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Wilful daughters, domestic goddesses, pious Muslims, and rebels: Islam, fashion, commodities, and emotions among upper class women in Pakistan, 1947–1962

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Abstract

Pakistan, 15 January 1950. Impeccably dressed, Zarina is going out to celebrate the wedding of her partner-in-gossip-crime, Fizza. Her busy life makes her feel anxious. The wrongdoings of the home helpers and her parents' constant bickering fill her family life. Fashion magazines, get-togethers at the association she has just joined, and ladies' glamorous parties are her only antidotes to stress.

This article explores the history of Zarina and her fellow upper class women's emotions, everyday lives, and daily perception of religious and socio-political ideas of change in Pakistan's momentous formative years (1947–1962). By relying on Francis Robinson's research on religious change, self, and the fashioning of Muslim identity, it provides the first historical ethnography of how upper class women in Pakistan understood and experienced socio-political change through the transformation of their emotions, religious views, lifestyle, and behaviour.

Drawing on material and visual culture and a rich selection of newspaper clippings and government records, this article lifts the curtain on the material and immaterial 'stuff' of women's dreams, taste in fashion, private lives, and political and religious ideas. Finally, it illuminates how women and their gendered agency became the key 'sites' for a new and, at times, surprising Islamic revival.

Keywords: Pakistan; fashion; Islam; women; emotions

*I am the hungry wave
Rising to kiss the sky
I am the mountain mist
Striving to reach the stars
I am the impulse of the bee
The yearning for the flower
I am pain
I am love¹*

'The modern girls [like you are] not getting up in the morning and [are] not saying their prayers,' complained her mother first thing in the morning.² In fact, Zarina always said her morning prayers and, after them, even regularly read the Holy Quran. She was a medical student. As she put it during an argument with her parents, she 'had rebelled

¹ M. S. Nawaz, *Tide*, n.d., in M. A. Husain, 'Miss Mumtaz Shah Nawaz', *Pakistan Quarterly* 1.2 (1949), p. 26.

² 'Zarina goes to college', *Pakistan Quarterly* 1.4 (1950), p. 82.

against “slaving at home”.³ The birth of an independent Pakistan awakened her sense of political responsibility and sharpened her awareness of her duties to the state and wider society. On her father’s advice, she embarked on a degree course. He had linked her enrolment to the ideas of progress, necessity, and the state’s needs. ‘If education comes,’ he kept repeating to her, ‘renaissance can’t be far behind.’⁴ Her mother teetered between pride and resistance. Her only piece of advice was that which she also gave to Zarina’s college mates when they came to visit her: ‘a woman should learn to run the home’.⁵ For her part, the young Pakistani was full of ambition. She looked up to the ‘thousands of [female] teachers whom she somehow always visualise[d] as being armed with books like shovels breaking away the barriers of ignorance’.⁶

Featured in a 1950 issue of *Pakistan Quarterly*, the fictional story of Zarina perfectly embodies the dilemmas and life experiences of upper class Pakistani women between 1947 and 1962. Female social activism marked Pakistan’s momentous formative years. Women’s associations cropped up everywhere. Primary schools up and down urban Punjab witnessed record numbers of new female enrolments. More and more female graduates applied for postgraduate courses at local universities. Still, as they explored new educational and professional avenues, upper class women reinforced the trope of dutiful wives and mothers, and of guardians of their domestic Islamic shrines. In many cases and ways, they chose ‘the path of least resistance’, submitting to the ‘convenience of subservience’.⁷ In 1955, 15 Pakistani women’s organisations took part in the Conference on the Status of Women. The ‘Responsibility of Women in Family and Community’ panel recommended that women should not put at risk family harmony by becoming too involved in life outside their families.⁸ For their part, women debating on education highlighted the relevance of social work and demanded new projects to establish colleges of home economics.⁹

However, these upper class women made sure to add a new twist to their status. ‘Today your country needs you as ever before’, declared Begum Shah Nawaz in September 1947, as a way to encourage women to join refugee rehabilitation efforts.¹⁰ ‘I mention women,’ she went on two months later, ‘because after all they are the managers of the household. Let the women of Pakistan prove that they are good managers.’¹¹ Their ordinary lives within the proverbial four walls were now perceived as an essential public service and, therefore, a job. ‘As such, let us pay for it,’ they argued as they spoke with their friends.¹² *Adab* (department)—as it had crystallised over the previous centuries—thus became a tool in state-building processes and a new way of conceptualising and expressing a sense of belonging to the wider national and international community. ‘In every city,’ suggested a ‘Housewife’ in October 1954, welcoming the inauguration of the Social Service Diploma at the University of the Punjab, ‘there should be a Citizen Enquiry Bureau to answer the hundreds of problems which confront us every day.’ Women’s sense of responsibility further marginalised religious figures to the benefit of their own, even religious, agency. ‘Problems of marriage?’, rhetorically listed a ‘Housewife’, ‘Problems concerning

³ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ A. Jalal, ‘The convenience of subservience: women and the state of Pakistan’, in *Women, Islam and the State*, (ed.) D. Kandiyoti (Basingstoke, 1991), p. 78.

⁸ Z. A. Ali, ‘The status of women of Pakistan’, *Pakistan Quarterly* 6.4 (1956), p. 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 25 September 1947.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10 December 1947.

¹² *Ibid.*, 17 October 1954.

with family budget? Bringing up children? Education? Career? Divorce? Family squabbles?':¹³ women in Citizens Enquiry Bureaus would be there ready to help their fellow citizens and project them into the world. 'Such bureaus in other parts of the world,' she went on, pleading her case, 'help citizens when they are in need of advice.'¹⁴

For many such women, Pakistan came with the promise of a moral state and the resolution of the contradictory relationship between modernity and tradition.¹⁵ Islam, its rites, and its imagery now burst onto the public political sphere as key elements of all nation- and state-building processes. They became the gendered means through which citizens elaborated on—even emotionally—their sense of belonging to both the state and the wider national community. As they made sense of their lives, women (re)drafted entire chapters of the revivalist *Bahishtī Zewar* (Heavenly Ornaments) that many of them received as a gift when they married.¹⁶ There was not resistance to either Islam or novelty. As Saba Mahmood would put it, it just expressed one of 'the multiple ways in which [women] inhabit[ed] norms'.¹⁷ Most of them straddled the line between Islamic and secular feminism. Their support of both secular nationalism and Islamic modernism went hand in hand with reclaiming Islam from male-only interpretations as a means to fight for their rights.¹⁸

To all those who are familiar with Francis Robinson's research, their lives are like an open book. Robinson's work transcends the analytical dimension of the Islamic revival in South Asia. Researchers can use his arguments on individualism, self-affirmation, affirmation of the ordinary life, self-consciousness, and reflective habit as a prism through which to view—comparatively and historically—issues of identity, citizenship, and belonging in all colonial and post-colonial Muslim societies. The revivalist shift to a this-worldly Islam carried with it, in some subtle ways, political implications too. This is for the obvious reason that it also responded to a new political and institutional power such as the British Raj. The Islamic revival in South Asia indeed affected the fashioning of new Muslim socio-political and individual identities and sharpened the distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims.¹⁹ Thus, both the individual and the power dynamics at play between individuals and local society prepared the way for the (re)definition of the Muslim self even in post-colonial South Asia (and beyond).

Robinson lays particular emphasis on the development of the female dimension of Muslim identity as a corollary of the rooting of Islamic revivalist movements across the Indian subcontinent. The responsibility for building a moral community fell heavily upon their shoulders. Custodians of the home and the sanctity of its Islamic-ness in a world imbued with Western values, women found themselves on the frontline. The shaping of their character and their knowledge was a matter of utmost relevance to the revivalists of the time. In their view, women's influence on children's education and family matters ensured that individuals and families—one of the main targets of the late

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ D. Wilmer, 'Women as participants in the Pakistan movement: modernisation and the promise of a moral state', *Modern Asian Studies* 30.3 (1996), p. 587.

¹⁶ On the relevance of Thanawi's *Bahishtī Zewar*, see B. D. Metcalf, *Perfecting Women. Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford, 1990).

¹⁷ S. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, 2012), p. 15.

¹⁸ On the difference between Islamic and secular feminisms, see M. Badran, 'Between secular and Islamic feminism', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1.1 (2005), pp. 6–28.

¹⁹ F. Robinson, 'The British empire and Muslim identity in South Asia', in *Islam, South Asia and the West*, (ed.) F. Robinson (New Delhi, 2007), pp. 120–145.

nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century revival—fully participated in the everyday implementation of both worldly and religious welfare.²⁰

As more women started making their presence felt in both the public space and debate, their agency intersected with politics, religion and—it goes without saying—multiple ideas of modernity.²¹ Now matter how much they were understood or experienced at the grassroots, everyday level, their attempts at building a moral community as well as at reasserting the transcendent and re-enchanting the world were a ‘modernising force in its own right’.²² Central to these processes are ordinary life, its affirmation, and its materiality. Robinson repeatedly argues, quoting Charles Taylor: ‘Although not uncontested and frequently appearing in secularised form [the affirmation of the ordinary life] has become one of the most powerful ideas in modern civilisation.’²³

This article tackles these gendered processes of social and individual self-affirmation and change from an unusual perspective. Its investigation focuses on ostensibly progressive, upper class Pakistani women, and the ways in which they understood and debated their emotions and identity as citizens and Muslims within the new institutional and political framework of an independent state. In the process, it tracks the legacy and the development of the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Islamic revival as these women debated fashion and its trends, cosmetic commodities, and films and their posters. Their lifestyle was a source of status and prestige. Its emulation among their middle class counterparts brought in its wake the redefinition of ideas of femininity, modesty, respectability, and, more broadly, morality.²⁴ Many upper class women had left *purdah* (seclusion/veil) and were on the horns of a dilemma that was far from trivial: what to wear?

When it comes to fashion, women are never helpless victims who are particularly prone to manipulation. In fact, their clothes and accessories are powerful, hand-picked signifiers of their political selves, their activism, and their process of elaborating their identity as citizens.²⁵ They are indeed a ‘bounded thing, fixed and experienced in space’ and time.²⁶ A paradigm of modernity, fashion is further linked to individuals’ needs and their aspiration for a sense of individuality.²⁷ It thus reflects even their anxieties about modernity, citizenship, and identity. In South Asia, it also substantiates women’s (as well as their families’) reputation and honour. In her ground-breaking research on clothing in India, Emma Tarlo maintains that decisions on what to wear are ‘one of the ways in which people [...] “pin down meanings” and control both presentation and interpretations of the self.’²⁸ Oddly enough, scholarship on Pakistan has largely overlooked the significant role of fashion in revealing meaning-making gendered practices of self-definition and nation-building. For its part, the scholarly discussion on the

²⁰ B. D. Metcalf, ‘Reading and writing about Muslim women in British India’, in *Forging Identities. Gender, Communities and the State in India*, (ed.) Z. Hassan (London; New York, 2018), pp. 6–7. See also F. F. Devji, ‘Gender and the politics of space: the movement for women’s reform in Muslim India, 1857–1900’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 14.1 (1991), pp. 148–152.

²¹ Robinson, ‘The British empire and Muslim identity in South Asia’, pp. 136–137.

²² F. Robinson, ‘Islamic reform and modernities in South Asia’, *Modern Asian Studies* 42.2 (2008), p. 281.

²³ C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 111.

²⁴ A. Gilbertson, ‘A fine balance: negotiating fashion and respectable femininity in middle-class Hyderabad, India’, *Modern Asian Studies* 48.1 (2014), pp. 120–158.

²⁵ W. Parkins, ‘Introduction’, in *Fashioning the Body Politics. Dress, Gender and Citizenship*, (ed.) W. Parkins (Oxford, 2002), pp. 1–18.

²⁶ C. Breward, *Fashioning London: Clothing and the Modern Metropolis* (Oxford, 2004), p. 11.

²⁷ G. Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago, 1971), pp. 294–323.

²⁸ E. Tarlo, *Clothing Matters. Dress and Identity in India* (London, 1996), p. 18.

lives of upper class women during Pakistan's formative years has very rarely gone beyond either political or oral history approaches to take in their tastes, dreams, aspirations, and ideas in wider, different settings such as emotions and material and visual culture.²⁹

Accordingly, this article investigates women's ideas on and around Pakistan's national dress and the latest trends in fashion, jewellery, haircuts, and even cinema-going, lifting the curtain on the extent to which they spoke of their identity as Muslims and citizens. Their implicit playfulness allows 'forms of self expression [...] that are not dependent on masculinist definitions of fulfilment' to emerge.³⁰ Exploring the vitality of Pakistani upper class women in early independent Pakistan further unearths fragments of redefinition and contestation of their individual daily lives, family relationships, and the shaping of a nation. Such women replaced religious and political, frequently male, authorities in the process of the adaptation of transnational narratives on and around their daily lives to local conditions. In doing so, they 'mov[ed] practices associated with home and family life out of the unconscious depths of collective social identity and up into conscious [nation-building] considerations'.³¹

Methodologically speaking, this article is the first attempt at historical rationalisation of Pakistan's material culture and its overlapping relationship with emotions, politics, and religion. It relies on a combination of sources that range from government records, visual and material culture, and newspapers clippings. The Sunday supplement of the *Pakistan Times* published from Lahore regularly featured the 'Women's World' column. Its three main contributors—a 'Housewife', Musaaafir, and Bilqees Begum—gave voice to women's problems, expectations, and dreams, recreating for their readers the rich tapestry of their lives, taste in fashion, and their emotional world. On a different level, their columns offered other women the opportunity to widen their horizons beyond their *zenana* (women's quarters) or their homes.³² Their readership belonged mainly to the Punjabi progressive bourgeoisie. Its members frequently put pen to paper to discuss, in their letters to newspaper editors, their everyday problems and the political and religious issues very close to their hearts. Therefore, their opinions provide important insights into their feelings and views as events unfolded.³³ Moreover, counterposing these to the contributors to the Karachi-based *Pakistan Quarterly* weaves multiple voices and views into a single national narrative. This magazine published long-ish essays on Pakistan's social and cultural life and history. Its female authors were among the most influential women in Pakistani society and its *beau monde*. Just like their *Pakistan Times* counterparts, they were—quite literally—making the history of their new country.

²⁹ See, for instance, S. Ansari, 'Polygamy, purdah and political representation: engendering citizenship in 1950s Pakistan', *Modern Asian Studies* 43.6 (2009), pp. 1421–1461; S. Chipp-Kraushaar, 'The All-Pakistan Women Association and the 1961 Muslim Family Laws Ordinance', in *The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan*, (ed.) G. Minault (Columbia, 1981), pp. 263–285; K. Miles, *The Dinamo in Silk: A Brief Biographical Sketch of Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan* (Karachi, 1974); P. Virdee, 'Remembering partition: women, oral histories and the partition of 1947', *Oral History* 41.2 (2013), pp. 49–62; and P. Virdee, 'Women and Pakistan International Airlines in Ayub Khan's Pakistan', *The International History Review* 41.6 (2019), pp. 1341–1366. Similar trends can be found even the autobiographies of the upper class women of that time. See S. S. Ikramullah, *From Purdah to Parliament* (Karachi, 1988); J. A. Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter. A Political Autobiography* (Karachi 2003); and A. Sultaan, *Memoirs of a Rebel Princess* (Karachi, 2013).

³⁰ R. Lal, *Coming of Age in Nineteenth Century India. The Girl-Child and the Art of Playfulness* (New York, 2013), p. 39.

³¹ J. E. Walsh, *Domesticity in Colonial India. What Women Learned When Men Gave Them Advice* (Lanham, 2004), p. 2.

³² M. E. Robb, 'Women's voices, men's lives: masculinity in a North Indian Urdu newspaper', *Modern Asian Studies* 50.5 (2016), p. 1446.

³³ S. Ansari, 'Everyday expectations of the state during Pakistan's early years: letters to the editor, *Dawn* (Karachi)', *Modern Asian Studies* 45.1 (2011), p. 162.

The mother of all women's problems: what to wear?

In February 1955, the campus of the University of the Punjab experienced a calm turmoil. No student ever came to blows or lost their voice in a heated debate. The problem was more of an 'undercurrent' than a real controversy.³⁴ 'For several weeks now,' reported the *Pakistan Times* university correspondent in his 'Students Horizon' column, 'a controversy has been raging among the current university students. Every now and then the question is asked "Is purdah serving any purpose?"'³⁵ On campus, half of the female student population wore burqas. A 1952 survey conducted among 200 taught postgraduate students had revealed that 90 per cent of them were in favour of the segregation of the sexes.³⁶ Many made sure to record they meant strict purdah.³⁷ The availability of separate, single-sex classes and hostels featured high on the wish list of women enrolling at universities.³⁸ Nevertheless, for many male students, purdah was an alienating, surreal experience. 'The moment they [female students] are outside the department,' remarked an influential student leader of the University of the Punjab, 'they once again put that primitive garment, making them impossible to recognise.'³⁹ Co-educational higher education institutions came with the promise of widening their horizons and helping them to view the world from different perspectives through peer interaction. 'But then a very strong limit is put,' went on the student, 'and that is imposed by the practice of the ancient custom of purdah by female students.'⁴⁰

For their part, women felt caught in the middle. The tension generated between the desire to be and appear educated, intellectually Westernised, and modern and the moral obligation to remain—as they put it—'socially orthodox' kept biting deep.⁴¹ In an interview with a *Pakistan Times* journalist, Nasim Ara, president of the student union at Fatima Jinnah College, Lahore, opened a window into her and her fellow students' emotional world. For many of them, veils and burqas were 'a necessity [...], for the man of the street is not possessed of any high sense of morality'.⁴² Still, in the same breath, she also admitted that they were 'an impediment in the way of higher education and progress'.⁴³ A new era of social, political, and institutional change was forcing Nasim to rethink how to approach her style and update her wardrobe essentials. Purdah and the ways she translated it into everyday practices embodied both her social status and her religious identity.⁴⁴ Just like many other women in Lahore and across the country, the president of the student union was preoccupied with a prosaic, day-to-day, and quite common concern: what to wear, then?

'A woman's dress is [...],' Zinat Rashid Ahmad made it clear, as early as 1949, 'a true reflection of her personality, taste and skill.'⁴⁵ An All Pakistan Women's Association co-founder, Zinat would later establish the Pakistan Federation of University Women to promote female education and women's rights across the country. She elicited admiration

³⁴ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 20 February 1955.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ M. Kureshi, 'Women's education in Pakistan', *Pakistan Quarterly* 7.3 (1957), p. 21.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 20 February 1955.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Kureshi, 'Women's education in Pakistan', p. 21, and Robinson, 'Islamic reform and modernities in South Asia', pp. 270–271.

⁴² *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 20 February 1955. Sarah Ansari records similar socio-historical trends even in Karachi. See Ansari, 'Polygamy, purdah and political representation', pp. 1440–1443.

⁴³ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 20 February 1955.

⁴⁴ G. Minault, 'Coming out: decisions to leave purdah', *India International Centre Quarterly* 23.3/4 (1996), p. 103.

⁴⁵ Z. R. Ahmad, 'Women's costumes in Pakistan', *Pakistan Quarterly* 1.1 (1949), p. 18.

and respect from each and every woman who read her work. Her words reiterated the simple, traditionally Islamic belief that the way in which women dressed related to their inner states of being.⁴⁶ However, in the early and mid-1950s, fashioning and performing the female self was a knot of contradictory feelings that women themselves found hard to untangle. A surprising Hamlet-like dilemma nagged at the back of many women's minds. 'What is our national dress for women?' wondered a 'Housewife' in the columns of the *Pakistan Times* in late 1954.⁴⁷ Immediately after independence, the *gharara* established itself as the most popular dress among the most fashionable upper and upper middle class women. Its stateliness evoked the glorious past of the Mughal empire and spoke of women's Muslim identity. 'The elegant charm of the "Gharara" coupled with the fact that it is altogether a Muslim heritage,' wrote Zinat, 'has gone a long way to make it popular particularly as rich sophisticated evening wear.'⁴⁸

Women's nostalgia for the pomp and the style of the Mughal era subtly made them feel and be modern. The longing for a past where Islam and political power fitted together neatly, unavoidably projected Pakistani women into the future of both the state and the nation.⁴⁹ Many of them pictured themselves in their brand-new *ghararas* celebrating Independence Day in style. 'I have often imagined,' confessed a 'Housewife', 'an August 14th celebration within [the] ancient precincts [of the Fort in Lahore].'⁵⁰ She daydreamed a ceremony with old rites that, in fact, spoke of the imagined future of the country to all Pakistanis and the wider international community. 'An elephant plodding up the stairs, bearing a gaily dressed and dignified monarch on its back followed by courtiers [...], she went on, 'wend their way to a mock "Darbar" upon the same spot as in the past.'⁵¹ The contributor to the *Pakistan Times* thus reinvented the past to mould the development of a 'unified [and unifying] mythology and mask the novelty of the nation-state'.⁵²

Unfortunately, women's route to negotiating a place of their own in a 'new' fashionable society did not prove to be clear and predictable. 'In Pakistan,' complained Zinat, 'there are, as yet, no [...] designers or highly paid cutters who draw fabulous salaries in return for creations. The selection of material, pattern, design and colour combination and even cutting stitching are done by the women herself.'⁵³ Combining womanhood with glamour, values of modesty and moderation, everyday nation-building processes and financial constraints made their lives a real 'drudgery'.⁵⁴ Foreign designer clothes available in local shops lacked quality and taste in design. To top it all, in the mid-1950s, Pakistan was gripped by recession. As the economic crisis hit the country, even middle and upper class women felt the pinch. Punjab-produced cotton moved back and forth across the globe before reaching local tailors' workshops. The decision of the Government of Punjab to decontrol all imported cloth made things even worse. In early 1955, in Multan, cotton cultivators and producers organised 'meatless days' as a way to spotlight the sorry state of their supply chain.⁵⁵ Unsurprisingly then, the price of cotton was so high as to thwart women in their desire to patronise the local economy. For its part,

⁴⁶ A. Moors, 'Islam and fashion on the streets of San'a, Yemen', *Etnofoors* 16.2 (2003), p. 43.

⁴⁷ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 21 November 1954.

⁴⁸ Ahmad, 'Women's costumes in Pakistan', p. 15.

⁴⁹ E. Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern. State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Durham; London, 2006), p. 9. See also S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, 2001).

⁵⁰ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 3 October 1954.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² M. T. Nguyen, 'Wearing modernity: Lemur Nguyen Cat Tu'o'ng, fashion, and the origins of the Vietnamese national costume', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2.1 (2016), p. 79.

⁵³ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 3 October 1954.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 28 November 1954.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 8 March 1955.

'the cheap-looking imitation of Japanese silk fabrics'—good for reproducing more stylish (and expensive) dresses—was 'unreliable in colour and doubtful in design'.⁵⁶

High inflation rates and recurring shortages of dress materials pushed women towards the popularisation of the much more affordable shalwar kameez. However, the choice of the shalwar kameez as the national dress was far from straightforward. Women enthusiastically accepted it as a symbol of the new nation and their new life. Its comfort led to its adoption as the uniform of the Pakistan Women's National Guard, a national volunteer organisation founded in 1948 to support refugee rehabilitation and resettlement efforts after partition. As such, the shalwar kameez embodied women's new sense of social responsibility, awareness of their duties to the state and the wider society, and their religiously informed desire for social recognition. 'For Islam had taught us a new equality,' wrote Colonel Razia Nazir Ahmad while introducing the Pakistan Women's National Guard to the readers of the *Pakistan Quarterly*, 'and destroyed the superstition that women were mere chattels.'⁵⁷ Still, in their everyday conversations, many Pakistanis kept highlighting the provincial origins of shalwar kameez. 'The Punjabi costume [...] is considered,' pointed out Zinat in a column that revolved around the distinction between the *gharara* as the Pakistani dress and the shalwar kameez as the Punjabi costume, 'more suitable for active life both on the field as well as at home.'⁵⁸

Women's need to match their tasks and their responsibilities as citizens frequently betrayed a persistent feeling of inadequacy. 'Abroad, this dress [the shalwar kameez],' commented a 'Housewife' with a touch of disappointment in late November 1954, '[...] causes a deal of curiosity, and some women have reported no small amount of amusement. Foreigners still believed it to be a "boudoir garment".'⁵⁹ Ironically, the need to take part in the wider international community as both symbols and citizens able to stand on their own feet forced Pakistani women to compromise on the very same elaboration of their national self as it was (re)defined at the everyday, grassroots level. 'Perhaps,' the contributor went on, warning her readers against any potential clash in fashion trends, 'the only rule which one might make for women from Pakistan who go abroad [...] is that dignity can be most easily achieved through simplicity, and to remember that in Western countries being over-dressed is very often a sign of vulgarity and bad breeding.'⁶⁰

A 'Housewife' and the unnamed *Pakistan Times* contributor shared the quintessentially twentieth-century, modern belief that visuality was an essential way to stage their gendered selves.⁶¹ The very same desire to see and be seen, at home and abroad, as an icon of a new, independent state indeed made them the most perfect modern girls and citizens of the world. In a 'Housewife's' view, the answer to women's dilemmas over the overlapping relationship between identity and iconography lay in the global debate itself. 'The world is round,' she maintained in early 1955, 'and when we talk of delegations [of women exchanging ideas and discussing their problems] we should remember that there is an East as well as a West; there is a Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Indo-Chinese too, and their problems are our concerns too.'⁶² As they rose to the challenge of blending local and religious customs with various ideas of womanhood, upper

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 November 1954.

⁵⁷ R. N. Ahmad, 'Pakistan Women's National Guard', *Pakistan Quarterly* 1.6 (1951), p. 35.

⁵⁸ Ahmad, 'Women's costumes in Pakistan', pp. 16–17.

⁵⁹ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 21 November 1954.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ A. E. Weinbaum et al., 'The modern girl as a heuristic device: collaboration, connective comparison, multi-directional citation', in *The Modern Girl Around the World. Consumption, Modernity, and Globalisation*, (eds) A. E. Weinbaum et al. (Durham; London, 2008), p. 13.

⁶² *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 30 January 1955.

class women highlighted the absolute relevance of their material life and the need to use certain commodities. After all, '[women's] domestic budget is a barometer of what happens at a higher level'.⁶³

Jewellery cases were treasured repositories of women's family history and wealth as well as their own honour and reputation. The way the 'new' Pakistani woman used her jewellery to accessorise her outfits resulted from well-thought-out decisions. It subtly interrogated what it meant to be a forward-looking person, a symbol of an independent state, and a Muslim. 'No longer is she [a woman] content to don a particular piece,' remarked Zeb-un-Nissa Hamidullah from the pages of the second issue of the *Pakistan Quarterly*, 'just because it happens to be the costliest in her collection.'⁶⁴ The opinion and the life of Zeb-un-Nissa Hamidullah were not those of a footnote in the history and everyday life of Pakistani women. In those years, Zeb-un-Nissa was the pen behind an outspoken column she wrote for *Dawn* (Karachi) called 'Thru a Woman's Eyes'.⁶⁵ She wrote on fashion, style, and deportment from the standpoint of a protagonist. The imperative which now guided Zeb-un-Nissa and any other fashionable women's taste in jewellery was a carefully constructed minimalism. 'The young Pakistani [...],' commented one M. Kureshi in 1958, '[is] wearing far less [jewellery] than her grandmother would have considered fitting.'⁶⁶ Fashion trends demanded that all the modern, respectable women of urban Pakistan reined in their exuberance and concentrated more on form, style, and colour.⁶⁷ For their part, highly intricate or heavily patterned jewellery came to be identified with the idea of peasant unsophistication. Indeed, 'it is [just] in the villages that one sees the heavy, old-fashioned type of jewellery' wrote Zeb-un-Nissa, with a touch of snobbery.⁶⁸

Weddings represented the only concession to ostentatiousness. In the 1950s, elite couples went through new performative, celebration rituals. Ceremonies now took the shape of what the elders in their families often scornfully dubbed as 'Registration Office marriages'.⁶⁹ They 'have been cut down to a minimum,' recorded Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, one of the two female members of the Constituent Assembly and, later on, Pakistan's ambassador to Morocco, 'and in the westernised family you have merely the bare marriage ceremony followed by a reception of the western style.'⁷⁰ For many women, Registration Office marriages were part and parcel of the equal rights guaranteed and granted to them by Islam as codified in the Muslim Person Law Application Act, 1937. Upper class women had a very clear head about the law of personal status then in force in Pakistan. In their new role as experts in Islamic law, they deemed it the source of 'most of the evils in [their] life', a result of 'the most orthodox opinion in this country', and a hindrance to the 'right of progressive thinking expressly enjoined by Islam'.⁷¹ They nevertheless acknowledged that, at least on paper, it granted them enough rights to live a decent life. 'Under this law [...] marriage is a civil contract, freely entered into,' stated the president of the Pakistan Home Economics Association Dr Zahid Amjad Ali, 'and it can take any form the two parties like, just like any other contract.'⁷²

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Z. Hamidulla, 'Pakistani ornaments and jewellery', *Pakistan Quarterly* 1.2 (1949), p. 45.

⁶⁵ Zeb-un-Nissa would later found the glossy magazine *Mirror*, becoming first Pakistan's female editor and publisher.

⁶⁶ M. Kureshi, 'Women's fashions in Pakistan', *Pakistan Quarterly* 8.2 (1958), p. 44.

⁶⁷ Hamidulla, 'Pakistani ornaments and jewellery', pp. 45–46.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁶⁹ S. S. Ikramullah, 'Wedding', *Pakistan Quarterly* 1.5 (1950), p. 55.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* On Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, see her autobiography: Ikramullah, *From Purdah to Parliament*.

⁷¹ Ali, 'The status of women of Pakistan', p. 50.

⁷² *Ibid.*

Brides' and female guests' outfits became the very last and only bastion of the lost grandeur and charm of a typical South Asian wedding. While recasting themselves as modern girls, women kept—albeit subtly—highlighting their role as everyday guardians of the domestic shrine of Islam. Their heavy jewellery and intricately embroidered dresses remained firmly within the tradition of their idea of an 'orthodox Muslim wedding'.⁷³ 'Whether it be a simple matron or a sophisticated lady of modern Pakistan,' pointed out Zeb-un-Nissa, 'all will be decked out in as much jewellery as they possess or can carry.'⁷⁴ Brides' red *ghararas*, crepe tunics with their gold thread embroidery and their gold veil, were truly meant to take guests' breath away.⁷⁵ In a way, lavishness attested to both their national and Muslim identities as juxtaposed with the West. The *Pakistan Quarterly* contributor proudly concluded. 'A Foreign visitor is frequently amazed at the display of wealth and finery that is to be found at a bridal party.'⁷⁶

Local aunties remind us that jewellery was also part of any daughter's dowry. Islam—they reassure us—prescribed dowries as a compulsory clause as a way to balance the contract in favour of the woman.⁷⁷ Registration Office brides made no exception to this rule. They saw jewellery as an 'essential feature' of any proper Muslim wedding and, therefore, of their very own selves.⁷⁸ In their fathers' eyes, jewellery provided women with a 'security guarantee' for their married lives.⁷⁹ For their part, on their wedding days, future in-laws presented brides with jewellery of a similar value. Jewellery then represented a visual, tangible proof of both women's family wealth and the financial security of the future couple. As such, its selection mirrored the social standing of couples as well as that of their families. Thus minimalism was an almost impossible challenge for all brides, even the most unconventional ones.

Nonetheless, these new fashion trends sowed tiny seeds of change in even the most well-rooted local tradition. Brides' single star in emeralds and diamonds or a simple pear-shaped piece in rubies and pearls replaced their mothers' heavily intricate *tikkas* (traditional headpiece).⁸⁰ Young married women also broke with the tradition of wearing nose rings as a sign of their married status. 'A married woman is seldom seen without her gold or silver bangles,' glossed Rani Johnson in 1951, 'for these, it is said, are synonymous [sic] with happy living.'⁸¹ A new symbol of a married woman, bangles and, quite frequently, bangles with a Western bracelet design also met the need to appear in a way that avoided impropriety and immodesty. Any respectable upper class Pakistani, reminded Zeb-un-Nissa, 'will nearly always have something on her wrists as women, especially married women, do not like to have their arms bare'.⁸²

Bangle and *tikka* trends came and went, but nothing could ever beat a classic South Asian necklace. 'The "necklace" and the "loket" were innovations in imitations of Western designs [...],' recorded Anis Ghulam Ali. '[Yet], the Pakistani woman to-day is going traditional in her choice of neck-jewellery.'⁸³ Indeed, if upper class Lahoris or Karachites wanted to cut a dash in the most fashionable circles, they had to go for bold, heavily decorated *holdili ta'viz* (necklaces/amulets). In the mid-1950s, designers

⁷³ Ikramullah, 'Wedding', p. 55. See also Hamidulla, 'Pakistani ornaments and jewellery', p. 43.

⁷⁴ Hamidulla, 'Pakistani ornaments and jewellery', p. 43.

⁷⁵ Ikramullah, 'Wedding', p. 55.

⁷⁶ Hamidulla, 'Pakistani ornaments and jewellery', p. 43.

⁷⁷ Ali, 'The status of women of Pakistan', p. 50.

⁷⁸ Ikramullah, 'Wedding', p. 55.

⁷⁹ Conversation with Dr Saeed Elahi, Lahore, June 2014.

⁸⁰ Hamidulla, 'Pakistani ornaments and jewellery', p. 44.

⁸¹ R. Johnson, 'Bangles', *Pakistan Quarterly* 1.6 (1951), p. 86.

⁸² Hamidulla, 'Pakistani ornaments and jewellery', p. 45.

⁸³ A. G. Ali, 'The necklace', *Pakistan Quarterly* 1.5 (1950), p. 43.

paid tribute to the centuries-old Muslim genius for calligraphy and pattern decoration. The reproduction of either Quranic verses or some other writing of religious significance on casquets re-enchanted women's material world and helped them reassert the transcendent in their daily lives. Such women felt that *holdili ta'viz*—and, thus, more broadly, Islam—added a touch of attractiveness, romanticism, and vitality to their outfits.⁸⁴ 'Everything [in *holdili ta'viz*], whether made for common or ceremonial use,' went on Anis, 'is so lavishly enlivened with ornament, so thoughtfully harmonised and expressed that seems to carry a strange vitality.'⁸⁵ Miniatures and arabesques served as a powerful visual reminder of God's power and wisdom, frequently rendered also through an embossed passage from the *Surah Luqman*:

And if all the trees on earth were pens and the ocean (were ink), with seven oceans behind it to add it its (supply) yet would nor the words of God be exhausted (in writing); for God is exalted in power, full of wisdom.

The moral politics of fashion

From the late 1940s up to the mid-1950s, Italian neorealist films and melodramas frequently smashed Pakistani box offices records. Their compelling stories of hope, love, redemption, frustration, and poverty spoke directly to important social issues that were also part of the local public conversation. For their part, the calibre of Italian female leads such as Gina Lollobrigida and Sophia Loren became both the forbidden dream of many Pakistani men and a 'fashion model' for their upper middle and upper class wives. Both their on- and off-stage style utilised colours and cuts to sensualise the female form. However piecemeal and partial, the Pakistani advertising industry appropriated their haircuts, clothes, and patterns (Figures 1, 2 and 3).

In Lahore, for instance, tailors designed women's clothes along the lines of those worn by Italian actresses in the films that were being screened in cinemas throughout Pakistan at this time. Yet, as M. Kureshi pointed out, 'designs [...] are translated into stronger, brighter colours than their European counterpart'.⁸⁶ Women embraced monochromatic outfits, a dressing strategy that was easy to lean into as their lives got busier and busier. Even those opting for local dresses were indeed 'keen that there should be one dominant colour in the entire dress'.⁸⁷

Also gone were the days when fashion dictated long hair gathered up in a Gandhara statue-like bun. When Ava Gardner landed in Lahore in February 1955 to make *Bhowani Junction*, local hairdressers were second to none. There, her look was already so popular that they could trim her hair in their sleep. From the late 1940s onwards, medium-length, gently curled hairstyles had indeed come to epitomise the fashioning of women's new individual identity as citizens of an independent state. Short(er) hair became a visible and tangible sign of their freedom, self-confidence, and different role in society. As such, it was both a site of contestation and a battlefield. Every now and then, Lahore woke up to the news that individuals from the most conservative sections of the local society had put women's pigtailed on display on its roads.⁸⁸ 'Indignant fanatics', 'a protest against [our] free public movement', commented many women with a fair degree of barbed wit.⁸⁹ For her part, an unnamed contributor behind the good manners

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Kureshi, 'Women's fashion in Pakistan', p. 43. See also 5935(15) Series, 71021/2(1.5), 0693a, 189/3146, 0795 I.S., 7109, 8095, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, United Kingdom.

⁸⁷ Ahmad, 'Women's costumes in Pakistan', p. 17.

⁸⁸ Ali, 'The status of women of Pakistan', p. 47.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

So restless at night, so fretful by day—no wonder baby wasn't making the progress that he should have done.

Mother and Ajah talked it over together and decided to start feeding him on Glaxo.

Glaxo is a pure nourishing milk food to which Vitamin D has been added to build strong bones and teeth, and iron to enrich the blood.

You would hardly know he's the same baby now. He sleeps well, gains steadily and is contented all day long.

Glaxo is so good for babies
IN 1 LB. TIN

GLAXO LABORATORIES (PAKISTAN) LTD.

P. O. BOX 4474 KARACHI - P. O. BOX 244 LAHORE - P. O. BOX 34 CHITTAGONG

Figure 1. *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 19 December 1954.

column of the Sunday supplement of the *Pakistan Times* acknowledged the, albeit slow and subtle, processes of social change that were taking place in Lahore and elsewhere in urban Punjab. The local society, this anonymous housewife claimed in a clear attempt to reclaim women's right to interpret Islam for themselves, was moving with the times. Provided that fashion was not perceived to be at odds with any personal, religious, or moral duty and standard, imitating what she nevertheless conceived of as a Western custom was both admissible and socially acceptable.⁹⁰

At times, women's search for socially acceptable and accepted role models took unexpected turns. Upper class women had been growing more and more conscious of their

⁹⁰ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 13 July 1955.



Figure 2. *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 16 February 1955.

bodies, their emotions, as well as their sexual desire. Sex, reformist literature had taught them, was one of those main aspects of everyday life in which Muslims had to find meaning.⁹¹ Women were Muslim too: they just wanted to take part in the debate. Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, the daughter of Begum Shah Nawaz and Muslim League notable Mian Shah Nawaz and one of the first Pakistani women to leave purdah, became a pioneer of female emancipation. In one of her poems, she brilliantly translated the emotional tangle of her fellow sisters into vivid yet delicate words, demanding its acknowledgment from men:

Your office wall built round your soul —
 O break them down!
 For I shall demand
 That utmost gift of you
 Desire unsatiated [sic] when fulfilled
 And love
 Still striving to attain
 The far untainted mountain height⁹²

The 'new' Pakistani woman was—men were indeed all warned—'fire', 'storm', 'thunder', 'wind', and 'rain'.⁹³

⁹¹ F. Robinson, 'Religious change and the self in Muslim South Asia since 1800', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 20.1 (1997), p. 12.

⁹² M. S. Nawaz, II, n.d., in Husain, 'Miss Mumtaz Shah Nawaz', p. 26.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26.



Figure 3. *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 23 February 1955.

If it is peace you seek
Then go your way
With me you will only find
Fire
The urge of the stream,
The surge of the sea,
Climbing of hills
And hunger,
Human hunger.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Quite unsurprisingly then, adults-only films attracted considerable female attention. The '3 never-been-kissed cuties and 1,500 love hungry marines' of *The Girls of Pleasure Island* and the 'thousand shameful secrets' of *Behind Closed Shutters* appealed to both sexes, frequently resulting in 'packed [cinema] houses'.⁹⁵ These new trends prompted many raised eyebrows, even among women themselves. Anxieties about engaging with the 'right' sort of film and role models dominated their everyday conversations. In Lahore, sex was truly (up) in the air. Larger-than-life film posters portraying voluptuous actresses adorned many of its thoroughfares. Passers-by looked at them spellbound. For their part, local women did not seem perturbed at their presence. In their role as guardians of the morality of the nation, they considered only their explicit—too explicit—innuendos as unsuitable for all adults, themselves included. 'The posters used for display should be also submitted to some [...] board for approval [...],' recommended a 'Housewife', 'is not this *over-emphasis* [emphasis added] of the sex elements in the films [and their posters] positively unhealthy?'⁹⁶

In early 1955, the controversial *The French Line* dropped in all Pakistani cinemas. Back in the United States, the archdiocese of St Louis had forbidden its 473,000 adherents to watch it 'under penalty of mortal sin'.⁹⁷ In a curious twist of fate, in Lahore, its screenings were attended by a fair number of undeterred women.⁹⁸ One 'Concerned' was among them. Most probably, curiosity got the better of her, so she decided to head off to a local cinema to watch it. Her review was trenchant. The poster tagline—'[the lead] J[ane] R[ussell] in 3D. It'll knock both your eyes out!'—kept its whole, literal meaning. 'The cinema hall [...],' she angrily noted in her letter to the editor of the *Pakistan Times*, curiously pointing her finger only at men, 'was [also] packed with thirsty and ardent young men, eager to revel in the so-called physical charms of Miss Jane Russell, America's No. 2 pin-up girl.'⁹⁹ Threaded through her words was a strong desire to reassert her as well as other women's role as guardians of the moral order within the new institutional framework of an independent state. 'When will the time come when will make a point placing on our Film Censor Board responsible citizens who really have [...] the welfare of our young people at heart [...]?', she thundered towards the end of her *j'accuse* letter.¹⁰⁰

The federal government itself was on a war footing. Its members could not help but turn up their noses at the developments of these *sui generis* fashion headaches. 'The desire to be in line with the latest fashion,' noted the Minister of Interior in 1959, 'leads to imitating [...] the latest trends in Europe [...]. This involves loss of national individuality and self-respect, which are [...] pre-requisites for evolving a distinct national outlook.'¹⁰¹ Apparently, it hindered state authorities in their attempts to put forward nation- and institution-building policies. According to an official memorandum that was published in early March 1953, the adoption of such standards of living triggered a competition that 'subjected [civil servants] to unnecessary financial strains [and] in some circumstances provide[d] a major incentive to corrupt practices'.¹⁰² The card in the 1952 Parker pen advertisement, which a female hand had embellished with the 'world's most wanted pen, chosen without question by the world's most fashionable women',

⁹⁵ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 26 February 1955.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6 February 1955.

⁹⁷ *The New York Times*, 1 January 1954.

⁹⁸ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 9 February 1955.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Office Memorandum No. 20/2/59-Public, Minister of the Interior (Home Division), 4 July 1959, Multan District Records Room, Multan, Pakistan (henceforth MDDR).

¹⁰² S&GA Dept. Memo No. 832/59/AS, 4 March 1953, MDDR.

was now returned to sender.¹⁰³ After all, as the Information Department pointed out in 1962, ‘sending of greetings cards is a Western custom, which we [Pakistanis] need not imitate’.¹⁰⁴

Post-1947 fashion had indeed been ushering in a subtly socially subversive new era. Many daughters had their mothers fire their home helpers and employ them instead. ‘We can then buy all the necessities which we would like us to have like the other children in our class,’ they argued, ‘and we shall feel we are as well off as they are.’¹⁰⁵ Family reputation and prestige pivoted on the presence and number of their home helpers. Women’s need to feel fashionable and forward-looking now put them in jeopardy. Nevertheless, one ‘Bilqees Begum’ flattered herself that she had ‘spread the infection [as she put it] to the people across the road, where the daughter of the house demanded (and was given) 5Rs/month for cleaning their brothers’ shoes and making their bed’.¹⁰⁶ In her view, this was a way to transmit Islamic values to the younger generation. Her words echoed the Quranic verses that highlight the honour given to labour and the respect due to all workers.¹⁰⁷ She went on: ‘My three children became more and more conscious and aware of the dignity of labour.’¹⁰⁸

Even the selection of goods on sale on the shelves of local markets had been forcing Pakistani women to rethink the boundaries of their everyday life and their identities, and they often cried tears of frustration. They frequently came back home empty-handed from their hunt for Lux bars, their much loved and most trusted laundry soap. One can almost hear them complaining at their home helpers because the remaining ‘brands contain an excessive amount of soda, [and] the wool stands in danger of being spoilt’.¹⁰⁹ Theirs was not—readers should be warned—a passing fancy. In fact, Lux bars were a powerful symbol of progress and civility.¹¹⁰ Most importantly, they also represented women’s domesticity, an emotional *milieu* that the economic crisis and the nascent public sphere put now at stake. For the average upper and upper middle class housewife, wool evoked the pleasant memories of autumn afternoons knitting for their children and husbands. It was a tangible form of their care for their loved ones and their contribution to the family economy. Knitting was indeed ‘a pleasant hobby, and a very useful too’ as it helped them to save money for something more important or just a rainy day.¹¹¹

Choosing the right products was also part of the repertoire of secrets that made a woman the perfect, modern housewife. Handy tips for managing the household had been passed from mother (and mother-in-law) to daughter (and daughter-in-law), like the oral transmission of an epic poem. From the mid-1950s onwards, this peculiar epic poem started featuring advertisements that linked women’s domesticity to the shaping of the wider national, everyday imagined community (Figures 4 and 5).

Products were then instrumental in women’s attempts to fulfil their duties as wives, mothers, and citizens.¹¹² However, as families’ spending power fell, women went through a crisis. They felt helpless, like failures. ‘Is it not time now that some of our headaches

¹⁰³ *Jang* (Lahore), 28 December 1952.

¹⁰⁴ Information Department Letter No. SO(Pub)-I-7/62, 1 March 1962, MDDR.

¹⁰⁵ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 20 February 1955.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ See *Quran*, 11:38, 18:77, and 28: 26–27.

¹⁰⁸ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 20 February 1955.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 28 November 1954.

¹¹⁰ M. Hussain, ‘Combining global expertise with local knowledge in colonial India: selling ideas of beauty and health in commodity advertising (c. 1900–1949)’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 44.5 (2021), p. 930.

¹¹¹ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 28 November 1954.

¹¹² S. Khoja-Moolji, *Forging the Ideal Educated Girl. The Production of Desirable Subjects in Muslim South Asia* (Oakland, 2018), p. 75.



Figure 4. Dawn (Karachi), 26 December 1952.



Figure 5. Pakistan Times (Lahore), 21 February 1955.

[are] treated with a permanent cure?,' implored a 'Housewife' in late 1954. 'Can we not look forward to a time when the housewife may relax with her knitting, happy in the knowledge that [our] children are well-fed, being well-educated and healthy?'¹¹³

Women's complaints betrayed a general feeling of discomfort whose cause was quite easy to identify. Women wanted to be regarded and treated as being equal to men in their role as key sustainers and beneficiaries of the Islamic soul of the new, independent state. Working women framed their uneasiness in terms of a claim for equal living allowances. 'This discrimination [between men and women in regard to the cost of living allowances],' wrote 'Another woman employee' in her letter to the editor of the *Pakistan Times*, 'becomes all the more inexplicable when we see it practiced in an Islamic State like Pakistan which stands for equality between men and women in every sphere of life.'¹¹⁴ Her words were not a mere manifesto for an institutional recognition of women's new role in the public sphere. In fact, 'Another woman employee' publicly questioned the Pakistani authorities' Islamic credentials and their related ability to achieve the demands of modernity within a new institutional framework. Moreover, she envisioned an active role for herself as well as other women in the everyday sustaining of the nascent national Islamic society. 'I also suggest,' she concluded, 'that we form our own organisation on a strictly non-political basis to struggle for the redress of the above-mentioned and similar other grievances.'¹¹⁵ Their line of reasoning was that change had to be an Islam-informed one, and an Islam-informed one on their own, even religious, terms.

Conclusion

In the formative years of Pakistan, upper class women in cities such as Lahore and Karachi reconciled their new and, at times, Western-influenced lifestyle with their will to remain the perfect fit for the religious role the Islamic revival had assigned them.¹¹⁶ This carved out new creative room for their engagement in the development of a national community. As their ordinary lives and deportment turned into nation-building tools, these Pakistani women felt empowered to question the religious authority of the past (and the present) and the religious credentials of state authorities. In their role as guardians of the domestic shrines of Islam and the morality of the whole nation, they frequently—even publicly—reclaimed their autonomy and, most importantly, their right to interpret Islam for themselves, their fellow women, and their families.

The female contributors to both the *Pakistan Times* and the *Pakistan Quarterly* never disclosed the details of their religious affiliation. Nor did their identity fit neatly into any fixed religious category. Still, Islam kept leaping off the pages: women's dreams, taste in fashion, ideas of citizenship, and aspirations mirrored and spoke of the multiplicity of their religious individual belonging. Women hailing from the most important Pakistani urban centres reaffirmed the traditional values of moderation and self-control, and the need to fulfil their religious moral and legal duties.¹¹⁷ At the same time, they enthusiastically embrace novelty, rationalising its morality.

Their emotions and fashion choices re-encharmed—albeit very subtly and only partially—not only their lives but also the nation and the public sphere around them. Indeed, women's clothes and accessories and the *public* rationalisation of their anxiety *inhabited*

¹¹³ *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 28 November 1954.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7 October 1954.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ This provides further evidence and some historical perspective to Masooda Bano's comparative analysis of female education movements in northern Nigeria, Pakistan, and Syria. See M. Bano, *Female Education Movements. The Re-democratisation of Islamic Knowledge* (Cambridge, 2017).

¹¹⁷ Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, p. 9.

those spaces even because of their Islamic-ness. In a way, they and, more broadly, the materiality of their lives were also new practices of piety and, as such, maybe even the early signs of a new gender-led revival.

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