

## Artists' Spotlight

**Nazes Afroz, Ateş Alpar, Cecilia Garcia, Agata Kubis and Shirin Rai**

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**Nazes Afroz\***

\*Correspondence: [nazesafroz@gmail.com](mailto:nazesafroz@gmail.com)

Images 4, 11, 13, 18

### History in full circle

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Having spent many years of my childhood and early adult life in Park Circus, the most mixed and cosmopolitan part of Kolkata, I had a kind of flashback when I walked into the park where hundreds of Muslim women were protesting and raising slogans against the Indian government's plans of introducing a national register of citizens that potentially would disenfranchise many of them. As a young adult I was reminded that the process of Partition of Indian and Bengal had started in Kolkata. The religious strife that started here in August 1946, soon engulfed the whole of India, leading to its rupture within a year. The Muslims of Kolkata were always apportioned the blame for starting the Hindu-Muslim riots though only a small number of them chose to move to Pakistan. The resolute faces of the old and young Muslim women, sitting for weeks through the cold January nights, just wanted to establish that their parents and grandparents had chosen India to be their homeland and they were not going to move an inch from this country. I felt history had completed a full circle.

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**Nazes Afroz** has worked as a journalist for nearly 40 years, 18 of which for the BBC, covering current affairs spanning South, Central and West Asia in the capacity of a producer and later as a senior editor. He supervised and led the research project on third generation memory of the Bengal Partition on behalf of the Goethe Instituts in Kolkata and Dhaka. He continued with the project with a photography work titled, 'Uncertain Memories/Refugee Memories of Kolkata', which was exhibited in Kolkata in 2018.

Apart from coauthoring a cultural guidebook on Afghanistan, Nazes has translated Syed Mujtaba Ali's classic memoir of his time in Kabul, *Deshe Bideshe* into English under the title *In a Land Far from Home: A Bengali in Afghanistan*. As a passionate documentary photographer Nazes has held several exhibitions in countries across three continents from 2015.

## Ateş Alpar\*

\*Correspondence: alparates@windoslive.com

Images 2, 5, 6, 7

### Documenting Social Memory

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As a queer individual, taking photographs of the 18th Istanbul Feminist Night March held on 8 March 2020 is both memory work for myself and a contribution to social and cultural memory. I believe this banned march is a fundamental right of women. I have been working on LGBTI + individuals and their feminist practices as documents for the last seven years and I hope that what I do will contribute to the construction of a visual memory in this field. I am inspired by the hope and unity of the protestors in the streets and their collective solidarity. But mostly it is the streets that are the things that inspire me the most when I take my photos.

**Ateş Alpar** has studied cinema, photography and video. They have worked for a long time on photography, visual sociology, cinema and music. In the field of contemporary documentary photography, they produce video and photo stories by focusing on issues such as migration, border, identity, social movements, underground music and LGBTI+queer issues.

**Cecilia Garcia\***

\*Correspondence: ceciayelengarcia@gmail.com

Images 9, 16, 17

**Connected Struggles**

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Over the last five years, Argentina has seen a massive feminist movement bubble up in households, in schools, in workplaces, and spill into the streets and political institutions. From the first women's strike in 2016, in response to the brutal femicide of teenager Lucía Pérez, to the successive feminist strikes on March 8 of following years, to multiple marches and actions against the murders of women and trans people and for rights to abortion, this feminism has refused to accept a position of victimhood. The strikes highlight women's unpaid and unrecognized work, as well as the importance of that work and the power that lies in refusing to do it. This surge of feminist mobilization is also seen in the campaign for legal, safe and free abortion, which has retaken momentum in recent years, connecting the struggle for reproductive rights to struggles for bodily autonomy for trans people, to struggles for territorial autonomy for Indigenous people, and to struggles for economic and political autonomy for all feminized subjects. This feminist movement has transformed all aspects of life, from intimate relations to professions, leading to discussions and debate about what feminist photography looks like. Feminism and photography are sister projects, forms of showing up and putting one's body on the line in the territories where struggles take place and tools of simultaneous personal and collective transformation. Photography serves as the living memory of the people. Here we see feminist mobilization as not only pain, anger, and mourning, but also the joy of collective struggle (with **Liz Mason-Deese**).

## Feminist Dissent

**Cecilia García** is an Argentinean feminist photographer and communication specialist. She has worked for different media outlets, including Radio Gráfica, Megafón Radio, Ensamble Contenidos and as a photojournalist for ANCCOM (News Agency of the Communication Sciences Department – University of Buenos Aires). She studied photography at ARGRA School, Sub Cooperativa de Fotógrafxs and Hydra, Mexico.

## Agata Kubis\*

\*Correspondence: @agata.kubis

Images 1, 8, 10, 12

### Call it a Revolution

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On October 22, the Polish government further restricted the country's already draconian abortion laws. Photographers like Agata Kubis, based in Warsaw, Poland, have been documenting the protests sweeping the country that have brought together women from over five hundred towns and cities, and have foregrounded the energy of the younger generation born after the 'fall' of Soviet-style Communism. Kubis's photos are from the Women's Strike protests in Warsaw in October 2020 that saw protestors block the largest roundabout and bridges in the city. They also protested at the headquarters of the Constitutional Court, the PiS office (the right-wing Law and Justice party that has been in power since 2015) and the house of Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the leader of PiS.

**Agata Kubis** is a street photographer and photojournalist. For ten years, she has been documenting events related to the feminist, LGBT and freedom movement. She was a part of the editorial collective of Replika magazine, and since 2017 has been working as part of the editorial team of OKO.press.

**Shirin Rai\***

\*Correspondence: Shirin.ra@warwick.ac.uk

Images Cover, 3, 14, 15

**The Women of Shaheen Bagh**

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As the Indian state sought to exclude a sizeable population from its narrative on citizenship through the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, the women of Shaheen Bagh in southeast Delhi decided that they had had enough. Coming out of their homes, they made their presence felt in a way that connected them with the Indian independence movement – an insistence that their rights be recognised through their presence in a public space that could not be overlooked. They occupied a road, made into a garden of hope (bagh), an aesthetic oasis in the midst of the hustle and bustle of a mega-city's poor corner. And how attractive a space it became – with art, books, and libraries; with singing songs – the two most popular being Gandhi's favourite bhajan (devotional song) 'Vaishnav Jan To' and the ghazal by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, 'Hum Dekhenge', reciting poems, and readings in different languages. Just their presence opened up spaces – there and elsewhere. The optimism among the protesters was palpable – perhaps this was a turning point in Indian politics? A time for a new framing of citizenship that spoke to India's secular state?

**Shirin Rai** is Professor in the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick. She is the co-Director of the University of Warwick's Global Research Priority Programme on International Development. Her latest books are *Performing Representation: Women Members in the Indian Parliament* (with Carole Spary; OUP), 2019 and the *Handbook of Politics and Performance* (2021; OUP).

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