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Ghorba *Chronicles*



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Disclaimer: Please note that the opinions and views expressed in the zine are those of the respective authors and artists only and do not represent the views of the editor or the Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World at the University of Edinburgh.

Content note: Please note that some pieces in this zine reflect on and discuss racial violence and alienation. The piece starting on page 8 discusses a racial slur used against South Asians and people of South Asian descent.

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Editor's note

In the first edition of *Ghorba Chronicles*, I invited collaborators to respond to the prompt, 'What would you tell or show the ghorba if it invited you for tea?' Ghorba is an Arabic word that cannot easily be translated. Yet, it is often approximated through words and phrases like, 'exile', 'longing for home', 'homesickness', and the like. Nadeen Dakkak (2023: 1) defines it as:

It is at once the fact of being physically distant as a foreigner far away from home, a psychological and emotional state of alienation and estrangement, and a reference to the foreign place itself, the land where one becomes a stranger and suffers the challenges that accompany this position, be they mundane, everyday struggles of adaptation, or the deeper strains of homesickness.

By personifying the ghorba, I was curious as to how we imagine building relations with alienation on a microscale level. And I was particularly curious about how descendants of migrants from the Global South relate to this feeling of alienation, which is one I often associate(d) with my parents' journey.

Initially, the call for submissions was open to young people from all over Europe, who grew up working class and self-identified as Muslim. Yet, with the rise of the far-right and the increase in reports of anti-Muslim racism across Europe, I have found myself yearning for local community to remind myself that connecting with others in the face of local and global uncertainty is still a possibility.

Thus, upon reflection, I decided that this edition of the zine would centre the voices of young Muslim women of colour, who also grew up in working-class households and who are currently based in Scotland.

Thinking with Martinican poet and philosopher, Édouard Glissant (2025 [1990]: 190), my aim with the prompt was not to “grasp” my collaborators’ experiences and encounters with the ghorba - or even to “grasp” the ghorba as a concept. In his seminal essay, ‘For Opacity’, Glissant (2025 [1990]: 193) theorises that every individual and community has the “right to opacity” - the right to remain ungraspable, unknowable, and irreducible. This right stands in contrast to the demand for full “transparency”, which Glissant (2025 [1990]: 190) understands as an imperial and colonial tool used to reduce and grasp ‘the Other’ by force and violence. Instead, Glissant (2025 [1990]: 191) reminds us that we can stand in solidarity with other people without the need to fully understand or know them.



Frederiksberg Have by Mouna Chatt, December 2025

I thus invite you to read this zine alongside Glissant's idea of 'opacity' (Jeyasingh 2024). In other words, I invite you to accept that not everything that is laid out on the coming pieces of paper are intended for your understanding, for your 'grasping'. Instead, I encourage you to stay with what is unclear and ask how you can relate to the pieces and the zine without the need to 'grasp' all aspects of them. What possibilities of relation reveal themselves to you when you decide that not every word on the page is meant for your understanding?

It is therefore important to add that it was a conscious editorial choice to only minimally edit my collaborators' pieces to respect that not everything has to be made legible to the editor or the reader.

As Ishrat Rahim's piece, *Invisible/Visible* (page 18) speaks to, this zine hopes to explore what exists between, within, and beyond the nexus of (hyper)visibility and invisibility that we as Muslim European women find ourselves in. While the knowledge of Muslim, Black, Indigenous and women of colour remain neglected in official institutions, our presence in society continues to be hypervisible. What possibilities of relating and creating exist in this bizarre space between hypervisibility and invisibility? And more importantly, what relations of solidarity can we build within it?



I want Paki as an option in the census

I want
Paki
as an
option in
the census

Sehar Mehmood

“We will always be Pakistani, but you, you will always be a Paki.”¹ (Kureishi 1986: 17)

I learned why when my mother cut off my tongue, and in its place a coconut grew. I reached my little fingers in, cracking and breaking teeth to make it fit. I understood a deal had been made — this is the cost of ‘the better life.’

I quickly understood that going back home was not a return; it was a victory tour. I could not give in to the idea that I was ever returning. There is no Punjab in me, no Pakistan Zindabad spirit in me; whatever I have left, it isn’t enough.

Paki knows me better than Pakistani, than Scottish Pakistani, than Scottish Pakistani Muslim. Paki is what I would tick in a census, if it were an option.

It is simultaneously a slur, a self-flagellation for my loss, and a way of giving grace to what I am.

And in the small moments when I suddenly become aware of the white meat between my teeth and its hairy, coarse brown shell,

I reach in again to break, to crack, and take the hammer when my fingers hesitate.

¹This line is an extract from Hanif Kureishi’s essay, ‘The Rainbow Sign’ recalling his life as a young South Asian boy growing up in England. This line was said to him as a young man when he was at a party in Pakistan. I read this at university, went home and cried.

I want Paki as an option in the census

But it was at its worst when I tried to pray. I thought for so long that God wouldn't understand me with this tongue. I had been taught to pray, make dua for my loved ones, and ask for forgiveness in a language I no longer had. Those moments were always veiled in shame.

Even now, when I make dua, I whisper: I'm sorry - can you understand me?

I think you were born, Ghorba,

From my severed tongue

and the waters between the places I can never claim.

Paki** knows me better than **Pakistani**, than **Scottish Pakistani**, than **Scottish Pakistani Muslim**. **Paki** is what I would tick in a **census**, if it were an option. **Paki** knows me better than **Pakistani**, than **Scottish Pakistani**, than **Scottish Pakistani Muslim**. **Paki** is what I would tick in a census, if it were an **option**. **Paki** knows me **better** than **Pakistani**, than **Scottish Pakistani**, than **Scottish Pakistani

Between Prayers

Between *Prayers*

Maria Farsoon

Nour (Khadra's Great Granddaughter), 2050:

I was lucky to be fed, clothed, and bathed as a first-generation child. When we stopped sleeping at the mosque, we decorated our own home with photos. We stuck one of my great grandmother Khadra over the mantle, one that my mother keeps in her wallet. I recount the memory I associate most strongly with it, one waxed to my brain. It was the year 2012, and I had invited a friend from school over, Christian, for my first play-date. We were six years old. Once school ended, I spotted my father, snatched Christian's hand and ran to him. I don't remember much else besides the moment Christian detected the photo in our living room, and he started to cry- tears of fear. It was bizarre, as though someone had hurt him, or was about to. He sprung out of the room, and although it didn't take long for him to recover, he stayed cautious of his surroundings.

It was one of the only old memorabilia we had. I often wonder what she was thinking as that photograph was being taken. Had someone ticked her off? Was there something strange in the distance? Did she dislike the photographer? I wonder.

Khadra, 1950:

They - my sons - are pointing that large black block in the direction of my face now. They tell me it is a camera and that I must stay still. I do loathe their foreign antics; behaviours their uncle has probably taught him since his return from the West. I fear he has become one of them. He no longer sits with us late into the night. He does not even rise early for Fajr. On top of that, I do not see that he is bringing home anything of worth: not - real - investments, not even interesting topics of conversation. Let alone his idleness out in the fields.

He has forgotten that on this land, we prefer to measure time by dawn and dusk, and the shadow before us.

It is a small strip of living; soil, chatter, tea. We prize these most. I know everybody's stories like the back of my hand, and everybody knows mine. It's been written in textbooks and the travellers' diaries that we are a strange people - that we follow one another, murmur to ourselves, and live like animals, and that our language sounds heavy, guttural, almost frightening. This nook of the Earth seems to arouse unwarranted interest. Why? Is it because the light touches our crops differently? Is it because we invite each other for all three meals of the day? Or, is it because we share the same silence, five times a day, without thinking twice?

Nour (Khadra's Great Granddaughter), 2050:

My bedroom here, in England, is quiet. I know one's mind should be clearer while one prays - a conversation, an interaction - but the flashes of memory from my childhood find me, catch me, and hijack the moment.

Instead of hearing the call to prayer mask the voices of people outside, there is no second layer here. No recitation to conceal the vehicles in traffic and the screaming matches erupting outside of my window. No reverberation to muffle the sounds of my daughter's friend as she cries during their play-date, probably having detected the photograph above the mantle.

Khadra, 1950:

...I think it has something to do with the tattoos on our faces.
When I was a young girl, I waited for this tattoo. It is on my chin, and it makes me feel taller, as though I must hold my head higher so as to expose it to all, whether friend or foe.



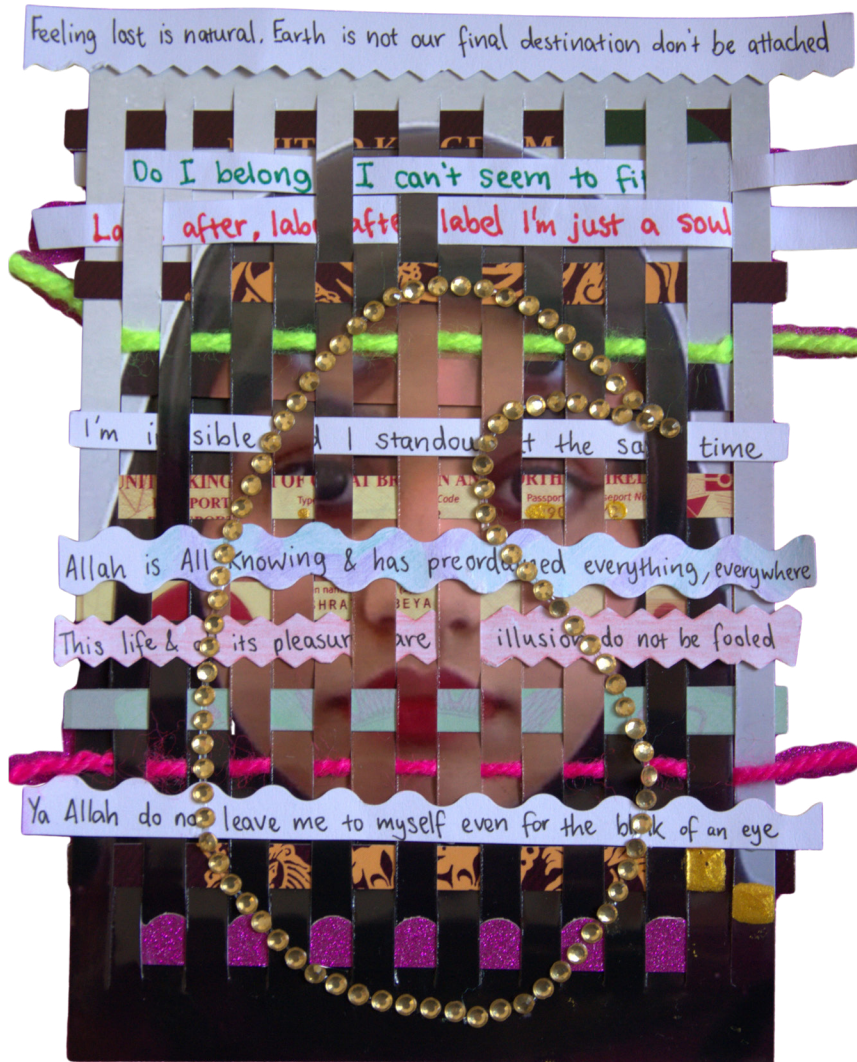
Woven photographic image of the artist's passport

Title: *Passing by*

Medium: Paper (of various kinds), paint, pencil, and wool

Dimensions: 15.2cm x 10.1cm

Date: 2026



Woven photographic image of the artist's legal passport photo
(taken in 2022)

Title: *Invisible/Visible*

Medium: Paper (of various kinds), paint, wool and rhinestones

Dimensions: 15.2cm x 10.1cm

Date: 2026

Dear Ghorba

Longing for home is such a tricky thing to describe and such a visceral, personal experience. What comes up for me is not just about continental borders but quiet nostalgic moments. Home is personal and in some ways my relationship with Bangladesh is distant, removed and in the background, it's my background but not really in the foreground of my life. My first home was a little three bedroom house in Edinburgh, all my childhood I was there & I look back fondly although my family faced racism & abuse in the community. So when we moved house for a better life it was so difficult to say goodbye to me & my parents 1st home. I long more for my childhood home than I do for a country I have been a handful of times. Don't get me wrong I do want to see Bangladesh again, it'll just be so different as a grown woman, with very little family there as many have migrated & my broken mother tongue which

shows everyone I'm a foreigner, someone who couldn't hold onto it, someone different and changed by the colonial tongue which I speak to you now. I have access to things that many girls in Bangladesh don't have & I could have been one of them. I do often think about the version of myself who was born & raised there, if all my family & my grandfathers just stayed put. What it would be like and honestly it frightens me. Even though it's hard being different here, I don't think I could deal with the societal pressures, lack of opportunities & general conformity (of course there are many great things there too but I don't think it outweighs its cons). I have loads of conflicting emotions & I'm allowed to when my family, culture, heritage & birth place are scattered across the world and that is truly how Allah planned it all and I am ever so grateful for the life I do have, I just want to keep reminding myself too.

Artist biographies

Sehar Mehmood is a South Asian writer whose work engages with history, memory, and legacy. ‘I want Paki as an option in the census’ marks her return to writing after a three-year hiatus spent working within the museum sector on projects examining the British Empire, slavery, and their enduring impact. The piece is shift in focus, moving from scrutinising the external to looking at the internal emotional and spiritual impact of the bloody imperial system.

Maria Farsoon is a journalist, writer, and editor. She is interested in poetry, politics, and place. Her portfolio includes work for *The Skinny Magazine* and *Plurality Journal*. She is currently studying for an MSc in Publishing at Edinburgh Napier University.

Ishrat Rahim is a South Asian Muslim artist. She graduated with her undergraduate degree in 2025 in Painting BA (Hons) at The University of Edinburgh. The pieces included in this zine are woven out paper using photographs and papers. This includes the symbolism and representation of the passport, use of identity, bound by privilege and politics as well as weaving in the thoughts and worries that come to mind when thinking of belonging.

Mouna Chatt is founder and editor of *Ghorba Chronicles*. She currently works as the Project and Communications Officer at the Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World at The University of Edinburgh. She holds an MA (Hons) in Sociology and Politics from The University of Edinburgh.

Playlist

The following songs are a selection from a playlist I compiled while developing the zine. Some speak directly to themes covered in the zine while others have ‘just’ inspired, comforted or given me energy the past year. Enjoy?

Sobri Sobri - Khaled

Aloula - Fairuz

Longing - Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Michael Brook

101 FM - Little Simz

Wahdon - Fairuz

Si je rappe ici - Ideal J

The Field - Blood Orange feat. The Durutti Column, Tariq Al-Sabir, Caroline Polachek, Daniel Caesar

Ana Bashaa El Bahr - Najat Al Saghira

Danger: Intro - 113

Beltway - Solange

Lifetime - Erika de Casier

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I want Paki as an option in the census:

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And, as always, I am most thankful to my friends, who fuel my creative ideas and processes every day, who remain the primary source of inspiration for my work, and who hold me accountable to my values and principles. I am lucky to have such talented and warm people in my life. You are truly my favorite people to think and create with.

What
would *you*
tell or show
the ghorba
if it invited
you for tea?

Interested in *Ghorba Chronicles?*

Interested in collaborating? Got ideas for a (potential) second edition? Want to do a zine swap?

Contact ghorbachronicles@proton.me