

Artists in the City: Exploring the Creative Identities of Visual Artists in Dhaka

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the requirements for the degree of BSS in Anthropology

Economics and Social Sciences

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that,

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing a degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through complete and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

This research is an exploratory study on contemporary visual artists in Dhaka city and the theorization of different kinds of creative identities among artists. The idea of creativity is closely related to our understanding of the self, however, it is also based on our relationship with others and our social, cultural, technological and other external instances. The study will look into how artists establish their creative identity in our society and how external aspects impact the concept of the creative self and the artistic identities of visual artists. The thesis will also look into how the art market or the nature of the art industry affects the creative growth of artists. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six contemporary artists and one expert for the research. Applying Pierre Bourdieu's idea of habitus, social/cultural capital and cultural production, and Homi Bhabha's idea of cultural hybridity, the research will look into how artists in Dhaka establish their creative identity.

Keywords: Artists, Creativity, Creative Identity, Hybrid Identity, Contemporary art, Social Capital. Cultural Capital.

Chapter One

Introduction

Artistic creativity is thought to be an individual aspect, something that comes from within. It is very closely related to our understanding of the self. However, creativity is also heavily influenced by external factors. Outside instances, such as social, political, cultural, economic, technological, etc., play an important role in the creativity of artists. Therefore, to understand the nature of art and the creative identities of artists in a given society, we need to look at their experiences of surrounding external ideas and circumstances. It is important to look into the lived experiences, exposures and interactions an artist had in their childhood and throughout their journeys of becoming creatives, to understand the nature of artistic identities in a society.

Art and aesthetics in Bangladesh have always played an important role in terms of representing the culture and historicity of the region. Artists have always involved themselves in representing our cultural and national identity. As a result of constant interaction and occupation by different societies, our society has a rich history and is culturally diverse in terms of ethnicity and religion. More recently, with the rise of advanced interaction with outside countries, the hybridity in cultural aspects like art and aesthetics is increasingly apparent. However, little is known about the nature of creativity in contemporary artists and how artists in our country establish their creative identity. Because of the lack of research on the topic, this study will present an explorative study on contemporary artists based in Dhaka. The present study will look into the journeys of visual artists in establishing themselves as creatives and how external influences such as social, cultural, environmental and technological aspects affect the nature of

their artistic identities. Before discussing findings and analysis of the current study, the thesis will look into previous related studies done both inside and outside Bangladesh.

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

There are studies done on creativity, which have been more focused on an individual's internal or cognitive understanding and less focused on their external environment and experiences. The idea of how one's creativity is affected by their lived experiences and surrounding circumstances needs to be analyzed to properly understand the nature of people's creativity in a given society. In the following paragraphs, the thesis will look into some of the existing research done both inside and outside Bangladesh to look into what we already know about the different perspectives, both global and local, on how we understand creativity identity and the establishment of such identity.

2.1 Establishment of Creative Identity in Contemporary Artists

To Glaveanu & Tanggaard (2014), creative identity represents the interaction between the self, others and the idea of creativity in a social context. It is argued that the analyses of creativity by researchers and psychologists have mostly revolved around a person's cognitive and personal traits, while the influence of an individual's socio-cultural surroundings and their relationship with others has been less explored (Glaveanu & Tanggaard, 2014; Güss et al. 2018). The idea of creating involves identity work, and identity is fundamentally a social category; hence, a creator does not create in isolation but instead co constructs their creativity with their relation with others in society (Glaveanu & Tanggaard, 2014). The sociocultural context influences the nature of creativity in multiple ways; for instance, the identity of the creator/artist can be dynamic in terms of time and space, which means the nature of the self of an artist varies depending on their historical and geographical context (Victor & Natalia, 2018; Glaveanu & Tanggaard, 2014). Identity is also not singular, as in a person can be associated with multiple sorts of identity. A

creator identity can be established by one or more contextually enacted identities (Glaveanu & Tanggaard, 2014; Kosmala, 2007). Furthermore, creative identity is considered to have a mediated structure in terms of not only social interactions of the creator but also with social ideologies and discourse of their society. And so, to understand creativity more comprehensively we need to look at the social, dynamic, contextual and mediated aspects of it.

Exploring the works of a Polish artist, Kosmala (2007) argues for the importance of individual experiences about how contextual factors like gender and politics affect the construction of the creative and/or professional identity of artists. The author further argues that identity is formed through the power of discourse and the positioning of artists in the wider cultural area. Kosmala exemplifies the works of Kuiks for her analysis; Zofia Kuiks is a Polish artist who draws her inspiration mainly from her experience of living in a political crisis in Central Eastern Europe (CEE) in the 1970's, her involvement with underground or subliminal art, and her individual experience of being a female visual artist in a male-dominated profession. Taking a critical standpoint of the established norms in her society, the artist builds her creativity by both being in the system and standing against it. The article explains her as a female artist who rejected and resisted against the contracted gendered identities through her body performances and photographic work.

The external influences of an artist are certainly not always visible in their art. Looking into the work of Yayoi Kusama, a famous Japanese artist, Thomas (2020) argues that despite the highly individualistic nature of her work, she illuminates the lived experiences of her surroundings in her earlier years (Thomas, 2020). For instance, her artwork *Accumulation of Corpses* represents her difficult childhood in the militarist and nationalist era of Japan as they were involved in fifteen years of war with China (1931- 1945). The painting, along with a few

others, portrays her struggles with depersonalization and self actualization that relate to her traumatic childhood. Suppose we look at Infinity Net (another famous painting by the artist). In that case, the author argues that the “uninteresting” appeal of the artwork with its unlimited repetitive circles represents the artist’s silent resistance to the competitive, advanced and pragmatic nature of New York City, where she moved and struggled to get by at the time of making the artwork (Thomas, 2020). Although Kusama's work is thought to be very personal, her experiences in life about where she lived and grew up had a significant impact on her work. And so, we understand that even though art is something that comes from within, artists are in ways influenced by their surrounding environment and circumstances.

Exploring the idea of creativity through artists' perspectives, Danial (2020) found that the artists in the study identify their internal or personal aspects as the key to their creativity and the process itself. For the artists, their creativity is a means to express themselves, to express their freedom, and to make meaning. To some, creating art is also related to spiritual instances, such as their relationship with the divine (Danial,2020). However, the artists also acknowledged the importance of external environments like the art world and how people perceive art within the wider population of the society. One of the important highlights of the study was the impact of time and money in relation to how artists financially sustain themselves while practising their creativity. The author explained that other works of creativity, such as medicine or business, have a day-to-day financial role, however, artistic creativity primarily has an aesthetic purpose. For artists, their work or creativity is very personal. It involves most of their lifetime, unlike creativity in business, where it is limited to a person's involvement in the industry. Hence, the author argued, people generally find it difficult to understand the value of artistic creativity in terms of education, political and socio-cultural instances in a society.

The art market of a particular place, the conception of commercialization of art or what kind of art will sell also has an impact on the creativity of artists. In the present day, most creative work merely serves the creative industry and does little to fulfil the artistic aspiration of the artists themselves. Analyzing the creative industry in Indonesia, Kasiyan (2018) found art industries to be features of late capitalism and control creators as workers to produce art. According to many researchers, neoliberalism is considered the core of the creative industry (Kasiyan, 2018). Exploring the idea of creative work and contemporary identities, Littleton and Taylor (2012) found that earning money through art is also a potential source of validation for artists. The authors argued that contemporary creatives give importance to monetary values to some extent and expect artists to achieve a “big break” in their careers. But then again, artists only focusing on the financial gain are considered as being a “sell-out”. Therefore, to balance out such instances, artists are motivated to maintain a double life (Littleton and Taylor, 2012). They need to both think about their creativity and make money to continue their career as artists.

The creative identity of the present age of technology is more dynamic in nature than ever before. In her analysis of youth experience in visual material culture, Eglinton (2013) explained that everyday cultural transition is transforming young people’s identities in complex ways as they interact with the globalization process, however, she argues that the transition does not erase the idea of local places, values and meaning in the contemporary globalized world, rather they play an important role in the production of youth identity. Exploring hybridity in artists' identities, Emrali (2016) argues that with the rise of interconnection for people around the world, the idea to state one's identity has been more prevalent than ever. The uniqueness of an artist's identity, the author argues, depends on how well they know their own culture and how they interpret other cultural instances. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the breakdown of

borders, increased international relations and technological advancement along with our identities got more and more hybrid and artistic works became more unified and mixed with traditions and shared techniques (Emrail, 2016; Carroll, 2007). Artists now can portray a variety of cultures and get out of the conventional ideas like race, gender and ethnicity.

Literat and Glaveanu (2016) argue that the internet and digital media have drastically, however not completely, changed the nature of creativity. The online participation of creative people is associated with increased connectivity among diverse groups and unprecedented access to knowledge and information. The article also argues that the internet allows creative participation outside formal arrangements that are generally associated with art, as in locating it within the sphere of museums or galleries. The limitations of time are also different when using online mediums for creative participation, as there are fewer physical barriers, projects online could go on for a long amount of time, and people can participate at their own convenience compared to offline projects (Literat & Glaveanu, 2016). And so, new technologies and media have heavily impacted our creative field regarding how we communicate, exhibit and expand our creativity.

The above studies exemplify studies on how we understand the creative identity in terms of social, cultural, political, economic and technological perspectives and looked into some previous literature on artists from different societies in terms of how they establish their creative selves according to their personal and social surroundings. The interconnectivity has impacted the way we internalize sociocultural ideas, it has created more meaning in our self-identity and opened up previously bounded ideas like class or gender-related activities (Burno et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important that we analyze the creative identity of artists on the basis of their access to a range of knowledge from different sources of culture and society and different

presentations of “self” in the present age. Before diving into the analysis for such instances, let us discuss relevant literature on the topic based in Bangladesh.

2.2 Contemporary Artists in Bangladesh

The idea of art and aesthetics among artists in Bangladesh has altered and exchanged through years of social, political, geographic and cultural changes. Bangladesh has a long history of conquest, trade and commerce with various different societies; different religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc., have been a part of our region for almost two millennia (Selim, 2014). With the increase of globalization, this cultural flow among different societies has been more prevalent than ever. In the present era, this constant interaction with a variety of other societies has had a significant impact on our understanding of the creativity and imagination of artists in our country (Hassi & Storti, 2011; Islam, 2007; Selim, 2014). As we focus on the idea of creative identity in the present times, let us look at a few of the literature on contemporary artists and their works to better understand the arts of the present day in Bangladesh.

Since the 1960’s contemporary artists started to emerge with their modern/postmodernist work in the art scene in Bangladesh. Artists like Monirul Islam, Shahid Kabir, Hashem Khan etc., are some of the known modern artists of the early contemporary period (Islam, 2010). Monirul Islam paints abstract art with the elements of Bangla calligraphy and Bangladeshi landscape and folk crafts. Similarly, Hashem Khan, a semi abstract painter, draws his inspiration from the liberation war and urban landscape. More recent artists like Farida Zaman apply a unique pattern of dots in her art that might be inspired by both local folk designs and/or pointillism from European painters (Islam, 2010). According to Sarker (2018) artists like S M Sultan and Zainul Abedin, the pioneers of modernism in Bangladesh, are the first ones who

learned to not just follow the works of old masters (a standard practice in the old academic art institutions) and to express one's own experience through art. Modernism was prevalent in the 60's, but its popularity gradually declined with the rise of representative and figurative work in the region. However, the modernist style of art again gained its popularity. One of the popular examples of abstract artists today is Ghiyasuddin, who uses local signs and symbols, myths and tales to evoke his sense of emotions and identity in his modern style artworks. After years of training in Japan, his art could be described as works that "...emerge from a fusion of Bangladeshi consciousness and Japanese sensation" (Sarker, 2018). In his analysis of the artist, Sarker articulates a global identity that is basically a collection of signs, specific coding with specific meaning that seems distant and unfamiliar through the abstraction of art, creating a kind of form through the formless art. And so, we understand that since the 1960's, the art scene in Bangladesh saw a shift as several groups of artists were heavily influenced by different cultural environments which reflected on their creativity as their work became more diverse and hybridized.

Bose (2015) argues that the fragmented history of our country heavily affects the construction of Bangladeshi national and personal identity. Given the hybrid cultural influence of the country, artists struggle with the issue of national and personal identity, and their relation with the global world. Bose focuses on three women artists in Bangladesh who portray their idea of identification in terms of gender. The article focuses on the works of Tayeba Begum Lipi, Dilara Begum Jolly and Nazia Andaleeb Preema and their creation of art using different media and content to portray what it is like being a woman in a nation that is in a continuous process of change but still resorting specific gendered expectations. For instance, the article discusses Tayeba Begum Lipi, one of the most active artists in Bangladesh. She and her husband,

Mahbubur Rahman, are heavily inspired by the international incident of 9/11 and how the world subsequently treated Bangladeshi Muslims. Their work also focuses on how people back in Bangladesh reacted to the incident as people turned more to their faith, for women, it meant increased popularity of wearing a veil (Bose, 2015). In response to this, Lipi and Rahman made an installation piece named *Toys Watching Toys* (2002) exhibited in Dhaka, where she showcased four life-sized figures of Lipi in burqa facing triptych oil painting where three portraits of Lipi were shown with her hair down, wearing makeup and exposed shoulders. The art conveys two different portrayals of the artist, each observing and questioning the identity of the other. Similarly, the article discusses Dilara Begum Jolly's work that focuses on local religion and politics. Jolly is inspired by both international artists and Bangladeshi visual culture (Bose, 2015). Her work since the late 90s has focused on global and local issues against women. For instance, her work *Tader Bola* represents female reproductive organs stitched into *nakshi katha* Bengali embroidered quilts. A paradoxical image of pain and domesticity linked with stitches represents the artist's memory of her female relatives working on embroidery. All of the artists mentioned in the article express the struggles of women in our society expressing the tension between aspects like modernity and tradition, global and local, faith and secularism in relation to gender in Bangladesh.

In his recent work, *Midnight's Third Child*, Naeem Mohaiemen (2023) discusses multiple contemporary artists and their work as an anthology of essays. He attempts to write down the narratives of a variety of creative works that are created inside and outside the institution of arts around the country. These works are either built upon essentialist ideas and/or speak against major ideologies. He talks about artists like Abir Shome, who uses mostly abstract textual work to express contemporary issues. For instance, in a Bengal Shilpakala exhibition in 2016, Shome

used textual art (using the English language) to express the idea of his identity as a brown-skinned Bangladeshi individual in relation to America and their oriental perception of the East (Mohaiemen, 2023). Similar to Shome, Razib Datta on the other hand, uses both Bangla and English in his textual artworks to speak his mind on political and literary issues. Mohaiemen argued that Datta's work has a delightful and anarchic quality to it which is more prominent when he uses the Bangla language. He might use English to reach out to a wider audience outside Bangladesh, but those who cannot understand the works done in Bangla, miss out on the frenetic energy and essence of Bangla prose that the artist uses in his abstract work (Mohaiemen, 2023). Mohaiemen also mentions artists like Joydeb Roaza, a Tripura artist and art activist. Roaza is mainly a performance artist, but he also works on drawing and painting . His work projects an implicit critique of Bengali nationalism against indigenous societies in Bangladesh. One of Roaza's exhibitions in Japan in 2016 showcased a series of line drawings expressing a confrontational tone against the ongoing militarization of Chittagong hill tracts. His work portrays the accountability of Bangladesh state for five decades of slow-moving ethnic displacement in the hill tracks. Most of the contemporary artists mentioned in the book use elements from both their own culture and outside influences to speak against national/international issues.

From the above discussion, we understand that visual art in Bangladesh has been through years of transition, and today, in the age of constant global interaction, the concept of creativity among artists in our country is more diverse than ever. The literature discussed above addresses the mix of various techniques of art along with the diversity of cultural, political and social instances in the works of contemporary art in Bangladesh as a result of global communication. There is research done on the kind of art made in our country or what social or cultural factors

result in different kinds of art, however, little research has been done from the perspective of artists themselves on the process of establishment and representation of different creative identities. Focusing on contemporary visual artists, the present study will look into the much-unexplored art scene of Dhaka city and analyze how artists understand and establish their creative selves in relation to personal, social, economic, technological and cultural circumstances and how they structure their creative identities based on their experiences and exposures. To be more specific, the thesis will try and look into the following questions and objectives;

Research questions

- What are the initial influences of creatives in their journey towards becoming artists?
- How do external aspects such as social, cultural, global and technological instances influence the creativity or creative flow of contemporary artists in the city?
- What kind of creative identity do they establish through these influences?

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the research will be mainly based around two theories. Bourdieu habitus, especially focusing on the artistic habitus, social/cultural capital, and cultural production. The thesis will further focus on Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity. Bourdieu's theory will help us analyze the first two questions of this research and through Bhabha's theory, we will look into the third question at hand. In this chapter, we will elaborate on the theories and how they will be related to this study.

2.3.1 Bourdieu's Theory of Habitus, Forms of Capital and Cultural Production

According to Bourdieu, to understand the complexities of society, we need to look at the opposing relations between the individual and the society. Bourdieu came up with the ideas of habitus, field and capital to understand how individuals in a society regulate the way they do. Bourdieu argued that everything in society is structured into fields, and you have to have certain habitus within you to enter or be a part of the fields. Depending on the field of its functions, Bourdieu divided capital into three forms - economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Here, we will mainly focus on the idea of social and cultural capital to understand how it relates to the growth of visual artists in Dhaka city. To Bourdieu, cultural capital can exist in two ways - it can be either embodied in us as our habitus, or it can be learned through institutions, books, museums and other objectives (Bourdieu, 1986). A person's position in society is mostly determined by their cultural trajectory, and what kind of family and educational background they grew up with (Huang, 2019; Bourdieu, 1972). The embodied factors or our habitus are mostly the ones we learn or adapt from family and upbringing. They are a set of instinctual ideas that let us know how to behave in a certain context. Habitus is ingrained, however, is not something that is fixed; it can change depending on us learning new ideas and phenomena. Therefore, our family, education and social upbringing, or our habitus, play a vital role in who we become and where we end up in society.

Cultural and artistic production in a given society can be understood through Bourdieu's broader concepts of habitus, field and capital. Like any other field in society, cultural reproduction contains both autonomous and heteronomous principles (Bourdieu, 1983). On an autonomous level, an artist's social background, their education, and the forms of art they were exposed to affect their artistic credibility. On the other level, Bourdieu argued that the

production of art is interconnected with other fields in society like economic, political, educational and intellectual fields (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). To Bourdieu, everything from artists, agents, galleries, curators, critics and so on affects what is considered as art. And so, art is not only dependent on the artist or individuals pure expression, but it is dependent on the power struggles between agents in the art field.

2.3.2 Homi Bhabha's Theory of Cultural Hybridity

Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity focuses on the interaction of two different cultures and how they produce and negotiate different positions. According to Bhabha, culture should be understood without a given or presupposed idea of diversity, organized around a built community and/or selfhood. He urges us to think of culture as something that is always in process, changing according to its association with others, and understanding the "location" of a culture beyond the idea of it being fixed to here or there (Byrne, 2019). Bhabha proposes a different approach to looking at the interaction between two cultures; rather than focusing on cultural mixture as "assimilation of contraries", which mainly stemmed from colonization, he states that assimilation should be understood as a process that opens up a new position, which he calls "The third space", where cultures blend together to create a hybrid culture. A position that should be articulated based on cultural hybridity and not on the exoticism of cultural diversity or multiculturalism (Bhabha, 1994). Sociologist Stuart Hall calls this third space the third position. Similar to Bhabha, he explains cultural identity through a third position which is a combination of the similarities and differences of cultures. According to Hall, the idea of globalization breaks the old logic of cultural/national identity, that cultural identities are pre-determined, and creates a new one where identities are understood as something that is never complete and is always in the process (Mattelart, 2008). Applying the theory of third space to the present research will help

us understand how the creativity of artists has been affected through their interaction with the global world.

Chapter Four

Methodology

The primary goal of this research is to understand the creative identities of contemporary artists in Dhaka city. Since the 1990's, the city has seen a new development in the art market with galleries, curators, critics, collectors and artists (Selim, 2014). One of the reasons behind choosing Dhaka as the research area was the access to the wide range of art galleries and exhibitions in the city. Furthermore, as I am a resident of Dhaka, it was also convenient for me to reach out to the artists through fieldwork and my network around the city.

Through qualitative research, the study aims to look into the creative journey of artists in the city, the external influences of their work, and finally, how they establish their artistic identity through these influences. As it is an exploratory research, a qualitative research method makes it easier to explore the groups in a much more flexible way. This openness and flexibility help us understand specific social and cultural nuances and changes that may or may not occur within the field (Shaw, 2015; Australian Aid, 2019).

The methodological tools that was used for collecting data are as follows

- Primary research: In-depth interview of participants
- Secondary research: Existing literature on the topic

This chapter will mainly be focused on the methodology aspects of this research. It will look into the demography and location of the participants, how the data was collected, how the data was analyzed, and finally, what were the challenges/limitations of the study.

4.1 Primary Research: Participant Interviews

In total, six artists and an art curator (as an expert) were interviewed for the study. All of the artists were aged around mid 20 to 50 years. Only the expert interviewed was above 50 years of age. The participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Three of the participating artists are female, and three of them are male (including the expert). All of the participants in the study belong to the middle to upper-middle-class societies.

I conducted fieldwork at different art festivals and exhibitions to find artists and potential interviewees. I went to a four-day art festival called *Dhaka Makers*, arranged by artists in Dhaka, where the creative community of the city gathered to promote, sell, exhibit their work, and meet other artists. I met and talked to several artists at the event and eventually interviewed one of them as my research participant. The expert in this research was also at the event, however, I could not contact him later through a personal network. I also went to different art and photography exhibitions to explore the art sense in Dhaka and found one of my participants through these explorations. The other four of the artists were found through one of the participants and my network.

After meeting the artists, the primary interviews were conducted both online and offline. It took me almost a month to finish all the interviews. I interviewed four of the participants (including the expert) in person, and the other three were conducted online. With the permission of all the participants, I recorded the interviews. The interviews were 30 to 90 minutes long, and the online interviews were taken via Google Meet and WhatsApp voice calls. All the interviews were in-depth conversations based on open-ended questions that were prepared beforehand. The

main purpose of the interviews were to look into the participants' journeys to become an artist, and explore the different artistic identities that exist in the city.

4.2 Secondary Research: Existing Literature

As a qualitative research, this study focuses on both primary and secondary data sources. Along with the primary data for the study, I went through various relative research that I could find to justify the research objectives and support my primary research data. I included relevant books, journal articles, thesis papers, etc. that I could find online. The existing literature not only helped to support the arguments of the study but it also structured the thesis and navigated my fieldwork and overall primary research.

4.3 Data Analysis

As the study explores the creative identities of visual artists in a broader sense, I have chosen artists who are associated with different kinds of mediums in visual arts. The participants in this research are associated with different mediums such as painting, illustration, comic art, sculpting, murals and photography. Looking at a variety of the participants allows us to understand the different nature of existing creative identities in Dhaka today; it gives us a variation and, in terms of understanding, what influences the creativity of artists in the city in a broader perspective.

After taking the interviews, for a thorough analysis of the collected data, I transcribed and summarized the interviews. The interviewees spoke both in Bangla and English, and so they were transcribed both in Bangla and English. Some of the Bangla interviews were translated into English when transcribing. After transcription, the data was coded and categorized into different themes and sub-themes. Transcribing and summarizing the interviews help to find themes, nuances and recurring patterns within the data.

The research mainly focused on three themes. Firstly, the data focused on the understanding of creativity/ creative identity among artists in Dhaka. This category focused on aspects like what being an artist or a creative person means to them in terms of childhood and familial circumstances, what was their journey in pursuing art, and why/when they decided to pursue their creativity as a profession. The second theme focuses on what influences the creativity of artists in Dhaka. This theme is sectioned into four different categories: (1) social, economic and cultural influence, (2) environmental influence, (3) influence of advanced communication and technology; and (4) influence of the art market and commercialization of art. Looking into these categories will give us a comprehensive understanding of how the visual artists in Dhaka city are inspired or influenced by their external environment. Finally, the third theme focuses on how artists establish their creative identities under the influences discussed in the previous themes.

4.4 Limitations/Challenges

Most of the interviewees were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, and so the population in the study was not as arbitrary. Because of the time constraints, the study could look into the perspective of only six artists and one expert, which narrowed down the variation in terms of perspectives and experiences. The small number of participants is also limiting in terms of the social class of the artists, as all of them belong to the middle to upper-middle-class societies.

Various types of visual artists were interviewed to acquire a broader understanding of the topic at hand, however, this might have limited the in-depth analysis of specific mediums of artists and their creativity. The age range of the participants (20 - 50 years of age) also results in a broader view on the topic. Furthermore, choosing participants only from middle to upper

middle class societies prevents the study to look into artists from other classes. Although the study helps us get a clearer picture of the contemporary creative identities in Dhaka city, the limitations do restrict the outcomes and result in a narrowed-down perspective of the topic.

Chapter Five

Visual Artists in Dhaka and Their Understanding of Creativity

Dhaka is home to many of the contemporary artists in Bangladesh. Since the last couple of decades, Dhaka has experienced a rapid increase in the art industry. Presently, Dhaka has an emerging group of artists working towards building the future art scene in the city. Despite such visible development, there needs to be more study done on the emerging artists. No specific research was found that looks into establishing the creative identities of the artists in the city. This research will look into the creative journey of six artists in Dhaka and explore their understanding of creative identity, what motivates their creativity and finally, how they create and spread their work in this age of interconnectivity.

In this chapter, we will look into how the participants of the study got into art, how and why they chose art as their profession, and their understanding of being an artist. It will dive into their initial journeys in terms of their familial and childhood atmosphere growing up, and how it affected the artists in pursuing their creativity and finally, what it personally means for them to be an artist.

5.1 Origin of the Artists' Creativity

The participants' familial background and childhood environment have a huge impact on their journeys to becoming artists. All of the artists in this study are from middle to upper-middle-class society. Most of them were passionate about art from a very young age. Three out of the six participants had an artist in their family/ or their family were art enthusiasts. All of the artists decided that they wanted to pursue art professionally in their teenage to early

adult years. Three out of six of the artists went to art school and got academic art training . One of the artists dropped out of art school, and two of the other artists/photographers do not have any art-related academic background. None of the artists faced any issues expressing their love for art when they were younger, however, some of the artists did face difficulties when they tried to establish their passion into a career.

Details of the Participant Artists and Expert

No	Name	Age	Profession	Speciality	Artist in the family	Academic Background
1	Farzana Ahmed Urmi	30- 40	Painter	Portrait	Yes	Dhaka University, Faculty of Fine Arts (printmaking)
2	Sayeef Mahmud	20- 30	Cartoonist/illustrator/graphic designer	Digital art /illustration	No	Art school dropout
3	Istela Imam	20- 30	Graphic designer/illustrator/muralist	Illustration/ murals	No	Assumption University, Thailand (communication

						art/ graphic designing)
4	Sayd Muhammad Jakir	40- 50	Performance artist/sculptor/lan d artist/painter	Performance art/ installations	Yes	Dhaka University, Faculty of Fine Arts (Sculpting)
5	Taiara Farhana	20- 30	Gallarist/art teacher/ Painter	Portrait/insta llations	Yes	ULAB (Media studies)
6	Faria Ahmed	20- 30	Student/ Photographer (part time)	portrait/ photo documentari es/street photography	No	Brac University (Computer Science and Engineering)
7	Najib Tareque (Expert)	50- 60	Curator/ painter	Printmaking	No	Dhaka University, Faculty of Fine Arts (Printmaking)

Most of the participants who have one or more artists in the family or have family members who are art enthusiasts were able to more easily pursue art. Because of the support from their family and also because of familiarity with the artistic field, for many of these

participants, getting into art was not as difficult. Here, we see Bourdieu's idea of embedded factors or habitus of the artists helping them to easily adjust and be a part of the artistic community. Taiara Farhana, a gallerist/art teacher/artist, mentioned that because both of her parents are artists themselves, Taiara had easy access to everything she needed to practice art. She was able to learn a lot of things and develop artistic skills from an early age. Similarly, another artist, Muhammad Zakir, had an artist uncle in his family, which helped him find his passion quite early in his childhood. And so, we understand that the artistic influence in the family and art-friendly childhood environment has a significant impact on the establishment of an artist's creative endeavor.

All of the participants now work as full-time artists except one who had/ and still has a hard time pursuing their passion as a profession because of family restrictions against such a career. One of the participants, Faria Ahmed (who is a photographer) mentioned that even though she works as a part-time freelance photographer, when she wanted to apply for a photography job, her parents did not allow her to do so. The main reason for the restriction, as she mentioned, was the spontaneity of the job. Usually, professional photography requires photographers to stay out late and in unknown locations, so her parents did not feel safe for her to work at such jobs as a woman. Therefore, we understand that all the participants could express their love for their passion, however, it is not easy for everyone to pursue their passion as their profession.

Social networking among artists in Dhaka plays an important role in the creativity of young creatives. For instance, among the participants who have artists in their family or grew up in an environment that supports artistic activities, they tend to have an easier way to pursue art. According to Bourdieu, habitus is a set of embodied factors that people acquire from their family and the social position they were raised in. The habitus of an individual allows them to get into a

particular field and know the rules of the “game” (Wilkes, 2010). In this study, we see that artists who were brought up in a family of artists or grew up in a family that values aesthetics were more likely to be a part of the artistic field easily. Taiara, Zakir and Urmi, for instance, all grew up in a family that valued art and had the cultural capital, as in, they are aware of the knowledge, etiquette and techniques of the artists’ society. Their family understood the value of art differently compared to Faria, Sayeef and Istela, who grew up in a less artistic household, where art is valued on a different level. Taira and Zahir belong to a family of artists, and so for them, they grew up having the social capital needed to be a part of the artistic community and entered the art field with relative ease. The connections and networking they had made their journeys to become an artist much easier compared to Faria, Sayeef or Istela.

The study further found that artists, like Taiara, use her advantages to help others gain access to such networking. She hopes that the open art studio she runs with the family in Dhaka will help young artists who lack networking advantages to come together and build a community of artists in their locality. She mentioned that being raised by two artists gave her many advantages (social and cultural capital) that many young artists do not have. So, the open studio they built might help the local artists to expand their information and communication horizons. As an art teacher, Taiara also mentioned that she hopes to get young children interested in art and sustain their creative selves . She hopes to work towards modifying the art education in our country in a way that students will stick to their creativity and give the support many children lack from their social surroundings. This initiative also indicates the idea of how individuals within a field can effectively change the nature of the field. Rowlands and Gale (2016) argue that as the practices of individuals can understand habitus , the shaping and reshaping of habitus in a given field depends on the practices of the family or community. In that argument, the

practice of art within the society plays an important role in terms of how artists emerge in a society. And for artists like Taiara to work towards changing how art is practised in our society will slowly, but eventually, bring change to the overall field of art in our society.

5.2 Art as Profession

Most of the participant artists keep their passion and professional art separate; they lead a “double life”, as Littleton and Taylor (2012) explained it. Five out of six of the artists mentioned that the commercial work they do as an artist is done solely to earn money. Their true passion for creating does not get much involved when doing commercial work. Taiara Farhana mentioned that she used to do commercial work from a young age. She used to do paid work and had multiple jobs related to the art field. However, she explained that none of these paid work or jobs fulfilled her inner self as an artist. She drew for people, and they gave her monetary and mental satisfaction, but it barely fulfilled her as an artist. And so to focus on her own work, Taiara quit her job and started an open studio with her family. She still sometimes does contractual, commercial work here and there, but now she is mostly focused on hosting events at the studio and using the space to work on her own passion for art. Similar to Taiara, Muhammad Zakir, a sculptor, painter and a performance artist, also mentioned that he works as an art consultant and a designer for architectural firms only to earn money and make a living. His true passion lies in his installation and live performance art that he does in open spaces. These works, as the artist mentioned, do not pay much, and he also does not necessarily expect to get paid for them. He does this merely out of his passion for art.

None of the artists went into art just to make it their profession. They always liked creating art and thought of ways to make a living out of it so that they could be involved in the

things they love doing. Istela Imam, an illustrator, graphic designer and muralist, mentioned that she went into graphic designing as a beginner artist because she thought it was the only way to make money. She worked with multiple brands and companies to design their brand identities and worked on murals. Similar to other artists, she also mentioned that these commercial works are very rigid and have to create things according to the brand's style. Istela mentioned that now that she is at a stable place in her career, she tries to focus on her own work style and is aware of the kind of commercial work she works on.

However, not every artist maintains the same kind of duality in their work. Sayeef Mahmud, an illustrator/cartoonist, mentioned that he decided to pursue art as his career because that is the only thing he is good at doing. He explained that for him, creating a design is like solving a problem. He thinks of his clients as someone with a design problem or they come to him with a boring text that needs to be made attractive, and he has the skills and technical grammar to solve the design problem. He further mentioned that his work life has become his personal life. The colleagues at his work are his friends, and he has known them. And so, we understand that most of the artists pursuing art found ways to work as a full-time artist.

5.3 What Does it Mean to Be an Artist?

Even though all of the artists started their art journeys as a hobby and all of the artists, except one, ended up becoming professional artists, to most of them, art is much more than just a hobby or career; it's something that is very personal to them and gives them inner peace, something that they cannot imagine their lives without. Most of the artists interviewed for this research mentioned that art is simply a way for them to express themselves. Sayeef Mahmud, a cartoonist/illustrator mentioned that creating was like a daily activity for him,

“...I draw every day, I still draw every day. For me, it's like eating food.”

For some, creativity gives them mental peace. Istela Imam explained,

“If I'm feeling anxious or cannot sleep, then I would wake up and create stuff to get it out of my system or to calm myself down. So, for me, I don't know how else to be.”

Creating art is also very much spiritual to some artists. They make art to feed their inner selves and answer their existential questions. Muhammad Zakir explained to him,

“I try to keep the spirituality that I have inside (we all have that) alive through art. This is the most valuable thing for me, to answer the philosophical questions in life, why we are here, what we are doing. This search is more important than if I could sell some art.”

Taiara thinks that art is a part of everything we see around us.

“...As I grew older, I slowly realized how art is part of everything...And if we did not respect, explore or acknowledge the creativity within us, we would not have achieved many things that you see around us.”

As Danial (2020) found in his research on the exploration of artists' reflection on creativity that artists put a significant amount of importance on self-expression and internal reward, the current study also found that the majority of the participant artists create art either as a self-reflection, to create mental peace or satisfy the inward thoughts and concerns. Similarly, to the artists in this research, creativity is much more than making aesthetic art or being successful as an artist, it's about answering and satisfying the inner self. Therefore, despite starting their love of art starting as a hobby or art being their main profession, all of the participants mentioned that being an artist is much more than just a pastime or a job, it is an inevitable part of them.

In this chapter, we looked into the origin of the artists' creativity and found that the familial and childhood environment plays a significant role in the journeys of the participants to becoming artists. It also looked into their pursuit to becoming professional artists and found that for most of the artists creating art to make a living and creating art out of their own interest is very different from each other. Most of the artists mentioned, because of such distinction, keep their passion for art separate from their professional work. All of the artists mentioned that their passion for art is much more than a hobby or profession, it is something that gives them inner peace, something that they cannot imagine living without.

Chapter Six

Creative Influences of Artists in Dhaka City

The external influences of creativity are mainly the social, cultural, economic and environmental circumstances of a creative. Consciously or unconsciously, the effect of such influences can be seen in the work of creatives.

In this chapter, we will be looking into the external influences of the artists and analyze how such inspirations help shape their creative identities. This section has been categorized into three parts - social and cultural influences, environmental influences, global and technological influences, and finally, the influence of the art market and commercial work.

6.1 Social and Cultural Influences

Social and cultural aspects are a big source of influence of the artists in this research. These influences mainly come from people around them and the sort of social settings they belong to. When asked about how the artists are inspired by their surrounding aspects, especially the city, most of them emphasized on the lifestyle of people living in Dhaka city as their inspiration. One of the artists, Sayeef Mahmud, mentioned that when he first moved to Dhaka city, he used to roam around alone and loved to explore the city. He used to spend hours looking at mundane things like how a vendor works. He used to find these day-to-day things exciting and a lot of it used to get incorporated into his earlier artworks. He mentioned that he loved to incorporate small aspects of his surroundings, aspects that only a local would notice. For instance, in a biryani shop, the vendors have a particular way of marking food items. The biryani or the non-vegetarian items are usually wrapped in red cloth, whereas vegetarian items are wrapped in

green. These small details are noticeable only to the locals, and the artist loved to add those when he drew any cartoon or series based in Dhaka.

“...I thought I should use it and over-describe the things around us as a local person would.”

These small cultural details gave his work the unique style it upholds. This finding agrees with what Islam (2010) and Mohaiemen (2023) found in their analysis of contemporary artists in Bangladesh, that incorporating aspects that are closely related to their cultural experiences often reflects on artists’ work. Similarly, Farzana Ahmed Urmi mentioned that very small things around her, like how a rickshaw puller works his pedals or how a tea seller works at his stall, give her much inspiration. These things might sound redundant or too mundane, but to an artist, even the smallest things, things that are unique to their culture and catch their creative eye, can become a part of the artists’ inspiration.

Besides these cultural nuances, social aspects like norms, values, rules and regulations in our society also somehow influence the work of a few of the artists. Istela Imam, for instance, mentioned that much of her earlier work surrounded her experience as a woman living in Bangladesh. Her reaction to the norms and regulations of a woman in our society, more specifically, her reaction against them, is reflected in her artwork. Her experience as a single woman living alone in the city, for instance, is one of the things that can be seen as an underlying aspect of her latest works. Istela mentioned that her new designer stationery business *Paka*, which she recently started, has the fundamental idea of her being seen as *Paka* or “mature for her own age”. She mentioned that the idea of her living alone as a single woman is not taken positively by the people around her, as it is considered a taboo in our society. The designs she made for the stationary brand surround her or against such negatively that she endures. This finding can be analyzed through what Kosmala (2007) argued in her analyses of the importance

of individual experiences of things like gendered ideologies on the identity of artists. Here, Istela indirectly, and rather satirically, shows her reaction to the norms and restrictions that our society structure puts on women.

Therefore, we see that, positively or negatively, a lot of the social and cultural aspects around the artists' work as an inspiration to their art. This inspiration in terms gives their work its unique style or identity.

6.2 Environmental Influences

Environmental influences have been a prominent inspiration for most of the participants in the research. The urban environment of Dhaka city, which is unique to the city, inspires most of the artist's creativity.

Muhammad Zahir's work, especially his installation and performance art, is heavily based on his surrounding environment. Zakir explained that his main inspiration for most of his installation work is things around him. Instead of using expensive materials, the artist uses bits and scraps he finds lying around the city. Zakir mentioned that he loves to roam around both in nature and the urban city, talk to people around the streets and collect anything that he could use for his art. Furthermore, along with being an artist, Zakir also considers himself as an environmental activist, and many of his works also depict environmental issues. In his second solo exhibition, Zakir had a few installations containing only the plastic scraps he found around a small part of the city. The artist collected hundreds of plastic bottles, wrapped them in big plastic cloth and hung them in an area in his exhibition, depicting them like a hanging tree. The installation addresses our waste of plastic and the harm it causes to the environment.

Dhaka has its own vibrant and chaotic urban environment. The city is famous for its busy streets and ubiquitous city life. The energetic and multidimensional city is a huge inspiration to many of the artists residing in the city. Istela Imam, for instance, was born and raised in Chittagong. When she moved to the city after her university abroad, she mentioned that the urban nature of Dhaka was rather new to her. The noisy city, hectic traffic jam and haggling with CNG and rickshaw was a new experience for her. It took time for her to get used to the city, and, at one point, she turned all of this into her inspiration for art. One of the artworks she showed called *Jam Jar* is inspired by the traffic jam of the city. The painting depicts a jam jar with all the traffic of Dhaka city inside of it. Another of her famous artworks from a series of works called *Head Jam* depicts a girl with all the elements of Dhaka street on her head. Istela mentioned that all the chaos is clustered in her head because, along with portraying the city, the piece also represents the mental stress you go through living in one of the busiest cities in the world. Furthermore, as a typography lover, Istela also gets her inspiration from the city's billboards, especially the billboards from old Dhaka. Most of her (Bangla) typography is inspired by these old billboards. And so, Istela turned her experience of her surrounding environment, especially her experience of Dhaka city, into a part of her creativity.

Environmental influences have always been a part of the creativity of artists in Bangladesh. Islam (2010) and Sarker (2018) found that the surrounding environment, especially nature and people, heavily influences modernist artists in our country. For instance, whether it is using colors from nature or the landscape of rural Bangladesh, the environment works as a big inspiration for early contemporary artists. Similarly, for the young artists in this study, the surrounding instances that inspire them as residents of the urban city of Dhaka constitute aspects like the traffic jam of Dhaka to the populated environment of the city.

Through the discussion above we understand that the environmental circumstances play a huge role in the creativity of artists. For some of the artists, their surroundings become the focal point for many of their creations.

6.3 Influence of Advanced Communication and Technology

Digital advancement allows people to shape their identity through a diverse source of social and cultural influences (Burno et al, 2019). Creativity in a particular society can be heavily influenced by other cultures and societies, especially, in the current age of globalization and advanced interconnectivity. Most of the artists in the research notice a significant amount of global influence in their work.

Istela, for example, considers herself as a fusion of different cultures. She explained that she grew up watching both English and Bangla movies and entertainment like many others. This exposure to different cultures and languages, she argued, has a big impact on the mixed nature of our self-expression . Not only Western influence, but her work is also inspired by artists from other countries like Indonesia and Palestine. Similarly, Sayeef, a cartoonist/illustrator, mentioned that his work is heavily influenced by French and Japanese pop culture.

The influence of different cultures also affects the artist's creativity by travelling to different parts of the world. Urmi mentioned that frequently goes to artists' residencies and travels around the world. The artist residency is an accommodation provided by a host organisation for guest artists to work in a new environment, often away from their daily lives. Artists and organizations come together to arrange residencies and collaboratively work on their art. Urmi explained that going to art residencies in different countries helps her explore different cultures and people. This also enables her to represent our country to people in different regions.

Urmi also travels for residency to different parts of Bangladesh, taking inspiration from both inside and outside Bangladesh .

Besides getting influenced by different cultures and societies, contemporary global networking and the use of communication technology have made interaction between artists, selling and exhibition of art easier than ever before. Urmi mentioned that the online communication helps her participate in exhibitions both inside and outside Bangladesh. She explained that she had exhibitions abroad simply by contacting them and sending her portfolio online. She further explained that access to visiting exhibitions also has become more convenient than ever. She exemplified how places like The British Museum or the Louvre Museum started organizing exhibitions online since the Corona pandemic. This allowed people to enjoy their exhibitions for free, from the comfort of their own homes. Istela mentioned that she was able to contact the artist from different countries, living miles away through social media. This connection would not have been possible for her without the use of technology that we have nowadays. These findings agree with Literat and Glaveanu's (2016) argument that technology and digital communication have changed the creative field in terms of how we communicate, exhibit and get inspired for our creativity. Most of the participants agreed that advanced communication media has expanded our creative networking and allowed artists to extend their technical and artistic knowledge more than ever.

The use of technology however is not always positive, some artists agree that online exhibitions or virtual art teaching methods lack the human element in it. When asked how online exhibitions are different from the physical ones, Urmi explained that online exhibitions are helpful if you want to learn about different artists, however, to her, the physical interaction traditional exhibitions have is important. These interactions have a huge impact on the artist's

life. Similarly, Jakir explained that when it comes to online learning artists have easy access to technical knowledge of art, however, the relationship between teacher and student, learning from others experiences, these aspects are no longer there when it comes to learning virtually about art. And so, the technological influences both have a positive and negative impact on establishing creativity.

Through the above discussion, we understand that advanced communication technology has a significant impact on the creativity of artists in our society. Whether it is the influence of other cultures, advancement in communication with other artists or the learning process of art, current technological advancement has both positive and negative influence on the practice of art.

6.4 Influence of the Art Market and Commercialization of Art

The art market or how a particular society treats art also plays an important role in the artistic identity of an artist. All of the participant artists are aware of the influences of the art market and/or commercial work on one's creation. When asked whether she thinks about the art market or her audience when creating art, Istela mentioned that she does sometimes even though she should not. In the beginning, she used to let it bother her that her work might not be what people want. But as she grew as an artist, Istela came to realize that focusing on her work got her more and more positive responses. Similarly, Sayeef mentioned that even though people have told him otherwise, in his opinion, if an artist believes in their work and puts their mind and heart into it, it will pay off. He explained some people get so stuck in the idea of making money out of art that they only create what sells and forget to acquire proper artistic skills along the way. To him, if someone has true potential for art, getting fixated on the idea of earning money is a problem for

artists. Artist/curator/expert Najib Tareque explained that it is really important to understand the art market in order to understand art. He explained,

“...If you draw according to the art market, that would be considered craft. If you want real art, it has to be out of the market.”

To work on their true potential, some artists try to be out of the art market as much as they can. Zakir explained that when he was in art school, he decided he would never be completely involved in the art market of our country. He does contractual work for architectural firms to make a living, and his own creative work, which is mostly performance and installation art, are done out of his own interest. He explained,

“...I never wanted to be controlled by the art market because if I did, I would have to compromise my creativity for the sake of selling artwork...”

He further explained,

“...I know that the performance or installation art I do out of my own interest is not as saleable... I am not interested in selling them...the work I sell to make a living, I would not really call them pure art.”

He believes that the art market runs solely on a capitalist system. Kasiyan (2018) argued that the art industry thinks of the artistic process merely as activities of “craftsmanship” that can be controlled to make materialist art and profit from it. On the same basis of understanding, Zakir also believes that the art market does not care about true art, they only use artists to create and sell art that will make a profit.

Bourdieu's analysis of the art industry helps us understand the point of view of these artists towards the market. As Bourdieu explained, the artistic field operates as any other social or symbolic system (Bourdieu, 1983); agents in the artistic field like museums, galleries, art

critics and the audience of the art all play an important role in the production of art. The artist has to navigate through the art market while also keeping their true artistic self intact. In this study, most of the artists interviewed struggle with this balance between surviving in the art market or being relevant to the audience and at the same time creating the kind of art they want. That is why artists like Taiara quit commercial art to pursue art on their own terms while running their family art studio, or Zakir who decided from a young age that he would avoid the art industry as much as he could to not be creatively controlled by the needs of the market.

To summarize this chapter, external influences whether its social, cultural norms and values, environmental influences like the urban city atmosphere or climate change, technological aspects such as advanced communication with other societies or the nature of the art market or commercialization of art in our country, plays a significant role, positively or negatively, on the creativity of artists in Dhaka city.

Chapter Seven

Establishment of Creative Identity Among the Artists

All of the participants have their own creative identities based on their individual experiences and circumstances. Some are heavily influenced by their own social, cultural or environmental circumstances, and some are influenced by other cultures and societies, but almost all of the artists have a hybrid identity mixed with different encounters and experiences in their lives. This chapter will look into the overall nature of how artists establish their creative identities in terms of the external influences and exposures discussed in the previous chapters.

For a few of the artists, the fusion of different cultures in their work is clearly visible. Sayeef's cartoons, for instance, are based in Dhaka or in different parts of our country, but his style or drawing technique is a visible reflection of his inspiration from French/Japanese pop culture and other cartoons or comics he used to watch in his childhood. When asked about the hybridity in his work, Sayeef explained that in today's global interactions, it is given that there will be a mixture in our identity, some people see it in a bad way and some see it as a good transformation.

The acceptance of one's such hybridity, however, does not come easily as easily to every artist. Istela mentioned that because she used to be insecure about her work not being "Bengali" enough. She explained,

"...even though I work with Bangla text and typography, and I am directly and indirectly influenced by everything that I see around me, I feel like I present it in a very "non Bengali" way."

She further mentioned that the idea of *Bengali*-ness is mainly based on the use of traditional art or following the popular art style in Bangladesh that is heavily based on our

national identity. Her work is not considered Bengali because she does not follow these artistic trends in our country. But she now embraces this hybridity as it gets her a positive response for such uniqueness in her work.

Most of the artists agreed that, consciously or unconsciously, their work reflects both local and global influences. Eglinton (2013) argued that even though globalization is mixing up cultures, local values and influences still play a role in young artists' lives. The statement has been true for all of the participants in the present research. Taiara mentioned that every artist's childhood or the location they grow up in has a huge impact on the art they create. She explained that if we look at the works of artists based in Dhaka versus artists in Chittagong we will see some defined patterns. For instance, most artworks produced by artists in Dhaka are very chaotic and upfront, whereas, if you generally compare it with artworks made by Chittagong-based artists, their work is very distant or has an outreaching element to them. And so, we understand that, for most of the participants, location or environmental aspects play a huge role in the type of art produced in society.

Curator Tareque mentioned that many young people, when trying to build their creative identity, try to avoid their past or get away from their roots. But to him, in order to truly find oneself, one cannot forget their roots, they have to stick to them and embrace it to establish their identity. Similarly, Taiara believes that despite what kind of outside influences we have or where we travel to, our roots or the place we grow up in will always be with us. She explained that most of the Bangladeshi artists she knows who now reside abroad, all have a Bengali essence in their work despite where they are now. This finding is similar to what Sarker (2018) found in his study of modernist art in Bangladesh where he analyzed the work of the famous abstract artist Ghiyasuddin. Despite his training to be an artist in Japan, Ghiyasuddin work reflects the heavy

use of Bangladeshi with the mix of traditional beauty and aesthetic sensibility of Japan (Sarker, 2018). Therefore, the influence of roots or an artist's past will always play a role in the creative identity of an artist regardless of what kind of outside influence they encounter.

Hybridity is apparent in most of the artists' creative work in this research. According to Bhabha, hybridity in cultural aspects needs to be understood through the negotiation and production of different positions. He explained that the mixing of cultures is not about assimilation but rather creating a new position through the encounters. This idea of building a "third position" through interaction with other cultures is visible in the experiences of artists in this study. For instance, Istela's work lacks a certain amount of "Bengali-ness" because her work is a fusion of different styles of art; she found a way to embrace the Bengali in her through her own non-conventional style. She attempts to create her art by not copying other foreign artistic styles, but by using the techniques and methods to embrace her own culture and things she experienced in her society. Furthermore, Bhabha explained that a culture cannot be bound to a specific location; it is ever-changing as we come across other cultures and societies (Bhabha, 1994). As we discussed, Sayeef's work represents his experiences of living in Dhaka but the art style he uses is heavily inspired by French or Japanese popular culture. Similarly, Urmi has heard from people that her work has an essence of German expressionism. She never consciously tried to mimic German expressionist art, however, exposure to such art might have influenced her to incorporate such art style. The diverse influence, from different locations, is mainly the result of present advanced communication that has made cultural influences cross boundaries more easily than ever. Here, his influences from other cultures allowed him to present his lived experiences in a new way, and him to create a unique style of his own.

According to Emrail (2016) every artist is the conveyor of their own culture and in today's interconnected era, the representation of one's own roots has been more important than before. Emrail further argues that the uniqueness of artists is heavily based on their ability to embrace their culture along with how they adapt to encounters of other cultures. The findings discussed in this chapter suggest that for some of the participants, the uniqueness of their creative identities is based on how they incorporate both local and global influences. Sayeef's influence of different popular cultures from his childhood, Urmi's residency in different parts of the world or Istela's education outside and her exposure to different artists around the world, consciously or unconsciously, helped them develop an artistic identity of their own.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Artists play an important role in the representation of a society. Their creations and imagination come from within, however, their personal experiences with external instances have a significant impact on their creativity. An artist's creative identity is closely related to what kind of experiences, exposure and relations they had with others. Outside factors like social, cultural, environmental, technological, and global influences play a big part in the establishment of the creative identity of artists.

The present study explored the creative identities of visual artists in Dhaka city by looking into their understanding of creativity, the major influences behind their creative style and finally how they establish their own creative identity through the different experiences and encounters they have living in Dhaka city. The study found that, in terms of their understanding of what creativity is or what it means to be artist, all of the artists mentioned that art is something that is more than just a hobby or a career for them. All of the artists in the research are full-time or part-time artists, however, none of them got into art solely to become professional artists. Art is something even more personal to them; for some artists, it gives them inner peace, some mentioned that it helps them find their existential questions, and for some, it is just like any daily activity like sleeping or eating. Looking into their familial circumstances and childhood environment, the research found that participants who have artists in their family or relatives found it easier to pursue their passion for art. According to Bourdieu's theory, because of their background, they were able to inherit certain knowledge and ideologies that helped them get an easy access to the artistic field. The nature of their upbringing also helps them acquire certain kinds of social and cultural capital to be a part of the field.

The study further looked into external instances such as social, cultural, environmental, technological and global influences on the creativity of participant artists. Social and cultural aspects like our norms, values, beliefs and ways of living play a particular role in the sort of artistic identities we see among artists in Dhaka. Access to social and cultural capital, in terms of establishing oneself in the artistic field, played a huge role in the lives of participant artists. Small cultural nuances to bigger issues like gendered ideologies affect the way artists build their individual creativity. Besides social and cultural surroundings, the environmental aspects of Dhaka also have an impact on the creatives in the city. Dhaka has an idiosyncratic nature of its own with its vibrant urban atmosphere, starting from its diverse group of people to the traffic jams and loudness of the city. The environmental issues such as the urban climate of Dhaka, with the city being one of the most populated cities in the world, also inspire what kind of art creatives produce. Technological and communication instances in the present age also affect the creative process of the artists. The study suggests that interaction with other artists around the world and their expansion of artistic knowledge and technicality has been easier than ever before with the help of technology. Despite the positive influences, the artists also mentioned that there are a few negative impacts of such changes in art such as a lack of human connection in aspects like virtual exhibitions and online art education. Finally, the study looked into the impact of the art market or commercialization of art on the creativity of artists. The findings suggest that like most other art markets in the world, the market in our country is heavily based on a capitalist system as well. Both the art market and the commercialized art mostly focus on how an art piece will make money rather than focusing on its aesthetic or deeper values. Most of the artists, who make art as a living, therefore keep their commercial work separate from the work they do for

their own interest. They rarely think of making money when working on art pieces that they truly call art.

This is an exploratory study to understand the creative identities that exist in Dhaka. The research looked into the topic from a broader perspective, analyzing the experiences of different kinds of visual artists. As the study did not focus on any specific medium or type of artists and tried to explore the art scene in Dhaka in a more holistic way, this could be a guide to further studies on art and aesthetics in the city. For instance, the study found that the capitalization of the art market and commercial art has a huge impact on the creativity of artists. Future studies need to be done on what kind of influence the capitalization of art has on the overall production . Furthermore, researchers also need to look into the emergence of small local art studios in Dhaka and the social, cultural and economic impact of such organizations. Finally, as the current study was based on Dhaka, studies need to be done outside of Dhaka as well given that there are many other districts that remain unexplored in order to better understand the overall nature of different kinds of artists and creative identities that exist in our country.

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