Pakistan-Afghanistan Pukhtun Festival

Celebrating diversity and resilience

By Alam Zeb Khan

ONCE one of the most influential artists of the 20th century Pablo Picasso had rightly said, "Everything you can imagine is real." They imagine it and now they are making it a reality. The Pukhtun women activists have committed to showing their resilience and certifying their gradual appearance in the society. Now they have decided to challenge their stereotyping at the hands of media and the less informed people living in urban areas.

Three-day Pakistan-Afghanistan Pukhtun Festival 2018, framed by renowned anthropologist and documentary filmmaker Samar Minallah Khan, began on Friday at PNCA Islamabad. 'Cultor' (culture in Pashtu) is founded by activist Samar Minallah along with other 3 co-directors (Maria Usman, Lubna Farooq and Shandana Khan) with a vision to use culture as a powerful tool for development and connecting people, particularly the neglected and vulnerable women.

The three day festival is unique for many reasons. It seems to be the first ever multicultural event being dominated by women writers, women activists and poetess with undaunted efforts. The festival comprises speeches on cultural diversities, women rights, challenges to Pukhtun women, Art exhibition, Attan dance, songs from some leading Pashtu singers and many more.



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Apart from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA the gathering will be represented by women activist from Balochistan (including Hazara Community) and Afghanistan. The audience will be able to listen to Afshan Afridi, an activist fighting for the rights of women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Another prominent voice and founding member of Khor (acronym of Khwando Himmat and Rainra i.e sisters' empowerment and awareness) from Kurrum Agency Dr Noreen Naseer will highlight her struggle for the empowerment of women in FATA.

The festival has a major representation from Afghanistan, where leading social and women activists Palwasha Hasan (Founder of Afghan Women Activist) , Semin Qasmi (women rights activist) and Zakia Wardak (President of The Afghan Samoon Society) will brief the audience with their tremendous role they contributed to the society and excelled in their respective fields. Arzo Ziarat Wal and Haseena Gull are among the leading poetess to express their thoughts on the struggle and role of Pakhtun women in society through their enchanting verses.

Fortunately, the event is in progress at a time when the Noble peace prize winner and inspiration of all the participant women activists, Malala Yousafzai, is already in town for the first time after being shot injured by militants in Swat in 2012. Her presence in Pakistan will fuel a fresh impetus among these activists to bolster their struggle and reconnect their cultural bonds being indigenous to them. It will remind them of the role of a woman who is the creator of 'Tappa', the oldest and most popular genre of Pashto poetry, whereby mothers, sisters, wives and others were admiring and remembering their loved ones and enemies while displaying courage, gallantry and challenges.



By giving space to the female activists of Afghanistan, FATA, KP and Balohistan, the event aims at multiplying the message of peace in the volatile region. The event also aims to promote education and empowerment of women. Gathering of women activists under the same roof with a view to find out solutions to the underlying challenges is expected to inculcate a ray of hope among the neglected and deprived women of the region.

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In conversation with sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein

'Marx is eminently worth discovering'

By Marcello Musto

IMMANUEL Wallerstein is considered one of the greatest living sociologists. He is currently a Senior Research Scholar at Yale University, New Haven - USA. He has authored more than 30 books, which have been translated into several languages. Among them is The Modern World-System, published in four volumes between 1974 and 2011. Marcello Musto is Associate Professor of Sociological Theory at York University, Toronto - Canada. He has authored and edited several books on Marx, including Karl Marx's Grundrisse (Routledge, 2008); Marx for Today (Routledge, 2012); Workers Unite! (Bloomsbury, 2014) and the latest Another Marx (Bloomsbury, 2018).

30 years after the end of the so-called 'actually existing socialism', there continued to be publications, debates and conferences all around the globe on the contemporary relevance of Karl Marx. Is this surprising? Or do you believe that Marx's ideas will continue to hold relevance for those who are looking for an alternative to capitalism?

There is an old story about Marx: you throw him out the front door and he sneaks in through the rear window. That is what happened once again. Marx is relevant because we have to deal with issues about which he still has a lot to say and because what he said is different from what most other authors argued about capitalism. Many columnists and scholars – not only myself – find Marx extremely useful and today he is in one of his new popularity phases, despite what was predicted in 1989.

The fall of the Berlin Wall liberated Marx from the chains of an ideology that had little to do with his conception of society. The political landscape following the implosion of the Soviet Union helped to free Marx from the role of figurehead for a state apparatus. What is it about Marx's interpretation of the world that continues to garner attention?

I believe that when people think of Marx's interpretation of the world in one concept they think to 'class struggle'. When I read Marx in light of the present issues, for me class struggle means the necessary struggle of what I call the Global Left – who I believe endeavour to represent the bottom 80 per cent of the world's population by income – against the Global Right – which represents maybe 1 per cent of the population. The struggle is over the other 19 per cent. It is about how to get them to come onto your side, rather than the other. We live in an era of structural crisis of the world system. The existing capitalist system cannot survive, but nobody can know for sure what will replace it. I am convinced that there are two possibilities: one is what I call the 'Spirit of Davos'. The goal of the World Economic Forum of Davos is to establish a system that maintains the worst features of capitalism: social hierarchy, exploitation and, above all, polarisation of the wealth. The alternative is a system that must be more democratic and more egalitarian. Class struggle is the fundamental attempt to affect the future of what will replace capitalism.

Your reflection on the middle class reminds me of Antonio Gramsci's idea of hegemony but I think the point is also to understand how to motivate the mass of people, the 80 per cent you mentioned, to participate in politics. This is particularly urgent in the so-called global South, where the majority of the world's population is concentrated, and where, in the past decades, despite the dramatic increase of inequalities produced by capitalism, progressive movements have become much weaker than they were previously. In these regions, the opposition to neoliberal globalisation has been channeled into support for religious fundamentalisms and xenophobic parties. We are increasingly seeing this phenomenon arise in Europe as well.

The question is does Marx help us understand this new scenario? Recently published studies have offered new interpretations of Marx that might result in opening of other 'rear windows' in the future, to use your expression. They reveal an author who extended his examination of the contradictions of capitalist society beyond the conflict between capital and labour to other domains. In fact, Marx devoted a lot of his time to the study of non-European societies and the destructive role of colonialism on the periphery of capitalism. Consistently, contrary to interpretations that equate Marx's conception of socialism with the development of productive forces, ecological concerns figured prominently in his work. Finally, he was widely interested in several other topics that scholars often ignore when they talk about Marx. Among them there are the potential of technology, the critique of nationalism, the search for collective forms of ownership uncontrolled by the state and the need for individual freedom in contemporary society: all fundamental issues of our times. But beside these new faces of Marx – which suggest that the renewed interest in his thought is a phenomenon destined to continue in the coming years – could you indicate three of Marx's most recognised ideas that you believe are worth being reconsidered today?



Wallerstein thinks recently-published studies have offered new interpretations of Marx that might result in opening of other 'rear windows' in the future

First of all, Marx explained to us better than anybody else that capitalism is not the natural way of organising society. In 'The Poverty of Philosophy', published when he was only 29 years old, he already mocked bourgeois political economists who argued that capitalist relations 'are natural laws, independent of the influence of time'. Marx wrote that for them "there has been history, since in the institutions of feudalism we find quite different relations of production from those of bourgeois society", but that they did not apply history to the mode of production they supported; they represented capitalism 'as natural and eternal'. In my book Historical Capitalism, I tried to make the point that capitalism is what has occurred historically, as opposed to some vague and unclear idea espoused by some political economists. I argued several times that there is no capitalism that is not historical capitalism. It is as simple as that for me and we owe a lot to Marx. Secondly, I want to stress the importance of the concept of 'primitive accumulation', meaning the dispossession of the peasantry from their land which was at the foundation of capitalism. Marx understood very well that it was a key process of constituting the domination of bourgeoisie. It was there at the beginning of capitalism and it still exists today. Finally, I would invite greater reflection on the subject 'private property and communism'. In the system established in the Soviet Union – in particular under Stalin – the state-owned the property but it did not mean that people were not being exploited or oppressed. They were. Talking of Socialism in one country, as Stalin did, was also something that never entered anybody's mind, including Marx, before that period. Public ownership of the means of production is one possibility. They can also be cooperatively owned. But we have to know who is producing and who is receiving the surplus value if we want to establish a better society. That has to be entirely reorganized, compared to capitalism. It is the key question to me.

The year 2018 marks the bicentenary of Marx's birth and new books and movies have been dedicated to his life. Is there a period of his biography that you find most interesting?

Marx had a very difficult life. He struggled with severe personal poverty and he was lucky to have a comrade like Friedrich Engels who helped him survive. Marx did not have an easy life emotionally too and his persistence in trying to do what he thought of as his life's work - the understanding of the way in which capitalism operates - was admirable. This is what he saw himself doing. Marx did not want to explain antiquity, nor define what socialism in the future would look like. These were not the tasks he put for himself. He wanted to understand the capitalist world in which he was living.

For all his life, Marx was not merely a scholar isolated among the books of London's British Museum, but always a militant revolutionary involved in the struggles of his epoch. Due to his activism, he was expelled from France, Belgium and Germany in his youth. He was also forced to go into exile in England when the revolutions of 1848 were defeated. He promoted newspapers and journals and always supported labour movements in all the ways he could. Later, from 1864 to 1872, he became the leader of the International Working Men's Association, the first transnational organisation of the working class and, in 1871, defended the Paris Commune, the first socialist experiment in history. Yes, it is true. It is essential to remember Marx's militancy. As you recently highlighted in the volume Workers Unite, he had an extraordinary role in the International, an organisation of people who were physically distant from each other, at a time when mechanisms of easy communication did not exist. Marx's political activity also involved journalism. He carried that on through much of his life, as a way of communicating to a larger audience. He worked as a journalist to get an income, but he saw his contributions as a political activity. He had not any sense of being a neutral. He was always a committed journalist.

In 2017, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Russian Revolution, some scholars returned to the contrast between Marx and some of his self-styled followers who were in power during the 20th century. What is the main difference between Marx and them?

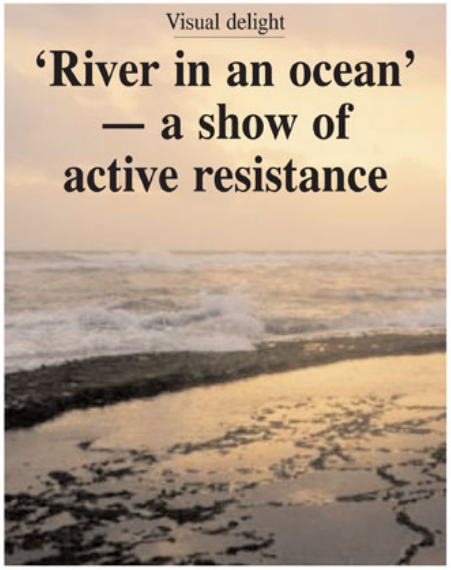
Marx's writings are illuminating and much more subtle and variegated than some of the simplistic interpretations of his ideas. It is always good to remember the famous boutade in which Marx said: "If this is Marxism, what is certain is that I am not a Marxist". Marx was always ready to deal with the reality of the world, not like many others who dogmatically imposed their views. Marx changed his mind often. He was constantly on the search for solutions to the problems he saw that the world was facing. That is why he is still a very helpful and useful guide.

To conclude, what would you like to say to the younger generation who have not yet encountered Marx?

The first thing I have to say to young people is that they have to read him. Do not read about him, but read Marx. Few people – in comparison with the many who talks about him – actually read Marx. That is also true of Adam Smith. Generally, one only reads about these classics. People learn about them through others people's summary. They want to save time but, actually, that is a waste of time! One must read interesting people and Marx is the most interesting scholar of the 19th and 20th centuries. There is no question about that. No one is equal to him in terms of the number of things he wrote about, nor for the quality of his analysis. So, my message to the new generation is that Marx is eminently worth discovering but you must read, read, read him. Read Karl Marx!

Visual delight

'River in an ocean' — a show of active resistance



By Saulat Ajmal

'RIVER in an Ocean', a visual exhibition, held true to its inspiration from the late Lala Rukh's work of the same name. Abdullah Qureshi, Natasha Malik and Saira Ansari as adviser, curated a show of active resistance and resilience, drawing from Lala Rukh's lifelong commitment to fighting for gender equality and discrimination against women and minorities and how artists are dealing with these concerns today.

The exhibition starts with a false façade on the outside of the building by Saba Khan that gives percentages of female representation in the art world while also referring to the history of the building itself. Stepping on to the second floor the ominous sounds from the first door on the right leads you into a room installation with Lali Khalid's projections on multiple, ripped screens challenging the viewer to align the image through movement as it talks about immigration and fluidity of identity. All the while Ujala Hayat's sound pieces and photographs dealing with issues of pregnancy and inhabitation of the female body, in the same room, heighten the discomfort.

Anushka Rustomji and Zara Asghar's performances of loitering and Noor-us-Sabah's engagement with certain public spaces bring to attention the fact that resistance against women and minorities exists even today

The second projection room holds videos by Farsam Zafar and Waleed Zafar, playing on the idea of intimacy in public spaces, while Hilde Krohn uses found materials on public websites, creating a narrative that points out the perverse in society through innocent moments of insecurity. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on the other hand presents a phantasmagorical video of overthrowing western imperialism through a fictitious queer rebellion.

Walking into the larger hall, we are confronted with a sculpture by Seyhr Qayum, back lit by the windows and standing eight feet high. The octagonal, wire mesh, female torso holding a metal crown over her head and sporting a metal dress with Islamic patterns painted on it, show a dominance of the female form, but the dress holds the torso totally restricted. In contrast, Rabila Kidwai, Vidha Saumya, Zahra Ehsan and Amra Khan's small sculptures and delicate works on paper, boldly confront the issues of female sexuality and perceptions of the female body.

Aziz Sohail, Maha Ahmed, Fiza Khatri, Imran Nafees Siddiqui, Mohsin Shafi, Noor us Sabah, Faraz Aamer Khan, Haider Ali Akmal, Harris Chowdhary, Noor Chaudhry, Mustafa Boga and Malcom Hutcheson deal with the complexity of identity through not just the proposed male/female dichotomy but also through an investigation of the self and the intimacy of their relationships.

Anushka Rustomji and Zara Asghar's performance of loitering and Noor-us-Sabah's engagement with certain public spaces brings to attention the resistance against women and minorities to even exist in these areas without 'reason'.

While Faraz Amer, Rehan Bashir and Gillian Rhodes brought in their own acts of resistance in the form of music and dance performances, Natasha Jozi and Sarah Mumtaz activated the body and questioned the spectatorship of the body in public view.

In confronting issues of identity, gender and sexuality; these artists tackle issues of both the personal and the political, making the show show an act of resistance in itself.