is currently working on an ethnographic study of Muslim South Asian immigrant youth in the United States after September 11, 2001 and questions of empire and citizenship.

Her piece in this issue, entitled: Here and There; Fragments of War, Solidarity and Resistance, explore what it means to be a South Asian American during the “War on Terror.”

We thank Professor Maira and all those who submitted for their willingness to explore and their evolving creativity. Thank you, also, to everyone who made this publication possible: student group performers at our fundraising event (Awaaz-a-palooza), Media Services, Dean Katherine Bergeron and countless others for their expertise and support.

And of course you, the reader, for taking the time.

Sincerely,

Jhale Ali ’08
Editor in Chief

*all submissions were selected through an anonymous voting process and do not necessarily reflect the views or perspectives of Awaaz, South Asian Journal of Arts’ members
## Staff

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**special thanks to . . .**

Metcalf Copy Center; Class Board; Dean of the College, Katherine Bergeron; Gena Albanese Burke from Brown Media Services; Brown’s MPCs and MPC Friends for spreading the love; and to...

the Awaaz staff: Awaaz-a-palooza...baby!
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City Hall shakes her rusting dome
like a wet dog after the rain.
She smells like one, too,
sodden with the smoke of
one hundred expiring flames
roasting corn on the cob
on robot corners
(turn it over
and over
and over).

The usual tent city
has in a moment
disassembled,
scuttling under the street bridge
for cover.
Only a few stands remain
shivering in the rain,
selling curries, sneakers,
bedspreads.

It is a pop-up book:
the next page brings
a whole new sunup
City Hall is no longer coughing
up green mucous
the market is up and running
blooming from the seed
it was the day before.

Sardines packed into a
kombi-taxi.

They are also for sale.
She swiveled her hips in slow circles... crimson-painted nails and kajal smeared across her eyelids. Her body slipped seamlessly from gesture to gesture, shape to shape, goddess to goddess. And when Saleema danced you could never tell where one move had ended and the next began. Her body moved in one continuous flow... like water. Her legs were rivers and her arms streams that flowed with unparalleled grace through the air. She held her pose, her body turned at an angle, two red fingers pointing toward her eye (outlined in black and always watching Fedosia).

She swiveled her hips in slow circles... crimson-painted nails and kajal smeared across her eyelids. All the court could not take their eyes off of her. They read into her hand gestures, they marveled on her poses, and they saw in her eyes whatever they so pleased. They knew not what she danced. For dance to Salome was a language. It was not entertainment or release. It was conversation and life itself. Perhaps that's why she seldom spoke. Such were the teachings of Kallan. She would lecture her dancers during class, and sometimes at night, she would take Saleema into a mysterious little room where the bible was left open side by side next to the Mahabharata. Kallan would read between the two interchangeably, as if it did not matter.

She always focused on the dancers; perhaps because no one else ever did. They were like detached, faceless symbols of beauty... stage beauty. Stage beauty is like glitter; only shimmering in a certain light. At least that’s what Kallan said. No one ever said that Salome was beautiful; yet it has always been assumed. Saleema was not beautiful. She was a beautiful dancer, but she was not beautiful. Fedosia did not know this. So when she gazed at him, her eyes full of loveliness, it never occurred to him that she was only beautiful because he was looking at her.

In the dark Saleema was like every other woman; with tender curves, a steady heartbeat, and delicate hands. Yet even then, she didn’t cease to be a dancer. The heaviness with which she pressed her heels against the marble floor, or the firm, yet suave nature with which she braided her classmates’ hair was unmistakable. Like many of the others, Saleema was the daughter of the Raja, yet it was not for this that people respected her. It was her incredible dancing. Sometimes she taught them moves outside on the palace verandah. On such occasions she would part her seldom speaking lips and describe to the other girls, not the movements themselves, but the motions that drove them. “Aharian (ornamentation), like when Radha adorns herself to meet Krishna,” she would say. “Angikam (body) like where Ganga bends herself around the curves of the earth. Om (peace) like when my mother gave me her dancing bells before she died.”

At this point Fedosia looked up from his paperwork, and as his colleagues sat waiting for his dictation, he said to her, “you know, Saleema also means peace.” And as she sat with her hands clasped in “om” she moved them ever so insinuatingly into lotus position, her red pointed fingertips forming the petals. He looked away abruptly, and clearing his throat continued with business.

You know, Salome also means peace. Kallan told her that evening. Not having had her mother to tell her the meaning of her name, this was all a revelation for Saleema. It was the night before Saleema’s grand performance for the court, and Kallan had insisted on speaking with her. Your mother named you after a dancer, because she thought it would bring you good omen. I’m sorry I never told you. I guess I assumed you knew. It’s silly of me, but you remind me so much of your mother that sometimes I mistake conversations I’d had with her for the ones I’ve had with you. She turned gravely. But there are many things you don’t know Saleema... That night Saleema and Kallan stayed up half
the night talking. The curtains rose on a new truth and hideous faces were stripped of their deceptive masks.

Once upon a time, Saleema nearly had a sibling. Her mother was pregnant for the second time, and one of the raja’s advisors feared scandal. The raja had made it clear that he cherished her far more than his own wife. Already he had given the kingdom a bad reputation by letting himself be influenced by a courtesan. With a child on the way, the advisor feared that if male, he would be declared the heir to the throne. In his panic he conspired in league with the Rani, a young, jealous, girl from an extremely affluent family. The two of them poisoned Saleema’s mother. His name was Fedosia.

Saleema looked around the room. She saw each courtier smile, having taken from her dance whatever he or she so wished to see. Her movements were so inspired and passionate, the people could not help but be moved. As she bowed her head, she gazed at Fedosia. He was smiling in mesmerized bliss. She twirled her wrists and swept her balance onto one foot, seductively extending her hip on the side. Her curves were in perfect harmony. The light, the shadow, and the glittering shimmer of her eyes all melted into the most perfect tableau he had ever seen, or ever would see in his life. He had no right to look. So knowing, he glanced away, and in that instant missed the genuine, yet confused, longing in her eyes. He asked the Raja for her hand in marriage.

Salome looked around the room. She saw each courtier smile, having taken from her dance whatever he or she so wished to see. Her movements were so inspired and passionate, the people could not help but be moved. As she took her bow, she gazed at John the Baptist. She could barely see his face through the dungeon window. His ankles were roped together, but she knew he could see her. He was smiling for a moment, caught up in her charm. She looked at him longingly and as if by instinct, the smile melted, and he looked away. He knew he had no right to smile. Afterall, he had been the one to put her mother to shame.

“Ask me for whatever you wish and I shall give it to you,” Herod said to Salome in appreciation of her dance. “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom,” he swore.

Salome ran to her mother. “What shall I ask for?” she said. Now, despite what others say, you must understand that Salome was not a foolish or malicious or cruel woman. She did not ask for material possessions, for she was a dancer. All that she needed was her body and soul. She did not ask to be loved by anyone, for already her charms had beguiled them all. She needed only to retaliate for her mother’s pain. So when her mother said, “the head of John the Baptist,” Salome knew her purpose.

“Ask me for whatever you wish, and I shall give it to you,” the Raja said to Saleema in offer of a wedding gift. Saleema looked deep into his eyes. He did not know.

“What should I ask for?” Saleema asked Kallan that night.

“Ask for something you need,” Kallan replied. Saleema looked at her. Kallan’s eyes shimmered.

She stroked his lips peacefully and placing her hand on his pale cheek, she lay the platter before her mother.

She stroked his lips peacefully and placing her hand on his pale cheek, she lay the platter down on her mother’s grave.
But I love you.  
Do you love me.  
What to say  
when you see me.  
-Creeley

Hands fallen only newly formed fat.  Complacency formed into comfort, somewhere during sophomore year.  New jeans and orange mesh make you wonder, when were you going to notice?  Thick chipmunk cheeks and maybe a sign of final disillusionment.  And yet, amidst the fat, roll 3, 4 and 2, I would still marry you.

I could not touch you  
I wanted very much to touch you  
but could not.  
-Creeley

Reaching out an arm.  Outstretched, go ahead.  But you wouldn’t, though these hands, fallen, were amazing.  You take a deep breath and smell, deliberately, in my direction.  
Vanilla fields and yellow fragrant roses, wrapped up in a not so subtle immaturity.  Slowly, I withdraw; disillusionment breaking rolls 1, 2 and 3  
And still, I would marry you.

a pit of fear,  
a stench,  
hand unreasonable  
ever to touch.  
-Creeley

The walk away, intentional.  You went in the opposite direction, turned around, got back in and left.  Agreed somewhere a few days within to let binges be bye gones and forget how it felt.  
This is a hard day for you too, I remember.

I have come far enough  
from where I was not before  
to have seen the things  
looking in at me through the open door.  
-Creeley

My face is my own, I think.  But you have seen it and even then, I would marry you.  Moments later, hair limp and skin outstretched, I wait complacently, for a decent reaction.  
Evidence in empty mailboxes and travels to Italy from New York confess to quite the contrary and yet, I wait, hands fallen upon your fat, wrinkles 1, 2 and 3,  
hoping for the form of this return.
Indian actress Amisha Patel told me that India has two passions: Bollywood and Cricket. “Bollywood”, she says, “has the larger impact of the two.” A portmanteau of Bombay and Hollywood, Bollywood means the collection of film studios existing in India. Producing more than 1,000 films a year to satisfy the 14 million Indians that attend cinemas every day, Bollywood is the world’s largest film industry. With a combination of narrative, dialogue, and music, each Bollywood film has a reach unparalleled by most media. Especially in rural areas, where other entertainment is scarce, Bollywood has enormous impact. Films broadcast on national television in India draw large numbers of villagers at one time to a single TV set. A typical village youth often has lyrics to countless songs memorized and is able to dance every step. Many of them, however, often leave school after a few years, and those who do stay in school learn very little to propel them into the modern world of India’s knowledge economy. Around 35% of India’s 1.1 billion people are illiterate or early literate. In some of the poorest areas of Uttar Pradesh, women’s illiteracy rates can be as high as 70%.

PlanetRead is an organization that seeks to combat high illiteracy rates and improve literacy education in India by capitalizing on the power and reach of Bollywood. By adding Same-Language-Subtitling to film songs broadcast on television so that viewers learn to read along with lyrics, PlanetRead provides automatic reading practice to 300 million early literates. Currently, programs featuring Same Language Subtitling are broadcast in 10 different languages by India’s national broadcaster. Funded by Google’s philanthropic arm and a host of other Indian and international organizations, PlanetRead perfects its program through research and development, and expands it through fundraising and influencing policy change.

Dr. Brij Kothari, Associate professor at the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmadabad and Ashoka fellow, has developed and championed this subtitling program. Ashoka is an organization that began in India to support social entrepreneurs worldwide. Ashoka fellows receive a host of resources, including funding, to fulfill their missions.

I worked with PlanetRead as a documentary filmmaker and field researcher for three months this summer. I visited seven states, three major cities, and over ten rural districts to speak with PlanetRead’s beneficiaries to discern how the program benefits people. I spoke to Bollywood film stars and a former government official who supports the program. They unanimously applauded PlanetRead for employing an effective and entertaining method to promote literacy. I then edited the footage into a documentary geared toward potential sponsors of the project and the neighboring governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Attempting to describe how much I loved the people, cultures, and foods that constitute the Indian universe would not do justice to their importance to me. I developed an addiction for Bollywood songs, especially the melodious tunes of Tamil Nadu. The friendships I forged with my incredibly driven and intelligent coworkers will be lifelong. Their efforts give me a strong belief in India’s modern future. Through PlanetRead, I learned of media’s true power and I learned that the heart can overcome all odds. Yesterday I came across a map of Mumbai that made me wistful of wearing my dhoti, eating with my hands, and sipping tea amidst camels in the interior of Rajasthan.

To learn more, visit www.planetread.org and search Google video for PlanetRead documentary.
untitled [Articulations]

I thought I might try writing
A bit more than I’m used to.
His little brown fingers, hard and cracked
Curl tightly around black metal grills.
Childish anxiety hisses behind
We'll be caught...they'll see us...
Curiosity is firm; it persists
He peers through lifeless glass barriers,
Gapes at elegant teak-wood tables
Bedecked with flimsy crystal figurines,
He claps for majestic china horses
Whirling on their fancy carrousels,
He blinks at the snowy lights
Much stronger than the stars he is used to
That clock is supposedly gold and diamond
His baby feet shuffle in the mud
Mother’s favorite ebony statue
Glitters in his eyes:
Glass marbles glazed with black icing
His guiltless smile sticks to the glass

Someone rudely draws the curtains
The show ends, the smile wilts
He turns around and leaves.
The outline of a lost smile
Remains glued to the window.

Saagar – a boy’s name; the word itself means sea.

Nandini Jayakrishna ‘10
Monkey
Darshan Patel '09
Digital Photograph
The road runs on, 
diffusing slowly as I float 
Through. 
Filters of light pass 
Through 
the window flickering 
on and off as the sun dips and 
Rests. 
Hum, rumble, and sometimes 
a Lift.

There’s no need to rush- 
Relativity plays 
its Role. 
But the balance must not be 
Violated- 
Submersion is an impossibility. 
We have two for a Reason.

The skies soon darken and 
warn of the End- 
the noise 
Stops. 
And we can only sit back to 
try and remember what 

Seven o’clock was.
Waiting at Kalandia checkpoint, Ramallah [Palestine]
Sunaina Maira
Digital Photograph
What is it like to live in a war zone? What kinds of feelings of fear or hope, or impulses of resistance or solidarity does it evoke? What can South Asian Americans bring to the anti-war movement in the U.S., and to these discussions in South Asia? What should we do?

These questions loom large for me, and for many others, increasingly so since the U.S. launched its War on Terror, a war purportedly for “freedom” and “democracy,” a “perpetual war” waged around the globe but particularly in the Middle East and South Asia. The answers to these questions, particularly the last questions of ethical responsibility, are not easy. Perhaps you wrestle with these questions, too.

After all, we are funding U.S. wars through our tax dollars, so we are directly and indirectly paying for occupation, invasion, and torture in Iraq, Israel, Afghanistan, and Lebanon, and these acts are being committed in our name, regardless of our ancestral origins. Sometimes when I walk around the lush green streets of Oakland that bloom with flowers all year round, or even the slightly deserted but wide streets downtown dotted with restaurants, I think about other places—where there are snipers on the rooftops, roads smashed by tanks, windows darkened because the power plant was bombed, weeks of fasting because of food blockades, whole regions being bombed to rubble and starved to desperation, so that they too can be “free.”

What kind of freedom is this if our hands, clutching our credit cards, are covered in blood and their children have empty stomachs and empty futures? And where is the border where “we” become “them” and lose all hope of living in a decent country, clean inside and out?

As I sift through moments of outrage, helplessness, anxiety, pessimism, hope, and euphoria, a few fragmented images and experiences emerge clearly, marking moments in recent history which have given me pause in thinking about war and resistance.

Wedding and War in Galilee

I arrived in northern Israel during the second week of the Israel-Lebanon war this summer. My husband is from a Palestinian village in Galilee, and there was a big wedding in his family to which we had been looking forward for a year. So we went to visit his family anyway, hoping that the skirmishes on the border would subside in a week or two. Instead, Israel used the pretext of the soldier captured by Hezbollah to launch its all-out war against southern Lebanon. For thirty-four days, Israel bombed the civilian infrastructure of Lebanon to smithereens, destroying airports, bridges, roads, water plants, electrical facilities, hospitals, homes, offices, and shops. If it wished, Israel could have released its captured soldier in exchange for the aging Lebanese detainees Hezbollah wanted to free, who are among the 10,000 Arab prisoners—the majority of whom are civilians—held in Israeli prisons. It became clear that Israel had been waiting for an excuse to do two things: destroy Hezbollah and reinvade southern Lebanon, parts of which they were still occupying since the 1982 war with Lebanon; and destroy the emerging economic vitality and tourism industry of Lebanon.

Hezbollah fought back, more tenaciously than the Israeli military had expected, reminding Israel that the war would end only if Israel would negotiate the exchange of prisoners, as they had done in the past, and if their military would withdraw completely from Lebanon and return occupied areas to the Lebanese. As Hezbollah rockets began raining down on Israeli
military areas and Jewish towns, advancing as far as the port city of Haifa, Jewish Israelis were stunned and terrified. The Israeli army assumed that its superior (U.S.-made) military weapons and intelligence would crush an Arab guerilla army. This was not supposed to happen. However, the U.S. refused to insist on a cease-fire, hoping that Israel could still emerge victorious.

The Israeli army did finish part of its job by the time of the presumed ceasefire, during which they continued to drop the (U.S.-made) cluster bombs on Lebanon. It killed at least 1200 Lebanese, most of them civilians and one-third of them children. It displaced about one million civilians. It violated Articles 33 and 48 of the Geneva Convention. A little discussed issue was the plight of foreign domestic workers in Lebanon, including Filipina and Sri Lankan women, many of whom were trapped in Beirut during the war. Some of them jumped out of buildings as they were being bombed because there was no one to help them escape.

While this was going on in the north, Gaza was being strangled in the south. The power plant had been destroyed by Israel before the summer heat intensified, and the economic blockade imposed by the U.S. and Israel had created food shortages and slow starvation. Elected Palestinian Authority officials were kidnapped and detained by the Israeli army. Israel continued its attacks on civilians in Gaza, killing children and families on the beach in broad daylight; in fact, 100 civilians were killed in Gaza during the first week of the invasion of Lebanon while the world’s attention was focused on the war. The attacks and sanctions are collective punishment against the Palestinian people for having elected the Hamas government through democratic polls. Despite the so-called Israeli “withdrawal” from the Gaza Strip in 2005, Gaza is still a prison where a humanitarian crisis looms ominously.

While staying in Galilee during the Lebanon war, Palestinians continued their lives as normally as they could. This is not surprising, since they have lived through so many wars since Israel was created on their lands and they were displaced from their homes in 1948. As we heard the fighter jets roaring overhead on their way to bomb Lebanon, and the dull thud of rockets through the day on Israeli military areas, Palestinians probably heard echoes of the other Arab Israeli wars of 1956 and 1967, and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982—before Hezbollah existed. When Israeli soldiers massacred women and children in Kana, Lebanon, sorrow gushed over this horror and the repetition of horror, bringing back memories of the Israeli massacre in Kana in 1996.

This summer we did not travel to the Jewish coastal towns such as Nahariyya, where Israeli soldiers in uniform hang out at beaches and cafes with rifles slung over their shoulders, for the cafes and seaside bars were all closed due to the attacks. All Israeli civilians at some point are, have been, or will be in the Israeli occupying forces. I realized that because Israel is a heavily militarized state, where the occupation is next door and not far away in Iraq, the boundary between civilian society and military life is very fine. So being in Israel during an official war, not just the routine attacks of the military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, is not that much different.

Palestinians in the village were tense, understandably, but life went on and so did the family wedding. The venue for the final celebration was changed to a safer location, but the nightly parties, the dancing and henna, deejays and drinking and feasting continued as they would have, except for the background thud of Katyushas and the whirring of Israeli helicopters overhead. Guests at the wedding festivities occasionally looked up at the night sky to guess where the rockets were headed, and some mothers nervously looked over their shoulders to keep an eye on children.
Palestinians in Israel, who constitute 20 percent of Israel, are Israeli citizens but do not have the full civil, economic, and political rights of Israeli citizenship since these are afforded only to Jewish citizens. Palestinian villages are crowded and sometimes dirty, without parks, libraries, or recreational facilities, because they do not get the same social services as Jewish towns, which are spotlessly clean and much like American suburbs, with lush green streets and flowers blooming in the desert. Apartheid in Israel is a visible fact of daily life. The indigenous Palestinians, like the native blacks who suffered under South African apartheid, have to struggle to get acceptance into Israeli colleges and find employment, and many end up leaving the country to study elsewhere. Many people know that Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza live under military occupation with separate roads, concrete checkpoints, and a 35-foot high prison wall. However, I realized that Palestinians within the 1948 borders of Israel live with invisible checkpoints and within what some call a “glass wall” of policies that discriminate against them, because they are not Jewish.

During the 2006 war, a few Palestinians in Nazareth and Haifa were accidentally killed by Hezbollah rockets. Hassan Nasrallah had announced these attacks, warning Palestinians in his regular speeches on Al-Manar television watched across the Arab world. In the village, people were glued to their TV sets during his broadcasts, listening as he announced that Hezbollah would fight till they died to end Israeli occupation and aggression and resist U.S. imperialist designs for the “new Middle East.” Palestinian Israelis may have partial Israeli citizenship but they understood that this was also their war, not just Lebanon’s. This was a war to end decades of apartheid and occupation and for equality and liberation. So while they mourned the deaths of the Palestinians who were killed by stray rockets, they saw these losses as sacrifices in the larger struggle against Israeli racism and oppression.

**Soldiers Tripping on Shanti**

The wedding went on and the war was won by Hezbollah, despite Bush’s squawks about “victory” for freedom. But Lebanon was smashed, the world wrung its hands, the war in Iraq and also Afghanistan continued, and life for everyone else went on. We went to India after the wedding, and what did we see? Many things that were hopeful, including street protests against corruption and for women’s education, and some things that gave us pause, such as Israeli tourists looking for “shanti.” Beginning about ten years ago there have been a flood of Israelis visiting India, usually after they finish their reserve duty in the military, to do drugs in Goa or visit the Pushkar fair in Rajasthan. Some are in search of an Orientalized mystical culture and peaceful way of life that is labeled “shanti” culture in Israel—as if trekking in the Himalayas could absolve them from killing children or demolishing homes in the West Bank or Lebanon.

The sight of former Israeli soldiers flocking to India is strange for someone who grew up during the time when India did not have official relations with Israel, like other nations who supported Palestinian rights. India was host to many Palestinian students in exile who came to colleges all over India. India was in fact the first non-Arab nation to recognize the PLO in the United Nations, expressing solidarity with other anti-colonialist struggles during the Non-Aligned Movement era. The landscape has changed since the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in India in 1988 and established official relationships between India and Israel, deepening the military and
economic ties that were already in place. India now buys half of its arms from Israel and collaboration on nuclear and missile defense and sharing of intelligence has continued even with the new United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government. India and Israel have found a shared enemy to target in their respective “anti-terrorism” operations, linking Kashmir and Pakistan to Palestine, but also a framework that has gained global currency with Bush’s “war on terrorism,” resulting in the new India-Israel-US axis.

In fact, India’s alliance with Israel is part of the burgeoning romance between the U.S. and India, enabling U.S. designs for remapping West and South Asia and India’s aspirations for becoming a regional superpower. Pakistan, too, has made overtures to Israel as part of the increased normalization of relations with Israel by European countries as well as Arab nations after the Oslo Accords. The door to Washington, many have realized, is through Tel Aviv. And in the U.S., according to some, the door to Capital Hill is through AIPAC, a pro-Israel lobbying group that shuts down all criticism of Israel as “anti-Semitic.” Hindu right-wing groups, such as the Indian American Political Action Committee (USINAPAC) and the Hindu American Foundation (linked to the VHP) have forged alliances with AIPAC and the American Jewish Committee, learning strategies to advance their agendas and suppress criticism of their regime’s policies in the U.S.

**Solidarity is Our Home**

At the same time, it should be apparent that Indian Americans, and South Asian Americans more generally, increasingly share similar experiences of racial profiling, detention, and deportation with Arab Americans and other immigrant groups. The crisis of heightened “racial profiling” and political repression of Arab, Muslim, and South Asian Americans after 9/11 is linked to the overseas wars waged by the U.S., and its client states such as Israel, and is the domestic front of its imperial policies in the Middle East and South Asia. If our communities are being targeted in the U.S. and abroad, Indian and South Asian Americans need to find common cause with Arab Americans and other groups to fight for human rights and self-determination, rather than engage in alliances based on racist and exclusionary ideas.

Making this link between the domestic and overseas fronts of imperial power helps us understand that the shared experiences of South Asian and Arab Americans in the U.S. are due to the workings of empire and not just due to a breakdown in civil rights. This is obviously also the case in linking the experiences of Asian Americans with those of Latinos, African Americans, or Native Americans who are disciplined and subordinated by the imperial state. Forging solidarity between communities in the face of divide-and-rule tactics is one very important strategy of resistance that we have in our hands. Making these connections by challenging imposed borders and speaking out in the face of repression is a powerful weapon that we can choose to use. If we are exiled, displaced, or persecuted, it in solidarity that we should find our home.

Solidarity takes struggle, it can not just be based on good intentions. It takes work to learn about other histories of colonization and resistance, to connect our own struggles to other movements that are fought by people who may or may not look like us. In my view, there is a link between the government surveillance of South Asian and Arab immigrants in places such as Lodi, California and the surveillance, detention, and torture in Iraq or Palestine. There is a connection between farmers committing suicide in India, because neoliberal economic policies have made it impossible for them to pay for their daughters’ weddings, and the domestic workers who had no one to help them evacuate from Beirut. We cannot fight on all fronts, but we do need to understand the connec-
tions between imperial warfare, repression, poverty, and labor migration created from the ravages of imperial domination and economic neoliberalism.

**After Party**
I realized this summer that war is nearer than you think, but it is also not as close as you fear. Driving through the village in the early hours of the morning after the wedding, I noticed that the flag that flew the most from rooftops was not the Palestinian or even the Israeli flag, but the Brazilian flag. Most Palestinians in the village supported Brazil in the World Cup. Their sons are sometimes named after Brazilian soccer players, sometimes after Arafat, and occasionally after Fidel Castro. The yellow and green flag of Brazil reminded me, coincidentally, of Hezbollah’s own flag that I saw at demonstrations against the war in the West Bank.

I rarely see any yellow and green flags fluttering in the Bay Area, not even Brazil’s, but I imagine people climbing onto their rooftops, above the indifference and denial, and looking out to sea. There are lights in all the windows, even though the streets are in darkness. Silhouetted against the window, I see people in wedding dresses, white, red, yellow, and green. I am not sure where they are from, or even if they are women or men. They are pointing at something, and I look up and see that it is raining hoods, a shower of pointed black hoods and white hoods pouring down into the sea. The brides leap from the windows but do not fall. I see their veils floating above the roofs, like pennants of green, yellow, red, and white, traveling far, farther than I can imagine right now.
The stars turn their backs on us,
Our shadows lose their inhibitions
And as our fears dissolve into the darkest of hours
Desire.

That one instant
When the wind whispers its warnings
And the night conceals our gravest sins.

That separation
During which fingers disentangle
And hearts give in to order.

That final exchange
Which will draw out the moon
On the darkest of nights.

Those moments
Of love...

As harsh the sentence
So resilient the prisoner.
As cruel the world
So determined the survivor.
As doomed the love
So timeless the lovers.

Farewell.

No matter how much condemnation this love of ours
faces,
I will not be able to forget these heartbeats.
No, I will not die because of this separation,
Yet I cannot live with this loneliness...

Jitni hi nafreen mile humare is mohabbat ko,
Bhula nahin paoongi tumharein in dhadkanon ko.
Main mar nahin jaoongi is judaai se,
Lekin jeen bhi nahin sakti is tanhaai mein...
My hands smell of onions
I cut them slowly
puncturing through the purple flesh
droplets flew out
prickling my eyes
one slice and then
a perpendicular cut
smaller and smaller
pieces that spread
through my fingertips
coating my skin
stinging
One more
I wipe my eyes on my sleeve
and drop the knife
to press my hands close.

It is too full again.
On Reclaiming

Breaking teeth not so
Clear lovely as
Minus 9 degrees wind
Expelling all concrete air inside drawers
Fold up like dollar bills y’all and don’t
Listen
Here is the apple and plastic not separate
Concepts

Listen
Not something
To want but something to do
Old problem from between old pages of a
Book that yes you guessed it rooks
Also hardshiny

   Concepts don’t let them
Confuse you beautiful
Fruitful Buddha you cannot
Reclaim virginity ownership specially
When you still have it, can you
Reclaim chastity can
You in a dollar bill fold some

And also your clothes away
And also

Down when all the lights change colour
Up look surprise
   Honey you look like peaches –
No not so much like falling as submerging
   Tail has a knot in it when you wake
Up look silent because plastic softened up
It’s pretty damn clean.
Before it was the wrong bird I suppose
It is reminiscent of Macbeth and The
Tower of
Which isn’t really what we’re doing here is
It.

And there’s nothing special about learning a code
And then verseing in it like this
Only about making them. Remember being little in
Treehouses and doing codes on paper with friends, isn’t
That the whole goal – the little ___? (-i- --- --%--* ?)

On the right feeling fuller and breasted is the
    Small hole in ground gun
    Attached at the navel
    of what it is to be in bed
    And perfectly trimmed
And here on the left is the other
    What is wrong with going back and being in pyjamas and fluffy haired
    sweet and innocent like a smoothie
Going to Agra
Kam Sripada ’09
Digital Collage
Tuesday, September 12, 2006 was not a typical day for members of Brown University. A large group of students mobilized to protest. Their reason: police brutality. WBRU News was on the scene of the protest and the only organization to obtain this sound.

*SOT: CJ*

Let it be known from this point on that we are recording history alright. We will not forget. When something happens we will have it documented. There will be no “we don’t have any record of that,” there will be no “please do not report us or we will make it worse for you.” There will be none of that.

On the weekend of September the 10th there were two incidents involving Brown’s Department of Public Safety, Providence Police and Brown Students. In both cases the students involved are African American men, and in both cases there are allegations of serious police misconduct,

I spoke to Brown University Chief of Police Mark Porter. He gave me a statement on where the school’s Department of Public Safety stands.

*SOT: Chief Porter*

Well obviously this is a very serious matter which DPS is taking very seriously. I can tell you that the incident itself has certainly ignited a level of anger and concern throughout the entire campus community. Obviously that being said I also think that it will open up the opportunity for our department to address this specific issue and quite frankly, the other long standing issues and concerns between the community and law enforcement. What we really need to do now is shift the focus and continue to develop the necessary inroads if you will in addressing these types of issues.

One incident happened on campus after a Brown DPS officer responded to a report of two unknown males attempting to gain entry into a residence hall. Chipalo Street and Simon Panosh were thought to be those males, and were pointed out to the officer. When the officer asked them for ID, Mr. Panosh complied but Mr. Street did not and walked away. What transpired immediately afterwards is now the subject of an investigation. It is known that Street was arrested, and in the process was injured to the extent that he was taken to the hospital where he received stitches over his left eye. The manner of and reason for arrest are in dispute.

I talked to Chipalo Street. He explained, in general terms, his perspective of what happened last Sunday morning.

*SOT: Chipalo*

I was assaulted by officers while officers from either Brown Police or Providence police were present or involved in the beating. This stems from me walking away from Brown police after being asked to show ID. Among other things I have concerns affecting my arrest, the amount of force used, and the way officers reacted to witnesses watching the incident.

Mr. Street was unable to answer any specific questions because he’s currently attending legal proceedings relating to the matter. The second incident occurred off campus. WBRU News contacted the Brown Graduate student involved in that event however, we received no response.
These two incidents caused Brown University President Ruth Simmons and Interim Vice President for Campus Life and Student services Russll Caerey to send out a campus wide e-mail. It stated quote “matters such as these raise important issues in our community regarding relationships between students and law enforcement, community safety and individual rights and responsibilities.”

While researching this story this reporter was informed of a hate crime that took place on Brown’s campus in February of 2004. Makini Chisolm-Straker is currently a graduate student but has been with the University since her undergraduate years. She was closely involved with the student reaction to that incident.

*SOT: Mikini
We decided that we wanted to develop a hate crime protocol.*

According to Makini the 2004 incident involved a Brown student making homophobic remarks and physically assaulting another Brown student because of his sexual orientation. The gay student was ultimately accused of assaulting an officer for grabbing the officers arm while trying to get his attention but the student who instigated the altercation received no such punishment.

*SOT: Mikini
Essentially it was for political reasons. And it was considered in the university’s best interest - in the end to not really have any strong ramifications for this student and I think that there was a hope that it would blow over.*

Vocal members of Tuesday’s student protest impress upon the fact that they are disappointed with Brown police accountability. Jane Mee Lee is one of the many organizers in the group of student protesters. She voiced her opinion:

*SOT: Jane-Mee
I think that the administration wants to create the impression that Brown Police and Providence Police are very separate but in reality Brown police and Providence Police officers do work hand in hand. This article, titled “Rethinking Arming: Safety or Protection,” was published in the Brown Daily Herald on April 27, 2005. Brown contacted the Rhode Island state police to provide all weapons related training’s to DPS. Of the six state police agencies included in a 1991 Department of Justice report on police brutality, Rhode Island’s was cited with the highest number of complaints for excessive force, according to Human Rights Watch.”

Brown University is the first college in Rhode Island to arm its police force. Each officer of the University’s Department of Public Safety receives 160 hours of sensitivity training. However in a meeting last Tuesday Colonel Porter indicated that Providence Police officers receive less hours of training.

So, should the investigations at Brown and the Providence Police Department find nothing aberrant in the two cases, will students move on or if they do find crooked practices, what change will occur? At this point it’s quite clear that there are still a lot more questions to be answered.

For 95.5 WBRU News, I’m Rukesh Samarasekera.
A Morning of Music

The morning Azan\(^1\) seeps in through flimsy curtains
Mingling with Dadi’s soothing bhajan\(^2\)
I feel like a king, awakened by varied music
Made just for me

The rest watch the news in the living room
Sipping hot cups of tea
And talking about riots
I can never see the point
The snappy machine voice reports
Figures, losses mix with prayers
Swirling into my ears, bombarding my mind

I think of Shazia chachi
In a parrot green salwar kameez
Eyeliner caking on her matching green eyelids
‘Id Mubarak’ – She had bent down to hug me
A whiff of rose perfume
Mixed with the distinctive aroma of her
Home-made savayeen\(^3\)
Had lingered on my body

‘Religion shouldn’t confine but embrace’
Chachi always says
Her husband was killed in the riots
She celebrates Holi with us every year
Making extra sweets for us children
Forgetting her sorrows in the splash of colors

The voices from the living room get louder
The T.V’s maddening drone continues
Now drowning both prayers and hopes
*If only it could end…*
Somewhere temple bells erupt
In complete agreement.

\(^1\) The Muslim call to prayer
\(^2\) Hindu devotional song
\(^3\) A special sweet dish with vermicelli and milk made on the day of Id
Ila Tyagi: Well, Ila, you’ve been in America for many months now. Do you feel you have come to terms with the “culture shock” that all international students are warned about?

Ila Tyagi: It’s interesting that you should ask that, actually, because I didn’t initially feel that I’d experienced much “culture shock.” Or at least, not to the degree that I’d been expecting. I suppose that has to do with coming here from Kuwait. A friend of mine used to call Kuwait America’s fifty-first state, and I think she was right.

IT: But there must be some things that are different.

IT: Definitely. But when family relatives that are being charged by the minute to make a long-distance telephone call ask you how you are adjusting to life in America, you get the sense that they don’t want too long a reply. So my autopilot response has been that the hardest thing to get used to is the Monday to Friday working week, after eight years of a Saturday to Wednesday one in Kuwait. I’ve given this default response many, many times without really thinking about the question. Some things have indeed been difficult to adjust to.

IT: Such as?

IT: Well, I am sometimes overwhelmed by the way everything is so much BIGGER in America. The superabundance of everything, as well as the corresponding amount of waste, is both fascinating and repulsive. Though I try to be open-minded, I am a little scandalized by the insouciance with which Americans throw things away. This has to do with my Indian upbringing, rather than the time I spent in Kuwait. A characteristic common to most Indians, I think, is that they rarely throw anything away. My mother, for instance, kept old photocopies and printouts in the kitchen, and used the reverse side to write her shopping lists on. She folded plastic carrier bags from the supermarket as carefully as you would fold a silk dress, and stored them for later use. In my household it was a sin to throw away food, and now, in America, I still fight to finish every single crumb of every single meal even though my straining, over-full belly is screaming “Mutiny!”

IT: But you said Kuwait is America’s fifty-first state, so you ought to be used to consumption on a grand scale by now.

IT: Yes. But even Kuwait exercises a little restraint. Perhaps that’s because everything, from toothpaste to potted plants to cans of soda, has to be imported into the country, and it is expensive to do so. As I said, everything seems bigger, much more full-blown, in America. This superabundance has been one of the most challenging things I’ve had to deal with as an immigrant. Having lived in India, having seen how hard people there have to labor merely to exist, I can’t get rid of the sense that I am doing something wrong by living the immensely comfortable life America offers.

IT: But you would never consider going back?

IT: God, no. Guilt is far easier to bear than returning to a life in India would be. I was born in India, and lived in India until I was ten. I remember it as a country plagued by rabid dogs and human shit on the streets, by cacophony and corruption. I realize that its standard of living is probably improving now that India is trembling on the brink of becoming a world power, but that doesn’t change the fact that I have very few friends left over from my Indian days, and that I’m not terribly close to my relatives. Even when my family lived in Bombay, we visited the relatives only once a year because they live in the New Delhi-northern Uttar Pradesh area. I have almost nothing to return to, in other words.
IT: Is there a country that you identify with the most?

IT: I left India when I was ten, which is a fairly young age, so I don’t feel particularly “Indian.” And few migrate to the Middle East with the intention of settling there permanently. My parents are only staying in Kuwait—a country whose immense wealth is reflected in the high salaries there—long enough to finance my education here. Foreigners are not permitted to own property or to apply for Kuwaiti citizenship, so there’s no chance of feeling “Kuwaiti.” All the cultures I have been exposed to have influenced me in some measure, I suppose: I am as much an Indian citizen as I am an Anglophile, as much a freewheeling American as a conservative Kuwaiti. It can be little frustrating, at times, to have such an ambiguous national identity.

IT: How do you deal with this frustration? How do you deal with the knowledge that you don’t “belong” in India, that your Kuwaiti visa expired last month, and that, for the moment at least, America considers you a “resident alien individual”?

IT: Being “homeless” is a little unsettling, certainly. I honestly don’t know what to say when, prior to any major vacation, I’m asked whether I’m going home. I want to wail that I don’t have a home, unlike those lucky, lucky people who know precisely what their hometown is. Certainly my parents have a house in Kuwait; they have a house in Bombay; my grandparents have a house in Delhi—but I can’t think of these places as my homes. I have never lived in them for long enough for them to feel like home.

At the same time, however, a part of me is glad that my home is not a physical place. The only home I can be said to inhabit is the intangible space in between the three countries I have lived in: India, America and Kuwait. I may be ambivalent about my national identity, but I love that when I ring my mother up at 9:30 p.m. my time, she is just waking up to an early Delhi morning. I love that I travel often enough to be unsure where I was flying to when I watched a particularly bad movie on the plane. I love telling my friends that if they ever need a place to stay in Providence, Ahmadi, New Delhi or Bombay, they should look me up. I love researching hotel prices in Rome with a high school friend who now lives in England: I converted Kuwaiti dinars into dollars, pounds into dollars, euros into pounds, and finally euros back into Kuwaiti dinars because I was very confused as to what the true value of the money under consideration was exactly. There is something terribly beautiful about shifting across the boundaries between time zones, currencies and cultures regularly. Doing so appeals to my desire to be a true cosmopolite, to have the whole world be my neighborhood.

IT: So you would argue that the “burdensome freedom” of being an immigrant is more a freedom than a burden?

IT: I suppose so. Yes. It certainly makes life more varied, rich and strange.
to write. to write. to write. the most honest moments i’ve ever had have been face down. forehead touched in middle, starting at a point and moving outward. dime to a penny. quarter. onwards. rippling at the knees, pressure points, releasing all pressure. points. thinking, words, in a picture drawn somewhere (to create. to create. to create.) spilling from open cavity to open floor. thinking: honest moments, caught off guard. must, write write write.
Convenient

Drain: When I see
It amongst the tiles I
Surrender realise that an
Empty swimming pool is what
I have been walking in. I

Like to peel you like
An orange in one strip,
Minimal juice loss, white
Naked skeleton all there
Still. This is not art, you do

Not pick at my peel in
Unexpected places like at
My elbow which is I
Surrender uncomfortable, check
The flesh dirtied under your
Fingernails. Love

Is a science, I am not
Ungrateful, incurious or
Epicurious, or foaming
Like a plastic bag. Neither

Am I convenient, a warm
Body I suggest you invest
In a sleeping bag if you want
Something to lie inside. See
This with your hands:
Here is empty swimming pool
Empty, syrup, peel.
If you would like to be part of Awaaz or would like to submit pieces for our next publication, please contact Awaaz.Brown@gmail.com or for additional comments or suggestions, please contact Jhale_Ali@brown.edu